



Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

June 11, 2015, to December 10, 2015
and Index

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker



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Alberta Hansard

Thursday afternoon, June 11, 2015

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

First Session

Wanner, Hon. Robert E., Medicine Hat (ND), Speaker
Jabbour, Deborah C., Peace River (ND), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Feehan, Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (ND), Deputy Chair of Committees

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Rocky View (W)
Anderson, Shaye, Leduc-Beaumont (ND)
Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (W)
Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (ND)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (W)
Bhullar, Manmeet Singh, Calgary-Greenway (PC)
Bilous, Hon. Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (ND),
Deputy Government House Leader
Carlier, Hon. Oneil, Whitecourt-St. Anne (ND)
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-Meadowlark (ND)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, Calgary-Fort (ND)
Clark, Greg, Calgary-Elbow (AP)
Connolly, Michael R.D., Calgary-Hawkwood (ND)
Coolahan, Craig, Calgary-Klein (ND)
Cooper, Nathan, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (W),
Official Opposition House Leader
Cortes-Vargas, Estefania, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (ND)
Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake (W),
Official Opposition Deputy Whip
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (ND)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South West (ND)
Drever, Deborah, Calgary-Bow (Ind)
Drysdale, Wayne, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (PC),
Progressive Conservative Opposition Whip
Eggen, Hon. David, Edmonton-Calder (ND)
Ellis, Mike, Calgary-West (PC)
Fildebrandt, Derek Gerhard, Strathmore-Brooks (W)
Fitzpatrick, Maria M., Lethbridge-East (ND)
Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (PC)
Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., Calgary-Buffalo (ND)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (ND)
Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (PC)
Gray, Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (ND)
Hanson, David B., Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills (W),
Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
Hinkley, Bruce, Wetaskiwin-Camrose (ND)
Hoffman, Hon. Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (ND)
Horne, Trevor A.R., Spruce Grove-St. Albert (ND)
Hunter, Grant R., Cardston-Taber-Warner (W)
Jansen, Sandra, Calgary-North West (PC)
Jean, Brian Michael, QC, Fort McMurray-Conklin (W),
Leader of the Official Opposition
Kazim, Anam, Calgary-Glenmore (ND)
Kleinstuber, Jamie, Calgary-Northern Hills (ND)
Larivee, Danielle, Lesser Slave Lake (ND)
Littlewood, Jessica, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (ND)
Loewen, Todd, Grande Prairie-Smoky (W)
Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (ND)
Luff, Robyn, Calgary-East (ND)
MacIntyre, Donald, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (W)
Malkinson, Brian, Calgary-Currie (ND)
Mason, Hon. Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (ND),
Government House Leader
McCuaig-Boyd, Hon. Margaret,
Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley (ND)
McIver, Ric, Calgary-Hays (PC),
Leader of the Progressive Conservative Opposition
McKittrick, Annie, Sherwood Park (ND)
McLean, Stephanie V., Calgary-Varsity (ND),
Deputy Government Whip
McPherson, Karen M., Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill (ND)
Miller, Barb, Red Deer-South (ND)
Miranda, Ricardo, Calgary-Cross (ND)
Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (ND)
Nixon, Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (W),
Official Opposition Whip
Notley, Hon. Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (ND),
Premier
Orr, Ronald, Lacombe-Ponoka (W)
Payne, Brandy, Calgary-Acadia (ND)
Phillips, Hon. Shannon, Lethbridge-West (ND),
Deputy Government House Leader
Piquette, Colin, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater (ND)
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie (W)
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (ND)
Rodney, Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC)
Rosendahl, Eric, West Yellowhead (ND)
Sabir, Hon. Irfan, Calgary-McCall (ND)
Schmidt, Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (ND),
Government Whip
Schneider, David A., Little Bow (W)
Schreiner, Kim, Red Deer-North (ND)
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-Centre (ND)
Sigurdson, Hon. Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (ND)
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (W)
Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC),
Progressive Conservative Opposition House Leader
Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (W)
Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (W)
Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (ND)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (ND)
Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (W)
Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (ND)
van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND)
Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)
Vacant, Calgary-Foothills

Party standings:

New Democrat: 53 Wildrose: 21 Progressive Conservative: 9 Alberta Liberal: 1 Alberta Party: 1 Independent: 1 Vacant: 1

Officers and Officials of the Legislative Assembly

W.J. David McNeil, Clerk	Stephanie LeBlanc, Parliamentary Counsel and Legal Research Officer	Brian G. Hodgson, Sergeant-at-Arms
Robert H. Reynolds, QC, Law Clerk/ Director of Interparliamentary Relations	Philip Massolin, Manager of Research Services	Chris Caughell, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms
Shannon Dean, Senior Parliamentary Counsel/Director of House Services	Nancy Robert, Research Officer	Gordon H. Munk, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms
		Janet Schwegel, Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>

Executive Council

Rachel Notley	Premier, President of Executive Council, Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations
Deron Bilous	Minister of Municipal Affairs, Minister of Service Alberta
Oneil Carlier	Minister of Agriculture and Forestry
Joe Ceci	President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance
David Eggen	Minister of Education, Minister of Culture and Tourism
Kathleen T. Ganley	Minister of Justice and Solicitor General, Minister of Aboriginal Relations
Sarah Hoffman	Minister of Health, Minister of Seniors
Brian Mason	Minister of Transportation, Minister of Infrastructure
Margaret McCuaig-Boyd	Minister of Energy
Shannon Phillips	Minister of Environment and Parks, Minister Responsible for the Status of Women
Irfan Sabir	Minister of Human Services
Lori Sigurdson	Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education, Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, June 11, 2015

[The Mace was on a cushion below the table]

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order! All rise, please.

[The Clerk read the Royal Proclamation dated June 3, 2015, summoning the Members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta to convene on this date]

The Clerk: Please be seated.

Entrance of the Administrator

[The Premier, the Clerk, and the Sergeant-at-Arms left the Chamber to attend the Administrator]

The Sergeant-at-Arms: All rise, please.

Her Honour Chief Justice Catherine Fraser, the Administrator for Alberta.

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, the Administrator of Alberta, the Hon. Chief Justice Catherine Fraser, the Premier, and the Clerk entered the Chamber. Her Honour took her place upon the throne]

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Please be seated.

Ms Ganley (Provincial Secretary): Hon. members, I am commanded by Her Honour the Administrator to inform you that she does not see fit to declare the causes of her summoning of the present Legislature of this province until the Speaker of the Assembly shall have been chosen according to law. She is therefore pleased to retire from this Assembly, to return at a subsequent hour on the next sitting day to declare the causes of her calling of this Legislature.

The Sergeant-at-Arms: All rise, please.

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, the Administrator and the Premier left the Chamber]

The Clerk: Please be seated.

Election of a Speaker

The Clerk: Hon. members, pursuant to the Administrator's direction and section 16(1) of the Legislative Assembly Act nominations are invited for the Office of Speaker of this Assembly for the 29th Legislature. Pursuant to Standing Order 11(1) the Speaker shall be elected according to the procedures set out in schedule A of the standing orders.

Mr. Hinkley: Mr. Clerk, today I rise before the Assembly to nominate the Member for Medicine Hat, Robert Wanner, as our new Speaker. Mr. Wanner has a long-standing history as a dedicated public servant, from the work as commissioner for the city of Medicine Hat to his dedicated leadership in social policy and mediation. Mr. Wanner has shown time and time again to uphold fairness, balance, and co-operation in the name of the greater good. His mantra is the duty and responsibility to serve and use what we have to help others.

Mr. Wanner was a member of the University of Calgary senate for three years and has been a member of numerous boards and community groups. He is an experienced mediator and small-business owner and has gained a reputation in both provincial and

international communities as a fair, impartial public servant. Mr. Wanner will be a dedicated ambassador for Alberta and a fair, guiding voice for this Assembly.

The Clerk: Mr. Wanner, do you wish to accept the nomination?

Mr. Wanner: I do so, Mr. Clerk, with humility and a huge sense of responsibility.

Mrs. Pitt: Good afternoon, hon. members. It is a pleasure speaking for the first time in this Chamber. I rise as a private member from Airdrie, as the person selected by my caucus to shadow the minister responsible for the status of women, to nominate a candidate for Speaker.

Now, we have gathered here from all over Alberta to elect our Speaker – our Speaker – not the government's Speaker, not the cabinet's Speaker, not the people's Speaker but our Speaker, the individual elected by MLAs individually by secret ballot for all of us. The Speaker is more than a referee in this place; the Speaker is the protector of our collective and individual privileges. We can't do our jobs unless we have those privileges protected. It is an important role, and historically Speakers have been arrested and threatened with death for protecting the privileges of elected members.

I am hoping that this will be a historic election. We have the opportunity to do something that has never happened in Alberta and to have a circumstance that has never happened anywhere in Canada or even the world. Alberta has never had a female Speaker. If we elect one today, it will be a first for Alberta. If we elect a female Speaker today, we will also create a first for the world. Tomorrow we will install a female Lieutenant Governor to represent Her Majesty the Queen. A few days ago we installed a female Premier. Alberta's Chief Justice and the Administrator of the province is also female, as is the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada. This afternoon, if we elect a female Speaker, the Crown's representative in all three levels of government, the executive, the judiciary, and the legislative branches, will be presided over by women. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity – truly, this is – and I have to do my small part to try to make it a reality.

With that in mind, I would like to nominate the most experienced female member of this Legislature who is eligible for the job, the Member for Calgary-North West. The Member for Calgary-North West has served a term in this Legislature. She has been a member of cabinet, and she has been a forceful proponent of human rights. She is eloquent and forceful and brave. I think she would be an excellent candidate for Speaker, and I think that she would do brilliantly as Alberta's first female Speaker. I hope she will accept the nomination and that you all will vote for her so that Alberta will be the first place in the world where all the senior roles in government are held by women.

Thank you.

The Clerk: Ms Jansen, do you wish to accept the nomination?

Ms Jansen: Mr. Clerk, I thank the member for her kind words and for her wonderful endorsement. I respectfully decline the nomination.

The Clerk: Dr. Starke.

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Mr. Clerk. Fellow members of the 29th Legislature, today we as a group make the first in a long line of decisions entrusted to us by Albertans, and they are watching. They want to see how this group of individuals, duly elected 37 days ago, makes the first crucial set of decisions.

Now, while some may view the role of Speaker as being largely ceremonial or symbolic, make no mistake: the Speaker's role is critical, and the first decision is critical. The Speaker has a huge influence on the tone, on the demeanour, and, ultimately, on the smooth functioning and effectiveness of the House of the people.

It is with this in mind that I'm honoured to nominate the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, Mr. Dave Rodney, to be Speaker. Prior to entering the political spectrum, Mr. Rodney was a nationally and internationally recognized educator, author, speaker, and businessman. He holds bachelor's and master's degrees in education, has taught on three continents, and is the only Canadian to have successfully summited Mount Everest twice.

Mr. Rodney was first elected to this Legislature in 2004 as Member for Calgary-Lougheed. He is commencing his fourth term, tying him for the second-longest length of service among current members. During his career Dave has co-operated effectively with members on both sides of the House. He has always placed the interests of Albertans ahead of partisan objectives, and that ability has allowed him to successfully sponsor several pieces of legislation, legislation which has always placed the health and wellness of Albertans at the forefront, including the Smoke-free Places Act and the physical activity credit act.

Dave has a deep and abiding respect for and knowledge of the role of the Speaker. Now, what, exactly, is that role? Well, it means looking after the PRs: our privileges as members, which he must guard; our protocols, that they are adhered to; our procedures, that they are followed correctly; and our precedents, those decisions made by past Speakers that will guide future rulings. The final PR is public relations. The Speaker presides over public functions and observances here in our Legislature. With his experience as a public speaker before 2004 and working with Speakers since 2004, Dave Rodney is eminently well qualified to take on these difficult and diverse roles.

That brings us to the decision we have today. As I've said before, Albertans are watching. It's our job to elect the person best qualified to take on the role of Speaker, and that's what Albertans expect. They expect us to set aside partisan politics. If there's one message that should be clear to all of us from this election, it is that Albertans expect us to do things differently. Doing things differently means setting aside political partisanship for the benefit of all Albertans. Voting in lockstep along party lines, adhering to decisions made behind closed doors, especially on nonpartisan issues like this one: well, that's the old way of doing things. Albertans rejected that, and that's why many of you are here.

So, colleagues, today we have a choice. We can choose a member with a long and distinguished record of service, with a reputation for nonpartisanship and fairness, with a clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities of Speaker, or we can keep doing things the old way. It's our choice. Albertans are watching. This is our chance to show them that we've heard their message, that we have listened, and that we have the wisdom and the courage to act on it by electing Dave Rodney as Speaker of the 29th Legislature.

The Clerk: Mr. Rodney, do you wish to accept the nomination?

Mr. Rodney: I do, Mr. Clerk, with great respect and appreciation. Thank you.

The Clerk: Are there further nominations?

Mrs. Pitt: Hello again, hon. members. Thank you for letting me speak again. The Speaker here is more than a referee in this place. The Speaker here is to protect our individual privileges. I am hoping that this will be a historic election because we have the opportunity here right now to do something that has never happened. I say

again: we have a circumstance that has never happened anywhere in Canada or even the world. We have the opportunity to elect a female Speaker. If we elect a female Speaker today, we will also create, again, a first for the world.

Tomorrow, again, we install a female Lieutenant Governor to represent Her Majesty the Queen to stand beside our female Premier. Alberta's Chief Justice and Administrator of the province is also female as is the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada. This afternoon if we elect a female Speaker, the Crown's representative in all three levels of government – the executive, the judiciary, and the legislative branch – would be presided over by women. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Please. I am so honoured to be able to do my small part to make this happen. With that in mind and with all due respect for the Member for Calgary-North West, I would like to nominate a female member of the governing party for the job of the Speaker, the Member for Calgary-Varsity.

The Member for Calgary-Varsity, like the Member for Medicine Hat, is also a rookie in this Legislature, but she is a lawyer who has demonstrated a love for the law. She's served as clerk for the Provincial Court. She understands precedent and the importance of procedure and the value of decorum. She has been active in politics, and, as I understand, she did her share in recruiting to politics some of the members of the Legislature, including some members in the cabinet. She is an active community volunteer, having served on the board of directors for both Alberta Theatre Projects and Friends of Medicare. She has also offered her legal expertise to Calgary Legal Guidance, the Student Legal Assistance Society, and the Elizabeth Fry Society.

I think she would make an excellent candidate for Alberta's first female Speaker. I hope the Member for Calgary-Varsity will accept the nomination and that you will vote for her so that Alberta will be the first place in the world where all the senior roles in government are women.

The Clerk: Ms McLean, do you wish to accept the nomination?

Ms McLean: Thank you. I thank the hon. member; however, in my role as deputy whip, which I am very much appreciating – unfortunately, I cannot serve in both roles at the same time. I thank you for your kind words, but I'll have to respectfully decline.

Thank you.

The Clerk: Are there further nominations? Mrs. Aheer.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you. Good afternoon. Hon. members, it is also my pleasure to speak for the first time in this Chamber. I rise as a private Member for Chestermere-Rocky View to nominate a candidate for Speaker.

Now, we have come here today from all over Alberta to elect a Speaker, and I truly hope we will have an election, a competitive election. In April 1997 Speaker Kowalski became Speaker on the second ballot in the second Speaker's election in Alberta to happen by secret ballot. He was not Premier Klein's choice, but he was the choice of members of the Legislature as the person that they wanted to have protect their privileges.

Protecting our privileges and protecting your privileges is important. Some of the most famous rulings made by Canadian Speakers in recent years have not been about disputes between the opposition and the government; rather, they have been disputes between the government backbenchers and the ever more centralizing role of the Prime Minister's or Premier's office.

I agree with everything my friend from Airdrie has said about selecting a female Speaker. This is an amazing opportunity, a historic opportunity. However, my choice, again, is amongst the

government caucus. I would like to nominate a female member of the governing party for the job of Speaker, the Member for St. Albert.

The Member for St. Albert, like the Member for Medicine Hat, is also a rookie in this Legislature, but she was for 14 years the executive director of the St. Albert nonprofit Lo-Se-Ca Foundation, a community-based organization that employs 150 people, many of them with developmental disabilities. Two years ago the Member for St. Albert and Lo-Se-Ca, which stands for love, service, care, were recognized nationally, receiving the Prime Minister's volunteer award for social innovation for the prairie region. Last year she was named one of the top 100 women in business by the *Wanderer*, the University of Alberta's online journal.

The Wildrose has worked with the Member for St. Albert, standing up for the rights of persons with developmental disabilities. We always found her thoughtful, fair, and deliberate. Her management experience, her caring, and – dare I say it? – her patience make her ideally suited to be Alberta's first female Speaker.

I hope the Member for St. Albert will accept the nomination and that you will vote for her so that – I reiterate – as my friend from Airdrie has said, this will be the first place in the world where all senior roles in government will be held by women.

Thank you.

The Clerk: Ms Renaud, do you wish to accept the nomination?

Ms Renaud: Thank you very much for your incredibly kind words, but I respectfully decline the nomination.

Thank you.

The Clerk: Are there further nominations?

I declare the nominations closed. The nominees for the position of Speaker are Mr. Robert Wanner and Mr. Dave Rodney.

Voting will commence after the list of nominees is posted in each voting booth.

[The lists of candidates were posted]

The Clerk: The voting will now begin. Members will vote by printing the first and last name of their preferred candidate on the ballot paper and placing their completed ballots in the ballot box on the Sergeant-at-Arms' desk. Please proceed from here and from here.

[Members voted from 1:57 p.m. to 2:07 p.m.]

The Clerk: Have all voted who wish to do so? There are no negatives there, so I guess that's a yes. We will retire to count the ballots, and we'll ring the bells for one minute when we return.

[Ballots were counted from 2:08 p.m. to 2:20 p.m.]

The Clerk: Hon. members, the number of ballots cast for the election of Speaker, 86; the number of spoiled ballots, one; the number of votes required to achieve the 50 per cent plus one majority, 44. The member having received the majority of votes cast, Mr. Robert Wanner. Mr. Robert Wanner is hereby declared the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta for the 29th Legislature. [Standing ovation]

[The Speaker, with apparent reluctance, was escorted to the chair by Ms Notley and Mr. Jean]

The Speaker: Before I begin the prayer, I would like to express to each and every one of you my thoughts and hopes and aspirations, that I know many of you share with each other.

I would first of all like to acknowledge the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed for putting his name forward. That process is one of the institutions that we must all value as we move forward.

Fellow members of the 29th Alberta Legislative Assembly, I think it's appropriate as we sit together in this meeting place that we all join together in a moment of silent reflection in memory of Constable Daniel Woodall, who, like many more before him, gave his life in support of the very principles upon which this Assembly exists. Please stand and bow your heads.

Thank you, hon. members. Please be seated.

[The Sergeant-at-Arms placed the Mace on the table]

Prayers

The Speaker: I would invite everyone to stand for the prayer. Patience will be something that I ask of all of you.

Let us pray and let us reflect together. On this day of a new beginning we ask for guidance in the responsibility we have undertaken and help in fulfilling our duties. As Members of this Legislative Assembly may we faithfully serve all Albertans and, in serving them, serve You. Amen.

Please be seated.

Statement by the Speaker

Working Together

The Speaker: With your permission, I would like to make some additional comments. This building has tradition, heritage, and history buried in the very oak and marble that surround us. It is important to remember that this Assembly started in a school, with wooden floors and wooden desks and chalkboards. The building that we are in now in all its splendour, however, is simply a symbol, a symbol of what well-intentioned people can do when they choose to decide to work together to make a better world.

Hard work, co-operation, persistence, and a dedication to a freedom of thought and life, a freedom that sees diversity as a strength and compassion and public good as the critical veins of our democracy: it is, my fellow Assembly members, these values that give us all hope and confidence in our future, hope that our children will build upon what we may have made and, more importantly, that the long term will build investments for our grandchildren. It is hope and confidence that binds us all together.

Our belief in the Westminster model of parliamentary democracy is what brings us all together in this room as representatives of our citizens. It is not a perfect institution. It has had its failings. It has, however, a tradition that has passed the test of time. As an Assembly of representatives we must together find the balance between preserving that tradition while at the same time judiciously managing the change that is necessary. Change sometimes requires courage.

Our freedom of rights brings with it a humbling sense of responsibility, the responsibility to use our collective good judgment to make decisions, to respect this institution, the people we serve, and each other. People have died for our freedom. Our words and our actions and our engagement with each other must always represent our respect for those who have paid the ultimate price. That is the reason that we are here.

It is these essential interests and values that I believe all 86 of us share together. We must find new ways to set aside our positions and focus on our collective interests. I feel privileged beyond any words that I might be able to find to say that I feel truly honoured to be one of you. I would humbly ask for your patience, your support, and your advice as we move through the next four years together. We must find a way of working together and making this great province and its great people a better place than when we found it.

Thank you.

With your permission I would like to introduce my wife, my daughter, my two grandsons, and my son-in-law, who are seated in the first row. I hope you give me some licence in terms of the protocol, the sequence of events. If they would stand, I'd appreciate it.

Election of a Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees

The Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to section 17(1) of the Legislative Assembly Act and Standing Order 58(1)(a) nominations are invited for the office of Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees of this Assembly for the 29th Legislature.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to my colleagues for this opportunity to rise in the House and to address you today.

I would like to thank the members, our colleagues across the floor, who today have spoken so eloquently about the amazing honour we have as a province in having the representation of a female Premier, a female Lieutenant Governor, and a female Chief Justice. Indeed, we are incredibly proud to serve as a government that is focused on elevating the status of women in our province. We are also incredibly proud to represent Albertans with the first gender-balanced cabinet and nearly gender-balanced caucus in the history of our province and our nation. As noted by our colleagues across the floor, we are also proud to be the first provincial government in Alberta to appoint a minister for the status of women.

All of this being the case, it is my honour and pleasure today to have the opportunity to nominate the Member for Peace River, Ms Debbie Jabbour, for the position of Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees for this House. Ms Jabbour brings six years of experience working for the Legislative Assembly with *Hansard*. In this role she gained a deep and thorough understanding and training in House procedures. She has spent hours reading, transcribing *Hansard* and observing the workings of this House. As such, she brings a rich depth of experience and knowledge that would serve her well in the role of Deputy Speaker. This experience along with her work as a provisional psychologist positions her to be a fair and impartial voice in this House in service of us all.

Ms Jabbour has a deep passion for public service, as reflected in her commitment to her constituents and her time as a board member of the Canadian Mental Health Association and the Chinchaga Adult Learning Council. It is important to note that in that work with the Chinchaga Adult Learning Council she has also developed strong relationships with First Nations in our province. Ms Jabbour has had the privilege and honour of working with them on many issues.

It's worth noting that a large portion of her constituents are, in fact, from Alberta's First Peoples, the peoples of Treaty 8. Alberta is, in fact, home to three treaties: 6, 7, and 8. Today we have the honour to stand and meet in this House on Treaty 6 land, which we honour and respect. We have had the honour now of electing a Speaker that comes from Treaty 7 lands. If we choose to elect Ms Jabbour, she would then be a Deputy Speaker with strong ties to the First Peoples of Treaty 8.

Ms Jabbour has a deep respect for our parliamentary process and the historic traditions of this House. It is my hope that our colleagues across the floor, having shown their enthusiasm for the election of a woman with experience and knowledge, will support and vote for Ms Jabbour. I'm truly confident that given her experience and dedication she would fulfill the role of Deputy Speaker with dignity, confidence, and respect for all members.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. member, do you wish to accept the nomination?

Ms Jabbour: I'm humbled and honoured to accept. Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there any other nominations?

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me begin by congratulating you on your election as Speaker, and I do want to sincerely thank you that as your first act you called on this Assembly to pay tribute to the police constable that passed away. That was truly a class act, and if that's a harbinger of things to come, you're off to a great start.

Mr. Speaker, I should also say that in my role as third-party House leader I received some advice from the most seasoned member of our Assembly, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood – the Minister of Transportation, the Minister of Infrastructure, and the Government House Leader – who advised me that in this role in the third party, one which we are somewhat unaccustomed to, we can often be in a position where we can be so darn sure we're right and still lose and who in his position in many years developed a losing streak that will probably never be equalled and one that, certainly, we have no intention of challenging in any way.

That being said, it is my privilege and honour to nominate for the position of Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees the hon. Dave Rodney, the Member for Calgary-Lougheed. As I said in my past nomination speech, which I will choose not to repeat verbatim, the hon. member has an outstanding record of co-operation on both sides of the House. Mr. Speaker, as you just said, if ever there was a time when the parties need to work together and when there is help required from all sides of the Legislature, this is perhaps that time. Well, the good news for you is that help is available should the Chamber decide to make that decision and provide you with the hon. member's considerable experience as a legislator, as a mover and sponsor of legislation which in most cases, I will point out, passed unanimously because of his ability to work with members on both sides of the House.

Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to nominate the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, Mr. Dave Rodney.

The Speaker: Thank you. Hon. member, do you wish to accept the nomination?

Mr. Rodney: Mr. Speaker, I would like to sincerely, from my heart, congratulate you on your appointment. It would indeed be an honour to work with you, so the answer is yes.

The Speaker: Are there any further nominations? I therefore declare, seeing none, that nominations are closed.

The nominees for the position of Deputy Speaker are the hon. Member for Peace River, Debbie Jabbour, and the Member for Calgary-Lougheed. Voting will commence after the lists of nominees are posted in each voting booth.

[The lists of candidates were posted]

The Speaker: We have the ballots. The voting will now begin, please.

[Members voted from 2:43 p.m. to 2:55 p.m.]

The Clerk: The number of ballots cast for the position of Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees, 84; the number of spoiled ballots, two; the number of votes required to achieve the 50 per cent plus one majority, 43. The member having received the majority of votes cast, Ms Debbie Jabbour. Ms Debbie Jabbour is hereby

declared Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta for the 29th Legislature.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I wondered if you'd like to make a few comments.

Ms Jabbour: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To my colleagues and the hon. members of this House I want to say thank you for entrusting me with this incredible responsibility. I feel privileged to take on the role. It's a great honour, and I'm going to do my utmost to show respect for the traditions of this House and be a very good Deputy Speaker.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Election of a Deputy Chair of Committees

The Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to section 17(1) of the Legislative Assembly Act and Standing Order 58(1)(b) nominations are now invited for the office of Deputy Chair of Committees for the 29th Legislature.

The hon. member.

Ms Gray: Thank you. It is my pleasure to rise and speak in the House for the first time. I'd like my first words to be those of congratulations to you, Mr. Speaker. I am so excited and looking forward to working with you and the hon. members here in this House over the next four years. Secondly, let me also offer my congratulations to Ms Debbie Jabbour, our new Deputy Speaker and hon. Member for Peace River. Congratulations on your election as well.

It is my privilege to rise and to nominate the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, Mr. Richard Feehan, for the position of Deputy Chair of Committees. The hon. member has over 33 years' experience as a social worker, administrator, instructor, and small-business owner. As an instructor at the University of Calgary in the Faculty of Social Work for the past 11 years he has been committed to creating a just society here in Alberta. Through his dedicated service to his community, membership on numerous boards and organizations, he has gained skills and experience that I know he will be able to use with great success in the role of Deputy Chair of Committees.

I encourage the hon. members of this Assembly to support Richard Feehan, who I know, without reservation, will uphold the respect, impartiality, and wisdom that this role requires. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, are you prepared to accept the nomination?

Mr. Feehan: It is with respect and appreciation that I accept the nomination.

The Speaker: Are there any further nominations?

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, we're pitching a shutout so far, so we thought we'd try it a little bit differently this time. We might have to get used to that, from what I understand.

I, too, would like to take the time, Mr. Speaker, to congratulate you, well chosen by this House. I look forward to working with you for the next four years, and I know that you will do an exemplary job. Congratulations.

Also to our Deputy Speaker congratulations. We will look forward to benefiting from your guidance when you are in the chair. I also know that we look forward to nothing but the best, and I know you will deliver.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to nominate the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed, Mr. Dave Rodney. There's been a great deal said about the hon. member earlier, so I won't repeat that other than to say that you know him, you love him, and you trust him. You know he can do the job. This is an opportunity to have the second most experienced person in the House available to work with the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker, and I recommend that members of this Assembly support the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

I think that's enough from me right now, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. member, do you wish to accept the nomination?

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With a great deal of humility and just a little bit of trepidation, I must say, I happily accept the nomination.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there any further nominations?

I would declare the nominations closed. The nominees for the position of Deputy Chair of Committees are Member Richard Feehan and Member Dave Rodney. Voting will commence after the list of nominees is posted in each voting booth.

If I might, as I am learning the protocol – and that's the patience part of this process – I would remind the members that out of respect for the chair as you leave the House, you acknowledge the Speaker's chair, both entering and exiting the House. That's a symbol of respect to the House and to our peers.

[The lists of candidates were posted]

The Speaker: Fellow members, if I might, before I call for the vote process, I would like to acknowledge, as we all learn the new procedures and processes, the young people who are our pages in here. As you've noticed, a few times during the day I have stood and sat. Every time that I stand, they stand, and I will be more conscious of that into the future.

Mr. Clerk, the vote will begin.

[Members voted from 3:18 p.m. to 3:27 p.m.]

The Speaker: Have all members voted?

Hon. members, as we all learn the protocols and processes of the House, in addition, there were several members, for example, that needed to leave for meetings today. When votes take place, the doors are secured, so as you are planning ahead in any future kinds of instances, keep that in mind.

Again, today's events are much more informal, but when we are in the House, if you cross from one side to the other of the House, I would respectfully ask that you pass behind the dais. Those kinds of traditions are what preserve this House, and I'd ask that we all practise them.

Thank you.

[Ballots were counted from 3:28 p.m. to 3:38 p.m.]

The Clerk: The number of ballots cast for the position of Deputy Chair of Committees, 84; number of spoiled ballots, one; number of votes required to achieve the 50 per cent plus one majority, 43. The member having received the majority of votes cast, Mr. Richard Feehan. Mr. Richard Feehan is hereby the Deputy Chair of Committees of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta for the 29th Legislature.

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, on a point of clarification. It's my understanding that the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford also is the caucus chair for the NDP caucus. Earlier today we saw the

Member for Calgary-Varsity turn down her opportunity to make history by declining a nomination for the Speaker's chair, and I'm curious to know if the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford will be stepping down from his role, that we believe would be in conflict with him being the Deputy Chair of Committees.

Mr. Mason: We'll get you an answer in due course.

The Speaker: We'll take that under advisement, and we will get back to the House.

Would the hon. member please say a few words to the Assembly.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, of course, would like to begin by offering my congratulations to yourself and to Debbie Jabbour for your election as Speaker and Deputy Speaker. In addition, I would like to express my happiness at sitting in the

luckiest row in the Chamber and assure the House that I do intend to honour the traditions of this Chamber with my work cooperatively with everyone on both sides of the House.

The Speaker: Members of the Assembly, I'm going to check with the Clerk. Are there other events that need to be business today?

I would take this brief opportunity – as several in the Assembly have already said, there is a series of very significant events, that have happened in sequence in our province, that seldom happen in the manner in which they have. I remind you that tomorrow our new Lieutenant Governor will be in this Legislative Assembly, and I would urge as many of our Assembly members as possible to be a part of that historic event.

The House stands adjourned until Monday, June 15, at 3 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 3:42 p.m. to Monday at 3 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, June 15, 2015

Day 1

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

First Session

Wanner, Hon. Robert E., Medicine Hat (ND), Speaker
Jabbour, Deborah C., Peace River (ND), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Feehan, Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (ND), Deputy Chair of Committees

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Rocky View (W)
Anderson, Shaye, Leduc-Beaumont (ND)
Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (W)
Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (ND)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (W)
Bhullar, Manmeet Singh, Calgary-Greenway (PC)
Bilous, Hon. Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (ND),
Deputy Government House Leader
Carlier, Hon. Oneil, Whitecourt-St. Anne (ND)
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-Meadowlark (ND)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, Calgary-Fort (ND)
Clark, Greg, Calgary-Elbow (AP)
Connolly, Michael R.D., Calgary-Hawkwood (ND)
Coolahan, Craig, Calgary-Klein (ND)
Cooper, Nathan, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (W),
Official Opposition House Leader
Cortes-Vargas, Estefania, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (ND)
Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake (W),
Official Opposition Deputy Whip
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (ND)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South West (ND)
Drever, Deborah, Calgary-Bow (Ind)
Drysdale, Wayne, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (PC),
Progressive Conservative Opposition Whip
Eggen, Hon. David, Edmonton-Calder (ND)
Ellis, Mike, Calgary-West (PC)
Fildebrandt, Derek Gerhard, Strathmore-Brooks (W)
Fitzpatrick, Maria M., Lethbridge-East (ND)
Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (PC)
Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., Calgary-Buffalo (ND)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (ND)
Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (PC)
Gray, Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (ND)
Hanson, David B., Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills (W),
Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
Hinkley, Bruce, Wetaskiwin-Camrose (ND)
Hoffman, Hon. Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (ND)
Horne, Trevor A.R., Spruce Grove-St. Albert (ND)
Hunter, Grant R., Cardston-Taber-Warner (W)
Jansen, Sandra, Calgary-North West (PC)
Jean, Brian Michael, QC, Fort McMurray-Conklin (W),
Leader of the Official Opposition
Kazim, Anam, Calgary-Glenmore (ND)
Kleinstuber, Jamie, Calgary-Northern Hills (ND)
Larivee, Danielle, Lesser Slave Lake (ND)
Littlewood, Jessica, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (ND)
Loewen, Todd, Grande Prairie-Smoky (W)
Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (ND)
Luff, Robyn, Calgary-East (ND)
MacIntyre, Donald, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (W)
Malkinson, Brian, Calgary-Currie (ND)
Mason, Hon. Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (ND),
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McCuaig-Boyd, Hon. Margaret,
Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley (ND)
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Miller, Barb, Red Deer-South (ND)
Miranda, Ricardo, Calgary-Cross (ND)
Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (ND)
Nixon, Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (W),
Official Opposition Whip
Notley, Hon. Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (ND),
Premier
Orr, Ronald, Lacombe-Ponoka (W)
Payne, Brandy, Calgary-Acadia (ND)
Phillips, Hon. Shannon, Lethbridge-West (ND),
Deputy Government House Leader
Piquette, Colin, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater (ND)
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie (W)
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (ND)
Rodney, Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC)
Rosendahl, Eric, West Yellowhead (ND)
Sabir, Hon. Irfan, Calgary-McCall (ND)
Schmidt, Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (ND),
Government Whip
Schneider, David A., Little Bow (W)
Schreiner, Kim, Red Deer-North (ND)
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-Centre (ND)
Sigurdson, Hon. Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (ND)
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (W)
Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC),
Progressive Conservative Opposition House Leader
Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (W)
Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (W)
Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (ND)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (ND)
Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (W)
Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (ND)
van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND)
Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)
Vacant, Calgary-Foothills

Party standings:

New Democrat: 53 Wildrose: 21 Progressive Conservative: 9 Alberta Liberal: 1 Alberta Party: 1 Independent: 1 Vacant: 1

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Irfan Sabir	Minister of Human Services
Lori Sigurdson	Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education, Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

3 p.m.

Monday, June 15, 2015

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order! Order! Mr. Speaker.

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, the Speaker, accompanied by the officers of the Assembly, entered the Chamber and took the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Author of all wisdom, knowledge, and understanding, we ask Your blessings on all here present. We ask Your guidance in order that truth and justice may prevail in all of our judgments for the benefit of all Albertans. Amen.

Please be seated.

Ladies and gentlemen, I would now invite Mr. Robert Clark, accompanied by the Royal Canadian Artillery Band, to lead us in the singing of our national anthem.

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Please rise.

Hon. Members and Guests:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
Car ton bras sait porter l'épée,
Il sait porter la croix!
Ton histoire est une épopée
Des plus brillants exploits.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Entrance of the Lieutenant Governor

[The Premier, the Clerk, and the Sergeant-at-Arms left the Chamber to attend the Lieutenant Governor]

[The Mace was draped]

The Speaker: Ladies and gentlemen, prior to the arrival of Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor the Royal Canadian Artillery Band will play music called Festmusik, festive music, by Richard Strauss. I'm proud to say that our RCA Band was originally founded in Quebec City in 1879. The RCA Band is Canada's first permanent military band. The RCA Band was active in both world wars and in the Korean conflict and has been in service in many parts of the world as well as throughout Canada. On December 4, 1997, St. Barbara's Day, the patron saint of the Royal Canadian Artillery Band, the band officially moved from Montreal and today is stationed under the direction of Captain Patrice Arseneault, who is in the Speaker's gallery.

[The Sergeant-at-Arms knocked on the main doors of the Chamber three times. The Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms opened the doors, and the Sergeant-at-Arms entered]

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Ladies and gentlemen, all rise, please.

Mr. Speaker, Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor awaits.

The Speaker: Sergeant-at-Arms, admit Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor.

[A fanfare of trumpets sounded]

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta, Lois Mitchell, CM, AOE, and Mr. Mitchell, their party, the Premier, and the Clerk entered the Chamber. Her Honour took her place upon the throne]

Her Honour: Please be seated.

The Speaker: May it please Your Honour, the Legislative Assembly has elected me their Speaker, though I am but little able to fulfill the important duties thus assigned to me. If in the performance of these duties I should at any time fall into error, I pray that the fault may be imputed to me and not to the Assembly, whose servant I am and who through me, the better to enable them to discharge their duty to their Queen and province, humbly claim all their undoubted rights and privileges, especially that they may have freedom of speech in their debates, access to Your Honour's person at all seasonable times, and that their proceedings may receive from Your Honour the most favourable construction.

Ms Ganley (Provincial Secretary): Mr. Speaker, I am commanded by Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor to declare to you that she freely confides in the duty and attachment of this Assembly to Her Majesty's person and government, and not doubting that their proceedings will be conducted with wisdom, temper, and prudence, she grants and upon all occasions will recognize and allow their constitutional privileges.

I am commanded also to assure you that the Assembly shall have ready access to Her Honour upon all seasonable occasions and that their proceedings as well as your words and actions will constantly receive from her the most favourable construction.

Speech from the Throne

Her Honour: Friends, Alberta is a province of indigenous peoples whose roots in this land go back thousands of years and who will be stewards of this land for thousands of years to come. Together we are learning to respect that.

We are also a province built by wave after wave of pioneers and settlers, farmers and oil workers, researchers and students, job seekers and job creators. We are people from around the world who share a dream of a better life and who have found it here in Alberta. We are optimistic, hopeful, entrepreneurial, remarkably diverse, and community-minded people. We are people who dream no little dreams and live them. We are people who get things done.

In this province what we wish for ourselves, we desire for all, like freedom from poverty, freedom from violence, and freedom from discrimination because of whom you love. We believe in looking after our children and making sure they are safe, healthy, and have access to excellent education. We believe in looking after our seniors and making sure they are safe, healthy, and have a dignified place to live. We believe in respecting women, including our sisters who have disappeared or who have been murdered and whose families are looking for answers and for justice.

Albertans are working together to build a prosperous, entrepreneurial, diversified economy full of opportunity for us all, we are working together to build a lifelong learning system that brings out the potential in us all, and we are working together to build a health system that is there when it is needed, for us all.

We haven't always got it right. As I speak, we face another oil price challenge, that is having a more profound effect on our families and on our public finances than it might have had because we have not always made the right choices in this Legislature. But as has been proven, the Legislature can change.

There are 70 new MLAs in this House as a result of the recent election. The people of Alberta decided it was time for a change, and they didn't get there through half measures. And so we can begin again.

We can work together. We can disagree without being disagreeable. We can talk about what unites us as well as what divides us. We can listen to each other and build on each other's best ideas, just as Albertans have been doing with their neighbours since the founding of this province.

It is in this spirit that this government begins its new mandate and takes up the tasks given to it by the people of Alberta. The government begins its work mindful that it is building on the achievements of governments who have come before.

Alberta's first government was led by the Liberal Party. As is remembered in a small but important memorial just outside of this building, that was when democracy and responsible government were brought to Alberta.

Today our political and party system cries out for renewal, so we will take a first important step towards renewing our democracy as the first piece of business our new government puts before you.

Alberta's next government was led by the United Farmers of Alberta. The UFA was an alliance of farmers and workers determined to put the interests of Alberta families at the heart of the work of this House.

Alberta's new government will reintroduce a fair and progressive tax system and restore stable support for health and education in order to do exactly that. We will put the interests of Alberta families at the heart of the work of this Legislature.

Elected in the depths of the Depression, our province's next government was led by Social Credit. The Socreds were men and women who believed that Alberta could overcome adversity and return to prosperity by working together in the common interest. The Social Credit government was a strong supporter of job creators and entrepreneurs. It also equipped our province with important tools to build prosperity such as Alberta Treasury Branches, which still contribute to prosperity in Alberta's communities, large and small, today.

Alberta's new government will also be a good partner with job creators, with entrepreneurs, with small business, with credit unions and co-ops, and with the great enterprises we have built together.

Finally, the Progressive Conservative government elected in 1971 fought a ferocious battle with Ottawa to ensure, beyond debate, that our energy resources were owned and controlled by the people of Alberta. The PCs then set out a plan for a successful and sustainable energy industry, managed in both our people's short- and long-term interests. Their plan recognized that our resources are a trust. Those are principles to which Alberta's new government will now return.

And so, to the work of this session. As its first act our new government will introduce Bill 1, An Act to Renew Democracy in Alberta. At long last this act, if passed, will ban corporate and union donations to political parties in this province.

There is much more that needs to be done to renew our democracy. Alberta's new government will work closely with all members in this House and will take careful account of your views and those of all Albertans before taking the necessary additional steps.

As its second act our new government will introduce Bill 2, An Act to Restore Fairness to Public Revenue. This bill will ask those who have benefited the most from the boom times in Alberta to now contribute a little more so that our schools and health care can be spared from chaos and reckless cutbacks. Corporate taxes on the largest and most profitable corporations in Alberta will be increased from 10 per cent to 12 per cent; small-business taxes will remain at the current rate, 3 per cent; and progressive income taxes will be

reintroduced in Alberta for those earning more than \$125,000 a year. When these changes are implemented, each and every citizen of Alberta will still be contributing by far the lowest provincial taxes in Canada.

As its third act Alberta's new government will propose Bill 3 to restore stability to Alberta's education, health care, and human services. This is an interim supply bill which will maintain stability in essential public services while Alberta's new government reviews our province's economic situation, its finances, and its budget priorities.

We will invest in stable and predictable funding for our schools and postsecondary institutions because our children are worth it, because our communities are worth it, and because investing in skills and education is the single best investment our province can make to ensure our future prosperity. We will invest in stable and predictable funding for our health system because universal, accessible, high-quality health care must be there when Alberta families need it and because the time has come to meet our society's growing need for community services like long-term care and home care. And we will invest in stable and predictable funding for human services because the people who have suffered the most in the recent economic downturn should not be the first in line to be cut.

With this agreed, our new government will then work on a new budget and a new legislative program and will present these to you in the fall.

Alberta's new government knows well that these are only a few first steps. There is a great deal that needs to be done. This province needs to work with steady determination to create the conditions for a sustainable, diversified, and prosperous economy, an economy that will provide Albertans with good jobs. Alberta needs a stable, long-term plan for health care and education. This province needs to demonstrate real leadership on the environment and on climate change.

Concurrently, we must forge a much stronger partnership with our fellow provinces and with the federal government in order to build a Canadian energy strategy that ensures that a sustainable, responsible Canadian energy industry can reach markets all around the world. We need to review how the people of Alberta, including our grandchildren and our great-grandchildren many years from now, will be rewarded for the development of their own energy resources.

We need to return to a respectful relationship with this land's indigenous peoples.

We need to make sure all Albertans are paid fairly at work, including those on the minimum wage.

We need to ensure this province's rural and resource communities have the tools they need to keep contributing to the prosperity of Alberta.

There are parks to tend, public transit and roads to build, hospitals to build and renovate, schools to plan and open, people living on our streets to help. It won't all happen at once, but we will start. We will start today with these first steps, and we will do more in the fall, when my new government presents its first budget and its first full legislative program.

Thank you, friends.

God bless Alberta.

God bless Canada.

God save the Queen.

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order! All rise, please.

The Speaker: Ladies and gentlemen, I would now invite Mr. Robert Clark, accompanied by the Royal Canadian Artillery Band,

to lead us in the singing of *God Save The Queen*. Please remain standing at the conclusion.

Hon. Members and Guests:

God save our gracious Queen,
Long live our noble Queen,
God save The Queen!
Send her victorious,
Happy and glorious,
Long to reign over us;
God save The Queen!

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order!

[Preceded by the Sergeant-at-Arms, Their Honours, their party, and the Premier left the Chamber as a fanfare of trumpets sounded]

The Speaker: Please be seated.

[The Mace was uncovered]

The Speaker: Ladies and gentlemen, as an add-on, today I was told as I came into this room that we are at, truly, a historic moment. Today, by the very date and time, is the 800th anniversary of the signing of the Magna Carta in 1215.

I wanted to share some information about the members of this House, which the public and our electorate in Alberta may well be pleased to hear about. On May 5, 2015, over 1,488,000 votes were cast in 87 constituencies throughout our province of Alberta. Eighty-seven individuals were elected with a shared hope for a more constructive culture in this Assembly. In addition, a number of new individuals have commenced this service as members of this Assembly. Including myself, 70 new members have joined the ranks of those before us who have served Albertans as members of this Assembly. This is not the greatest percentage of new members as that distinction belongs to the eighth Legislature in 1935, with 92 per cent of the members being new.

I'd like to take a few minutes to introduce the members of this 29th Legislature collectively to Albertans. As mentioned, 70 members are in their first term of office; nine members are in their second term of office; four members are in their third term of office; two members are in their fourth term of office; and one member is in his sixth term of office.

While generally we may be new to the Legislature, we bring a variety of education and experience from other realms to our work on behalf of Albertans. Based on the information received to date from members themselves, 20 members have had direct involvement in education, including eight postsecondary instructors, two professors, two principals, nine teachers, and five students. Fifteen members have experience in business, two in finance, and eight have acted as consultants. Nine members have worked in labour relations. Twelve members have worked in the civil service and eight in nonprofits. Nine members come from the health care fields, and four have experience as first responders. Six members are registered as social workers, and I'm proud to say that I am one of those six.

We have seven members who are farmers or ranchers. Six have worked in transportation and six in the sciences. There are five lawyers. Ten members have worked in media, communications, or in information technology. Eleven members have worked as researchers, managers, analysts, or support staff. Three members have worked in real estate, and three are musicians. Members have also held the following occupations: sports and fitness instructor, sales representative, psychologist, carpenter, clergy, insurance agent, mediator, and veterinarian.

We have one member who has served as a Member of Parliament, who is now the Leader of the Official Opposition. Eight members have served as councillors or aldermen, and two members have been school trustees.

Among us we have 62 bachelor's degrees, 22 master's degrees, six law degrees, two doctors of medicine, one doctor of veterinary medicine, and over 40 other diplomas, certificates, and professional designations.

Members are reflecting the changing characteristics of the Albertans we serve. While the majority of members were born in Alberta, we have a number who were born in other Canadian provinces as well as in Brazil, Chile, Colombia, France, Nicaragua, and Pakistan. In addition to English, members can communicate in French, German, Spanish, Punjabi, Cantonese, Chinese or Mandarin, Dutch, Italian, Korean, Pahari, Thai, and Urdu.

Twenty-nine members are women. To date this is the largest number of women ever elected in Alberta. As a father of four daughters, with five granddaughters, I am particularly proud of this accomplishment.

Based on the information available, our average age at the time of our election on May 5 was almost 46 years old. This is five years younger than the 28th Legislature. The youngest average age of a Legislature was back from 1909 to 1913, during the Second Legislature, when the average age of the 41 members was 42 years of age.

We are proud to have two of the youngest members ever elected to the Alberta Legislative Assembly in our midst. At the ages of 20 and 21 these members will reflect the views and perspectives of the young people of this province as we conduct our business. Additionally, we have members whose life experience will guide our debates and inform our decision-making. At the time of the election we had nine members in their 20s, 22 members in their 30s, 16 in their 40s, 24 in their 50s, and 15 members in their 60s.

Members go into this 29th Legislature pledging to listen and act on behalf of all Albertans in a meaningful and respectful way. As elected representatives we will strive to make the best decisions for the short- and long-term future of this wonderful province.

From my discussions with all members there is a shared optimism for the 29th Legislature, a desire and a commitment to work better together, to recognize our differences of opinion as a strength and not a weakness. There is a desire to make this place not a theatre but a forum for democracy.

Thank you.

[The Premier returned to the Chamber]

Tablings

The Speaker: I have the honour to table a copy of the speech graciously given by Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor.

Introduction of Bills

Bill 1

An Act to Renew Democracy in Alberta

Ms Ganley: Mr. Speaker, it is my honour and privilege to rise today to request leave to introduce this government's first bill, An Act to Renew Democracy in Alberta.

During the election we promised to reform the electoral process in this province. Bill 1 is the first step in our efforts to help ensure that Albertans have the strongest voice in our democracy. Mr. Speaker, An Act to Renew Democracy in Alberta will amend the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act so that,

effective today, corporations and unions will be banned from making political contributions in this province. From now on only residents of Alberta will be allowed to do so. This includes political donations to political parties, constituency associations, candidates for election in senatorial elections, and leadership contestants.

The Chief Electoral Officer has been consulted, and his advice has been taken into account in the development of the amendments. These amendments will bring equity and fairness to election financing and represent just the beginning of our efforts to renew democracy in our province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 1 read a first time]

Certificates of Election

The Clerk: Mr. Speaker, I have received from the Chief Electoral Officer of Alberta pursuant to the Election Act a report containing the results of the general election conducted on the 5th day of May, 2015, which states that an election was conducted in the following

electoral divisions, and the said report further shows that the following members were duly elected.

[The Clerk read the election returns]

Motions

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, I move that the speech of Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor to this Assembly be taken into consideration on June 16, 2015.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to all. I move that the House do now adjourn until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 3:44 p.m. to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, June 16, 2015

Day 2

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

First Session

Wanner, Hon. Robert E., Medicine Hat (ND), Speaker
Jabbour, Deborah C., Peace River (ND), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Feehan, Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (ND), Deputy Chair of Committees

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Rocky View (W)
Anderson, Shaye, Leduc-Beaumont (ND)
Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (W)
Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (ND)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (W)
Bhullar, Manmeet Singh, Calgary-Greenway (PC)
Bilous, Hon. Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (ND),
Deputy Government House Leader
Carlier, Hon. Oneil, Whitecourt-St. Anne (ND)
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-Meadowlark (ND)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, Calgary-Fort (ND)
Clark, Greg, Calgary-Elbow (AP)
Connolly, Michael R.D., Calgary-Hawkwood (ND)
Coolahan, Craig, Calgary-Klein (ND)
Cooper, Nathan, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (W),
Official Opposition House Leader
Cortes-Vargas, Estefania, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (ND)
Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake (W),
Official Opposition Deputy Whip
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (ND)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South West (ND)
Drever, Deborah, Calgary-Bow (Ind)
Drysdale, Wayne, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (PC),
Progressive Conservative Opposition Whip
Eggen, Hon. David, Edmonton-Calder (ND)
Ellis, Mike, Calgary-West (PC)
Fildebrandt, Derek Gerhard, Strathmore-Brooks (W)
Fitzpatrick, Maria M., Lethbridge-East (ND)
Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (PC)
Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., Calgary-Buffalo (ND)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (ND)
Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (PC)
Gray, Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (ND)
Hanson, David B., Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills (W),
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Hoffman, Hon. Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (ND)
Horne, Trevor A.R., Spruce Grove-St. Albert (ND)
Hunter, Grant R., Cardston-Taber-Warner (W)
Jansen, Sandra, Calgary-North West (PC)
Jean, Brian Michael, QC, Fort McMurray-Conklin (W),
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Kleinstuber, Jamie, Calgary-Northern Hills (ND)
Larivee, Danielle, Lesser Slave Lake (ND)
Littlewood, Jessica, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (ND)
Loewen, Todd, Grande Prairie-Smoky (W)
Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (ND)
Luff, Robyn, Calgary-East (ND)
MacIntyre, Donald, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (W)
Malkinson, Brian, Calgary-Currie (ND)
Mason, Hon. Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (ND),
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Orr, Ronald, Lacombe-Ponoka (W)
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Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie (W)
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (ND)
Rodney, Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC)
Rosendahl, Eric, West Yellowhead (ND)
Sabir, Hon. Irfan, Calgary-McCall (ND)
Schmidt, Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (ND),
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Schneider, David A., Little Bow (W)
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Shepherd, David, Edmonton-Centre (ND)
Sigurdson, Hon. Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (ND)
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (W)
Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC),
Progressive Conservative Opposition House Leader
Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (W)
Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (W)
Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (ND)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (ND)
Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (W)
Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (ND)
van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND)
Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)
Vacant, Calgary-Foothills

Party standings:

New Democrat: 53 Wildrose: 21 Progressive Conservative: 9 Alberta Liberal: 1 Alberta Party: 1 Independent: 1 Vacant: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, June 16, 2015

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Let us pray and contemplate in our own minds. Give to each member of this Legislature a strong and abiding sense of the great responsibilities laid upon us. Give us a deep and thorough understanding of the needs of the people that we all serve. We'll take a moment. Amen.

Hon. members, as is our custom and way, we pay tribute on our first day to members and former members of this Assembly who have passed away since we last met. I will duly be mentioning the members in the Speaker's gallery today, but the families are with us.

Mr. John Albert Gogo
February 15, 1932, to April 4, 2015

The Speaker: Mr. Gogo was first elected to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta as the Member for Lethbridge West on March 26, 1975. He was re-elected in the next four provincial elections, serving for a total of 18 years, two months, and 20 days, until his retirement on June 14, 1993. During that tenure, in addition to serving on numerous legislative committees, Mr. Gogo served as Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees from 1986 to 1989 and minister of advanced education from 1989 until 1992. Mr. Gogo was a veteran of the Korean War. Mr. Gogo was a vocal proponent for his home city of Lethbridge, and as a result in 2007 he was awarded an honorary doctorate of laws from the University of Lethbridge.

Mr. Frank Pierpoint Appleby
December 23, 1913, to May 18, 2015

The Speaker: Mr. Frank Pierpoint Appleby served as the Member for Athabasca from August 30, 1971, until his retirement on May 7, 1986. Mr. Appleby had a varied career. During his tenure as a Member of the Legislative Assembly he served on many committees, including as chair of the Select Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections. Mr. Appleby served as Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees from 1979 until 1986. In 1985 he introduced the Forestry Profession Act and was subsequently recognized by the College of Alberta Professional Foresters, which now bestows an annual award bearing his name. For his dedication to lifelong learning and his efforts to establish Athabasca University, he was awarded an honorary doctorate degree from Athabasca University in 2005.

Mr. Norman Allen Weiss
December 23, 1935, to June 2, 2015

The Speaker: Mr. Weiss was first elected on March 14, 1979, as the Member for Lac La Biche-McMurray. He served a total of four terms, the last for the electoral division of Fort McMurray. During his tenure he served as minister of recreation and parks from 1986 to 1989, associate minister of family and social services in 1989, and minister of career development and employment from 1989 to 1992. Upon his retirement from the Assembly Mr. Weiss, who was born in Edmonton, noted his love for northern Alberta and his gratitude for having the opportunity to contribute to the

development of programs and services for his northern constituency.

In a moment of silent reflection and prayer I ask each of you to remember Mr. Gogo, Mr. Appleby, and Mr. Weiss as you have known them. May we each take a moment of silence in recognition of our three members.

You may be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, with our admiration and respect there is gratitude to members of the families who shared the burdens of public office and public service, and I know that each of you over the next years will appreciate that much more than you do today. We have with us today members of the Gogo, Appleby, and Weiss families. I would ask them to rise and remain standing as I call their names, and then we can welcome them all at the end with our applause and appreciation.

Representing the Gogo family are Joyce Gogo, wife of Mr. John Gogo; Susan Gogo-Quinn, daughter of John Gogo; Sharon Gillett, daughter of John Gogo; Shannon Donkersgoed, daughter of John Gogo; Sandra Hegland, daughter of John Gogo; and Doug Hegland, son-in-law of John Gogo.

Representing the Appleby family are Dorothy Appleby, wife of Frank Appleby; Brian Appleby, son of Frank Appleby; Liz Appleby, daughter-in-law of Frank Appleby; Kevin Appleby, grandson of Frank Appleby; Erin Echeverria, granddaughter of Frank Appleby; and Dawn Minns, niece of Frank Appleby.

Representing the Weiss family are Jill Weiss, daughter of Norm Weiss; Louise Stewart; and Graham Stewart, grandson of Norm Weiss.

Could I ask the members to please stand and show your appreciation. [Standing ovation]

Greetings of the House to each of you, and thank you for being with us.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Are there any school groups with us today?

Mr. Piquette: Mr. Speaker, it's my privilege to introduce visitors from my riding. Actually, I'm quite fortunate today. The Applebys are mostly from my riding – I'm glad you introduced them – but I also have with us today councillors from Thorhild county. If they could please rise, we have here Reeve Wayne Crosswell, Deputy Reeve Dan Bury, and Councillor Larry Sisson. Could we please give the customary warm welcome of the House?

I'm also fortunate to be able to introduce to you and through you the Martin family from Athabasca. They are prominent local business persons as well as active community members. If I could please have Fred, Elsie, and Trevor Martin rise. Could you please extend the warm greetings of the House?

1:40

The Speaker: The Minister of Municipal Affairs and Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a remarkable example of political engagement, dedication, and volunteerism. Sonia Varela has been a tireless volunteer for the New Democratic candidates, MLAs, and MPs in our great province for decades. Our recent success in the election does not solely belong to those who sit in the Assembly but also to those Albertans like Sonia who have dedicated their time, energy,

and money to making our province a better place. I'd ask Sonia to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The Minister of Education and Minister of Culture and Tourism.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to you and through you to all members of the Assembly. I have 20 visitors from Alberta Education, who have come to check up on me and the rest of us here as well today. If they can rise as I read their names, please. I have Mrs. Robyn Hodge, Miss Shirley Han, Ms Amy Johnson, Tara Sliwkanich, Michael Skoreyko, and Aretha Greatrix. If they could rise and please receive the warm welcome of all the members of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a great Albertan. He was orphaned at 14, worked in the coal mines and forestry. He truly helped build this province. Along the way he had three children, 11 grandchildren, of which I am proud to be one, and 22 great-grandchildren. I would ask that my grandfather Ulric Lamontagne rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, it's my great pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two school groups. They are home-schoolers, one from the great constituency of Airdrie and the other from the great, the fabulous, I might say, constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, and two of the world's best teachers, I think you'll find they would tell you. We have Gunther, Linnea, and Martin Laubenstein, and the world's best teacher, Heather Laubenstein. We have Porter, Paxton, and Peyton Cooper – some resemblance – and my beautiful wife, Tanya, is also there.

The Speaker: I would particularly remind and thank the speakers that when we have children with us in this Assembly, we ought to look to them as our future. Thank you, hon. member.
Edmonton-Whitemud.

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The single best preventative health measure known is to reduce tobacco use. On May 31, shortly after our election, the Minister of Health announced that menthol-flavoured cigarettes would be banned. This will markedly reduce youth smoking and will save lives. The Campaign for a Smoke-free Alberta has been working on this project for many years, and the representatives of that group are in the gallery today. They've strongly supported our government's decision to ban menthol and other flavoured tobacco products.

Mr. Speaker, through you and to the members of the Assembly I would like to introduce the following, and if they could stand: Angeline Webb from the Canadian Cancer Society, Leigh Allard from the Lung Association of Alberta, Kayla Atkey of the Alberta Policy Coalition for Chronic Disease Prevention, and Les Hagen of Action on Smoking and Health. If you'll give them the usual warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my great honour to introduce to you and to the Legislature Eric Musekamp and Darlene Dunlop, no strangers to the Alberta Legislature.

They've been here every session for 11 years, first introduced in the House in 2005 by the current Education minister, from Edmonton-Calder. These human rights advocates have sacrificed in an extraordinary way to put farm workers on the agenda of this government after years and years of neglect. This year, in fact, they received supportive letters not only from the Queen but from the Pope.

They're here again today with a new sense of hope in their hearts to remind this House that 25 people died last year on farms. Hundreds of people were injured, many of them children, and they are in urgent need of protection. They're here to meet with ministers and work with this new government to redress past government negligence of both worker safety and fundamental human rights. I'll ask Eric and Darlene to rise and receive the usual warm welcome from the Legislature.

Statement by the Speaker

Rotation of Questions and Members' Statements

The Speaker: I would like to make a few comments first. This part is particularly to the guests. I do hope that you appreciate that the Speaker, including many of these members – we are learning, and I hope you will stick with us and have patience for that.

Hon. members, before we proceed with Members' Statements, I want to outline the rotation that will apply for Oral Question Period and Members' Statements. As noted in the procedural memo that I sent out to all members yesterday, the Speaker's office received a document on June 15, 2015, signed by the three House leaders, confirming their agreement on the rotation of oral questions and of members' statements. Copies of the Oral Question Period rotation are on members' desks along with the projected sitting days calendar, that outlines the members' statements rotation. With respect to Oral Question Period the agreement is based on 20 questions each day and follows an eight-day rotation.

I want to say at the outset that I take heart that the very first section of *Beauchesne's*, sixth edition, lists as the first principle of parliamentary law "to protect a minority and restrain the improvidence or tyranny of a majority." I have reviewed the agreement amongst House leaders of the three largest caucuses and find that the allotment of questions to the single-member parties and the independent member is reasonable. By having three questions every eight days, the single-member party leaders have more questions than was the case when this situation arose before, such as on February 8, 2012, in the Fifth Session of the 27th Legislature. If there are concerns, I would encourage House leaders to meet and see me if further refinements are necessary or possible.

1:50

With respect to the agreements reached by House leaders, I want to articulate the sequence so that it is clear in the record of the proceedings and to let people who are following the proceedings know what to expect. Flowing from the agreement, the Official Opposition is entitled to the first three main questions each day, and the PC caucus is entitled to the fourth question each day. Question 5 is allocated to the Liberal caucus on days 1, 3, and 6; to the Alberta Party caucus on days 2, 5, and 7; and to the independent member on days 4 and 8. Private members of the government caucus are entitled to the sixth question each day. In addition to the first three questions each day, the Official Opposition is entitled to ask the seventh, ninth, 10th, 13th, 16th, 18th, and 20th questions. In addition to the fourth question each day, the PC caucus is allocated the eighth, 11th, 14th, and 17th questions. Apart from question 6 each day, private members of the government caucus may ask the 12th, 15th, and 19th questions.

I want to remind members that questions and responses should be 35 seconds in length and that preambles to supplementary questions are only allowed for the first five rounds of questions each day.

With respect to members' statements the House leaders' agreement is based on a three-week rotation. According to Standing Order 7(4) each day up to six private members may make a statement of no more than two minutes in duration. Private members of the government caucus are entitled to three statements on Monday and Tuesday each week and on Wednesday of weeks 1 and 2 and four statements on Thursday each week and on Wednesday of week 3. The Official Opposition is entitled to two statements on Monday and Tuesday each week and on Wednesday of weeks 1 and 2 and one statement on Thursday each week and on Wednesday of week 3. The PC caucus is allocated one statement on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday each week.

Under the House leaders' agreement the Liberal, Alberta Party, and independent members will each have an opportunity to make a member's statement once in the three-week rotation. The leader of the Liberal caucus is allocated a statement on Thursday of week 1, the leader of the Alberta caucus on Thursday of week 2, and the independent member on Thursday of week 3.

Thank you, hon. members. I will table a copy of the House leaders' agreement at the appropriate time in the daily Routine today.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: I will make a brief comment. As I've said several times and will be no doubt saying again as we move forward, my first statement was that we have patience with each other and, particularly, patience with the Speaker. I wish, however, to remind members that once we have all learned together, the application of tradition and practice may begin to evolve. So as I acknowledge to the Leader of the Official Opposition that I may provide some licence today in terms of a request he has made for an allocation of additional time, I do not wish any member of this House to understand that to be a precedent for the future. It may well change.

The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before I ask my first question here, let me congratulate all the newly elected MLAs, the returning MLAs, and, of course, you, Mr. Speaker, on your recent election and the Premier for a historic election. Amazing.

I also want to indicate to the House, Mr. Speaker, that I knew both Mr. Appleby and Mr. Weiss – without Mr. Weiss I would not be here today – and indeed both gentlemen I awarded Queen's medals to, and they were great individuals. My condolences.

Provincial Tax Policy

Mr. Jean: Albertans have high hopes for this new government, as we do. As the Official Opposition we want Albertans to know that we're here to work hard, to be honest and stand accountable for them, and to help this government make Alberta better for everyone. My first question is simple. I'm hoping it will also allow the Premier to get off on a good foot. Will the Premier today assure Albertans that her government will not bring in a provincial sales tax while she is Premier?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Let me begin, of course, by offering to my colleague across the way, the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, our caucus's congratulations on his election and his new position as Leader of the Official Opposition.

I think that leaves me about five seconds, Mr. Speaker, so the answer to his question is yes. He can be assured that we have no intention of bringing in a sales tax.

Mr. Jean: Well, that is great news, and Alberta's families, Alberta businesses will be very happy with that.

Wildrose believes that municipalities need stable, long-term, predictable funding to provide better infrastructure for Alberta families. Our 10-10 plan proposes that municipalities be allocated 10 per cent of the provincial taxes with absolutely no strings attached. Our municipalities expressed strong support for this infrastructure plan. Will the Premier commit today to implement the popular Wildrose 10-10 municipal infrastructure plan?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, we understand that municipal government in Alberta is the level of government that is closest to Alberta communities and provides important services to all Albertans, and we understand the value of the work that they do. We're very much looking forward to continuing the conversation with them with respect to the Municipal Government Act, and within that we will have conversations that include issues around predictable funding, around infrastructure as well as MSI as well as a number of other issues which are important to municipalities. I look forward to having those discussions and negotiations with municipal leaders, and I look forward to updating this Assembly with respect to the outcome of those discussions.

2:00

The Speaker: Second supplemental. The Leader of the Queen's Official Opposition.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, such great news. What a great answer.

I can see that help is on its way. I do think Albertans will be very pleased, and I'm certainly pleased. I know that all Albertans are very excited because we know that we pay the most income tax and the most tax dollars per capita of any province in Canada. We also know that Albertans are looking for additional good news, and I'm looking for an answer. Will the Premier today assure Albertans that during her time as Premier she will not give new taxing powers to our biggest cities?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I just outlined to the hon. leader, I respect municipal leadership, and I respect the work that they do in our communities. In order to do that, then, what we need to do is engage in fulsome, substantive negotiations with those leaders about a number of different options that they have to ensure that they enjoy the benefit of predictable, sustainable funding. The details of those discussions and those negotiations need to begin between this government and those municipal leaders, and as I've said before, once we reach those conclusions, we will happily inform the members opposite of the outcomes.

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Provincial Budget

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, we'd like to help provide Albertans with clarity on another important issue after that strong "maybe." We certainly recognize that the Premier isn't ready to table a budget just yet, and that's sort of understandable, but it would be helpful for Alberta businesses and Alberta families to actually know what direction the province is going and, certainly, to know what the financial plan is for the years ahead. Will the Premier commit to

Alberta families and Alberta businesses that she will reconvene the Legislature on September 7 to consider a budget?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The commitment that I have already made to Albertans and that I will make now to members of this Assembly is that this fall we will reconvene in this Assembly to have a thorough and fulsome discussion about the details of our budget. We will put forward a new budget, and I'm looking forward to working closely with the members of our caucus putting together that budget, and then I'm looking forward to hearing the input and the discussions from members throughout the Assembly when we debate that budget in the fall. It won't be on September 7; I can tell you that. It will be relatively soon after, and we will all have a fulsome opportunity to discuss . . .

The Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That answer just wasn't very helpful.

May I remind all members in this House that the last time the Legislature passed a budget here was over a year ago under Premier Redford, and in fact that was three Premiers ago. [some applause]

Mr. Mason: We're more stable now.

Mr. Jean: We're hoping.

Now, a few months' delay is certainly understandable, but the government can craft a budget in four months. It's been done before; it can be done again. Then we could introduce the budget in September. That would still mean the budget would not be passed until the end of this year. Albertans would like to know why – Mr. Speaker, I just noticed the thunderous applause on the other side might have taken some of my time.

The Speaker: The hon. member, I'm sure, will be hopeful that that applause will continue long into the future, and I must tell all of you that we must as a group retain that exchange that is happening amongst us in a very positive and constructive way.

I will recognize the hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My hon. colleague across the way, in fact, opined that one could probably put together a budget in roughly four months. That would mean that we'd be coming back roughly at the end of September, and I suspect that within more or less that range of time you will see us returning. But don't worry; we are going to have a very detailed discussion about a budget. Let me just say that that budget will be based on the principles that this government laid out to the people of Alberta in the last election. That's what the budget will include. It will reflect those opinions, reflect those principles, and reflect what the people of this province voted for.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to clarify that even with the thunderous applause I have no aspirations whatsoever of ever leading the NDP Party.

Mr. Speaker, it looks like the Premier won't even have us considering a budget until November, and we may not pass it until December. That means, frankly, that it's unfair to Albertans. It's unfair to Alberta businesses. We all know the Premier isn't planning on any cuts whatsoever, so really the only budget questions are which taxes are going to go up and how much new debt Albertans

are going to have to pay off in the future. Why won't the Premier be ready to give us these two answers in September?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you. Well, as I think I've outlined and as I think the member opposite suggested before, we're looking at roughly about four months. This is a time consideration that's been passed on to us by the previous government. What we have said is that we will move forward to ensure that we put in place the fundamental principles that we talked about in this election, so Albertans have a general sense about where we are going and should have a general sense about where we are going. But we're going to make sure that we do it in a considered, detailed fashion. We don't want to introduce Prentice 2.0. We want to introduce NDP 1.0 because that's what the people of this province just voted for, and that's what we owe to them.

The Speaker: As we create a sense of constructive dialogue with each other, I think we all share in this room – and I realize that the time I take is very valuable in this question period. I would, however, extend thanks on behalf of all of us for the support that the legislative staff have provided to each of us as we find our way through these first sessions.

I would recognize the Leader of the Official Opposition with his third main question.

Government Accountability

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During the election all parties did make promises. Indeed, one of the most popular promises the Wildrose made was to conduct audits of key decisions made by the past PC government, speaking of which. A few weeks ago the Premier made news when she suggested that the PCs had deceived us all and expenditures and revenues were different than what they'd said. No real surprise there. Does the Premier think it would be helpful to call for a full-scale audit of the government and the ministers' offices, and if so, will she do it?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As members of this Assembly would know, this government has been sworn in for I believe it's 22 days now, and we're getting ourselves up to speed with the issues that are going on within our ministries and within government. As we go through that process, we will evaluate the strength of the projections that were provided to Albertans in the past and the accuracy of our budgeting at that time. Once we've done that, we will in fact . . .

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, the Government House Leader recently talked about finding skeletons in the closet. I'm sure there are many. The Premier suggested that she was deceived about the true state of our province's finances and spending. I know for a fact that some very large and unusual spending decisions were made after the election but before the Premier was sworn in. There is no doubt that multiple audits are required. No doubt whatsoever. Albertans want audits of the past government behaviour. Is the Premier going to call in the Auditor General to look at the PC government books? Albertans want to know.

2:10

Ms Notley: Well, I want to say that I think in many ways the hon. member across the floor and I have some common cause on this issue. We certainly want to make sure that Albertans have been and will be getting the most accurate information they can. But what we

first need to do is to do a bit of an environmental scan with respect to how things are at this point and then consider what the best way is to proceed going forward. So I understand the issues that the member is raising, but we're not quite ready to make that kind of decision quite yet. I want to be clear as well. I do not believe that I was ever deceived . . .

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And to be clear, if you need help, there are 21 people on this side that would help you with the environmental cleanup situation.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans did vote for change in the last election. They wanted a new broom to sweep clean, and they wanted all the rocks turned upside down and the sun to shine into the dark corners of the PC universe. No question. Can the Premier tell us what she will do to ensure that Albertans actually get the transparency and accountability that they voted for in the last election?

Ms Notley: There are a number of different mechanisms, Mr. Speaker, that we can engage in in order to increase transparency and accountability, many of which were talked about by both sides of this House during the election and many of which we'll move forward on. I was very pleased that the Leader of the Official Opposition agreed with our government's initiative, in response in part to his initial proposition, that we put together a select special committee that will consider issues around election financing, around conflict of interest, and around whistle-blower legislation. I think that's an incredibly good first start. I look forward to working with all members of this Assembly to ensure that Alberta truly has a first-class . . .

The Speaker: I would hope that the hon. Premier acknowledges and appreciates the patience with respect to the opposition leader for time, as a couple of occasions apply today as well.

I'd like to recognize the leader of the third party, the Progressive Conservative Party.

Mr. McIver: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take a few seconds to congratulate the Premier, her cabinet, and all of the government caucus for their success in the election. Well done. I and all members of our caucus look forward to working with you and all members of this House for the betterment of Alberta.

Provincial Tax Policy (continued)

Mr. McIver: My first question is to the Premier with regard to the 2 per cent tax increase planned for corporations. How much revenue does this government expect to raise by adding this corporate tax?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, we're going ahead with respect to implementing this corporate tax because this was a critical issue that was discussed during the election. As we address the fact that our province has to deal with the fiscal crunch generated in part by our overreliance on royalty revenues after many, many years of the previous government's management decisions, we went to Albertans and asked them: how should we deal with this? And Albertans said resoundingly that those profitable corporations, who have profited during the boom times, need to pay their . . .

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. McIver: Thank you. It's a little disturbing that the government is putting a tax in place and they don't have any idea how much revenue they're going to get. However, we'll move on.

Mr. Speaker, my next question, also to the Premier, with regard to the so-called progressive tax increases to be subtracted from the incomes of hard-working Albertans making over \$125,000 per year: how much revenue does this government expect to raise by adding this personal tax?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think that one of the things that first needs to be understood with respect to this government's progressive income tax change is that under our plan, versus the plan that that party ran on and introduced when it was in government, those Albertans who earn less than \$125,000 a year will pay less. The first thing to understand is that our approach to bringing in a progressive income tax was most focused on bringing in fairness and . . .

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. McIver: Thank you. So we're flying blind on two taxes. We have no idea how much revenue we're going to raise, but we're doing it anyway. That's what I heard.

Mr. Speaker, I have friends that earn over \$125,000 a year. Some are in one-income homes with children and are currently just making ends meet after paying for the normal expenses. Some of them intentionally live on a tight budget in hopes that their wages and benefits will increase due to the Alberta advantage that at least did exist. How much less will they take home each month?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to learn that some of the hon. leader's best friends are people that earn over \$125,000 a year. I'm sure that community will feel represented.

That being said, what will happen here in Alberta is that Albertans will continue to pay less tax than people in any other province in the country. That's the first thing that needs to be remembered. What we heard on the doorsteps and on the campaign trail was that many people in Alberta who earned a bit more understood that it was perhaps time for them to contribute a little bit more.

The Speaker: The Speaker recognizes the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Let me take this opportunity to congratulate all the elected officials today, new and old and older. It's a real honour to be with you, and I look forward to the session.

Flood Damage Mitigation on the Bow and Elbow Rivers

Dr. Swann: My constituents are concerned about the inaction on upstream flood mitigation in Calgary two years after the worst flooding disaster to hit the province. The previous regime hastily announced the Springbank dry reservoir just a few days ahead of the 2014 fall election. The announcement preceded the receipt of an important engineering report that was to provide analysis of the cost benefit of the project. My question to the environment minister: what is your position on the Springbank dry reservoir project, and what should Albertans expect in mitigation efforts upstream of Calgary?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View for this important question, which I know is near and dear to his constituents' hearts and to many of our Calgary members as well. You know, Albertans were devastated by the 2013 floods. That event caused tremendous economic and social costs to our province, and many of the devastating effects on public services and to our businesses are still being felt to this day. Our government will make sure Alberta is better prepared for future adverse effects through world-class flood mitigation and better planning to reduce the costs and damages caused by flooding.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll give the minister some leeway on that non answer.

Again to the minister: given the ambiguity over who controls reservoir flows upstream of Calgary, currently in the hands of TransAlta, and given the secret negotiations that went on with the previous government and TransAlta in pursuing a long-term agreement in the public interest, will this minister make public the negotiations and establish a long-term agreement in the public interest for upstream flows on the Bow and the Elbow rivers?

2:20

Ms Phillips: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, the former PC government did not adequately prepare for the 2013 floods. They waited for the catastrophe to start work on flood mitigation. That is just plain backwards. We have a situation where the previous government did not have up-to-date flood maps. Without up-to-date information the government left communities ill prepared. We will be moving forward on a proactive approach to flood mitigation and planning to keep Albertans' homes and businesses safe.

Dr. Swann: I am going to try it again, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister commit to making public the negotiations with TransAlta, including financial compensation, relating to upstream flows in the Bow River?

Ms Phillips: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the question because it's quite clear to us and quite clear to me after 22 days that the situation that we inherited from the previous PC government on flood mitigation can only be described as a gong show. Therefore, our government will achieve adequate flood mitigation and planning. We will work with municipal and community partners to meet their specific needs.

The Speaker: I would remind the members that as we move on to the next questions – not that you may have noticed any particular preamble speeches in the first five questions, but as we move forward, it is definitive that there won't be any of these. Thank you for your support on that.

I'll recognize the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Elder Abuse

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday, June 15, was World Elder Abuse Awareness Day. All of my questions are for the Minister of Seniors. Can the minister tell us how extensive the problem of elder abuse is in Alberta?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you to the hon. member for the question. This is something that my ministry staff brought to my attention early in my tenure, and I'm sure members opposite are well aware of the

extensiveness of the problem as well. In Alberta it's speculated that 1 in 10 elders, 1 in 10 people over the age of 65, is suffering the harmful effects of elder abuse, and I thank the members, the vast majority of whom are wearing their purple ribbon, for helping us address that issue as we move together as a province in service of all Albertans, including our seniors.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the 10 per cent figure that the minister has given us is only specifically reported cases and given that in rural areas there is less support for elder abuse, how do these grants support local initiatives?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you again to the member for the question, and thank you, Mr. Speaker. One in 10 elders, as has been noted, is at risk of facing abuse, and it's primarily at the hands of either somebody that they're related to or somebody that's in a position of power in relation to them. In terms of local autonomy and decision-making we've proudly announced grants in the million-dollar range for this year, \$3 million over three years so that local decision-making can be put forward. In the hon. member's riding \$50,000 was awarded for a local group, that's already doing advocacy in this area, to hire a part-time staff member.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this issue has been a concern for so long, why have these local supports not been given out before?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks again to the hon. member. What I can assure you of is that there are tremendous resources that have been created centrally through the Ministry of Seniors so that those who are in positions to be able to have opportunities to relay that information now will actually be able to give resources to the local communities so that they can actually staff their offices and make sure that information is actually shared more broadly. So I'm really proud of the fact that we're taking something that already was an initiative under way and actually making sure that it can have the legs, through this million dollars' worth of grants, to make life better for Alberta's seniors and their families.

Thank you.

The Speaker: I want to remind the members that there are no preambles.

I recognize the member for the great constituency of Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Health Care System Decision-making

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Minister of Health recently announced that she would be eliminating the move towards decentralized decision-making in health care, this after the province has seen its health budget inflate further and further beyond the national average while producing consistently mediocre outcomes for all patients and declining services in rural communities. To the minister. Albertans clearly want to see changes made in health care. Do you really think that more of the same centralized decision-making in health care is the way forward?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. What Albertans told us loud and clear in the election is that they were sick of the risk of mass cuts all across the province, centralization, decentralization, recentralization, disorganization. Albertans elected this government to make sure that we provide stability. The Premier made it very clear during the election campaign that that was our number one priority for health care, and I'm proud to be able to deliver on that.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, during the election we all heard from people who said that the current health care system is broken, unresponsive, wasteful, and unaccountable to the needs of Albertans. Albertans sent a clear signal that they expect us to work towards changing and improving these failing services. Can the minister explain why she wants to stabilize a broken health care system that doesn't work for Albertans instead of making positive changes for Alberta patients and families?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know we heard a lot about health care on the doorsteps, and that's because of over 40 years of having a government in place that doesn't live by and promote the Canada Health Act. You don't have a government like that today. We have a government that is committed to following through on the requests of Albertans, which is to have a strong health care system in place. When they talked on the doorsteps about their issues on health care, it was around wait times. We're working on a plan to address that. It was around making sure that we have long-term care. We're working on addressing that. I didn't hear anyone say: we want to have more decision-making bodies distract us from what actually is happening. Disorganization is not the answer; focusing on front-line services is. This government is committed to that.

The Speaker: I wish to remind yet again that in this set of questions – if the preambles could be abbreviated considerably. Proceed to your second supplemental.

Mr. Barnes: We heard too often that important health decisions are set far away from local residents. The last government missed the mark on ambulance response times, access to physicians, hospital infrastructure, and a host of other issues that hit rural Alberta particularly hard. Minister, in our shared interest of creating a more responsive system, will you recognize the concerns of rural Alberta and commit to empowering communities by putting local decisions back in the hands of local decision-makers?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much for the question. Mr. Speaker, of course, a local voice in guiding decision-making is a priority for this government, and I'm sure it's a priority for all of us. That's why we have local constituencies. We're going to ensure that when we do this review, we're providing stability, not another set of letterhead but actual stability, and making sure that local decisions have a voice to make their way forward. I will be very proud when we have the details around that consultation, how we're going to roll it out, to share it with all members of this House and all members of Alberta. Local voice will be a priority moving forward.

The Speaker: The next question is from the hon. Member for Calgary-West. I wish to again underline and ask for the patience of the House. In practice the preamble does not exist in this part of the questions.

Go ahead, hon. member.

2:30

Police Officer Fatality

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As a police officer for more than 10 years I can speak to the many dangers police face every day keeping our communities safe. I think everyone can join me in offering sincere condolences to the family of Constable Daniel Woodall, who was killed in the line of duty last week.

To the Minister of Justice. I have a two-part question I believe Albertans have a sincere interest in knowing the answer to. A fatality review is automatic. Will you make that review public, and will you commit to immediately adopting its recommendations so that we can protect our officers and victims ahead of the rights of offenders?

Ms Ganley: I'd like to thank the hon. member for the question. To begin with, I'd like to express the sincerest condolences to the family of Constable Woodall. We stand with you.

I would like to say that this government is absolutely committed to ensuring the safety of our front-line police officers and of our communities. The investigation is still ongoing at this point.

The Speaker: First supplemental. The Member for Calgary-West.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Justice minister. Given that I have been on the front lines and I have personally dealt with officers' families who have faced tragedy and given that this tragedy has terrible repercussions for the officer's family, what is the Justice minister doing to assist the family of Constable Woodall, his widow, Claire, and their two young children?

Ms Ganley: Thank you again to the member for the question. This government stands behind the families of officers, particularly in these tragic circumstances. I have been in contact with the widow, and we do plan to attend the funeral tomorrow. At this point she has not indicated that there is anything that is not being provided, but we are committed to providing any assistance they require going forward.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Second supplemental. The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Mr. Ellis: Great. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for contacting her and the family.

Again to the Justice minister: given that the so-called, quote, unquote, freemen on the land are listed by other jurisdictions as a domestic terrorist group and locally continue to cause issues and costs for police, courts, and law-abiding citizens, what is this government doing or planning to do to address these extremists in Alberta?

Ms Ganley: Thank you again for the question. Again, I say that this government is committed to supporting our front-line workers and to ensuring that they have the resources necessary. At this point we're still in the process of review, but certainly that is an issue that has come up.

Thank you.

Provincial Budget (continued)

Mr. Fildebrandt: Mr. Speaker, we want to help Albertans understand this minibudget. The NDP want to pass a minibudget that encompasses approximately 50 per cent of the government's operating costs. Added to the interim supply passed before the PCs made a very fateful decision to call an election, this province will

have run on interim supply for eight months. That's eight months without details, eight months without any real fiscal plan. Will the hon. Minister of Finance work with the opposition and commit to giving us a budget within six months, not eight?

Mr. Ceci: I'd like to thank the hon. member for the question. Mr. Speaker, I think the Premier has already made the answer to that clear. We'll be working closely with ministers and their ministries as we move into the early fall to bring forward a budget that will be before this House in the fall. I can commit to working hard through the summer, giving up my vacation, and bringing that report back to all of the members here in the fall. That's what I'll commit to.

Mr. Fildebrandt: I would gladly give up my vacation if I got to write the budget.

Mr. Speaker, to the Finance minister again. Crafting a budget so that Albertans know how their government is spending their money is the most important part of the minister's job. Albertans want to give this government a chance, but they don't want to give it a blank cheque. Given that the minibudget to be tabled is approximately 50 per cent of the size of a normal budget, will the minister not agree that Albertans deserve at least 50 per cent of the debate time given to a normal budget in this House?

Mr. Ceci: I thank the hon. member for the question. He and his members on that side will get a hundred per cent of the time to debate this budget when we get to the budget.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Mr. Speaker, we were referring to the mini-budget.

To the Minister of Finance. Once the full budget is passed, this fiscal year will nearly be over. This minibudget is likely to encompass 50 per cent of the government's operational costs, yet this minibudget is likely to provide very little in the way of details. Given that the minibudget being tabled is approximately 50 per cent of the full budget, will the minister not agree that Albertans deserve at least 50 per cent of the details?

Mr. Ceci: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member keeps asking about something that is not before this House. We're going to have an interim supply bill that's before this House in a few short days. That is known. In terms of the process what we will be able to look at are a number of revenue lines, a number of capital lines, a number of expenditure lines, so if he wants to talk about that, he can talk about that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Pipeline Development

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We heard the throne speech talk about the importance of market access for Alberta's resources. This sounds like welcome news, and we want to help the government make this happen, but we have some questions. We all know the Energy minister's chief of staff lobbied against Energy East and what Leadnow calls an illegitimate pipeline. We also know the NDP are against the pipeline to the west coast, and they're disinterested in going south. So can the Energy minister then explain how exactly we'll achieve market access without actually building pipelines?

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, first of all, Alberta is an energy province, and our government cares deeply about what energy brings to the prosperity of our province. We are committed to assisting the energy sector in getting product

to market. We're pretty isolated here in Alberta. We lack ports. So we've begun that already, those discussions in our royalty review. Last week we were in Calgary three times talking to over 50 energy senior advisers and over six groups that represent the sector . . .

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mrs. Aheer: Yesterday in a press conference the Premier went on at length talking about our market access and shipping our oil and gas to market without once using the word "pipelines" or the word "rail." Now, we're pretty sure there isn't a third alternative way of shipping oil and gas out of Alberta. So is this government actually committed to building any pipelines or expanding rail use?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Just to be clear, I'm very committed to ensuring that our energy industry is supported, and we understand that part of that means ensuring that they can get their product to market. When I say "ship," it's a verb. But let me be very clear. I understand that pipelines are, in fact, the safest way to get product to market, and I have every intention of working, along with my Minister of Energy and my minister of environment, with our industry to ensure that we establish a reputation and a process that will ensure that other parts of this country will welcome their partnership with us and industry.

2:40

Mrs. Aheer: Wonderful to hear.

Albertans need some clarity about where the NDP stands on these issues. In the opposition the NDP called pipelines job killers. The Energy minister's chief of staff, her top adviser, was the executive director for a group that said that pipelines and rail put "our communities, livelihoods and environment in harm's way." Will the Energy minister be crystal clear and commit today to advocate to expand market access through environmentally responsible pipelines?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to make two things perfectly clear. First of all, our position on the Keystone was that if we ship unprocessed bitumen to Texas, according to this government and to the American government we will give tens of thousands of Alberta jobs to Texas, not to Albertans, and that's not what Albertans want to see. The second thing that I want to make very clear – I want to make this very clear. For too long Albertans have been trapped in a discussion where when you stand up for our air and our land and our water, you are accused of being a job killer. What that does is that it contributes to the very record which is actually inhibiting our ability . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Education Funding

Ms Jansen: Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by thanking our new government for putting more than \$100 million into our education system, including \$6 million for private, charter, and independent schools. As a parent of a child in a charter school I could not be happier. But given that your party has formerly stated that funding private and charter schools was draining money from the public system, it's a little bit confusing. To the Education minister: do you support the public-private model?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks very much for that question. I think it's very important for everyone to understand that our government was voted in to make sure that we have stable funding for education here in the province of Alberta, and to that end we put in \$103 million to meet the needs of 12,000 new students moving into the school system here in the fall. It was a major contribution, and we included in that contribution money to charter schools, to home-schooling, and to private schools as well. It's important to use our capacity, and that's what we chose to do.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Education minister once again. You said yourself, and you just said that Albertans want stability in the education system. Yes, we do. Can you assure us, the parents, that you have no plans to change this model in the future?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for that question. It's very important for us to use the capacity that we have at our disposal here in the province of Alberta. We know with 12,000 moving into the schools in the fall and many more young children just waiting to go to school that we use the capacity we have available to us. That's why in interim supply I put money into the public schools. We put it for charter schools, private, and home-schooling as well to meet the needs of all Albertans.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I still haven't heard a yes. It was a pretty simple question.

Given that our independent schools save Albertans more than \$145 million every year and given that NDP governments in other provinces have attempted to bring in changes, we would just like the Education minister's word. Will he fix what isn't broken by cutting funding to charter, private, and independent schools? Tell the truth.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, actions speak as loudly as words or even louder. We put the money into this interim budget to ensure that everything was funded, from private to charter to home schools and so forth. We need to use the capacity in our system and to make sure that the stability is there so that people know, moving forward, that we've made that commitment for all students in the province of Alberta. It's as simple as that. You can't just be putting words into other people's mouths. Sorry.

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

Donations to Political Parties

Miranda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During the last election some candidates and political parties received tens and even hundreds of thousands of dollars in contributions from corporations. The question is to the Minister of Justice. What is this government going to do to stop the flow of campaign financing from corporations and from unions?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member. Our policy is to stop donations from corporations and unions going

to political parties and to put the voice back to the people of Alberta to choose who it is that they want to lead them, and we are committed to putting that through.

The Speaker: Hon. member, first supplemental.

Miranda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that limiting contributions to political parties will mean that candidates and parties have less money to spend during elections, to the Minister of Justice: what impact do you anticipate this change will have on elections in the future?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you again, and thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is our intention to give the voice back to the people of Alberta because we think that they are the people to whom we should be accountable, and by taking away union and corporate donations, we give that voice back to the people to choose. So, yes, it will have an effect on elections going forward, and I think it is an effect that the people will support.

The Speaker: Hon. member, second supplemental.

Miranda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that voters in Alberta want to ensure that it is their voices that are being heard and given that most Albertans cannot spend \$30,000 in donations to political campaigns, unlike some corporations, to the Minister of Justice: what is this government's plan to address this and ensure that Albertans' voices are being heard?

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you again, and thank you for the question. This government is committed to ensuring that union and corporate donations are banned. There are other moves that we want to make going forward, and together with the Official Opposition we have agreed to form a committee that will go forward. We are committed to studying other ways that we can improve our democracy to ensure that it is Albertans who have the primary voice going forward in our elections.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: Hon. members, in 30 seconds I will call for the first of several members' statements.

I recognize the Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Constable Daniel Woodall

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak for the first time in this Assembly, with the greatest of respect and humility, to deliver a message of solidarity and hope from the people of the constituency of Edmonton-McClung. Hon. members and all Albertans will mark the death and celebrate the life of Edmonton Police Service Constable Daniel Woodall as his funeral service is held tomorrow. Constable Woodall gave his life in dedicated service to all of us one week ago today. His wife, two young children, and extended family all suffered a terrible loss. Our thoughts are also with Sergeant Harley, who is recovering from wounds sustained in the same incident.

2:50

There was another, unrelated shooting in the same neighbourhood about a week earlier in the parking lot of Our Savior Lutheran

church. In response to both these violent acts one local pastor, Philip Penrod of Our Savior Lutheran church, organized a community prayer walk to allow the local community to express their sorrow over the shootings and make clear their determination that these violent acts would not define their neighbourhoods. Clerical leaders and members of all faith communities in the riding accepted Pastor Penrod's invitation to encircle the neighbourhood's pain with their resolve to re-establish the normally peaceful nature of our home territory. Over 100 residents marched together to pay respect to Constable Woodall and bear witness to his sacrifice.

My own home, sir, is only about three blocks away from where Constable Woodall died. I personally appreciated the opportunity to come together with my neighbours to mourn Constable Woodall's death, celebrate his life, and resolve to look out for each other more than we ever have before. This week that message is one that all Albertans can take to heart as we lay to rest one of this province's best.

I'm confident, sir, that the government of Alberta understands the value of safe communities. It will be working with determination to ensure that safety and security to live our lives is assured to all.

Thanks.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Jaydon Sommerfeld

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today with a heavy heart to honour the life and spirit of Jaydon Sommerfeld. In many ways Jaydon was not unlike a lot of 17-year-old boys. He was an amazing athlete – a lacrosse star – he was an excellent student, and he was supposed to graduate from Chestermere high school next year along with my youngest son, Sehran, and the class of 2016.

Tragically, Jaydon won't get to celebrate this milestone, and our community won't get to watch him grow up, graduate from university, start a career, or marry someone he loves. What made Jaydon truly special was the way that he touched and left an everlasting, positive impression on those around him. The absolute outpouring of grief and sadness since Jaydon's death is a testament to the beautiful life he led and the priceless memories he shared in just 17 short years.

Jaydon was taken from us at the intersection of highways 1 and 791. This intersection is notoriously dangerous, and the questions that we need to have addressed are: why has nothing been done, and why are we still losing people at this intersection? The intersection forces drivers to turn out in front of two lanes of highway traffic and then attempt the dangerous merge. I've driven this road since 1986, and I assure you that it's just as gut-wrenching as it sounds.

As legislators we owe Jaydon and his family more than words. While devastating and tragic, Jaydon's death is a call to action. Chestermere needs a new overpass at this highway intersection, and I will be fighting for this project in my capacity as an MLA.

Even in death Jaydon's kind spirit is bringing light and life to the world. His organs have been donated to eight needy recipients, that will get a second chance at life because of this. In fact, his beautiful heart has already found a home.

Jaydon and his family have given so much to this province, and I urge this House to help me give them something back.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Police Officer Safety

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is with great humility, respect, and sadness that I rise in the House today to offer,

again, condolences to the family and colleagues of Constable Daniel Woodall, who died in the line of duty on June 8. It was only three months ago that I rose in this very same House to remind Albertans that front-line emergency workers risk their lives every time they go to work. There are lessons to learn from last week's tragedy, and as the PC opposition critic for Justice I will do my best to ensure police have everything they need to perform their job safely.

As a former police officer and incident commander I can tell you that having all the tools is critical to any operation, especially when dealing with the unknown. The threat of the unknown is something that an officer experiences every time they have contact with the public. Officers perform these acts and the public perceives them as routine, but I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that there is no such thing as a routine contact. The threat of the unknown is always present in the mind of every police officer during every interaction, and the officer is prepared to give their life for you without hesitation.

Many citizens never know what the police do to keep them safe, and they shouldn't as that is the privilege of living in a free, democratic society. We as police know that most interactions with an officer usually result in a warning or a ticket, and we shoulder that abuse from the public, which we accept. But we are still prepared to run towards gunfire because that is our duty; that is our job.

Countless officers like Constable Woodall perform acts of heroism each day. For many, they do not even receive a simple thank you, and they don't ask for it, because it's what we do. It's who we are. It's what any hero would do. That is why I said on June 8, after the tragedy, that if you have an opportunity, please go out and say thank you to a police officer when you see one, not because they have asked but because they deserve it.

Mr. Speaker, we must always put the rights of victims of crime ahead of the rights of offenders. God bless you, Daniel. Thank you for your service.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Member for St. Albert.

Speech from the Throne

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to speak for the first time in this House. Yesterday was another historic day for Albertans, and I'm pleased to rise and share my thoughts about the throne speech. As we heard, this Assembly welcomed 70 new MLAs with a wide range of backgrounds. I, too, feel and share Albertans' enthusiasm and hope for change in this great province that we call home.

I've spent the majority of my adult life working to create inclusive communities for people with disabilities. Yesterday I was moved by the language chosen related to persons with disabilities. People with disabilities need not be labelled as our most vulnerable but as people first, people who require and deserve our support and the opportunity to be fully contributing and participating members of our communities. I am confident that is the commitment of this government.

I along with all Albertans am keenly aware of the challenges before us. I know we are resolute in our commitment to the people of Alberta that we will meet these challenges head-on by offering unprecedented co-operation, by listening to each other and taking the best ideas from all Albertans to create solutions that pave the way for all of us.

Yesterday we heard so many inspiring commitments for an inclusive future, a future in which there is freedom from poverty, violence, and exclusion. I'm so proud to be a member of this Assembly under the leadership of this Premier, a visionary woman

who has inspired people throughout this province and beyond. I am confident in her leadership, and I look forward to working towards an inclusive Alberta for all of us.

Every morning when I wake up, I look and I see a quote that I have on the wall of my home. It's a quote from a hero of mine, Mahatma Gandhi, and it says that you must be the change you wish to see in the world. We in this Legislature can be that change.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I believe that we require unanimous consent of the House to continue with Orders of the Day past 3 o'clock. If it's your wish, I would make such a motion.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: Thank you very much.
The Member for Calgary-Klein.

Workplace Fatalities

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, there's been a recent and tragic workplace death in Calgary, the death of 35-year-old Maryam Rashidi. She was killed attempting to stop a gas-and-dash where she worked.

Ms Rashidi was a chemical engineer from Iran who studied at the prestigious Sharif University of Technology. Ms Rashidi, her husband, Ahmed, and her six-year-old son were recent immigrants to Canada, first settling in Montreal, then both finding jobs at oil and gas companies in Calgary, eager to contribute to their new home. Her dream of making a new and better life for her family is a dream that all in this House can relate to as many of us are immigrants or our families are immigrants.

3:00

Ms Rashidi was recently laid off from a job at a Calgary oil and gas company. In trying to support her family, Ms Rashidi swallowed her pride to ensure income for her family and took the first job that was offered to her, working as a gas station attendant on the busy thoroughfare of 16th Avenue in Calgary.

Tragic events like this remind us of our duty to ensure that every single employee has a safe workplace and is trained on the hazards of their job. To me, a workplace death is the most tragic of all. Merely providing for your family should not be a game of chance that you won't return home after your shift.

Safety on the job is an issue that is close to my heart. As a business representative for the United Utility Workers' Association my priority was always to ensure that safety was at the top of the agenda. Still, injuries and death continue to occur to the women and men of our province earning a living to provide for their families.

I had the honour of speaking at Ms Rashidi's funeral. This was a brilliant and popular woman who will be greatly missed by her family, Calgary's Iranian community, and all those whom she touched. In addition, she has donated her organs, and six more people will be impacted by her life.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to be a member of a party and a government that cares about the safety of workers. Every Albertan deserves to go home safely to their family. This government will act effectively to make this a reality for working people.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Flood Recovery

Mr. W. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This Saturday, June 20, will mark the two-year anniversary of the southern Alberta floods. Although several communities, including Calgary, were

directly affected by this event, this once-in-a-generation flood had a severe and devastating effect on the town of High River, a wonderful place in the southern end of my constituency, and they're still recovering from that. Thousands of residents were displaced, a large number of homes and businesses were destroyed, and the recovery has been arduous and painful for many.

This anniversary will be a time to reflect on the incredible acts of courage and bravery we witnessed in 2013, acts of bravery from first responders, local officials, volunteers, charitable groups, and everyday Albertans who just showed up and said: what can I do to help? However, it will be a time to reflect on the incredible losses we suffered and to pay tribute to the five Albertans who lost their lives.

I'm pleased to hear that the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs will be taking time from his busy schedule this Saturday to visit High River, and I'm hopeful he'll meet with some important people, Mayor Craig Snodgrass and Jim Ross, chair of the DRP advocacy group, just a few of the individuals in our community who have been directly involved in the recovery process. I look forward to meeting with the minister and providing him and his team with an update on several key DRP and flood mitigation issues. I also look forward to working collaboratively with the minister to resolve ongoing issues quickly and effectively.

The 2013 floods challenged Albertans in a way we've never been challenged before, and we answered the call and showed the world our true resilient spirit. But there is more work to be done, more businesses to be built up and built back, more homes to be made whole, and more hearts to be mended. By working together, we can finish this recovery and make sure that every flood-affected Albertan is back on his or her feet and that they feel strong and they feel better sooner rather than later.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'm pleased to table today the requisite number of copies of the House leaders' agreement respecting Oral Question Period and Members' Statements.

Statements by the Speaker

Election of Deputy Chair of Committees

The Speaker: Hon. members, there is one outstanding item of business carried over from the election of presiding officers on June 11, 2015. The Official Opposition House Leader raised what he termed a point of clarification concerning the Deputy Chair of Committees and whether that member could continue in a caucus position. His intervention and that of the Government House Leader are found at pages 5 and 6 of *Alberta Hansard* for June 11, 2015.

Let me address a few preliminary matters. First, it is inappropriate for the Speaker to address any points of order or questions of privilege on the day the presiding officers are elected as the causes for summoning the Assembly have not yet been given. That is the purpose of the Speech from the Throne.

Secondly, there is no item known as a point of clarification, but I appreciate the expression, that has been used in connection with a request under Standing Order 13(2), to explain a Speaker's decision. Having said that, I undertook to address this matter.

As members know, on June 11 they elected the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford as Deputy Chair of Committees for the 29th Legislature. He was duly nominated and elected, and he is not a member of the Executive Council. There is no impediment to his nomination or subsequent election. It is my view that the Speaker

has no jurisdiction over this matter. There is nothing in the Legislative Assembly Act or the standing orders that addresses this matter, and the authorities are silent on this specific point. Accordingly, the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford is the Assembly's choice for Deputy Chair of Committees, and there is no reason for the Speaker to intervene in that decision.

15th Anniversary of Elected Member

The Speaker: Hon. members, I understand that the Minister of Transportation and Minister of Infrastructure, our longest serving member in this Assembly, celebrated his 15-year anniversary as a Member of this Legislative Assembly last Friday, June 12, 2015. As this is the first opportunity after the previous days' events to extend our collective best wishes, I would ask now that the hon. member step forward to receive his 15-year Mace pin and congratulate him on his outstanding service not only to his constituents but, in fact, to all Albertans.

I understand that there may be a point of order raised by the House leader for the Official Opposition.

Point of Order Anticipation

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure sort of to rise on the first day while we talk about points of order. I might just add, before we get to the meat of the matter here this afternoon, that while I know that I may be ruled out of order because you've made a ruling, it would have been delightful to be able to add some of our perspective prior to your making that ruling.

3:10

But specifically for today I will cite Standing Order 23(e) with respect to the question from the member opposite about a bill, particularly Bill 1, that will be a matter of debate later today in the House, and 23(e) reads that a member will be called to order when it "anticipates, contrary to good parliamentary practice, any matter already on the Order Paper" – we are all very clear; Bill 1 is on the Order Paper – or notice has been given for that day. Clearly, I want to be able to try and use this as an opportunity for us all to get better together, but it is my opinion that the question was certainly out of order.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I don't have a copy of the Blues in front of me, so I don't know precisely what was said. But my recollection of the question was that it was not specifically on the bill but on the points of policy contained in the bill. Nevertheless, the rules require that a point of order be raised at the time. The hon. member has not raised it at his first opportunity. Perhaps he was unfamiliar with that rule. Nevertheless, you have to make your point of order at the time of the transgression, and then it's dealt with at the end. I don't know if the hon. member made that point during the question or just now.

Mr. Cooper: We sent a note.

Mr. Mason: You sent a note at the time. You need to rise, but that's fine.

The Speaker: Could I seek the guidance of the Clerk?

Hon. members, the point being raised, I'm taking it under advisement. We'll make best efforts to consider the points raised.

However, hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 7(7) the daily Routine is now concluded.

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

2. Mr. Mason moved:
Be it resolved that
 - A. Select standing committees for the present Legislature be appointed for the following purposes:
 - (1) Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing,
 - (2) Public Accounts,
 - (3) Private Bills,
 - (4) Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund, and
 - (5) Legislative Offices
 and, in addition thereto, there be appointed for the present Legislature a Special Standing Committee on Members' Services;
 - B. Legislative policy committees for the present Legislature be appointed for the following purposes:
 - (1) Standing Committee on Families and Communities,
 - (2) Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future, and
 - (3) Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship.

[Government Motion 2 carried]

Committee Membership Appointments

3. Mr. Mason moved:
 - A. Be it resolved that the following members be appointed to the Assembly's five select standing committees and one special standing committee:
 - (1) Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund: Ms Miller, chair; Mr. Nielsen, deputy chair; Mr. Cyr; Mr. Ellis; Mr. Malkinson; Miranda; Mr. Piquette; Ms Renaud; and Mr. Taylor.
 - (2) Standing Committee on Legislative Offices: Ms Woollard, chair; Mr. Dach, deputy chair; Mr. Bhullar; Mr. Connolly; Mr. Cooper; Cortes-Vargas; Mr. Kleinsteuber; Mr. Nixon; Mr. Shepherd; Ms Sweet; and Mr. van Dijken.
 - (3) Standing Committee on Private Bills: Ms McPherson, chair; Mr. Kleinsteuber, deputy chair; Mr. W. Anderson; Ms Babcock; Mr. Connolly; Mr. Dang; Ms Drever; Mr. Drysdale; Mr. Fraser; Mr. Hinkley; Mrs. Littlewood; Ms McKittrick; Mr. Rosendahl; Mr. Stier; and Mr. Strankman.
 - (4) Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing: Dr. Turner, chair; Ms Fitzpatrick, deputy chair; Mr. Carson; Mr. Coolahan; Mr. Cooper; Mr. Ellis; Mr. Hanson; Ms Kazim; Ms Larivee; Mr. Loyola; Ms McPherson; Mr. Schneider; Dr. Starke; Mr. van Dijken; and Ms Woollard.
 - (5) Standing Committee on Public Accounts: Mr. Fildebrandt, chair; Ms Gray, deputy chair; Mr. Barnes; Mr. Bhullar; Mr. Cyr; Mr. Dach; Mr. Gotfried; Mr. Hunter; Mr. Loyola; Mr. Malkinson; Ms Miller; Ms Payne; Ms Renaud; Dr. Turner; and Mr. Westhead.
 - (6) Special Standing Committee on Members' Services: Mr. Wanner, chair; Mr. Schmidt, deputy chair; Mr. Cooper; Mr. Fildebrandt; Ms Goehring; Ms Luff; Mr. McIver; Ms McLean; Mr. Nielsen; Mr. Nixon; and Mr. Piquette.

B. Be it resolved that the following members be appointed to the Assembly's three legislative policy committees:

- (1) Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future: Mr. Coolahan, chair; Mr. Schneider, deputy chair; Mr. S. Anderson; Mr. Carson; Ms Fitzpatrick; Mr. Gotfried; Mr. Hanson; Mr. Horne; Mr. Hunter; Ms Jansen; Ms Larivee; Ms McKittrick; Mrs. Schreiner; Mr. Sucha; and Mr. Taylor.
- (2) Standing Committee on Families and Communities: Ms Sweet, chair; Mr. Smith, deputy chair; Ms Goehring; Mr. Hinkley; Ms Jansen; Mrs. Littlewood; Ms Luff; Mr. Orr; Ms Payne; Mrs. Pitt; Mr. Rodney; Mr. Shepherd; Dr. Swann; Mr. Westhead; and Mr. Yao.
- (3) Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship: Ms Kazim, chair; Mr. Loewen, deputy chair; Mrs. Aheer; Mr. S. Anderson; Ms Babcock; Mr. Clark; Mr. Drysdale; Mr. Horne; Mr. Kleinstuber; Mr. MacIntyre; Mr. Rosendahl; Mrs. Schreiner; Mr. Stier; Mr. Sucha; and Ms Woollard.

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

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 18(1)(h) I rise to speak against Government Motion 3. It is a long-standing parliamentary tradition that parties are given first choice of membership on committees, and in light of the new spirit of co-operation, which I sincerely hope is sweeping through this House, I would hope that the government would consider this request.

I'm going to table three documents. A letter that I wrote on May 11, 2015, to former Speaker Mr. Zwozdesky expressing my interest in the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. I will table the second document, a print of an e-mail dated Wednesday, June 10, 2015, to all House leaders, forwarding the letter to Speaker Zwozdesky and expressing my interest in the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. Finally, an e-mail printout sent to all House leaders, including the Government House Leader, dated Friday, June 12, expressing my regret at not being included on the Standing Committee on Public Accounts and noting that of the 74 – I said in my e-mail 74; in fact, there are 73 – private members 52 sit on multiple committees, and of those three sit on three committees.

I believe it is in the interest of all Albertans for all parties to be represented on the Standing Committee on Public Accounts because it deals with all ministries and all departments. I note also that my friend the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View also did not receive his first choice of committee. So I ask that the members of the Assembly vote against this motion to give the House leaders and, in particular, the Government House Leader the opportunity to reconsider the makeup of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there any other members that wish to speak? I invite the hon. Government House Leader.

3:20

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We tried to accommodate everyone. I recognize that this committee is the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow's second choice. I did believe that we had accommodated the request which we heard verbally from the leader of the Liberal opposition to the committee that he was appointed to. Unfortunately, it's not always possible for the House to accommodate the specific wishes of members, particularly members who are independents, but I believe that there are some very positive opportunities for both members to participate in the

work of the House, and we'll be prepared to review this in due course.

Thank you.

[Government Motion 3 carried]

4. Mr. Mason moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly resolve into Committee of the Whole, when called, to consider certain bills on the Order Paper.

[Government Motion 4 carried]

5. Mr. Mason moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly resolve itself into Committee of Supply, when called, to consider supply to be granted to Her Majesty.

[Government Motion 5 carried]

Evening Sitings

6. Mr. Mason moved:

Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 4(1) commencing Tuesday, June 16, 2015, the Assembly shall meet on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday evenings for consideration of government business for the duration of the first session of the 29th Legislature 2015 spring sitting unless on motion by the Government House Leader made before 6 p.m., which may be made orally and without notice, the Assembly is adjourned to the following sitting day.

[Government Motion 6 carried]

Transmittal of Estimates

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

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I received a certain message from Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, which I now transmit to you.

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order!

The Speaker: The Lieutenant Governor transmits interim supply estimates of certain sums required for the service of the province and of certain sums required from the lottery fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2016, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

Please be seated.

The hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I now wish to table the 2015-16 interim supply estimates (no. 2). This interim funding authority will ensure continuity in the business of the province while our government takes the time necessary to study, deliberate, and prepare its plans for the entire 2015-16 fiscal year and then the further time needed for this Assembly to discuss, debate, and enact 2015-16 funding in full. When passed, these estimates will authorize the approximate spending of \$56 million for the Legislative Assembly, \$15.4 billion in expense funding, \$2 billion in capital investment funding, \$765 million in financial transaction funding for the government, and \$387 million for the transfer from the lottery fund to the general revenue fund. These interim supply amounts include government commitments to provide additional funding to school boards, postsecondary institutions, and Alberta

Health Services over and above the funding planned by the previous government.

Thank you.

Government Motions

(continued)

7. Mr. Mason moved:

Be it resolved that the message from Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, the 2015-16 interim supply estimates (no. 2), and all matters connected therewith be referred to Committee of Supply.

Mr. Mason: Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to briefly put some comments on the record with respect to Motion 7 and the process moving forward. My real concern today is around our inability to support Motion 7 in sending the supply to committee with respect, actually, to Motion 8 in the time that's been allotted for that debate.

It appears that the new government has a very similar sort of tone to the old government when it comes to the amount of debate that they're willing to allow in this place. I must say that I was very hopeful in the early, early days of this government, when we had begun to discuss some of the processes moving forward. As many of you will know, the Wildrose and myself have introduced or shared a document that we believe would make the House work substantially better. But so far today we've seen the government introduce a motion for evening sittings on the first day of this Assembly, something that I personally have witnessed the Premier speak against when they were in opposition. We've seen in newspaper reports the minister for the status of women speak specifically to night sittings. This is not the sort of tone that we were hoping for when it comes to the debate in the Assembly, and particularly now we see that we're going to be sending this absolutely massive supply bill into committee.

Standing Order 61(1) states that "interim and supplementary estimates shall be considered for not less than 3 hours," and that is a minimum amount. Today we've seen the order on the Order Paper that it will be debated for 3 hours, being the maximum amount of debate. It's very difficult for the opposition to support a motion to send something this sizable to committee when debate is already going to be stifled by this government.

I understand that we just did some preliminary number crunching here. It looks like there's going to be \$18 billion that we debate in a three-hour period. I did some early calculations, guessing that it might be around \$15 billion, and we're going to be talking about spending \$83 million a minute during that three-hour period.

The Speaker: Hon. member, if I might, would you clarify for the Speaker and the House. Are you speaking to Motion 7 or to Motion 8?

Mr. Cooper: I'm speaking to Motion 7 and our inability to support Motion 7 as it relates directly to the rest of our proceedings. We're unable to support Motion 7 – and that's specifically what I'm speaking to – as a result of our concern with the direction of the Assembly.

Shall I continue, sir, or do you feel like you need to rule?

3:30

The Speaker: Proceed.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you. We're looking at spending \$83 million a minute during that debate period. We have had some discussion with the government about changing the tone, and in fact the former government in the last set of estimates, supply estimates, allowed for six hours' debate, and here we're going to be into a situation . . .

An Hon. Member: Thank God. Great debates, they were.

Mr. Cooper: Yeah. In fact, not only six hours of debate for interim supply but also six hours of debate for supplementary supply.

This government is working on the bare minimum that is permitted by the rules, so it sounds like there's been no change from the previous government to the new government. In fact, I was hoping that we would be under new management, but as it turns out, we're not under new management. This government is requiring us to support a motion that ultimately will end in three hours of debate, and it's totally unacceptable. It seems to me that orange, in fact, is the new blue.

It seems to me that there has been little commitment from the new government, and I recognize that we're in early days, but let me assure you that today is the best day for change. September, October, November, wherever we're heading: once we finally get around to talking about making the House work better, I can assure you that we will see more and more of this and less of change. It's for these reasons that I am unable and I would suggest that the vast majority of our caucus will be unable to support Motion 7.

However, I'm here to try and provide a strong, working Assembly for all members. Mr. Speaker, I can assure you that I would be in the subsequent moments in this House more than willing to accept an amendment from the Government House Leader to Motion 7 that would see six hours of debate in committee tomorrow, on June 17. That would allow for a spirit of cooperation, a change in the culture to this place, that in fact, sir, you so eloquently wrote about in your procedural memo of yesterday.

In closing, I would like to emphasize that with so many new members elected to the 29th Legislature, it represents a unique opportunity to create a new and constructive culture in the Assembly. As an aside, limiting debate to three hours on an \$18 billion supply budget is certainly not creating that constructive culture. I ask you all to be leaders in ensuring a culture of respect and cooperation, where the differences of opinions never undermine the credibility or public confidence in this cherished institution. Unless we can see a potential change from the government, we are unable to support Motion 7.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank my hon. colleague from Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills for articulating the position of the Wildrose Official Opposition with regard to Motion 7 and the interim supply bill. I will not repeat too much of what my colleague has said but will expand upon several of our concerns as the Official Opposition. Normally an interim supply bill is for a few hundred thousand dollars or a few million dollars. I would chance to say that it is extraordinarily rare that an interim supply bill would be for several billion dollars, let alone up to 18 and a half billion dollars, that we see added up in the motion and interim supply bill before us today. This is an extraordinarily large sum of money. One of the things that Albertans were concerned about – one of the reasons they voted for change was because they believed that the previous government was frivolous with their money, that they spent first and asked questions later if they would even accept questions.

We need to get off to a better start here. This is a new government and a new Legislature with nearly entirely new members. We need

to start with an atmosphere of respect for this Legislature and the period given to debate and also being serious with taxpayers' money. My colleague from Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills has said that we will be debating for the maximum of three hours how to spend \$83 million every minute. That works out to more than \$6 billion an hour. I don't know about you, but that scares me, and I think it would scare taxpayers if they knew that we were that frivolous with their money.

Mr. Speaker, we understand that the government is unable to prepare a full budget at this time, but more details would otherwise be needed. This is not a budget; this is a brochure. This is intended merely to give the government a blank cheque to spend money. Traditionally it is the constitutional obligation of the Legislature and of the Official Opposition in particular to scrutinize money bills before the House, to do due diligence in ensuring that when the executive comes before this Assembly and asks for funds, we are not giving them a blank cheque and we are doing our due diligence. The Wildrose will not be voting to give this government a blank cheque.

We are trying to be helpful, and we are trying to be co-operative in this new Legislature, so I will repeat the words of the Official Opposition House Leader, that if the Government House Leader would be open to an amendment to extend debate to six hours, which would mean we're only debating \$3 billion an hour, we would be willing, then, to accept the motion before the House.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. House leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I want to thank the hon. members from the Wildrose Official Opposition for their comments with respect to this motion, and I have a few comments to make. I don't think that the context that they're placing this motion in is actually fair or correct.

First of all, Mr. Speaker, as they have correctly pointed out, the previous government brought forward an interim supply bill, which was passed before the calling of the election. That was given six hours of debate, but we didn't have enough speakers from the party opposite to continue that for the full six hours. [interjection] Well, yeah, and you had to deal with it. Yeah.

So it didn't receive the full six hours that it was allocated by the previous government in the first place.

The point that I would really like to make is that this interim supply bill is in almost all ways the same as the interim supply bill that was debated before the election. We have made four changes. Only approximately 10 per cent of the allocation in this interim supply bill is new. The other 90 per cent has been discussed to the full extent of the opposition's desire to do so.

The second point I'd like to make, Mr. Speaker, is that the hon. Opposition House Leader did raise this question in our House leaders' meeting. The suggestion that I made at that time is that we could consider extending the three hours based upon estimates of each opposition party and how much time they wish to spend on that debate. We did not hear from any of the opposition parties with respect to that and made a decision to go forward with the three hours as originally proposed.

3:40

Mr. Speaker, the timing of this is unfortunate, and it is awkward. The previous government chose to introduce a budget, not pass the budget, and then take it to the people in an election. They did not expect that the people would not like their budget and that they would actually be defeated in the election based largely on an unpopular budget. That has left the new government in a position

of creating a new budget. The hon. members have acknowledged that you cannot just pull a brand new budget out of thin air, that it takes some time, and we're going to take that time because this is, in case people have forgotten, the first change of government in 43 years. It will take us some time to get it right, but we want to get it right, and we will bring forward a budget for full debate in the fall session of this Legislature. This is not what we chose. This is not how we wanted to do it, but it is the only way we can do it.

I think hon. members opposite should know this. We had an option of proceeding by special warrants, which means simply not meeting the House, not debating it, and simply borrowing the money to continue. We chose instead, despite being a brand new government, to face the House very quickly, to bring forward our interim supply bill, and to bring forward our bill with respect to changes to the tax structure so that Albertans would know where we stood.

So, Mr. Speaker, we are going to bring forward a complete budget in the fall, and I assure all hon. members that they'll have a full chance to debate that, but this particular interim supply bill is 90 per cent the same as the bill that was discussed before the election for five hours, I understand from the hon. member. There are only four departments in which changes have been made to the previous government's interim supply bill, and I would respectfully suggest to hon. members that they may wish to focus there.

But, Mr. Speaker, we need to get on with governing. We need to be able to pay the bills, pay our employees, meet the obligations of the government, and that is what the interim supply bill is for. It does not represent the final budget of this government. It is not a minibudget; it is an interim supply bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. member for the PC Party.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thought it was important that I rise after listening to the previous debate and point out that two members of the Official Opposition actually tried to adopt the previous government's time allotment for supply, I guess endorsing what the previous government used to do.

Mr. Speaker, I point out that the government of the day's House leader took some time to say that . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member and the House, I'm advised that a standing order indicates that once the mover of the motion stands, in fact, it is intended as a closure on the debate and, thus, the reason why I called for the vote and will now call.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, if I may.

The Speaker: Yes.

Mr. Mason: I would ask the House for unanimous consent to allow the hon. member to finish his remarks.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, colleagues and Mr. Speaker, and I will reward you by being brief. I just thought it was important to point out that two members of the Official Opposition tried to adopt the previous government's time allotment for supply, and the government of today didn't use the word "generous," but I think suggested, if not outright said, that the previous government provided more than enough time, because it wasn't filled.

I would say, Mr. Speaker, that members of our party might be the only ones left in the House that realize that we made mistakes in the

last government. While the rest of our colleagues might not acknowledge that, we are determined to learn the lessons of the past and go forward and look forward to debating the supply estimates.

The Speaker: Are there any other questions?

The hon. House leader to close debate.

Mr. Mason: I have closed.

[Government Motion 7 carried]

8. Mr. Mason moved:
Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 61(2) the Committee of Supply shall be called to consider the 2015-16 interim supply estimates (No. 2) for three hours on Wednesday, June 17, 2015.

[Government Motion 8 carried]

Consideration of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

Mr. Connolly moved, seconded by Ms Kazim, that an humble address be presented to Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows.

To Her Honour the Honourable Lois Mitchell, CM, AOE, the Lieutenant Governor of the Province of Alberta:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank Your Honour for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

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

Mr. Connolly: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to open debate on the Speech from the Throne, and I wish to thank Her Honour for the remarks that she brought to this Chamber yesterday.

I would also like to thank and congratulate you, Mr. Speaker, on your election both to this Assembly and to the chair. I trust that you will be a good and fair arbiter of the proceedings here. Further, I would like to congratulate all of my hon. colleagues in this Assembly on their election to this Chamber and thank the countless volunteers, regardless of which party they toiled for in the most recent election, for their commitment to our democracy and to their communities. Finally, of course, I would like to thank the hon. Premier for honouring me and the residents of Calgary-Hawkwood with the opportunity to open debate on Her Honour's speech.

The speech represents the plan that the voters of my riding chose on May 5. They chose fairer taxes, safeguarding vital education, health, and human services, and a renewed democracy. The opportunity to represent the citizens of my riding, which is located in northwest Calgary and includes the communities of Arbour Lake, Citadel, Hawkwood, Ranchlands, and Silver Springs, is truly humbling. I'm excited to get to work with the Premier to implement the fresh start so many residents of these communities hoped for when they cast their ballots.

Calgary-Hawkwood is a riding that represents so much of what Alberta is and why people from all over the world flock to our province to join our communities and pursue their dreams with relentless optimism. The communities in my riding are relatively new – the oldest was only developed in 1972 – but they have come to be remarkable, vibrant places where a diverse range of people from all walks of life make their homes. Much like our incredible province, my riding has grown quickly, and its residents work in a wide range of industries. With the Bow River forming the southern

border and the scenic nature of the foothills in which it is nestled, it is no surprise that people are drawn to the natural beauty of this place and the wonderful green spaces and parks that have grown alongside its communities.

Despite the hopeful, optimistic, and entrepreneurial spirit of the people of Calgary-Hawkwood, the residents of my riding understand that our communities and our province face real challenges that our government is tackling in a straightforward and steadfast way. So many in my riding understand that the priorities laid out in Her Honour's speech are vital to the health and vitality of our province. They hope for better health care for all of us, for a society that takes care of its most vulnerable citizens, and for a diversified and stable economy that benefits all of us. They also know and believe that you should be safe from discrimination and violence regardless of who you are and who you love.

3:50

It is an honour, Mr. Speaker, to rise today as one of the first openly LGBTQ-plus MLAs. The LGBTQ-plus community in Alberta has long fought for equal human rights, for recognition that despite who we love, we are Albertans just the same. As recently as last December this Assembly struggled with ensuring that our LGBTQ-plus students are treated fairly and equally. The debates around Bill 10 and Bill 202 were one of the many reasons that spurred me to run as MLA for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Since May 5 I have met with many individuals in the LGBTQ-plus community, and almost everyone has made me promise that I will help represent them because they feel like they have never had a voice in this Legislature. We have never had someone who truly understands what it's like to keep a secret from their friends and family for years, we've never had someone who knows what it's like to be afraid to hold their partner's hand in public, and we've never had someone who felt the fear every day of being kicked out of your home or fired just for being who you are, until now.

The Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park, the Member for Calgary-Cross, and I are proud to be members of the LGBTQ-plus community and to represent our community in this Legislature. The three of us have different life experiences, different educations, and different upbringings, but we are united to fight for both our constituents and our LGBTQ-plus community. It was truly overwhelming to march alongside them with our incredible caucus of LGBTQ-plus allies in Edmonton's Pride parade earlier this month. The diversity of this caucus is one that I am incredibly proud to see in this Assembly.

Another key priority for the voters in Calgary-Hawkwood and for me is a strong education system that brings the best out of all Albertans. This is particularly important for me. My mom is a teacher. My sister is training to be a teacher, and her partner is also a teacher. I see every day through those that I love and respect the impact that passionate educators can have on the lives of their students, especially when they are given the tools that they need from their government. When I hear Her Honour speak of our new government's commitment to stable and predictable funding for our schools, I know that the Premier has the same priorities as my family as well as those of so many other families in Calgary-Hawkwood.

I understand that education does not end when we leave high school either, Mr. Speaker. Why, it wasn't so very long ago that I myself was a university student, as some of my colleagues in this Assembly will undoubtedly know and continuously remind me of. I know that postsecondary education fuels our dreams, expands our worlds, and helps us grow our economy and compete globally. When I see the Premier acknowledge that there is no better investment our province can make than to ensure prosperity, I know

that Albertans can face the challenges ahead and come through stronger and better than ever before.

Mr. Speaker, I could go on about all of the exciting, positive new starts we are seeing in our amazing and resilient province – real action on mental health, making life a little easier for those of us who earn the minimum wage, a renewal of our democracy, and a new relationship of respect with our indigenous brothers and sisters – but I will simply conclude by thanking the people of Calgary-Hawkwood for the trust they have placed in me and in the Premier. This is truly a humbling experience, and I am looking forward to the challenges and opportunities that face our province of farmers and feminists, workers and entrepreneurs, settlers and indigenous peoples, students and teachers. We are truly an amazing province, and I am so very proud to be part of this new chapter in our history.

Thank you.

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

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to rise today and speak for the first time to this Assembly. To be a part of such a small group of individuals who have sat as elected members of this House is truly a privilege. I'm truly humbled that the people of Calgary-Glenmore chose to put their trust in the Premier, the NDP, and myself. I promise to work every day in this House to represent the people of Calgary-Glenmore and bring about the change they voted for in May.

The riding of Calgary-Glenmore is one of only two Calgary ridings that have not been divided since the electoral boundaries changed substantially in 1959, a riding that encompasses important landmarks such as the Glenmore reservoir; important tourist sites like Heritage Park; a huge diversity of people, including a strong Jewish community; people who speak many different languages like Cantonese, Mandarin, Urdu, Hindi, Punjabi, German, Spanish, and more; people who were born in Alberta, in other provinces, and across the world; people who have decided to make Calgary-Glenmore their home. While campaigning, I met some of these people, and I heard their incredible stories. These are the people and the riding that I'm honoured and humbled to represent and the people I will do my best for every day in this House and in the community.

Like many of my colleagues in this House, I have not been in politics long. In fact, it feels like I even have a bit of catching up to do, even to some of my newest colleagues. This election has taught me a lot, not just about the democratic process but about patience, perseverance, and dedication. Truly, in Calgary-Glenmore every vote counted. This historic election has proven that every vote, that every voice, that every constituent matters. Calgary-Glenmore has a long history of electing high-ranking politicians, including Premiers Aberhart and Klein, Speakers Arthur Dixon and David Carter, and Lieutenant Governors John Bowlen and Grant MacEwan. I hope one day in the future my name is added to that list of notable Calgary-Glenmore politicians.

I have long worked to make our province and my community a better place. Before my election as an MLA I spent many years working in the field of engineering. I completed my undergraduate degree in chemical engineering and then pursued a master's in environmental engineering at Western University in London, Ontario. Since then I have spent years in oil and gas and in research and development. I have developed knowledge of one of Alberta's most important industries. I did this work and completed these degrees because I wanted to find ways to make chemical engineering processes more environmentally friendly. I wanted to ensure that we were protecting our air, our land, and our water and that the work I was doing was not jeopardizing the health of our

environment. These are goals I will continue to work towards in my new role. I believe this experience will serve me well as an MLA, and I'm looking forward to the new challenges that lay ahead.

I got into politics because I wanted to make a difference. I always believed that victory not necessarily lies in the winning but in making a difference. I wanted to make sure that Albertans' voices were heard and their wishes were respected. That is why I'm so excited to get to work on the issues that are important for the people of Calgary-Glenmore. Being the voice of my constituents in this Assembly is my number one priority.

During the campaign and since I have been elected, I have heard people tell me that they are worried about their parents who need a long-term care bed but cannot get one because the wait-lists are so long. They have told me that they just can't afford the huge costs associated with caring for their elderly parents. I understand the importance of good seniors' care, and I'm so excited for our government to ensure that seniors have a safe, healthy, and dignified place to live.

Parents have told me how important their children's schools and teachers are. They told me how their children's classes already had 30 students and that their children were already struggling to get the support they need. They told me about the importance of programs for English language learners, for First Nations and Métis students, for exceptional needs students. In short, they told me how important our education system was to them and their children, and I have to say that I feel the same way. That is why I feel so strongly about ensuring that our schools, teachers, and students get the stable funding that they need.

I have heard concerns about balancing our growing infrastructure needs while ensuring we are good stewards of our environment. The people of Calgary-Glenmore told me that they were worried about the province's roads, hospitals, and schools. They want to make sure that when they bring their children to the Rockyview hospital, the hospital is a safe and healthy environment and that they are able to access the health care that they need when they need it. Our government understands the importance of public infrastructure, of roads and schools and hospitals. While all of these important projects may not be completed right away, we are making a step in the right direction.

4:00

The people of Calgary-Glenmore told me that care for seniors, education, and the infrastructure that they rely on are important, and the Speech from the Throne clearly shows that these are important to the government as well. This is the new start that we are all looking forward to. Albertans wanted change, so they voted in a government with new ideas and new people who are ready to get down to work for Albertans.

While the challenges associated with our health care system, our education system, and our infrastructure will not all be resolved in the next few weeks, it is clear to me that this is a huge first step. I look forward to working to ensure that the priorities of my constituents and of Albertans are met. I believe that we are moving in the right direction, and we will make a difference.

I'm hopeful that we can build a relationship of trust and respect with Alberta's indigenous peoples, especially our neighbours in the Tsuut'ina Nation.

I'm honoured and humbled to have been a part of this monumental change in Alberta's government. Albertans and the people of Calgary-Glenmore put their trust in me and in our new Premier. I got into politics because I wanted to make a difference, and by investing in health care, education, and human services as was outlined in the Speech from the Throne, we can truly make the lives of Albertans a little easier.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak and for the opportunity to serve as the MLA for Calgary-Glenmore.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, hon. members, and, indeed, the first two that have stood up and done their maiden speeches. It has been very interesting to hear your points of view. Thank you.

I'm honoured today to be able to rise and address this House in response to the Speech from the Throne. I would like to extend my congratulations to Mr. Wanner on being elected as the Speaker of the House, and I'm sure that we've chosen very well. You'll do a good job. I would also like to extend my congratulations to the rest of the elected members of this Legislature on their well-earned victories in this most historic of elections. Good job.

No candidate is successful without the support of their family. To my wife, Lisa, and to my children, Joshua, Luke, and Sarah: your love has sustained me, and it underlies everything that I do. To my mother and my father, Marlyn and Wayne Smith: you've invested your lives and your love into my life, and I'm so very grateful, and I want to say thank you.

I would be remiss if I did not thank the constituents of Drayton Valley-Devon for the support and the trust that they have placed in me. They placed their trust in me to represent them in this, the greatest of all democratic models, the Westminster parliamentary system of democracy, and I pledge to the best of my ability to represent their concerns in this Legislature, to uphold the rule of law, and to be a loyal servant of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

Elections are not won by a single individual, and I want to thank the many volunteers who worked so hard to ensure that a strong Wildrose voice would be heard in the Legislature from the Drayton Valley-Devon constituency.

The Drayton Valley-Devon constituency is a reflection of the broader Alberta that I serve today. It has a proud First Nations foundation as it encompasses the Maskwacis and Louis Bull reserves. The area was explored by David Thompson and was part of the great fur-trading empires of the North West Company and the Hudson's Bay Company. The descendants of Gabriel Dumont and Louis Riel reside in the area, reminding us that diversity and blending of cultures can and has made us stronger as Albertans.

We are a proud and we are a diverse constituency made up of veterans and farmers, oil workers and entrepreneurs. We are tied to the history of this province, and we are tied to the people who have helped make this one of the greatest places in the world to live.

In my 30 years of teaching in the Drayton Valley-Devon community, I've taught the descendants of Sir John A. Macdonald, I have visited with World War II veterans who flew over 50 bomber missions over Germany, and I have heard the descendants of John McCrae recite *In Flanders Fields*. This amazing constituency is a reflection of the great events in Alberta, in Alberta history. It has communities that can trace their beginnings to the families of freed black slaves that immigrated to Alberta and to the waves of immigrants from Britain and eastern Europe.

As you drive across this constituency from Lodgepole in the west to Winfield, Alder Flats, and Pigeon Lake in the south and to Devon on the north and eastern edge of the constituency, you see places of worship that represent a wide variety of religious faiths and doctrines. Eastern Orthodox onion-domed steeples blend with faiths as new as the Muslim and the Sikh communities that live within this constituency.

We are a constituency of ever-increasing ethnic diversity that has welcomed people from around the world to live in our communities, to use their talents and abilities to raise strong families and to create strong and vibrant communities where people through hard work,

creativity, and an entrepreneurial spirit are creating a prosperous and vibrant Alberta.

We are a constituency whose economic foundation is built upon the triad of industries that have made this province the economic engine of Canada. We are, first and foremost, a constituency based upon agriculture. Our cattle, grain, and dairy industries are a reflection of our history and a continuing legacy of the importance of agriculture to the fabric of this province.

We are a constituency where oil is of vital importance. Indeed, it was in this constituency where Leduc No. 1 was first brought online and where men and women have for several generations placed their energies and ingenuity into developing the companies that allow us to harvest this important resource.

We are also a constituency where timber plays a large role in our prosperity, and as your MLA I will do my best, to the best of my ability, to work towards ensuring the wise stewardship of these resources while also looking forward to diversifying our economic base as we move on into the 21st century.

In addition to this abundance, our constituency also is blessed with beautiful scenery and landscapes that attract people to fishing, hunting, camping, and all kinds of outdoor activities.

Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to rise today and respond to this first-ever Speech from the Throne by a New Democratic government. Being a social studies teacher, I cannot help but reflect on the many historic events that have shaped this province, this Legislature, and this nation. As we consider the Speech from the Throne and the direction that our new government would take Alberta, I believe it is important to place this new path in the context of the political events of the past that have impacted this province.

Alberta's motto is Strong and Free, and I know that this motto is a very appropriate description of the values and beliefs of all Albertans. This fall the physical representation of our motto, one of the most historic of all democratic documents, will be coming to this Legislature. The Magna Carta, the Great Charter, that was signed by King John in 1215, which is the foundation of all democratic liberty in this nation and in this province, speaks clearly to Albertans' desire for freedom, liberty, and a monarchy that governs at the behest and the will of the people. Indeed, the ceremonies surrounding the Speech from the Throne speak to our heritage of good governance and freedom.

As your MLA I will uphold and defend the freedoms that this Legislature and all Albertans hold so dear. As an educator I remember that this Legislature first met in a school just a few blocks from where we now meet, that our first Premier, Alexander Rutherford, was a Laurier Liberal and that the second leader of the opposition was R.B. Bennett, a future Prime Minister of this country.

4:10

Alberta has always had a strong political influence on the direction of this country. I am so humbled to sit in a Legislature where great Alberta statesmen like Ernest Manning, Peter Lougheed, and Ralph Klein have served the people of Alberta so ably.

The rise of new political movements that have swept the nation have been born in Alberta. Indeed, the descendants of Irene Parlby, one of the Famous Five suffragists, live within the Drayton Valley-Devon constituency. Social Credit, the Progressive Conservatives, the Reform Party, and the Wildrose Party all speak to the willingness of Albertans to think outside the box politically. It is this same forward-looking attitude that will enable Albertans to diversify and look confidently towards the future, a future that will, like Devon in my constituency, prepare an environmentally responsible, diversified economy.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to working with all the members of this House, and I am encouraged that the new government believed it was important to address the democratic deficit in this province. Albertans believe in democracy, and this government would be wise to pursue a path that would consider and implement the ideas of recall and free votes. Albertans believe in fiscal accountability, and I would encourage this government to remember that they must be wise stewards of our economy and not leave a legacy of high taxes and debt. Should they choose the latter path, the people of Alberta will look for an alternative government, and the Wildrose Party will be ready to serve in a fiscally responsible manner as the next government of Alberta.

That the people of Drayton Valley-Devon chose me to represent them in this 29th Legislature is truly humbling, but it also speaks to one of the real strengths of our democracy in Alberta. In this Legislature there are people who come from all walks of life. We are greatly blessed with a democracy where you do not have to be wealthy to get elected, for I am definitely not, and you do not have to come from a famous political family with generations of political influence. Otherwise, I would not have been chosen. Rather, it is the ideas of the political party that you represent and the character of the individual candidates in this Legislature that play the greatest role in determining election night victory, and we should all be very grateful for and proud of that fact.

We have been elected to do a job. We are called to listen to our constituents and, to the best of our ability, make wise choices to ensure that prosperity and the freedom of the people of this province are the result. We are called to provide good governance, reflective of the wishes and the aspirations and the beliefs of our constituents. We are called to find ways to balance differences of opinion and conflicting ideas. We are called mostly to represent what is good and true in our society. With God's help and by His grace, the Members of this Legislative Assembly will do just that. God bless Alberta. God save the Queen.

The Speaker: Members of the House, I am reminded that under Standing Order 29(2)(a) there is the opportunity to ask questions of the previous speaker.

Hearing no requests, I would propose to move to the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm truly honoured and sincerely humbled to rise before you on behalf of the constituents of Chestermere-Rocky View and to address the Assembly in response to the Speech from the Throne. It is time for all members of this Assembly to roll up our sleeves and get to work representing each of our constituents and indeed all Albertans. I invite you as my esteemed colleagues to collaborate on many levels so that we can make Alberta a better place for all Albertans. Our new government needs to demonstrate and respect that we work on behalf of the people of this fine province and that we are here to help.

Albertans voted for change, and it is time to proceed with that change. Where things were hidden, they can now come forward. Where things were clouded, we have an opportunity for transparency. Where government has been disingenuous, it can act instead with integrity. We can work together and move forward in creating stability where there has been instability. We can create accessibility where there has been inaccessibility. We can create savings where we have been overspending, and we can earn trust where there has been mistrust. We can use this opportunity to get back to grassroots politics.

Over the past five months Albertans spoke, and this is what they asked for: honest government, transparency, a government that is willing to collaborate with its opposition, insight, thoughtfulness,

to do more than what's expected, and to stabilize the energy sector and get the product to market, showing Albertans that we work for them and that the money we spend in this government is theirs and not ours.

How do we accomplish these common-sense goals and aspirations of our constituents? It begins with outreach. We need to know our constituents. They are the experts about the issues facing them. Some of these issues for the constituents of Chestermere-Rocky View are local health care, flood mitigation, property rights, education, seniors' care, and safe roads. Our constituency is very different from many other ridings because we have urban and rural issues to address. We have hamlets, villages, towns, cities, acreages, ranches, farms, and homesteads. All have specific needs that are close to their hearts. The diversity within this constituency is what makes it both beautiful and complex. The only way to accomplish our goals is to make sure that all people have a voice. This is what I plan to do for my constituents in Chestermere, Langdon, Conrich, Indus, Kathryn, Keoma, Delacour, Dalroy, Dalemead, Balzac, Springbank, Bearspaw, Elbow Valley, Redwood Meadows, Cochrane Lake, the Tsuut'ina First Nation, and numerous farms and ranches in between.

Being trusted as the shadow cabinet minister with the portfolio of Energy in this energy-rich province of ours is an honour and a challenge that I will tackle head-on. Working together, we can move Alberta forward by creating solid public policy that benefits all Albertans. Our energy sector needs the support of a government that listens to all stakeholders because strong economies are created through the intelligence of leaders who understand the different sides to each of the stories. What we do not yet understand, we need to learn by reaching out and truly connecting with the leaders and experts in Alberta's energy marketplace. This same outreach approach to listening and learning can and should be used in all sectors of our economy as we strive to diversify and meet the cyclical challenges head-on. There is an educated and intelligent workforce in all of our industries which needs the support and less bureaucracy to continue to grow and thrive.

To me, successful leadership means drawing the best out of each person in order to achieve results for the greater good. Leadership does not mean making unilateral decisions that best suit the leader. As elected leaders in this province we will be successful if we first seek the input and the expertise of Albertans when they work towards common-sense policy decisions. We need clarity and commitment from the government and its intentions in the energy sector. To create the desired stability, this requires our government to show leadership and to promote a climate for investment and growth. This sector, like all sectors, employs us to make sound decisions in our future. It is this sector that will also allow us to diversify, and it received little attention in the speech.

I have to say that being part of the tradition of the House, sitting here amongst my colleagues, participating in creating the future of our province, is just phenomenal, and I take to heart many of the positive attributes in the throne speech such as, "We believe in looking after our children and making sure they are safe, healthy, and have access to excellent education." Being a mother, I applaud this statement and look forward to seeing how our government will follow through with this and with life-saving infrastructure in Chestermere-Rocky View. Jaydon Sommerfeld's tragic death on Wednesday, June 10, must not be forgotten, and this tragedy must serve as a reminder for all of us in this House that we have a responsibility to create safe roads for our citizens. On this we must agree.

4:20

The constituency of Chestermere-Rocky View requires a strong stance on flood mitigation that will benefit both the city of Calgary

and the affected municipalities surrounding the city. This, again, requires good public policy. We have families in Chestermere-Rocky View who lost their cabins and second homes in the flood of 2013 and who to this day are not able to seek compensation for their losses and continue to pay mortgages on properties that no longer exist.

A friend of mine often says to me that there are no limitations on good ideas, and I firmly believe in this philosophy. It takes humility and the ability to listen to information, to take it in, and to truly collaborate. Alberta's prosperity was built collaboratively. Albertans work collaboratively to create an advantage that at one time attracted investment, thereby creating jobs, low taxes, and a strong economy through the investment in the people of Alberta.

Small businesses make up 90 per cent of all businesses and are responsible for 35 per cent of all private-sector employment in this province. Small businesses and the entrepreneurial spirit are alive and well in this province. These businesses need to be nurtured and encouraged to generate wealth, respected, and not punished for their hard work.

Again I refer to the throne speech. "Alberta's new government will work closely with all members in this House and will take careful account of your views and those of all Albertans." I hope to hear in the future of our government's plans to balance the budget. Remember that we are here to help. This is something that all Albertans need and deserve for the future. This will create the stability the government has spoken about, and Albertans spoke about it so passionately at the doors. We do not have a revenue problem. We need proper management of Albertans' money. Let me state this again: Albertans' money. We need not throw more money into the pot when we are not privy to the state of our finances.

We are an Assembly of many new faces, and we have much to learn and even more to accomplish moving forward. Let's understand the privilege we hold, the responsibility we bear by sitting in these seats. Let's build a better future and leave a legacy stronger than it was for our children and beyond. Let's learn from the triumphs and the challenges of those who have been here before us and those who are returning to sit here with us. I would love to thank my friends, both old and new, my family, and my constituents for placing their faith in me. Remember that we are here to help.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have enjoyed listening to the speeches on both sides in the response to the Speech from the Throne. I would now move that we adjourn debate on the Speech from the Throne.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 1

An Act to Renew Democracy in Alberta

Ms Ganley: I'd like to move second reading of Bill 1, An Act to Renew Democracy in Alberta.

This bill will amend the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act so that corporations, unions, and employee organizations will be banned from making political contributions in this province. Once the bill is enacted, it will come into force on the day it was first introduced; that is, June 15, 2015.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Only residents of Alberta will be allowed to provide political donations to political parties, constituency associations, candidates for election and senatorial selection, and leadership contestants. Candidates will need to talk and listen to Albertans to gain their support instead of relying on donations from organizations. It will help to ensure that Albertans' voices are heard in the Legislative Assembly and assure voters that political contributions from organizations weren't a deciding factor in the candidate's success.

Madam Speaker, we've had a lot of support for these legislative changes. Albertans have told us time and again that equity and fairness in election financing is important. Albertans value democracy. We've consulted with the Chief Electoral Officer about these amendments.

Madam Speaker, June 15, the effective date, will have implications for candidates who ran in the May 5 general election. It means that those candidates will no longer be able to accept union and corporate donations to eliminate any deficits remaining from the past election. It also prevents political parties from rushing to fund raise before a deadline. These are implications that will affect everyone, no matter which political party they represent. It will ensure that under this Legislature only Albertans can contribute to political entities. Our political system has been far, far too dependent on funds from a narrow range of donors with deep pockets and too far removed from the interests of ordinary people.

This bill, Madam Speaker, will reform election financing and give voters back their voice. It is a needed evolution in our electoral process and of our democratic rights. Together with a new special legislative committee which will be looking into Alberta's elections, whistle-blowers, and conflict-of-interest legislation, it represents just the beginning of our efforts to renew democracy in our province and to ensure that all parties are accountable to Albertans.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the privilege of rising this afternoon and joining the debate on Bill 1, An Act To Renew Democracy in Alberta. We are commencing this spring sitting on an important note. Accountability and fairness in the democratic process are fundamental cornerstones of a healthy political system and responsible campaigning. In fact, my colleagues and I are championing the need to introduce more robust accountability measures that would keep undue corporate and union influence out of the electoral process. To this end, I regard the amendments proposed in Bill 1 as positive steps in the right direction, and I applaud the intent behind the bill. As such, I want to help the government to achieve our shared goal of making sure politics are conducted in the best interest of Albertans, with Albertans as the focus.

Madam Speaker, if passed, Bill 1 will ban corporate and union donations to political parties, which would be effective on June 15. This would mean that only Albertan residents could make private contributions to parties, candidates, constituency associations of their choosing. The intent here is to bring an end to the enormous influence organized entities can have when they choose to invest large sums of money into the political process. More specifically, this will bring an end to the ability of corporations and unions to steamroll the will of individual Albertans, who are the real voters. I reiterate: this is where political influence should be coming from, Albertans.

4:30

Currently, Madam Speaker, the federal government along with the governments in Manitoba, Nova Scotia, and Quebec have legislation banning corporate and union donations. If Bill 1 is successful, Alberta would join that list. The principle underlying this bill is sound. It reflects what we in this caucus have been advocating for a long time. For years we have campaigned on the principle of banning corporate and union donations, and it is a pleasure to see that one of our policies is being adopted.

As such, I find it encouraging that democratic accountability is starting to get some acknowledgement for its importance. Indeed, it is a necessity for the effective representation of all Albertans regardless of the size of their bank accounts. It became regrettably commonplace for the previous governing party to receive untold millions in corporate donations, and while the new governing party has enjoyed the benefits of union donations, it is pleasing to see that they're taking the initiative in forsaking some of those donations going forward.

I certainly support the principle at hand, one we have long advocated for. In fact, if anything, I would suggest that Bill 1 doesn't go far enough, Madam Speaker. On this note, I have a few questions I would hope to get some clarity on. In the interest of helping government to achieve this goal and renewing democracy for Albertans, I would like to outline a few of these concerns for the House this afternoon.

When I say that this bill is not going far enough I mean that it still leaves open loopholes that weaken the overall effectiveness of this bill. Essentially, the bill in its present form is still allowing third-party advertisers to exercise their influence in elections. These third-party groups have actually been considered to be more influential in many of the elections that they've been presiding in. This includes Ontario and the United States. In those jurisdictions we have been told of the amount of power that they are able to wield by throwing large amounts of money into third-party advertising campaigns.

Let's look at Ontario, for instance. During the province's 2014 election third-party advertisers spent \$8.4 million.

An Hon. Member: How much?

Mr. Cyr: Eight point four million dollars. It's a stunning amount of money.

We need to consider if we really want to leave this door open to a wave of third-party advertisers wielding undue influence in Alberta's elections. Albertans certainly deserve better, I'm sure we can all agree.

Another concern I have relates to the retroactivity of this bill. Generally speaking, I oppose the notion of retroactive legislation. The problem in this particular case is that we are currently in an election period. Madam Speaker, this means that this bill, if passed, would change rules governing the current election period while it's still ongoing. So I have to wonder whether this leaves the bill liable to certain court challenges. What are the legalities here? Is the integrity of the bill jeopardized by the retroactivity of the bill? Would it not be more prudent to wait for an effective date in early July, when the writ period is officially closed? This is something that needs to be cleared up, and perhaps the government can help to provide some clarity on the issue. Officially the writ period still has three weeks remaining, as it runs for 60 days after the election.

Madam Speaker, there are also some, frankly, bizarre provisions in the bill that specifically allow unions and corporations to backstop loans. According to the bill as it's currently written, corporations and unions would be allowed not only to backstop loans but to make payments on the loans as well. These payments

would only be considered illegal donations if they were not reimbursed by the party taking out the loans. Does this not conflict with the principle behind the bill? The intent is to keep unions and corporate influence out of the electoral process. How do these strange provisions move us in this direction of keeping the unions and corporate influence out of the electoral process?

In the interest of helping the government to attain its goal on this bill, I would ask for an explanation on the matter. As it presently stands, these unusual aspects of the bill are cause for concern in an otherwise praiseworthy piece of legislation. The integrity of democratic accountability is at stake, so we want to make sure this bill is as strong as we can make it and as comprehensive as possible. We want to assist the government in making sure this is the case.

Madam Speaker, I believe the fundamental question at hand is this: how do we prevent third-party interests from influencing our elections while also protecting their freedom of speech? What we need is to strike a balance, and this is ultimately what we need to bear in mind while we move forward in considering Bill 1.

These things aside, Madam Speaker, this bill would accomplish something worth while, keeping political influence at the hands of individual Albertans, where it belongs. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to stand today in support of this important bill to renew democracy in Alberta. The bill at its core is the brainchild of the Wildrose Party. So first of all, on behalf of the Wildrose Party's grassroots I say: you're welcome. I hope this government keeps it up. We have a few other ideas, too, if you'd like to check out our policy book.

An Hon. Member: No good ones.

Mr. Nixon: Well, you sure liked this one.

As mentioned, the Wildrose has a long history of campaigning to end corporate and union donations, and it's a policy we are happy to see being brought in with Bill 1. We believe that the only influence in politics should be the influence of the voter, and this bill sets the stage for that. In the past we have seen former government parties rake in millions in corporate donations tied directly to government contracts. In fact, in the closing days of the 2012 election the former government received a \$400,000 donation from a big corporate donor. This practice is not just wrong; it's dead wrong. And thanks to the Wildrose, this bill will finally make actions like that a thing of the past. It is no secret that this current government has received massive donations from unions and other special-interest groups, and I'm encouraged that they are willing to adopt a bill founded on Wildrose policy that will close these donations off.

While the bill is largely Wildrose, there are aspects that even I have trouble understanding. For instance, why is this government enacting legislation retroactive to June 15 in the middle of an election period? This is akin to changing the rules of a hockey game in the middle of the game. While I'm sure there is an argument to be made for increasing the size of the net, you simply don't do it in the middle of the second period. We have questions about enacting this bill retroactively. Does it leave the law vulnerable to court challenges from other parties?

4:40

If we truly want voters to have the only influence in politics – and the Wildrose does – then we must ban corporate and union donations and commit to adopting legislation that does more than simply lip service to reform. This means banning corporations and

unions from making payments on party loans at all except in the case of default. This means empowering the Chief Electoral Officer with tools to penalize any party any amount, not less than the amount of the loan they have not repaid in the manner of the act.

While I am excited to see this government moving in the right direction, there is much more that can be done. But we'll be clear. The Wildrose supports this bill because it will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills and because it's the right thing to do, and when it comes to democracy, nothing less is acceptable.

We look forward to further debate, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes now of questions and answers should anyone wish to avail themselves of that.

Seeing none, any other hon. members wish to speak? The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Sorry, Madam Speaker. This is my first go at debating a bill. Actually, I'd rather enter into debate than questions. Have I missed my opportunity for such?

The Deputy Speaker: No. If no one takes advantage of 29(2)(a), then we go back into the debate. You wanted to speak to the main bill?

Ms Hoffman: To the main bill, yeah.

Just for clarity, how do we put our names forward to be on the list?

The Deputy Speaker: Send me a note.

Did you wish to speak now? I believe I can recognize you now, hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Sure. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

To my friends at *Hansard*, I hope this doesn't count as my maiden speech. It is my intent, though, to speak in strong support of Bill 1 at this point and to thank my colleague the Minister of Justice for bringing it forward. Actually, she brought it forward yesterday, on her birthday, so what a nice present, that she might see support both from the governing party and the Official Opposition on her first bill. I think that would be a great tone to set for our House.

In 2008, when I was working here as a researcher, this was something that we put in our platform and something that we were really proud to make sure was moving forward because we had seen evidence of how some of the wealthiest corporations and unions were having undue influence on our democratic system here in Alberta and also in other jurisdictions. We might recall concerns over wealthy business owners who could benefit from a downtown arena donating the max as well as their friends and neighbours, and I think there was even maybe a pet on the list donating the max as well as the business. So this is definitely something that we need to address.

I think that the voters of Alberta spoke loud and clear with the big shift in this election by sending both parties here in the capacity of government and Official Opposition who had this as a pillar in their platforms, not just in this election but in past elections. That, I think, is to be commended for all of us and for Albertans, for speaking so strongly on that.

I want to address the point that was raised around closing loopholes, and I agree that that's our intention, to make sure that we do close loopholes. In terms of the retroactivity, that's one of the reasons why at this point I'm leaning towards supporting it. I think it would be disingenuous of us to pass legislation and allow some

of the richest corporations and unions to continue donating the max for the period from which we gave notice that we won't allow them to donate until a point several weeks down the road. I think that it would actually create a bit of a gravy train effect should we not pass this legislation retroactively. That's my logic on it.

I think it's fair for us to say to our corporate and union friends: no, thank you. No, thank you, effective the date immediate that the bill was tabled. No, thank you, effective the moment that we first have the power as legislators to bring this legislation into effect. I think that if we were to delay that, as has been mentioned, by a few weeks, it would actually be counter to the intent of the actual legislation. I, too, wonder about retroactive bills, but this is retroactive to the date it was tabled. It's not retroactive to five years ago, making all of those donations illegal.

The other point I just want to raise is around guaranteeing a loan, being allowed to make interim payments as long as during the period that money is paid back. I think that that's the point. We want to make sure that there aren't any donations. In terms of guaranteeing a loan, I might be a small-business owner who needs to access a line of credit during my election period and have no intention of actually donating to that campaign but need to make sure that I have a guarantor for that loan. There may be a need to maintain my small-business reputation and my financial standing to make payments on a loan if the donations aren't coming in in a timely manner but, of course, not actually to make donations. So I think that that little cushion, allowing individual candidates to be able to have somebody to lean on in their time of need to make sure that that loan is being guaranteed, creates that opportunity. Of course, there would be a penalty to both the candidate as well as the donor if that was not paid back to the guarantor of that loan.

I appreciate the questions that have been raised. In terms of the loophole piece I worry that if we don't act to make this retroactive to the date on which it was tabled, we're actually indeed creating a larger loophole. That's some of my logic around it.

I am so excited for us to be moving forward in this direction. I think it really speaks to the democratic principles upon which every good democracy is founded, and that is around individuals having the right to set and determine the best government for themselves, for their jurisdiction.

I agree that we need to look at third-party advertising, and I know that there will be greater legislation, that we'll need to examine for that, around freedom of speech and other items. As an individual member of this caucus I want to say that I'm excited at having an opportunity to pursue that down the road, but I don't personally think that it fits into this bill that we're here to debate today.

I think there are other pieces of legislation we might want to visit as well. As a former public school board trustee I know that some of those campaigns can get into the multizero budgets as well. I think that the way the legislation stands right now, there's room for corporate and union donations for other orders of government, obviously not for federal, but we're looking at other orders of government here in Alberta.

In terms of municipal governments and elected school board governments I think that's something that we will want to examine as well. I know that there have been a few editorials speaking in that regard, and I personally as one member see opportunity and hope and that, moving forward, we've got a little window before the next municipal election comes around. I hope that that's something we can tackle together as a House in ensuring democracy not just at this level but in other orders of government as well for Albertans.

Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to my colleagues for the opportunity to share my remarks on Bill 1.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, the provisions of Standing Order 29(2)(a) would allow for questions and answers, five minutes, should anyone choose to take advantage of that. The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you. Well done, Madam Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to be recognized.

Thank you for what you've contributed to the debate. The question I want to ask you, though, centres around parts that are unclear to me. If a corporation or a union ends up making the payment for a candidate or a party because of the loan guarantee and because of that nature, it's not clear that that money has to be paid back by the candidate or the political party, leading to tremendous unintended consequences of a big corporation, a union, whatever, having their fingers in a lot of pies and having a lot of influence over a situation where, you know, they have a lot more influence than what this bill is intending. What this bill, of course, is intending, as my colleagues from the Wildrose have pointed out, is an opportunity to make individuals, those of us that actually vote, have a real say in our democratic system.

Could you please touch on the fact that if a union or corporation has to step in and make a payment, should the candidate or the party ultimately have to pay that back to the union or the corporation?

Ms Hoffman: I raised it, but I think the mover is actually in a better position to be able to respond to that question. So if I might ask the mover of the bill, my colleague the Minister of Justice, to please respond. [interjection] I can speak to this question in the close of debate if you like, say my colleagues. I personally don't feel like I'm in a position to be able to answer the specifics around that. It's a valid question, and we will ensure that you have a valid answer in response to that.

Thank you very much, hon. member.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other member wishing to take advantage of 29(2)(a)?

If not, then I will recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

4:50

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak in support of Bill 1. I think it is a very important act, and I offer my praise to the government for their quick action in making this the first order of legislative business here in the 29th Legislature. I'm particularly pleased to see them take this early action, because I understand, based on the previous history of some other parties, that on that side of the House it gets intoxicating after a while. So I praise you for doing it early before you get too used to some of the perks of power.

I would say, though, that there are some opportunities for improvements and some specific amendments that I look forward to discussing in committee. In particular, I wonder why the government hasn't taken the opportunity now to in fact reduce the amount that individuals can donate. I suspect that that's something they would find broad support for in this House. Although I recognize that there has been a committee struck, an all-party committee – and being a member of a party in this House, I sincerely look forward to being a part of that committee. I'm also finding that at this end it's actually a nice view of the entire Legislature. Much as I desire to move towards the middle of the House over time, it's quite a nice view at this point. As I say, I believe this House would agree to reduce the total amount that individuals would be able to donate, and that's something I look forward to discussing in committee.

The other thing I think that we probably would find some agreement on is eliminating public spending announcements during elections. This became a particular issue during the recent by-

elections last fall, where we had sod-turning upon sod-turning. In fact, the way I think the foundations for some of those schools are going to be built is simply with golden shovels digging the entire foundation.

So that's one, public spending announcements, and the other, of course, is using the office of a minister to make public policy announcements during a by-election and making those announcements clearly for political gain, something I refer to as the Gordon Dirks rule, something that had something of an impact on the by-elections in October of 2014. I think, again, that's something that we would likely find some wide support for in this Assembly. I look to the province of Manitoba and what they have done with their legislation, and I would encourage the House to consider that.

I also agree with the hon. Minister of Health, the Member for Edmonton-Glenora, in her comments that perhaps we should look at municipal campaign finance reform. That's something that likely would come up under the auspices of that committee as well, probably something that would be a little too deep for Bill 1. Again, I come back to the principles of the bill and agree absolutely that it is an admirable bill. As leader of the Alberta Party opposition I will be voting in favour of Bill 1. Thank you again to the government for bringing it up.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) comes into effect should anyone have questions.

Mr. Barnes: I'd like to ask the hon. member what he thinks of the June 15 deadline and changing the rules in the middle of the contest and how he thinks this may affect some of the candidates who, say, weren't as big, as high a fundraiser, maybe weren't successful. Do you foresee that changing the rules in the middle of the game is a problem, maybe its even being court challenged?

Mr. Clark: Thank you, hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, for that question. It is a challenge. There's absolutely no question. At the same time, I understand completely the rationale behind that change, that there would then be a mad rush to get as much corporate and union money into the coffers of political parties as possible in whatever time frame would remain. I recognize that that may leave it open to court challenges. I'm not a lawyer, so I can't speak to that personally. I understand absolutely the rationale for the June 15 deadline. It is a challenging issue, but my position at this point is to support that aspect of the bill.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Yes. Thank you. I just wanted to respond to the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow, who asked about other aspects of it. All of those things that you mentioned, hon. member, are things which are certainly on our minds and under consideration here and, I'm sure, on other sides of the House as well. This is not our last kick at the can in terms of this, and you've mentioned the committee as well. So I think you should look forward to a good discussion amongst all parties about where we go with regard to these matters. Certainly, spending limits was one of the things that you mentioned, that I think deserves careful consideration. It was matter of preparing a bill that would be ready for an early session and a short session, so many things were left out.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other speakers on 29(2)(a)? Go ahead.

Mr. Clark: I believe that was phrased in the form of a question, so I will. . .

Mr. Mason: It's questions or comments.

Mr. Clark: Questions or comments? All right.

The Deputy Speaker: On 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you. I thank the hon. House leader for pointing out that, indeed, it's not just questions or comments. In the spirit of all-party co-operation as requested by the Speaker in the past, it's practice, as we know, not to refer to each other by names because we're representing our constituents. It's about them, not about us. If we said some of the things that occur here, some would claim that it would be defamatory and otherwise. Again, to make a positive suggestion, just a thought of encouragement for the member and others, it's not practice to bring up the names of those who are not in this House and cannot defend themselves. A reference was made in a rather unflattering way of a person who was the former Education minister, and I just wonder if we could respect the good work that people have tried to do in previous administrations dating back to 1905.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.
Any others?

Mr. Nixon: I was just wondering if the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow would agree, in regard to the retroactiveness of the bill, if it would be appropriate that the government would disclose what they have received, since they formed government during the same writ period, from unions and corporations before they went ahead and retroactively changed the rules in the middle of the game.

Thank you.

Mr. Clark: I would agree with the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre that that is a good idea. Of course, I'm sure the government would respond that that will be done in accordance with Elections Alberta rules, and I would anticipate that that would absolutely be the case. But, yes, I would love to see that as quickly as possible.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other questions on 29(2)(a)?
If not, we'll go with the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a privilege to rise and speak to Bill 1. The province has indeed seen a tremendous change in its government, and I'm glad that now we are discussing making some much needed changes to our province's election financing laws.

Albertans made it clear when they chose to change the government that they needed trust restored to our political system. Albertans deserve accountability, integrity, and ethics in our political system. I find it appropriate that this legislation follows on the heels of a campaign in which we all heard again and again from constituents and all Albertans about trust. Albertans clearly have significant concerns about the trust that they can place in the system to fairly represent them. I heard many times from many people that their government no longer seemed accountable to them as citizens. They struggled to see how the system could serve them while being improperly influenced by long-standing, entrenched special interests.

This bill aims to ban corporate and union contributions, but in a larger sense we're discussing the issue of restoring trust and accountability in our political system and our institutions. The importance of this as the foundation of our democracy cannot be overstated. I'm proud to stand and say that the Wildrose has long

believed in the elimination of corporate and union donations. We have previously attempted to make these changes, but the government of the day was not receptive. I'm glad that we'll be able to work with the new administration, that shares our belief on these important issues and is committed to adopting our policy proposal. I'm also encouraged to see that the governing party is bringing in these changes despite having benefited in the past from large union and special-interest contributions.

5:00

Eliminating these types of contributions is even-handed and fair, and I am supportive of this limitation. The reason we in the Wildrose stand so firmly for the elimination of corporate and union donations is because we have a fundamental belief that Alberta's political system should not be influenced by special interests but only by Albertans. Furthermore, the integrity of our political system demands that political parties not be seen to be influenced by special interests who can exert this influence with their money. This legislation is long overdue and badly needed, but we must also be sure to use this opportunity to create meaningful, lasting, and effective change.

I am supportive of this bill, but I do think that it could be further strengthened to better meet its objectives of removing financial influence from parties. We are certainly in agreement in regard to the principles that underpin the bill, but I do have some questions and concerns that I hope will be addressed by this House in future debate and in Committee of the Whole. I'm concerned that the government has made the legislation retroactive to the date before the end of the election period. This piece of the bill may jeopardize the entire legislation as a whole by exposing it to legal challenges, legal challenges from candidates and parties who operated under the existing rules of the previous campaign. It would be very unfortunate if this legislation were put into doubt because of this one thing. For the overall health of the bill I think it would be wiser to make the effective date in early July, after this election period has come to a close.

My second concern is that the ability of corporations and unions to make loan payments on behalf of its parties is still available. This still constitutes fairly significant monetary assistance, which I believe is contrary to the spirit of this legislation. Every legislation has unintended consequences. It's important to keep it consistent with the spirit. If it is our goal to remove special-interest financial influence over parties and over the political system, then we ought to do it fully and comprehensively. That would involve banning corporations and unions from making these loan payments for parties in all cases except for the extreme case of default.

In the event that these special interests, like corporations or unions, do make loan payments for parties, I would like to see that we have concrete, absolute assurances that parties cannot profit based on this mechanism. Any attempt by a corporation or union to improperly pay off debts on behalf of a party or a candidate would violate the spirit of the law and the goals that this law sets forth. We must ensure that the Chief Electoral Officer penalizes any party that does not repay debts paid on its behalf. This penalty should strongly discourage any party or candidate from acting inappropriately to subvert the rules by accepting improper contributions in the form of debt payments.

My final concern is with the role of special interests in conducting third-party advertising. My goodness, we've seen elections in Ontario and the United States completely influenced by third-party advertising. Let's not do the same in Alberta. I think we can all agree that we do not want to see special interests with vast financial resources unduly controlling our democratic system. As I said earlier, we must let and we must have individual Albertans have the

ultimate influence over their government and their political institutions.

In the coming debate on Bill 1 I hope that all these concerns can be discussed and addressed. The changes that this bill aims to make are admirable and much needed for the overall health of democracy in Alberta. For this reason I am happy to support the intent of this bill, and I'm happy to support it on second reading, and I look forward to all the constructive discussion ahead.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under 29(2)(a)? If not, I'll recognize the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I want to sincerely thank the government for placing before the House Bill 1, An Act to Renew Democracy in Alberta. When I campaigned in the recent election, one of the concerns of my constituents revolved around how we could make our democracy better. My message to my constituents was that democracy is never a static system. We can do democracy differently, and we can do it better. So I'm very pleased that the first order of business that this Legislature will craft revolves around attempting to make our electoral process more representative of the will of the people by changing some of the rules around who can make donations to political parties.

In a democracy we place few restrictions on the free expression of ideas during an election. Elections are nothing if not about determining the wishes of the people. That can only happen when the people are allowed a full and free range of expression. Indeed, Bill 1 is all about trying to ensure that the people – not corporations, not unions – are heard in a general election. Money should not be able to determine the outcome of an election but, rather, ideas and candidates and the wishes of the electorate. For this reason there is much to support in Bill 1.

While Bill 1 takes positive steps towards ending corporate and union donations to political parties, I would caution that I believe that for many of my constituents Bill 1 will need to be expanded. It will need to deal with some issues that it does not address. I believe that democracies must always balance rights, and that there needs to be further discussion by the members of this House on how this bill will address the issue of third-party advertising. The Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act establishes rules for third parties that raise funds and incur expenses for election advertising related to provincial elections. Individual corporations and groups engaged in such activities must register with Elections Alberta if they place or plan to place election advertisements in any media if expenses or contributions exceed \$1,000.

I would encourage the members of this Legislature to consider the damage that can occur to the democratic process when union dues are used to fund third-party advertising or when corporations use their deep pockets to influence the results of an election through third-party advertising. Discussion needs to take place and this bill amended to ensure that the money that was a problem when given as a straightforward political donation is not, in turn, recycled into as big a problem with third-party advertising. Bill 1 takes positive steps, but we must keep in mind that sometimes our actions have unintended consequences, and rushing forward with legislation sometimes opens the door to results we hadn't planned for.

I look forward to further discussion on this bill and about democratic reform in Alberta in the future. But to return to the main point, ending corporate and union donations in Alberta is a major step in the right direction. Even though I would ask for clarification around third-party advertising, I'm proud to speak in support of this bill. This is a long overdue change in Alberta.

5:10

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under 29(2)(a)? If not, then I'll call on the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'll start by saying that Bill 1 is a good document with a couple of flaws. We as Wildrose campaigned on the principles in this bill, but I believe Albertans would be very disappointed if we did not address the issues of the loans being able to be paid off by corporations and unions.

We do support the legislation in principle, but we are unsure why the NDP have left those so-called transitional provisions in place, that allow companies and unions to pay off loans for the rest of this year. We don't see why corporations or unions would be allowed to make loan payments at all, even if they are later reimbursed, since this is still considered monetary assistance. We want reassurance that no party can profit from letting corporations or unions pay off its debts as this would be a violation of the spirit of the law.

Again, I'll reiterate that it would be very disappointing legislation for Albertans to witness.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under 29(2)(a)? Any further speakers who wish to speak on the bill? You wish to speak on the bill, hon. member?

Mr. Cooper: Please.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Madam Speaker, it's an absolute pleasure to rise today to speak to something we can agree on and not a point of order or a motion that the opposition disagrees with, with the direction of the House, but around some common ground, and that is specifically with respect to banning union and corporate donations.

For a number of years the opposition has been adamant about the need to put democracy back into the hands of the people. The Wildrose is a grassroots organization that believes that Albertans are primarily responsible for making Alberta a great place and that while business and corporations play a vital role in everyone's success, it's Albertans that are the ones that are responsible. So it's important that we take all the steps that we can to ensure that our democracy is continually held in the hands of just that, of Albertans.

I commend the government for taking this important first step of banning corporate and union donations. I spoke a number of times during the campaign and particularly on election night that, certainly, there's going to be a lot to oppose. We view the world through a very different set of glasses, so where it is required for us to do that strong opposing, I can assure you that the Wildrose will be here to defend the interests of all Albertans. However, today is not necessarily that day because we have found some common ground, so we look forward to the steps forward around that.

Now, while there is a significant amount of common ground, a number of my colleagues have quite eloquently laid out some of the real concerns that we have. The role of opposition is not just to oppose but to highlight areas where we can all be better together. So that's what our goal is here at second reading, to really highlight some of those concerns, particularly around this concept of corporations and, particularly in the case of the present government, unions being able to backstop loans. There is one party in this House who has a long track record of utilizing other people's money to backstop and run their campaigns, particularly when it

comes to debt-financing campaigns. It's certainly not the party of the Official Opposition. So it creates a little bit of uncertainty in the opposition when we see what appears to be a clause in a piece of legislation that is specific to a past problem that one political party or another may have had, and that comes in the form of fundraising, and it comes in the form of debt-financing campaigns and requiring loans in order to manage their financial affairs.

We've seen a significant period of time in Alberta where the government had a track record of introducing legislation that was of net benefit to one political party over another. While I cannot reiterate enough how supportive I am of banning corporation and union donations and the heart of what I believe the current government is trying to do, it does bring great pause to see this little wiggle room that's being provided in the form of this, which, traditionally speaking, has certainly been used by the party of the government that is in place today.

So we look forward to some real clarification around that. I would expect that there is a very high likelihood that we can see some amendments from the Official Opposition when we get to Committee of the Whole to try and better this piece of legislation because at the heart of it is ensuring that at the end of the day the best idea wins, not the government's idea, not our idea, but the best idea. While we're, you know, probably two-thirds of the way there, to the best idea, why not go ahead and make it as fair as possible, something that I know the party of the left is certainly hoping to do for everyone on every file, making it as fair as possible? We might as well move in that direction and go all the way when it comes to getting corporations and unions out of election financing. We're just about there, but we have one more giant step for Alberta political parties to go.

I'll move briefly to this issue of being in the middle of a writ period, of an election period. One of my big concerns is the mechanisms which will be put into place that would potentially prevent a candidate from reporting appropriately or not. You know, under the previous rules any candidate could and does report their financing over an election period. Nobody submits their bank statement that says, "This corporate donation came in on the 8th," or "This union donation came in on the 16th." We report an election period.

So I'm curious to know from the hon. Minister of Justice just what the mechanisms are and will be, during committee or perhaps at the close of debate today, should we get there. What will those mechanisms will be? It's critically important that we set out a set of rules and that we all follow them. Changing them, which would potentially encourage a candidate to be, like, "Hey, I received this on the 14th, not the 15th," I think puts candidates in an awkward position. As a number of my colleagues have said, clearly, it creates the potential for a court challenge. The rules were set out, you changed the rules halfway through, and now we can be in a situation where a candidate would want to challenge that in court. Additionally, it could encourage them to be more prone to bending the rules.

Certainly, no one in this Assembly would partake in such an activity, but let's keep in mind that there were, you know, approximately 220 other individuals in this great province who did their portion of public service by putting their name on a ballot and defending the ideals that are important to them. Not only are we debating this bill for us, but we're debating it for them, so I think it's important that we consider that. It's a very small change in the legislation to move it to the 4th or 5th of July. Keep the rules as is. To create this sense that there's going to be this mad rush of corporations trying to spend their last possible dime on a political party I just don't think is exactly what's going to happen. I think we had a set of rules, and we ought to stick to those rules.

5:20

In closing, again let me thank – now there's a day I didn't think would come – the NDP government for this area of common interest and common benefit for all Albertans when it comes to banning corporate and union donations. We want to help, so in the spirit of co-operation I encourage you to reflect strongly upon a number of the issues that the opposition have brought forward today and consider them as we move through the stages of debate so that we can be together for a better Alberta.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under 29(2)(a)?

Ms Hoffman: Yes. To the member who spoke last, I actually have a comment.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes. Go ahead.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I would like to just say: please don't rule out other opportunities to commend this government. We are absolutely committed to bringing forward the best ideas possible. Of course, the committee structure that we have in place will enable us to do that as well as members on both sides of this House. I'm looking forward to the opportunity to continue to have you commend and to say even those letters, NDP, in the House. It's music to my ears, hon. member.

Mr. Cooper: Yeah. We have lots of policies if you want to see many more good ideas. We're more than happy to send them over.

Conversely, I look forward to a very fulsome discussion with the House leaders about ways that we can make committees work better in this place. You know, traditionally speaking, committees very rarely see a bill before them. They've traditionally spent a lot of time on things like high-speed rail and run-of-river power, and very little legislation heads in that direction. The pace at which I believe even this government is going to pass legislation is certainly concerning.

So I hope that, in fact, we can just do that, utilize the committee system to ensure that the best idea can win and remove things from what at times can be a highly partisan environment here in the House by referring a number of important pieces of legislation so that Albertans can have their feedback, so that we can have expert witnesses.

I think you'll see that in the next couple of days a number of pieces of legislation that are significant will be ushered through, rammed through. Maybe that's a little strong for today. Hopefully, we can do just that and make sure that we utilize the committees in a way that is respectful of the process.

Ms Hoffman: I'm glad to hear the member opposite talk about wanting to ensure that there's time to bring our best work forward, wanting to make sure there's time for us to make sure that good ideas are what drives government and not working to some temporary timeline or false timeline. I hope that the hon. member and all of the colleagues in that party have the same confidence in our ability to work as individuals in ensuring we bring the best budget forward to Albertans, not just the fastest budget.

Mr. Cooper: Madam Speaker, May, June, July, August, September: five months from the election. I think that is a very ample amount of time to provide a budget.

Ms Hoffman: I just want to make sure that all members of this House are assured that every dollar that this government allocates will be treated with the same due diligence as any dollar that any individual has in their pocket. When you're talking about, for

example, the status of the Health budget, when you're talking about \$18 billion, I don't think you want me rushing those decisions, and I don't think you want this government working in a way that won't ensure a fair process and consultation with our stakeholders as well. I just want to say that we will bring forward a fantastic budget, and we look forward to seeing your support and to you commending the work that we do in that regard as well. You may have to wait a few weeks longer than you'd like.

The Deputy Speaker: Just a comment, hon. members, on the use of 29(2)(a), questions and comments. Please try to restrict it to the bill or the matter at hand as opposed to going off on some other topic.

Any other comments on 29(2)(a)? We still have a few seconds, I guess.

If not, I'll recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow on the bill.

Ms Drever: Thank you, Madam Speaker. We are all here as elected members because we are elected by Albertans. This was something I heard on the doorsteps in my riding. This bill will keep us, as elected officials, accountable to Albertans. I've heard from my constituents. I support this bill, and they support this bill. Individuals should be the only stakeholders allowed to donate.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under 29(2)(a)? Go ahead, hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. In response to this bill perhaps we should make it retroactive to election day, May 5.

The Deputy Speaker: Excuse me, hon. member. Are you speaking on 29(2)(a), questions or comments, for the Member for Calgary-Bow?

Mrs. Pitt: Yes. Sorry. My apologies. First time.

My suggestion in response to your speech is that to make it fair for everybody, would you agree that we make this bill retroactive to the date of election?

Ms Drever: As is. To June 15.

The Deputy Speaker: Any further questions or comments?

Any further speakers to the bill?

If not, then I'll call on the hon. Minister of Justice to close debate.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd like to thank all the members for their supportive comments and for their other comments as well. Just to close debate here, I'd like to begin by saying that this was an election promise that this party campaigned on. We are bringing it forward as Bill 1 to fulfill that promise. We think that this will have incredible benefits for the people of Alberta and that it will make all of us accountable to the people of Alberta, and that is one of our primary goals.

I will speak to many of the comments that were made in order. I will begin by dealing with the issue with respect to contributions to third-party advertisers. We absolutely agree that that is something that needs to be considered. However, before passing legislation which affects the rights of individuals, in particular the Charter of Rights, in this case freedom of speech, careful study and consideration of what those impacts will be is required. We were unable to compete that study fully before now, so we are looking into getting an opinion on that. I mean, as so many courts have said, our Charter rights are our most fundamental rights as individuals, so before we pass any legislation that affects the freedom of speech of any

persons in Alberta, we wanted to be sure that we had clearly gone over the implications and didn't rush into judgment.

I would also hasten to point out that in addition to being a promise in this election, this has been an NDP policy for a considerable length of time and, I believe, since before my friends were a party.

5:30

To speak to the issue of loan payments and loan guarantees, which are two separate pieces, the preamendment legislation, the legislation as it existed before this bill was introduced, already allowed both those payments and guarantees, so we're not actually creating an exception. The reason why we needed amendments to deal specifically with those issues is because it is possible, given that we are currently in the middle of an election period, that there was already a guarantee existing. It's possible that a corporation or a union had presented a guarantee already. Now, if the political entity, so the candidate or whatever it is, fails to make a payment on that loan, that union or corporation would then become legally required to make a payment on that loan.

The concern is that these organizations put forward these guarantees in good faith when it was legal for them to do so, so it would be unfair to then turn around and punish them for doing that which they are legally required to do; i.e., make a payment in terms of the guarantee. That's why those provisions have been brought in. It's to ensure, essentially, that we aren't punishing corporations and organizations for doing what they are legally required to do.

In addition, I'd like to clarify that these sorts of interim payments or guarantees can't become donations. They can't become donations under the legislation now. If a payment is made and it is not repaid by the time the political entity, whether it be a candidate or a party, is required to clear its debt, then those payments automatically become a contribution to the party, and those contributions would be unlawful under the new amendments. So that's just to clarify that piece there.

Since this essentially raises the issue of retroactivity, I will speak to that as well. The present bill has been carefully considered, and we're confident that it meets the needs of Albertans. If someone wishes to challenge it in court, that is, of course, their right in a free and democratic society. One of the crucial purposes behind the presumption against retroactivity is the idea of notice. In the present case on June 15 everyone was put on notice that this legislation was being introduced, so it's not possible at this point for someone, a corporation or a union, to make a donation to a political entity and then turn around and say: well, we didn't know. The reason for that is because we introduced the bill as written on June 15, the same date that the legislation comes into effect. So the result is that everyone was made aware that the rule existed before the rule would be enforced.

Hon. members have also raised the issue of unintended consequences. What we didn't want was an unintended consequence in the sense that we would cause a run on donations, as it were. We think that this best protects the interests of Albertans.

Finally, I'd like to address many of the comments made that this bill doesn't go far enough. To that I would simply say that we agree with you on that. It is our intention to bring forward further amendments to the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act. However, this was a clear campaign promise. It was something that Albertans clearly supported us on. So we are moving right away, while we have the support of other parties, to put this into law. As we go forward, the committee that we have set up will consider future amendments, and the Chief Electoral Officer has made recommendations as well. All of that will be considered in due course.

All right. The issue of making it retroactive to the beginning of the election period was also raised. I think the difficulty there is exactly the piece which I've just raised; that is, notice. So it would seem unfair for us to say, you know, that a corporation or a union who has made a donation in good faith while that was lawful is now going to be punished for having made that donation. I don't think that is what Albertans support, so I would not support that amendment.

In conclusion, I'd like to say that I appreciate the support from both sides of the House, that this bill has received. We are incredibly excited to take these first steps to renewing democracy in Alberta and to ensuring that individual Albertans have the strongest voice in this Legislature, in who it is that is sent to this Legislature. We are excited to work with you to take future steps going forward.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 1 read a second time]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I think we have made some excellent progress for the first regular day of our sitting, passing Bill 1 at second reading with full participation.

An Hon. Member: We knew you'd like our policy, Brian.

Mr. Mason: Yes. And I know how you came by that policy, all right, because I had something to do with it.

Nevertheless, it's great progress today, Madam Speaker. I think that all members deserve to be congratulated on an auspicious start to this term in the Legislature and to this Legislative Assembly and for all of the members. So with that in mind, I would move that we adjourn until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:37 p.m. to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, June 17, 2015

Day 3

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

First Session

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Drysdale Sucha
Horne Woollard
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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, June 17, 2015

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Let us reflect. Life and health are precious. When they are lost, all of us are impacted. Let us remember those who are no longer among us, and let us reach out with compassion and understanding to those who suffer. Today we remember and thank Constable Daniel Woodall for his bravery, his patriotism, and service to our province.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: I believe the Member for Calgary-Mountain View has a guest. Is that correct?

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure for me to rise and introduce to you and through you to the Assembly two former members of this House, both former leaders of the Liberal opposition.

Dr. Kevin Taft is the former Member for Edmonton-Riverview and the leader of the Alberta Liberals from 2004 to 2008. Dr. Taft is the author of several books on the need for accountability and political change. His latest book, *Follow the Money*, is an excellent analysis of the waste and mismanagement of our resource wealth, and it should be required reading for everyone in the new cabinet.

Dr. Don Massey, former Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, served 11 years in this House, including serving as the Leader of the Official Opposition in 2004. Public education has always been the passion of Dr. Massey, having served on the Edmonton public school board before entering provincial politics. He was recently honoured in Edmonton by having a public school named after him, a fitting tribute for a life of service.

They're already standing. Let's welcome them to the Legislature.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Are there any other guests or visitors that members would like to introduce?

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The member who represents the constituency of Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Medical Laboratory Services in Medicine Hat

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is always a privilege to speak in this House about the fine work being done in my constituency. Today I'd like to acknowledge the Medicine Hat Diagnostic Lab and the tremendous service they have provided the city and surrounding area. For years the staff there have provided an exceptionally high quality of service diligently and efficiently. The residents of southeastern Alberta know first-hand what a valuable asset the lab has been to their communities.

That's why we are so perplexed and disappointed to see Alberta Health Services remove important services from this facility. This is not the first time we have dealt with a loss of services. Over time it seems that the gradual removal of core health services from smaller cities and towns has been an unstoppable trend. This is an issue that all Albertans find deeply troubling.

The plan announced by AHS will take diagnostic services from the Medicine Hat Diagnostic Lab and move them to the hospital, supposedly at a savings of \$5 million over five years. However, this decision has not been made transparently and in consultation with local residents. We continue to wait for specifics on the calculation of those savings. We still have not seen the business case for this decision, yet we all see the efficiency and the diligence of the Medicine Hat Diagnostic Lab first-hand. Local residents cannot support the decision without having all the details made clear.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to say that we both agreed on the importance of the lab during this past election and the need for them to continue doing their good work, and we have an opportunity now to work towards changing a flawed decision of the past and committing to the restoration of local services in the communities where they're so desperately needed and valued.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-St. Albert.

Aboriginal Peoples

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to recognize the cultural diversity and heritage of Alberta. Here in Edmonton we are presently in Treaty 6 territory, as is my constituency of Spruce Grove-St. Albert. My constituency also includes one of the communities of the Alexander First Nation, and this province also includes parts of treaties 4, 7, 8, and 10, each being comprised of multiple nations and cultures. The nations that comprise these treaties are not the only indigenous peoples in this province.

I myself am a proud member of the Métis Nation of Alberta, but I cannot claim the honour of coming from any indigenous culture, nor have I ever had a mother, sister, daughter, or aunt disappear. Yet I am proud to come from a family that was among the earliest to work in a western business here in Canada and in Alberta, my family having a long history with the Hudson's Bay Company.

We all have much to learn from the culture of the First Peoples, who have lived in Alberta for thousands of years, their respect for the environment, their understanding of home and community, and we need to recognize more fully the implications of all of us being treaty people. The treaties are agreements with mutual commitments, and together we need to learn more about how they can be a source of all of us enjoying better lives together in our communities.

With that in mind, I urge all civil servants, members, Albertans, and this government to observe aboriginal awareness day on June 21 and to recognize the past Aboriginal Awareness Week that occurred on May 19 to 22. Indeed, it is my hope that all Albertans will follow the advice of the UN declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples as well as the report on truth and reconciliation and strive to increase awareness of aboriginal peoples within a larger cultural mosaic and to build good relationships and respect the inherent rights of all indigenous peoples, not just now but at all times.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The Member for Calgary-Hays.

Constable Daniel Woodall

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was moved today by the outpouring of support from across Alberta and internationally for the regimental funeral of Constable Woodall. All Albertans depend on men and women in uniform to maintain and enforce the peace and order which we all depend upon to live our lives in safety. This city and indeed the province stopped today to recognize a hero. I will say that I was proud to have our Premier in the front row for

the event, and I thank her for attending. I would always hesitate to speak for all members of this House, but in this case I think we can all be thankful to all men and women in uniform and join together in thanking Constable Woodall and his family, his friends, his colleagues for the safety and security that we take for granted every day.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Yes.

Mr. Mason: If I may briefly interrupt, I would move that we ask for unanimous consent to revert to Ministerial Statements at this time.

[Unanimous consent granted]

1:40 Ministerial Statements Constable Daniel Woodall

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to my colleagues for allowing me to rise today to make some comments. As has already been noted, I've just returned from attending the funeral of Constable Woodall, and I was joined at the funeral by thousands and thousands of Albertans and many of my colleagues from all sides of this House today. I think that while most of us may be new to this House, I believe this may be one of the most heartbreaking issues that we will face throughout our career.

On our way to the Legislature today many of us saw the blue ribbons that were tied to trees that line Edmonton streets. Those ribbons are an expression of Edmontonians' support for the Edmonton Police Service following last week's devastating murder of EPS veteran Constable Daniel Woodall. This morning that outpouring of support grew exponentially as thousands of police officers and other first responders came together to bid farewell to Constable Woodall. They were joined by many Albertans, who came together with them to show support for his family, including his wife and their two young children and his EPS colleagues. They came together to remind us all of the great dangers that our men and our women in uniform face every day as they serve and as they protect others.

Mr. Speaker, Constable Woodall was the first EPS officer to be killed in the line of duty in 25 years. He served on the EPS hate crimes unit, which, along with members from other parts of the force, was attempting to arrest a suspect for criminal harassment. Sergeant Jason Harley was also shot during the attack, and we all pray for his full recovery and a speedy recovery.

As many may know already, Constable Woodall was recruited from Great Britain, where he served with the Greater Manchester Police for several years. Those who worked closely with him, both here in Edmonton and the U.K., remember a passionate, dedicated, funny, and caring officer.

Mr. Speaker, this was a senseless and devastating crime against the very people who work every day, day in and day out, to keep our communities safe. Constable Woodall's death, like those of all police and peace officers and other first responders who perish in the line of duty, is a national tragedy. Police officers and all law enforcement personnel put themselves on the line every day for us, our families, and for our communities. It is the very least that we can do to ensure that they are aware of and feel the warmth and the depth and the sincerity of our gratitude and our remembrance of their sacrifice.

I encourage all Albertans to think about what those blue ribbons represent. I encourage them to think about law enforcement staff and emergency services personnel right across our province as well as their families, who stand behind them each and every day. And I encourage us all to be grateful for all that they do to protect us day in and day out.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to request that we now take a moment of silence to remember Constable Woodall.

The Speaker: Please be seated. Thank you, hon. Premier.

I would remind the House that past precedent is that the hon. Leader of the Opposition may also speak to ministerial statements. I would also take the opportunity to remind the House that unanimous consent is required by the Assembly for any other additional speakers who may choose to speak.

I would recognize the hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Premier, for those remarks. I would like to offer sincere condolences on behalf of all members of the Wildrose caucus to the family of Constable Woodall and especially to his wife and his two young children. They have been unfairly robbed of their father.

On Monday night of last week I received word that an officer-involved shooting had happened in southwest Edmonton. My heart sank. My immediate thoughts and my prayers went out to the first responders at the scene. I prayed for their safety and that they could all return home to the families that they love. When I received word that an Edmonton police officer had been killed in the line of duty, my heart broke. Constable Woodall, a very young man, only 35 years old, was callously gunned down while trying to protect the public from someone who cared very little for the sanctity of life. Unfortunately, Constable Woodall died in the line of duty while serving Canada, while serving all of us. There is no greater sacrifice, and not only must he be remembered, but he must be honoured.

Every morning police officers right across this country, right across this province put on their uniforms to serve and protect us and our public. They all recognize that that day may be the day they don't make it home to their family. That's what Constable Woodall did last Monday morning.

Constable Woodall was clearly a hero, as are the thousands of men and women that put those uniforms on every single day throughout this country. They live to serve the public of Alberta. They're the police officers, the RCMP, the firefighters, EMS, the sheriffs, and many other first responders that put their lives on the line for us and our priorities. Each of them, every one of them, puts their life on the line every single day to keep the public safe. We must honour and remember all of those people and remember the living as we do those who have passed. It's people like Constable Woodall who personify the term "public servant." I think a better term would be "hero."

Once again, my heartfelt condolences to his family, the loved ones, and also to the grieving members of the Edmonton Police Service, his family, his friends, our province, and our country.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member of the loyal opposition.

I acknowledge the Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to make two motions: one, that we extend Orders of the Day to complete the responses to the ministerial statement; secondly, that the House provide unanimous consent for any independent members who may wish to make a response to the Premier's remarks.

The Speaker: Thank you. You've heard the motion.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: Calgary-West.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To the Premier, thank you so much for being there today in the front row. It means a lot to me. It means a lot to my brothers and sisters in law enforcement. I am a sergeant with the Calgary Police Service. That is who I am. It's who I always will be.

To be here for six to eight months or however long it's been, and Constable Woodall and Constable Wynn – what you folks saw today was remarkable from a sense that you saw brotherhood; you saw sisterhood. You saw a family come together from throughout North America. They came here for a man who gave his life to Canada and to the United Kingdom because he was a police officer there as well. I think you all need to understand that this is a calling. It is not something that everybody can do, and that's fine. To see people who have died, to talk to people who have lost loved ones due to drunk drivers, to see people who have lost loved ones due to homicides is very difficult. It is very challenging.

1:50

I have chosen to come here to this realm to help my brothers and sisters. I had talked to them before I decided to go into politics, and I told them as I tell you: my heart is always with the Calgary Police Service; my heart is always with my brothers and sisters in law enforcement.

Mr. Speaker, 2829 is a number that will go down in Alberta history, if not infamy. That is the regimental number of Constable Woodall. You have to understand that those numbers may not mean much to a lot of people, but they mean something that is a sense of belonging. People will tattoo them on their bodies. They do it not out of any form of ego; they do it out of pride, pride for serving you and for serving Alberta.

I want to say that I was honoured and I was humbled to be there today with my colleagues. I offer whatever assistance I can, with my expertise in judicial administrative law, in incident command, to the Minister of Justice, whatever I can do to help out. I only got involved in politics to make this a better province.

Thank you, Constable Woodall.
God bless you all.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. I believe I would speak for all of your peers in this House in expressing that you, probably more than any of us, appreciate the significance and the tragedy that has taken place. Thank you.

I'd like to recognize the Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to say thank you to the Premier and to the Leader of the Official Opposition, but a special word of thanks to the Member for Calgary-West for everything you do and for everything that first responders around this province do.

No one should have to experience what Constable Daniel Woodall, his family, and his law enforcement partners have gone through. This is indeed, as Police Chief Knecht described, a tragedy of unspeakable proportions. We must honour the courage and the hard work of first responders and never forget the risks they take. These are the people who run toward danger while the rest of us seek safety. We owe a debt of gratitude to each and every one of Alberta's first responders and to our military, who put their lives on the line to protect our values and our way of life. Edmonton has lost one of its best and bravest, and his sacrifice will be remembered by this community for all time.

As I stood to watch the procession today, I thought of Constable Woodall's family and his young children, who are close to the age of my kids. I want Constable Woodall's family to know that this community is there for them in their time of great need. I am profoundly moved by the police forces from around Alberta who joined the procession and especially the 180 officers from Calgary, many of whom took up posts around Edmonton so EPS officers could participate in the memorial. This is the same Alberta spirit of co-operation we saw when Edmonton Police Service officers and Edmonton firefighters came streaming down highway 2 to help us in Calgary and southern Alberta during the flood of 2013. I hope this is one small way we can begin to repay EPS and the people of Edmonton, by helping them during their own time of need.

My thoughts and the thoughts of my family and all of those in Calgary and all around the province of Alberta are with Constable Woodall's family and with those who serve with the Edmonton Police Service and first responders all around this province.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the House for the opportunity to speak briefly on the memory of Constable Dan Woodall.

Today the thoughts of all Albertans are with the brave men and women of the Edmonton Police Service and with the young family that lost a husband and a dad. Like all police officers, Constable Woodall worked every day to protect all of us, serving with distinction in the hate crimes unit at the Edmonton Police Service. Like too many before him, he paid the ultimate sacrifice in the line of duty. As each of us tries in our small way to pay tribute to this sacrifice and as the province says goodbye, we carry a debt that we can never repay. All we can do is honour the sacrifice and promise that we will not forget.

To all the heroes, who run towards danger and keep us safe, our deepest thanks always.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Pipeline Development

Mr. Jean: Yesterday, in response to a question from the Wildrose energy shadow minister, we heard the Premier's lengthy, surprising point of view on Alberta exporting bitumen for refining and sale to overseas markets. It was clear that she was not in favour of pipelines going south. Her opinions, I worry, might even give President Obama more excuses to block the Keystone pipeline. Will the Premier please clarify her position and assure Albertans that it is not the policy of her government to oppose the Northern Gateway pipeline, the Keystone pipeline, or any other pipeline?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As you know, Albertans elected us to focus on creating jobs and building the economy, and that's, of course, exactly what we will do. The comments that I made yesterday are actually no different than the comments that I made throughout the election. I understand that we need to work together with industry to promote access. We also need to do it within the context of understanding what's best for Alberta and ensuring that we retain the capacity to invest upgrading where possible. Those things are not separated. Talking about

capacity is not something that should be negated or criticized. It's part of the overall process.

Mr. Jean: This Premier has publicly expressed doubts about the Northern Gateway pipeline. Her fellow party members object to the Kinder Morgan pipeline. Her Energy minister's top adviser was employed by a group that worked against the Keystone pipeline, Northern Gateway pipeline, Energy East pipeline, and worked against using rail to move oil. Yesterday the Premier confirmed what we all know, that "pipelines are, in fact, the safest way to get product to market." Will the Premier confirm that her government will support all pipelines that get Alberta's energy to market safely?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday what I did when I talked about Northern Gateway – I'm not sure if I did that yesterday; whichever, it doesn't really matter – was that I identified what most people in the industry already understand and have in fact confirmed to me, that the likelihood of the Northern Gateway pipeline being approved in the near future is not great. Many industry leaders have acknowledged that. Now, I have said, however, that I'm quite open to the prospects of working with governments across this country with respect to Kinder Morgan, and I'm also quite interested in pursuing Energy East and working with industry in both cases to ensure that we get the best . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Official Opposition leader.

Mr. Jean: I would remind the Premier through you, Mr. Speaker, that a car never starts unless you turn the key.

The Wildrose certainly wants this government to succeed as we want Alberta to succeed. Alberta's energy industry, through its investment, taxes, and royalties, is the key driver of Alberta's economy. It creates the jobs. It creates the opportunities that drive Alberta's prosperity. It allows us to have an incredibly generous society that looks after the vulnerable. It allows all of us to have a standard of living that is second to none in the world and the envy of Canada and the world. Yet there are people in the Premier's caucus who have actively and continue to actively oppose pipeline . . .

2:00

Ms Notley: Well, on the issue of Northern Gateway, Mr. Speaker, I would just say that the key has been turned, the car has been on, it's been idling, and it's been idling for a really long time because there's no road for it to be on. I will say this. When you talk about developing market access and also developing a willingness for people to accept our pipelines, the other thing that we need to do is that we need to establish credibility on the environmental file. Now, those folks' cousins in Ottawa have not been successful in that regard and neither has the previous government. If we're going to make progress, we're going to do it by finally creating a record that we can be proud of.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition. Second question.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd suggest that it had the wrong driver and it continues to have the wrong driver.

Provincial Budget Timeline

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, yesterday I tried to get Albertans some helpful answers on when they could expect the budget. Of course, Albertans need to know the government's fiscal plans as soon as possible, at the latest in September. The Premier and the Finance

minister were coy and suggested all sorts of timelines. Well, by September 7 this government will be four months out from the election. That is more than enough time to build a budget. Will the Premier introduce a budget in early September?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I've answered this question already. Albertans expect us to do a good, thorough job of reviewing the budget; they expect us to do a good, thorough job of reviewing the revenue; and they expect us to do a good, thorough job of reviewing spending and making sure that we don't make reckless, draconian across-the-board cuts but that if we do roll back certain programs, we do it thoughtfully and in an informed way. That's why they're going to see a budget in October.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, fall starts at the end of September. The Premier is hinting and telling us now that we won't get to see a budget until the end of October. According to the rules of our Legislature it takes more than 20 days of debate to pass a budget. That means we will not pass a budget until December. That is unacceptable to Albertans. Our businesses and our families deserve better, and they need to know this government's fiscal plan far before then. Why won't the Premier change her mind and bring in a budget in early September?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, it is true that if I were to operate the way the members opposite suggested that they were going to in their platform, we could just arbitrarily say: "You know what? Let's just close our eyes, cross our fingers, and take \$5 billion out and see what happens. You know what? It'll be great. We'll just wait until the teachers wander in and tell us that, yeah, there are a hundred kids in that class now because we've just laid off a whole bunch of them." [interjections] That's not a thoughtful way forward. That's exactly what Albertans voted against. We're going to bring in a budget in October, and if it takes longer to pass, it's because we're giving these guys a thorough opportunity to evaluate it once we've introduced it.

The Speaker: Might I advise the House that I have a hearing aid on one side, so I have difficulty hearing. It's very important that the Speaker hear both sides of the House while the party is speaking. I hope you'll respect that in the House and allow me to hear the speakers.

Second supplemental, hon. member.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would remind the Premier that our platform budget wasn't off by billions of dollars.

November and December are when a government should be consulting for next year's budget; it is not when this Legislature should be working on this year's budget. The Premier seems strangely reluctant to come back in September. I can't help but note that we will have a federal election on October 19. Will the Premier confirm and assure Albertans that federal politics has nothing to do with her delaying the budget?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can't help that the things that happened here in Alberta happened to work in favour of certain federal political parties and against others. You know, there's nothing we can do about that.

What this is about is ensuring that Albertans get a well-thought-out, well-researched, considered budget and that all members of the House get full opportunity to debate that budget. It's absolutely to be expected. If they're worried about the timeline, I would suggest that perhaps if their colleagues over there had not en masse crossed over to those guys, we wouldn't have had an election.

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

Health Care Review

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. All Albertans deserve a world-class health care system, and we want to help the government get there. But many remember that the last time Alberta centralized health services, all we got was ballooning wait times and packed emergency rooms. In response to this, the Health minister announced a plan to shrink wait times and provide more long-term spaces. Can the minister tell Albertans what this plan will actually involve besides throwing billions more at top-heavy Alberta Health Services bureaucrats?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you for the question. We made it very clear during the provincial election that we weren't going to be slashing billions of dollars from the front lines of health care and education, and Albertans made it very clear that that's what they stood by. So I'm sorry if some people don't like the results of May 5, but this government is here to deliver.

Mr. Barnes: Yesterday in question period the Health minister said that a review of the health system is already in the works. In fact, there was one just wrapped up a few short months ago. Quite frankly, there have been so many reviews and bureaucratic head-scratching on health care that we're beginning to lose count, and, oddly, none of the doctors, nurses, paramedics, front-line professionals, or any local experts that I've talked to know anything at all about this. I wonder exactly how the minister plans to hold a review without keeping any of our front-line experts in the loop.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Obviously, any time anyone begins a new job, they have a responsibility to review the decisions of the people who had that job for the 44 years before they took that job, and that's exactly what I'm doing. I've been tasked with making sure that we have good, strong decisions moving forward, and I'm doing a review. I'm reviewing the decisions that we've been making for 44 years to make sure that they align, moving forward, with our platform and the mandate Albertans have delivered to us.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Barnes: Minister, communities right across this province have told us that local decision-making is critical. A superboard in Edmonton is completely unresponsive to the need for 24-hour health care in Airdrie or Sylvan Lake, to the complete lack of dialysis treatment in Lac La Biche, or to proper diagnostic lab services in Medicine Hat. We know what the solution is: put local decisions back in the hands of local decision-makers. Minister, why announce a so-called review when you've already publicly committed to the failed centralized health policies of the past?

Ms Hoffman: Perhaps the member didn't hear what I was talking about. I was talking about our government taking time to do a review and make decisions moving forward. I wasn't talking about what past ministers, the one before or the one before that, did in the last six months or two years. I'm talking about decisions that we're making, ensuring that they're aligned with our values moving forward. I made it very clear, Mr. Speaker, that local voices will be considered moving forward. I think that what the members opposite would like to pretend is that you can cut billions of dollars out of

public health care, wave a magic wand, and magically have everything resolved because you just shuffled the decks at the cabinet table. That's not true. Albertans told us to focus on front-line . . .

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Government Policies

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The current downturn in Alberta's economy is being made worse by the climate of uncertainty coming from some of the policy statements of this government. In particular, the lack of concrete statements or clarity around the timing or outcome of a pending royalty review and the implementation of corporate taxes is clearly causing the business community to hold off on some investments. Holding off until sometime this fall is too long. To the Minister of Finance: what are you going to do to concretely assure Albertans and the business community that your government is not going to drive away the investment that provides the jobs that Albertans are depending upon?

2:10

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the hon. member from the third party: in our platform we talked about diversification of the economy, and we will be doing that as we go forward. We'll be consulting with the broad-based business community to make sure that they're onside. Just with respect to the corporate taxes there's a range of opinion, and most recently lots of opinion says that that's not such a bad thing: as long as you give us notice, we can plan for it, and we can put it in our budgets. That's what we're doing. It was in our plan. It's in their budgets. We're doing it.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, on Monday, the same day the throne speech was delivered in this Assembly, the Canadian Association of Oilwell Drilling Contractors sent out an updated forecast for drilling operating days that shows an estimated job loss of more than 25,000, 50 per cent, this year due to "potential policy changes in Alberta with respect to royalties." To the Energy minister: what are you doing to stem this massive employment loss that is happening as a direct result of your government's policies?

The Speaker: The hon. Energy minister.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Those numbers that came out yesterday were for the first quarter, and they are a result of world and global oil prices. What we're doing is meeting with industry to understand their concerns and asking for their advice as we move forward in a royalty review. We've agreed to work together as partners for the betterment of a vibrant energy industry in Alberta.

Mr. McIver: Well, that's twice we've heard the government say that set of answers about working with industry.

On May 14th, a whole month ago, the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers agreed to form an industry group to work with the new Premier "to explore and embrace the best change possible." To the Premier: have you or your ministers met with CAPP in the full month since they extended the olive branch to you, and what progress have you made on working together with important stakeholder groups? Albertans want and need to know.

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's an excellent question. Yes, we've met with representatives of CAPP. In fact,

they were invited to attend a full cabinet meeting, and we had a fabulous opportunity to meet with them there. We've had a multiplicity of conversations: the Energy minister and myself as well as the environment minister. They've asked at this point for certain things. They've asked that when we proceed with respect to climate change and royalty review, we deal with those issues together, that they be linked. They also asked that they be consulted in a meaningful way as we develop our plans going forward, and they've asked that in the interests of certainty we do it without undue delay. All three of those . . .

The Speaker: With your indulgence I'm going to give a little leeway, as I already have on a couple of occasions today.

I would welcome the Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Value-added Energy Industries

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Finally, I get my turn. Before I begin, I do want to congratulate the Premier on her historic victory and congratulate the Leader of the Official Opposition and all members of the House. It is truly a new day in the Alberta Legislative Assembly, or at least I sincerely hope it is.

Mr. Speaker, this government speaks frequently of their fondness for value-added, and who wouldn't? The words "value-add" do sound very appealing. But saying those words and actually adding value are two very different things with very different implications for Alberta taxpayers. When making these decisions, it's important to know the government understands the integrated nature of North American and global energy markets. To the Minister of Energy: what specifically are the government's plans to force a value-added model onto the marketplace?

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you for that question. As was mentioned earlier, we were elected by Albertans to work with energy on the royalty review and other parts to understand the industry. To date I have been in Calgary six, seven, eight times since the election started, meeting with over a hundred people in industry. We're discussing – all of us have the same interests, putting Alberta jobs first and the possibility of job creation. We've all agreed to work as partners, to go forward and promote all those projects that will create and preserve Alberta jobs.

Mr. Clark: You sound pretty locked in on your definition of value-added, as if Alberta's current production doesn't add any value to Alberta's economy.

To the Minister of Energy again: how many billions of dollars is value-add going to cost Albertans?

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you for that question. At this point we're still meeting with industry to discuss all the stresses for them right now, the current global prices, and what it will take for capital investments in this industry to create those jobs and move forward. We're talking about pipelines. We're talking about value-added and the millions and billions that it will take to invest. We're creating a climate that will encourage that investment as we move forward.

Mr. Clark: Sounds a lot more like magical thinking than a concrete plan, Mr. Speaker.

We were told the North West upgrader, which is now called the Sturgeon refinery, was a low-cost, low-risk project that would add value by upgrading domestic bitumen. Again to the Minister of Energy: will your government continue the North West upgrader boondoggle, a project which will cost Alberta taxpayers \$26 billion?

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you for that question. As with all the projects, we are consulting with industry as we move forward and looking at the pros and cons of all of that. Again, we're in constant consultation with industry to look at those projects that will bring value and jobs to Alberta.

The Speaker: I wish to underline again as we move past speaker 5: no preambles in the supplementary portions of your question.

I will recognize the Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Energy Industry Consultation

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government was elected to show leadership in both growing the economy and protecting the environment. Can the Minister of Energy tell me what she's doing to ensure that industry perspectives are included in this process?

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you for that question. Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned previously, I've been doing numerous visits to Calgary, engaging energy sector leaders. In fact, I got back about an hour ago from Calgary. We met with CAPP this morning; 40 CEOs and presidents were in the room. We discussed in a very frank manner how we're going to move forward together as energy partners and Alberta partners and create jobs and an industry that is going to be strong for Albertans.

Ms McPherson: Mr. Speaker, as the minister has been holding meetings, what has she been hearing from these discussions?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our energy partners have been very pleased, first of all, that we have met with them. Some of them have never been consulted before. Nobody has asked for their ideas. They advised us to look at the last resources review and not create a them versus us. They're pleased that we're working as partners, they're pleased that we're being collaborative, and they're very pleased to have input for all Albertans.

2:20

Ms McPherson: Mr. Speaker, since Alberta is an energy-producing province and many jobs rely on this important sector, what will the minister do to ensure that their ideas are addressed?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I've said, we have been listening and learning from the industry. They're encouraging us to create a royalty review, an energy review, an industry review that includes all the parts and all the sectors for all of Alberta. We are listening, and by all means we will create a plan moving forward that will encourage investment in Alberta, and in the end everything will be better for Albertans.

The Speaker: I recognize the Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Municipal Sustainability Initiative Funding

Mr. Stier: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week a major concern was raised at a joint meeting of the mayors and reeves of southern Alberta regarding sustainable, continued support for communities through MSI funding. The members are worried because they've received no updated information from this new government regarding any funding promises since those proposed by the former PC government. To the minister: considering that the amount of

MSI funding given to the communities has traditionally been communicated prior to the fall, when they prepare their budgets for the following year, will you commit now to maintaining the MSI funds promised by the last government for '15-16?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the hon. member for the question. You know, this government was elected on wanting to support our cities, our municipalities to ensure that they have the tools and resources available to deliver the services that Albertans rely on. I appreciate that the municipalities in question have been patient. I ask them to be a little bit more patient. This government will be ensuring that grants get to them.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Stier: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I appreciate the applause. I really do.

You know, our local decision-makers really deserve a better answer than that, Minister. The Municipal Government Amendment Act, which has now been given royal assent, that we passed in March, requires municipalities to prepare three-year financial plans and five-year capital plans. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs again, then: how can municipalities possibly prepare financial plans and capital plans when they don't know how much MSI funding the government intends to give them before the fall?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll thank the member for the question. Yesterday the Finance minister tabled the interim supply bill, which today we will be debating, so the member and municipalities will be able to see what this government is proposing as far as the dollars for MSI and for many of the other important grants that municipalities get.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Stier: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. The mayors and Reeves of southern Alberta as well as municipal leaders from across the province, frankly, have sent the minister a letter demanding that at the time of the release of the '15-16 budget this fall MSI funding intentions for the next year also be fully disclosed. To the minister: local decision-makers need to know how much MSI funding they'll be getting in order to plan for the future, not what is in the interim supply. Will you communicate this vital information to them today?

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, quite frankly, I think it would be irresponsible to make promises before this government has actually deliberated on a budget and decided exactly how we're going to go moving forward. I appreciate that municipalities are very eager to get answers. I can tell you that the Premier, this government, and myself are committed to ensuring that municipalities have the resources and the tools available to ensure that they can provide services to their constituents. So I ask the member and municipalities to be patient, and the answer will be forthcoming.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Speaker will ask to be given some more indulgence. I'm looking for Calgary-Greenway and can't find him in the pictures.

An Hon. Member: There he is.

The Speaker: My apologies. The hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway.

Mr. Bhullar: Hard to miss.

The Speaker: He is hard to miss.

Mr. Bhullar: Yes, Mr. Speaker. That is a first. I don't think I've ever been missed. This is the first time in many years that I get up to ask a question in this Assembly, so congratulations.

Provincial Tax Policy

Mr. Bhullar: I know the new government is eager to move forward with their platform. However, Mr. Speaker, there are many unintended consequences. My first question is to the Minister of Finance. One-third of Alberta's total tax revenue comes from a very small percentage of tax filers. If you drive just half of these individuals outside of Alberta with your proposed changes, how much money will we lose?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll maybe use a quote from Peter Lougheed, and I'll take the advice of former Premier Lougheed. He said in 2011 that it is time for us to consider an increase in corporate and personal income tax. We are doing that. In our platform we talked about both of those things. We'll take steps in the next day or two to bring those before this House and have a vote on them. We'll have an opportunity to vote on them or not. But we don't feel like anybody is going to leave this beautiful province of Alberta because there's everything here people want.

The Speaker: First supplemental from Calgary-Greenway.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much. We're not saying: don't raise them. What we are saying is: don't be the highest in the country. [interjections] Mr. Speaker, if I may, Alberta has a large proportion of individuals that file their taxes here that don't actually live here because this has been the cheapest jurisdiction to file taxes. If those people move, the burden shifts to the middle class. How much are you going to have to raise taxes on the middle class in three years or four years from now to make up for those \$3 billion?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think that federally we can see that the PCs have raised taxes on the middle class. We're not going to be doing that. Ninety-three per cent of tax filers will not see an increase to their taxes as a result of the proposals we're bringing forward in a few days.

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, the question is quite simple. Minister, you yourself have said that 93 per cent will not see a change. That other 7 per cent, however, produces about 30 per cent of our personal income tax revenue. If those tax filers move to British Columbia or move to Ontario, who is going to make up the difference? Is it hard-working Alberta families that have to make up the difference because of your short-sightedness to live up to . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Members on the government side of the House, I need to remind you that I couldn't always hear his question, so I hope you'll appreciate that.

The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much. The tax changes that we are bringing forward are fair for Albertans. They voted for us. We told them clearly what we were going to be doing. To the hon. member: I don't want to see one person leave this province. They get good value from all the programs and services here, and they'll continue to stay here not only because of the beautiful mountains but because this is an NDP government, and it's a great place to be.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

2:30

Education System

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It seems that the world of education is a very confusing place these days. I have three questions for the minister so he can help Albertans get some clarity. The Wildrose has always stood up for parental choice in school models. Will the Minister of Education commit this government to provide predictable and equitable funding for education and options that fall outside the public and separate systems for the next four years?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question from the Official Opposition Education critic, his first time, and we'll have a long and productive relationship, I'm sure. It's very important to understand first and foremost that this government chose to make a predictable and significant re-establishment of funding for 12,000 new students who just entered our education system. That's going to pay for teachers, it's going to pay for the upkeep of places, and it's for all forms of delivery of education: for our home-schools, for private schools, for public schools as well.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans also need clarity on Inspiring Education. Redesigning the curriculum is one of the initiatives intended to bring the vision of Inspiring Education to life. Does the Minister of Education intend to rewrite the Alberta curricula to meet the vague goals of Inspiring Education, which many parents and experts think is totally uninspiring?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you very much for this question. We recognize that some people have concerns around the curriculum, around the math curriculum as well. The very first thing I can do and say is that by re-establishing funding, we can make sure that there are lower class sizes, that we can have inclusion with supports. We can have adequate money to pay for public education, the education that we want right across the province, and we will work with our partners to make sure that the curriculum teaches the basics of language and mathematics.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans also need clarity on this government's education commitments. Yesterday the minister said, "We put in \$103 million to meet the needs of 12,000 new students moving into the school system here in the fall." The minister's own numbers disagree. They show that the real cost of this announcement was over \$200 million, and there will only be 7,500 new students. Could the minister help Albertans understand the discrepancy between these figures? Was this discovery math or just . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, our numbers are sound, and the hon. member can have perhaps a little lesson between the financial year of the province and the budgeting for a school year. That's where the difference lies. Certainly, we made a commitment by showing our good intentions for the interim funding. We know that we will put in place stable funding so that we can bring up our averages, make sure that students are learning the basics and that we can provide education for all people to be proud of in this province.

The Speaker: The chair will recognize the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Seniors' Care in Fort McMurray

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The first letter that the Wildrose sent to the Premier was about seniors' care in Fort McMurray. Seniors' care is an issue everywhere, but nowhere is it more prevalent than in Fort McMurray. No other community our size has gone this long without a long-term health care facility. We wrote the Premier, asking her to delay the tender for an ill-conceived seniors' project in Fort McMurray and to listen to the community. Is the Premier prepared to give the residents of Fort McMurray the facility that they need and deserve?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. We agree that this is a long overdue facility. We have been disappointed, as I'm sure the residents of Fort McMurray have been, that the seniors living there and in the surrounding neighbourhoods haven't had an option to age in place. In terms of moving forward, we want to make sure that we follow contracts, that we're not breaking contracts willy-nilly, unlike what some people might be proposing, and that, of course, long-term care is an option as well as other types of supportive living for the seniors of Fort McMurray.

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, the Parsons Creek project is the wrong project in the wrong location. The community needs an aging-in-place facility built at Willow Square. The Wildrose campaigned for Willow Square. The NDP candidates up in Fort McMurray campaigned for Willow Square. The only people that campaigned for Parsons Creek were the PCs. Willow Square is a model for every other community. Instead, an ill-conceived multimillion-dollar project is proceeding. Can the Premier tell us why such a controversial multimillion-dollar decision was made in between the election and her getting sworn in?

Ms Hoffman: It's always a great day, Mr. Speaker, when you can find opportunities to agree with members of the opposition. They agree with this government that the decisions made by the past government were out of touch, out of whack, and didn't actually help any of the Albertans in terms of making sure that we deliver the long-term care facility for Fort McMurray.

Of course, we are providing some stability as we move forward. In every decision that we are making, we're taking due consideration. One of the considerations that needs to be taken into consideration is the fact that something has been signed. The Minister of Infrastructure is reviewing the contracts as we continue to move forward and making sure that we've got the right facility for the people of . . .

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, like I said, seniors' care is an issue everywhere in Alberta. The Wildrose is here to help this new government. The government mentioned that they would meet our society's needs for home and long-term care. This is an opportunity to correct the errors of previous governments. Will the minister give us any details now on this government and how it will meet the needs of the . . .

Ms Hoffman: Thank you again to the hon. member. Of course, we want to make sure that any future decisions are made with the confidence of this government, and we are very happy to work with our partners on all sides of this House to make sure that local needs are being addressed as we continue to move forward. One of the things that needs to also be acknowledged is that there are financial implications for any infrastructure decision, especially once contracts have been signed. So we have to take financial responsibility as well as the evidence based on the needs of seniors and the local community as we move forward together with members opposite as well.

Thank you.

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

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a sad and sombre day here in the Chamber. I think one thing that we can all agree on is that the best way to honour Constable Woodall's memory is to do exactly what we're doing, and that is to actively participate in democracy, that he fought to preserve and protect.

Health Care System Decision-making

Dr. Starke: On that note, yesterday the Health minister told us that she had cancelled plans for decentralizing control of AHS in order to bring stability to the system, but the rural health services review and basically all of rural Alberta told her that, in fact, that's exactly what had to happen. To the Health minister: why have you decided to listen to your own opinions rather than to the opinions of rural Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Health minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. Past decisions may have been driven specifically in isolation and without consultation, but we've been very clear on the fact that we are communicating with front-line service providers. Members may have paid attention to the articles that have been published in the *Journal* and the support from the nurses as well as lead physicians across Alberta that what Alberta needs right now is stability, not another set of letterhead. They need to make sure that we can support front-line service delivery, and stability is needed for that.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, trust me, we in the third-party caucus understand the benefits that can accrue to Alberta from stability and consistency, but we also recognize that Alberta sometimes can be ready for change. In fact, though, the rural health review is based on input from over 100 Alberta communities, including countless front-line workers, and most of the 55 other recommendations also involve making changes. So what other recommendations does the Health minister plan to reverse or ignore in the name of stability?

2:40

Ms Hoffman: Thank you to the hon. member for the question. Stability is important to front-line workers. I've had lots of opportunities to speak to them, and one of the key messages that resonated

is that health care providers should be able to wake up in the morning knowing who they're going to be reporting to when they show up to work. This government is going to make that happen.

Now, in terms of making sure that we acknowledge the recommendations in the rural health review, that's absolutely been one of the items that we've been paying attention to and that I'll continue to update this House on when we have opportunities to do so, Mr. Speaker.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that the rural health review came about as a result of hundreds of hours of co-operative effort from people all across Alberta, including, I might point out, a member of your own caucus, a registered nurse, who came and spoke with us, is the minister willing to sit down with me to review and to discuss that work for the benefit of all Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member. I've actually put in a request to both the second and the third parties to have one-on-ones with the critics that shadow my portfolios, so the critics for Health and for Seniors. I believe that there has been a bit of a lag in terms of finding a time that aligns, but I would be very happy to have that be one of the items on the agenda when we do meet.

The Speaker: I'd like to recognize the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Infrastructure Project Prioritization

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Infrastructure. During the recent election we told Albertans that we would end the old practice of politicizing infrastructure projects. I know that the transparent prioritization and allocation of infrastructure resources are very important to the people of Alberta. Could the minister please update the House on the status of the infrastructure sunshine list?

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much for the question, hon. member. Mr. Speaker, this government certainly wants to let the sunshine in, and I want to indicate that we were elected to provide open, honest, and transparent government, particularly in the capital investment process. We've seen in the past the manipulation of the capital process in order to secure electoral advantage for ministers and candidates, and that's not something that we're prepared to accept. So we are going ahead on our promise to establish a sunshine list so everyone will know which capital projects are . . .

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the immense growth that has occurred in our province in the last decade, can the minister please shed any light on how the government will address the growing need for hospitals and schools in Alberta?

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much for the question. Mr. Speaker, it's our job to make sure that we provide the capital structures necessary to deliver the services that Albertans want with respect to education, health care, and other services. So I'll be working with my colleagues, particularly in Health and Education, to review the capital projects that have been planned. We will be doing our very best to make sure that the necessary projects that Albertans need and want are brought forward in a timely fashion and done on budget.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad to hear that our government is working hard to deliver on the commitments we made to Albertans. We promised Albertans not only to build new infrastructure but also to repair existing hospitals and schools, high concerns for my constituents in Edmonton-Mill Woods. Can the minister please update the House on how this government will improve Alberta's crumbling health and education facilities?

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much for that question, hon. member. Mr. Speaker, members on both sides of the House know that we have to meet the needs of Albertans. They have important things that need to be delivered to them in terms of hospitals and health care and educational facilities, and we are committed to ending the practice of broken promises, where a government promises one thing in the election and then does something completely opposite after the election. So we will deliver on our promise to provide world-class services to Albertans.

Thank you.

The Speaker: I'd like to acknowledge the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Minimum Wage

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to helping this government focus on jobs, growth, and prosperity in the coming years, but I do have some questions for them on the minimum wage hike. The NDP have said that low-income workers will benefit from a dramatic increase to the minimum wage. No doubt it will help some, but it will also cause job losses for others. What is the minister going to do to help those people who are going to lose their jobs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you also to the member for the question. Certainly, it was a clear campaign promise of ours to increase the minimum wage to \$15 an hour by 2018. We know that when some Alberta families are doing better, all Alberta families are doing better. We know from our consultations that the Premier and I were a part of last week with industry and also with advocacy groups and labour that many people are in support of increasing the minimum wage, and we're going ahead on this.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Wildrose and Albertans alike want to see as many Albertans in the workforce as possible. Minister, over a dozen Canadian studies have shown that just a 10 per cent increase in the minimum wage causes youth unemployment to rise by 3 to 6 per cent. You are wanting to raise it by 50 per cent in just three short years, so I will ask again. In the interests of helping all Albertans, what's the minister's plan to protect those who will lose their jobs with this upcoming proposed policy?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I said, the Premier and I consulted with business and labour and advocacy groups, and we're hearing what we can do to support them in making the changes. We know that 62 per cent of low-wage workers are women. We know that this will support them. It will

help many, many people. We are absolutely moving forward on this.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Hunter: There is no doubt that small businesses, those who create jobs in this province, are worried about paying their bills and keeping the doors open. These are uncertain times. Employment costs can account for 50 to 70 per cent of total expenses. These job creators have a deep understanding of this issue, and they believe there is a much more moderate approach to this. Will the minister commit to listen to the province's job creators rather than just big labour interests before bulldozing this policy through?

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We have been listening to industry and labour and advocacy groups on this issue, and we've heard also from the community that actually paying a higher wage, a \$15 wage, helps them because people have more retention. There is less need for recruitment, so they actually save money and create stability. Again, we're moving ahead on this.

Thank you.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The three remaining members' statements.

2:50

Calgary Dream Centre

Ms Payne: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honour the work of the Calgary Dream Centre, a pillar in the community of Calgary-Acadia, which is celebrating its 10th year of service.

The Dream Centre is a faith-based recovery centre that also offers life management skills, career development, and healthy living to the men in its programs. The Dream Centre also gives the space to heal emotional wounds by providing a compassionate ear, a shoulder to cry on, and spiritual support.

I recently visited the Dream Centre and met with some of their exceptional staff and residents. It was an honour to meet the people working so hard day in and day out to support members of our community and to ensure that all Albertans have the opportunity to meet their full potential.

The Calgary Dream Centre invests in people, and that is one of the most important investments we can make. The Dream Centre asks for compassion so that everyone feels cared for. It respects all human beings without reservation. It champions integrity and is always looking for ways to improve the lives of many. It is this kind of compassion and respect that makes Alberta such an amazing place to live.

I know that our government, under the leadership of Premier Notley, will be looking at avenues to improve life for all Albertans. [interjections]

An Hon. Member: Point of order.

Ms Payne: Organizations like the Dream Centre are models of how we can . . .

The Speaker: There are no points of order allowed in Members' Statements.

I would caution the members that you avoid using personal names in the Legislature.

Ms Payne: Thank you.

Hard work and dedication have been invested into the Dream Centre over the past 10 years, and I know this will continue. The

Dream Centre will be expanding its services to women soon, and I had the honour of meeting people who will be establishing those programs. My thanks to the staff and the supporters of the Calgary Dream Centre for their work and their kind hearts and gentle souls, that work to make Calgary a better place to live.

County Clothes-Line Foundation

Ms McKittrick: Mr. Speaker, in the throne speech the Lieutenant Governor stated: “We are optimistic, hopeful, entrepreneurial, remarkably diverse, and community-minded people. We are people who dream no little dreams and live them. We are people who get things done.”

It is with pride today that I highlight how one organization in Strathcona county has been modelling this spirit. At the pride of Strathcona county awards on Monday night the County Clothes-Line Foundation received the mayor’s award for their contribution of over \$1.6 million in the past 30 years to approximately 950 local organizations, groups, and individuals. The foundation also works through Alberta apprenticeship and industry training and Alberta Innovation and Advanced Education to ensure that students receive annual scholarships.

The County Clothes-Line is a true social enterprise. It operates a nonprofit second-hand clothing store to provide county residents a place to shop and donate their gently-used goods. This organization also provides free clothing to job seekers and essential goods to families in need.

Like many community organizations, volunteers started the County Clothes-Line. The County Clothes-Line store opened in April 1984. They hoped that the money raised would only cover operational costs, and instead they were surprised by the instant popularity and money generated.

I personally spent five years at the University of Victoria researching the contribution of nonprofits, social enterprises, and co-operatives to the economy, capacity, and well-being of communities. It gives me great pleasure that an organization in my constituency demonstrates this contribution so well. My congratulations to the current and past volunteers and staff of County Clothes-Line for their work in building capacity and using community strengths to fund much-needed projects.

The Speaker: Before I recognize the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, Member for Calgary-Hays, I want to confirm that you did speak earlier on Members’ Statements.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, yes, I did. Thank you for asking.

The Speaker: The Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Official Opposition Policies

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, we the members of the 29th Legislature were elected by our constituents to stand up for their beliefs and their values. They sent us here to defend their rights. The vast majority of people in Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills were clear about their wishes. They expect me to fight for small and effective government, low taxes, and personal responsibility as well as personal choice. This is the Alberta way, and that is exactly what I intend to do. The good citizens of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills oppose unnecessary, bureaucratic central planning. We see no value in overtaxing the hard-working Alberta families who drive our economy. We don’t believe in pitting one region of Alberta against another.

We do believe that parents are the best people to make decisions about their children’s education. We believe that local community

leaders are best positioned to make decisions that impact our homes and our communities. We believe that low taxes are the key to economic prosperity, that we must always keep our province competitive and we must always pursue policies intended to make Alberta the best place to live, work, and raise a family. Let me be clear. Albertans make Alberta great, not the government.

The freedoms we enjoy – the freedom of speech, the freedom of assembly, the freedom of religion – are our society’s foundation. These freedoms are worth defending, not just on election day but each and every day, and I can assure you that’s what I and my colleagues intend to do.

Tabling Returns and Reports

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, I have two tablings. I made reference in my questions today to website statements from the Canadian Association of Oilwell Drilling Contractors and from CAPP. I have five copies of each, which I think is the requisite number, and I’d like to table them now.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It’s my pleasure to rise today to table the requisite five copies of three documents I referred to yesterday during the debate on Government Motion 3 on member appointments to committees. There are five copies of my letter to the hon. Speaker and two e-mails that I sent to House leaders and members from Calgary-Mountain View and Calgary-Bow on committee assignments. I’d like to table those now.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Seeing as the clock is about to approach 3 p.m., I’d like to request unanimous consent of the House to complete the Routine past 3 p.m., Standing Order 7(7).

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

Mr. Rodney: I thank you, Mr. Speaker. I’m humbled and honoured to table five copies of the program for the regimental funeral of Constable Daniel Woodall. Constable Woodall was a son, husband, father, friend, law enforcement specialist, and a hero. Dan, we salute you, we celebrate your life, we honour your sacrifice, we mourn your loss, we send our love to your family, and we will remember you.

Statement by the Speaker

Anticipation

The Speaker: Hon. members, I have a statement with respect to a point of order concerning anticipation raised by the Official Opposition House Leader in our last sitting. Hon. members, the Official Opposition House Leader raised a point of order yesterday concerning anticipation. The exchange between that member and the Government House Leader can be found at page 22 of *Alberta Hansard* for June 16, 2015. I indicated that I would take it under advisement, which I have, and I’m prepared to rule on it today.

First, I would like to make a point about practice when points of order are raised. Members should indicate in the Assembly by rising and catching my attention that they wish to raise a point of order. This procedure ensures that notice is provided to the members, to

myself, and to the people who assist on those matters such as the table officers and *Hansard* staff.

3:00

With respect to the point of order, it related to a question by the Member for Calgary-Cross to the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General about donations to political parties, which is the subject of Bill 1, which can be found on page 19 of the *Alberta Hansard* for yesterday, June 16.

For the benefit of all members I will read Standing Order 23(e), which states:

A Member will be called to order by the Speaker if, in the Speaker's opinion, that Member

- (e) anticipates, contrary to good parliamentary practice, any matter already on the Order Paper or on notice for consideration on that day.

Basically, the rule is what it says, that a part of the proceedings should not be on the same subject as something that is scheduled for later in the day. My investigation into the matter demonstrates that the rule is not necessarily strictly observed in relation to Oral Question Period. Speaker Kowalski stated on March 3, 1998, page 649 of *Alberta Hansard* that questions that were framed so as to ask if something was a matter of government policy "took it out of the realm of debate on a particular bill." I note that in a May 8, 2013, ruling on the same issue, page 2194 of *Alberta Hansard* for that day, Speaker Zwodzesky reaffirmed Speaker Kowalski's ruling on the rule against anticipation not being violated by a question about the government policy in relation to a bill which was up for consideration that day.

Members may be interested to know that the Canadian House of Commons no longer applies the rule against anticipation during question period, as is discussed on page 561 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition. In this instance, the question asked what the government was doing about campaign financing, which is, of course, the subject of Bill 1. I think the Official Opposition House Leader had a valid point and a legitimate point of order although it could have been maybe brought forward to the Assembly's attention at the appropriate time.

As we move forward together during this session, I am sure that we will now be more aware of the rule against anticipation.

Orders of the Day Committee of Supply

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the Committee of Supply to order.

Interim Supply Estimates 2015-16 (No. 2) General Revenue Fund and Lottery Fund

The Chair: Hon. members, before we commence this afternoon's consideration of interim supply, I'd like to review briefly the standing orders governing the speaking rotation. As provided for in Standing Order 59.02, the rotation in Standing Order 59.01(6) is deemed to apply, which is as follows:

- (a) the Minister, or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, may make opening comments not to exceed 10 minutes,
- (b) for the hour that follows, members of the Official Opposition and the Minister, or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, may speak,

- (c) for the next 20 minutes, the members of the third party . . . and the Minister or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, may speak . . .
- (d.1) for the next 20 minutes, the members of any other party represented in the Assembly or any independent Members and the Minister, or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, may speak,
- (e) for the next 20 minutes, private members of the Government caucus and the Minister or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, may speak.

During the above rotation speaking times are limited to 10 minutes. For the time remaining, to the extent possible the rotation outlined above shall apply with the speaking times reduced to five minutes, as provided in Standing Order 59.02(1)(c). Provided that the chair has been notified, a minister and a private member may combine their speaking times with both taking and yielding the floor during the combined period. Finally, as provided for in Government Motion 8, approved by the Assembly yesterday, the time allotted for consideration is three hours.

The Committee of Supply has under consideration the 2015-16 interim supply estimates (No. 2).

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

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to move the 2015-16 interim supply estimates (No. 2) for the Legislative Assembly and the government. When passed, these interim supply estimates will authorize approximate spending of \$56 million for the Legislative Assembly, \$15.4 billion in expense funding, \$2 billion in capital investment funding, \$765 million in financial transactions funding for the government, and \$387 million for the transfer from the lottery fund to the general revenue fund.

These interim supply estimates provide funding authorization that will allow the normal business of the province to continue until the full 2015-16 estimates are approved in the fall. These estimates also follow through on specific commitments this government has made to the people of Alberta.

Approval of interim supply estimates, pending the release and approval of the budget, will allow the government the time it needs to prepare its plans and the Assembly the time it needs to review and debate those plans here before us. Those budget documents will include comprehensive budget information in the form of the government's fiscal and business plans, the ministry business plans, and the government estimates. These estimates will be fully debated when the budget documents are tabled.

Just with regard to the budget itself, obviously, we're not doing this fast because we're going to do it right. The budget, as I said, will be presented in the fall. In the meantime we're investing in health care, education, postsecondary education, health services, just like Albertans asked us to do by virtue of the election. This supply bill is all about keeping the lights on, the trains running, and government functioning. At the same time we're restoring stability to Alberta's education, health care, and human services. The bill will maintain stability in essential public services while the government reviews the economic situation, finances, and budgeting priorities.

Just a note about what we're investing in. We're investing in stable and predictable funding for our schools and postsecondary institutions. We're doing that because investing in skills and education is the single best investment our province can make to ensure the future prosperity of all. We're investing in stable and predictable funding for our health care system because the time has come to meet our society's growing need for community services that are more in the community, like long-term care and home care,

and we're investing in stable and predictable funding for human services because people who have suffered in the recent economic downturn need our support. The new money will be, as I said, put into the areas of education, health, human services, and innovation and education.

3:10

I was looking over the previous Finance minister's interim supply bill, that he brought forward to this House on March 16, 2015, the hon. Robin Campbell. Everyone knows that that was for a three-month period of time. The estimate when added up was about \$12 billion for three months. As members opposite have identified, this is for five months, from July 1 until November 30, and it's about \$18 billion.

This interim supply, as I said, Madam Chair, will allow us to keep functioning and will allow us to invest in the things that Albertans told us they wanted invested in by virtue of the recent election.

Thank you very much for the introduction of this bill.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. Minister.

For the next segment the Official Opposition has the opportunity. Do you want to share back and forth, or how would you prefer to proceed?

Mr. Fildebrandt: Yes, Madam Chair, we would like to invite the minister to debate back and forth.

The Chair: All right. I recognize the Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Chair. Today I rise to speak to Bill 3 in a manner which I did not expect I would have to do with the election of the first new government in 44 years. I falsely assumed that with the election of a new government we would see a new way of doing things in this place. While in opposition both the Premier and the Government House Leader consistently spoke out against the undemocratic time allocation for bills as a general principle, let alone for such a hugely important piece of legislation such as the pending bill before us today. This bill has been allocated a mere three hours of debate, the minimum time legally allowed under the standing orders of this House for interim supply. That is three hours of debate for \$18.6 billion of spending, of which \$1.8 billion is new and entirely unbudgeted.

The last time that this province passed a budget was the spring of 2014, under the old Redford government. Since then we have had three new Premiers, which will cost us God knows how much for their portraits in the lobby. Our province has been operating in the dark without any real fiscal plan since that time.

Now, the Official Opposition understands that the current government is unprepared to meet this House with a full and costed budget at this time. We have made clear from the start that we understand this and that we will work co-operatively with the new government to pass a reasonable interim supply bill. Unfortunately, this government has not seen fit to live up to its own principles, that it campaigned on during the election, and has seen fit to invoke a time allocation of just three hours. That means that in this three hours we are debating \$6.209 billion per hour and \$103 million a minute.

Madam Chair, this would be unreasonable in and of itself even for a bill authorizing just \$1 billion. It is even more concerning when we are asked to pass not a budget but a brochure. We have been given three pages with virtually no details with regard to where the government actually intends to spend this money. Now, I'm going to read a quote.

It looks to me like about four months' worth of spending. It's an awful lot of money, though, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre is absolutely correct. This is a very, very minuscule amount of information that is provided to the House, to the Assembly, in order to make the decision that is required. We certainly have no objection, you know, to voting interim supply for the government provided that a budget is brought forward relatively quickly.

You know who said that, Madam Chair? The Government House Leader. You know when he said it? March 18, 2015. That was for four months of spending. The government is now asking us to run on interim supply for eight months.

We have been given no details with regard to how this money within the departments will be allocated, and, most concerning, we have been given no details on what this means for the budget's bottom line. This bill contains not a hint of what the total expenditures will be for this fiscal year. This budget contains no details with regard to what the revenues will be for this fiscal year. This document contains no details with respect to what the deficit will be for this fiscal year, no details about what the debt will be for this year, and no details about what the net financial assets for this financial year will be.

In short, this is a document asking for a blank cheque. This is a document asking permission for the government to spend without accountability or scrutiny and without any guidance from this Legislature whatsoever. It is a document that spends first and asks questions later. It is a document that spends frivolously. This is a document that treats money as if it grows on trees. It is a document that is irresponsibly allocating a massive sum of taxpayers' money. This government is merely asking this Assembly for its rubber stamp and asking Albertans to just trust the government.

As some of you know, I've been in the business of not trusting governments. I've never believed in just taking the government's word for it, especially these guys over here. We, the Wildrose, would not be doing our job as the Official Opposition if we just let this pass through this House without any details, without any details on what the effect will be on Alberta's economic future, without a larger fiscal outlook for the province, without any fiscal framework whatsoever. Some of my colleagues will be asking specific questions of ministries in this government with regard to what they will be spending taxpayers' money on in their respective departments.

In the meantime I have five simple questions for the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board. One, how much money will the government spend this fiscal year; two, how much revenue will the government collect this fiscal year; three, what will the deficit be this fiscal year; four, what will the debt be at the end of this fiscal year; and five, what will be the province's net financial assets at the end of this fiscal year?

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Madam Chair. I can begin at the beginning, I guess. The portraits for the Premiers will cost about \$12,000 each, and I can't wait to see them. I do want to say that I need to correct one thing that my hon. friend across the floor said. He might have misspoken, but he said that the original interim supply was a four-month interim supply. It was actually a three-month interim supply from April 1 to June 30. The one we're bringing forward here is a five-month interim supply.

But this is not a budget. This is the ability to keep government operating, the ability to keep, as I said, the trains running and the lights on and spending happening. The government estimates of

2015-16 are where you'll find more comprehensive information with regard to the actual ministries and what they're spending on.

That's not the intent of interim supply, and actually our interim supply looks the very same as the hon. Robin Campbell's interim supply. [interjections] Well, I've got these right here, and they look the same to me. They are the same in terms of content except for the number of months and the dollar amount.

3:20

So we're not here to present a budget, as I've said. That will be presented in the fall. We're here to extend the spending through the ministries. They have accountabilities. They have benchmarks. They have measures that they have to address. That is all within their ministries, and it's not expected to be in interim supply.

So, Madam Chair, the work that we're doing is what is necessary to bring forward, and when we do a budget, we'll be working on a budget. We have the time to come up with all of the answers that our hon. member is looking for, but those are not before us today, because that is not what we're presenting.

Thank you.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Madam Chair, if I had misspoken, then it was the Government House Leader who had misspoken. I was quoting him with regard to three or four months. But the principle of the Government House Leader I still agree with, that when a government is asking for a large amount of money in interim supply, they should provide more detail. Now, the hon. Minister of Finance talks about the number of pages in this. I've never been a particularly big fan of the details that the PCs have ever brought forward in their financial documents, but if I'm not mistaken, their interim supply was closer to 75 pages not three.

Mr. McIver: Looking pretty good now, eh?

Mr. Fildebrandt: Don't get excited.

Madam Chair, I asked the minister five simple questions. How much money is the government spending? How much money will it collect? What will the deficit be? What will the debt be? What will the province's finances be? Now, I'm going to live in a pleasant dream world for a minute and pretend that I was the Finance minister.

Mr. McIver: That is a dream world.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Four years.

If I had taken over as the Finance minister, the very first thing I would do when I got to the office, after turning off the shredders, would have been to ask to see the books. I would see a bunch of numbers in black ink, and they would all add up to an expenditure figure at the bottom, and then there would be another ledger, and they would add up to a revenue figure at the bottom. Then there would be a nice little line drawn, and there'd be another number there, probably in red ink, and I would really be concerned about that number. Then I would ask the deputy minister of my department to tell me how much my new spending measures are going to cost in addition to that and what that is going to mean for the province's deficit.

Madam Chair, I believe that if the minister cannot answer one of these simple questions, then he is unprepared to meet this House. If the minister cannot answer one of these questions, then he is asking taxpayers to trust him with \$18.6 billion in the form of a blank cheque. Current projections for revenue under the previous budget were at \$44.8 billion and account for the second-highest revenue in the history of this province. This is despite the drop in oil prices and due to record personal and business tax revenues. In the year before

this Alberta recorded the second-highest revenue in its history and also set record revenue levels the year before that. This government does not have a revenue problem. It has a spending problem. Before the government comes before this House and asks for one dime in new spending, it should first present a commitment to get its current expenditures under control.

One of the reasons that Albertans lost trust in the previous PC government was their frivolous treatment of taxpayers' dollars. The previous government regularly misspent, misappropriated, wasted, and at times came perilously close to the legal definition of stealing. Albertans knew that the government treated their money as their own private piggy bank. Albertans knew that far too often the previous government was willing to cut a blank cheque to any special-interest group in any department to make political concerns go away without any regard to the bottom line of Alberta's budget. They ran eight consecutive deficits and planned to run three more. They ran up \$12 billion of debt and planned to run \$6 billion more this year alone. In the last 10 years they ran up \$49 billion of annual spending increases, far beyond the rates of inflation and population growth. We have in this province one of the biggest, most expensive governments in the country. It is time to get spending under control. This is not a time to give the government a preloaded gift card and send them to the West Edmonton Mall.

Now, we know that the government has a majority of NDP MLAs. But does the government have a majority in this House of MLAs willing to act irresponsibly, or will they do their duty as private members and require the proper scrutiny of the executive branch of the government? Let me remind the members opposite that if they are not in cabinet, they are still responsible for holding the cabinet accountable even if they are in the same party. They have a duty to ask questions and to hold the cabinet accountable in this Legislature and not with prewritten questions from the minister's office. If they abdicate that duty, they'll be little better than the government that came before them, who allowed the government to spend, to tax, and to borrow frivolously. I'm asking the minister my five basic and easy questions. I'm asking the private members opposite to do their duty and hold the executive branch of the government accountable with regard to how it intends to spend taxpayers' money.

We are on the mere second day of the actual proceedings of this Legislature, so let's start anew. Let's show Albertans that this is a new Legislature that they voted for and not a different shade of the last Legislature just run by another party. Let's all do our duty as custodians of the public purse and taxpayers' money.

I want to know: will the minister table a document detailing the information that we have requested very reasonably in this House before asking the House to pass it? If he will not table an answer to one of these questions, then I believe he is unprepared to meet the House. So let me ask them another way. I asked if he was able to answer every one of them. Can I ask the minister: can he answer even one of them?

Mr. Ceci: The answer is that the Fiscal Management Act requires that on June 30 we present the consolidated financials for this province. We'll be releasing that information prior to June 30 as is requested in the act. That document is before Treasury Board tonight, and then it is going to our Auditor General. I can tell you that from the perspective of the Ministry of Finance we are very, very satisfied with all of the financials in those documents, and I think the member and the previous government needs to be congratulated to a degree because there's some good news in those documents that you will find out on June 30.

The Chair: The Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Chair. The minister stated that their supply bill is based off the previous government's supply bill. Not that I am a particularly big fan of the previous government, but why don't you just introduce their budget?

Mr. Ceci: That's not our plan. Our plan is to move forward with our platform, that we campaigned on, and we are using the unpassed budget of March to build our interim supply bill on. So we're using that budget, that's not passed, and coming up with the numbers, extending through the first supply bill to ours. As I said, in the fall we will have our own budget before this House, and we will ask for support of that from all in this House.

3:30

Mr. Fildebrandt: Madam Chair, if we concede that this government has absolutely no idea about the big financial picture for this fiscal year, then perhaps they can answer some questions on the government's interim supply bill on an interim basis. Will the Minister of Finance tell us what his interim finance policy is?

Mr. Ceci: I think that would be fairly clear. The policy that we have built this supply bill on is to look at the previous government's budget and to carry that through to this supply bill, with the addition of four areas that we campaigned on, that we said we were going to restore. So we're restoring the cuts that were proposed by the previous government and building on the previous budget to do that.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Madam Chair, how much time do we have left?

The Chair: Thirty seconds.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Oh, I'd better make it good, then.

Madam Chair, it's been one of my great concerns, before being elected to this Legislature, with regard to the government's accounting policies. Two and a half years ago the former government repealed the Fiscal Responsibility Act and Government Accountability Act, that drastically weakened the reporting standards for budgets and quarterly updates for the government of Alberta. Can we expect the minister to improve upon this in the budget following interim supply?

The Chair: One moment, hon. Minister.

I didn't perhaps explain this at the beginning. You do get a full hour for the Official Opposition, but it's divided into 20-minute segments. So you can continue for the next 20 minutes if you choose, or another hon. member in your caucus can take the next 20-minute segment.

Mr. Ceci: Do you want me to answer that question?

Mr. Fildebrandt: Yes, sir. You can if you want.

Mr. Ceci: I just need to remember what the question was, again. [interjections] Oh, the improve-on-process one. Yes. We are in discussions now at the ministry with regard to how we're going to bring forward reporting. I can tell you that there are some discussions amongst officials in my ministry and the Auditor General with respect to refining the reporting process. What was done quarterly may not be done quarterly in the future. We haven't landed on an actual process that we're happy with or that we're going forward with, but I can tell you that the way things were done in the past isn't necessarily the way we're going to do them going forward.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. Minister.

We'll continue with the next segment. Cypress-Medicine Hat, you're taking over the next segment?

Mr. Barnes: Yes, please, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Do you want to go back and forth again?

Mr. Barnes: I would like to go back and forth, please.

The Chair: All right. Continue. Go ahead.

Mr. Barnes: Okay. Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to focus my questions in interim supply more on health care and infrastructure, but thanks to the hon. member for helping to set the stage as to where the government is at and what, you know, the state of Alberta is. My first two questions in question period focused around local decision-making, focused around the value that the taxpayer deserves for his hard-earned tax dollars.

Some points that I want to put on the floor right away are that since this experiment in centralization began in 2008 – health spending then was approximately \$12 billion. Last year the previous government's estimates had our health spending, Alberta Health Services and Alberta Health combined, at over \$18 billion. When I look at the numbers that are presented in your interim supply and what was in the three-month interim bill from before, \$7.75 billion plus the \$5.25 billion in the earlier one show \$13 billion for eight months. An incredible \$19.5 billion we're now at for health care in a province of 4.3 million people.

It's also scary because it doesn't include the infrastructure part of health care. If my recollection is right, how the government used to do it was that infrastructure spending for health care was in the Infrastructure budget, while infrastructure spending for education was in the Education budget. So we have some areas there that I would like to go over. Again, we're looking at what in Canada now is the second-highest per capita spending of all provinces, behind only Newfoundland and Labrador: many, many instances where the outcomes don't match the amount of money going in.

In the three years that I've been the MLA for Cypress-Medicine Hat, the stories I've heard, you know, make you shake your head. Easily the number one complaint in my constituency association office is people that have just been to Great Falls or Kalispell, just spent \$15,000 or \$17,000 to get a shoulder fixed, just spent \$23,000 to \$29,000 to get a knee or a hip done because they didn't have access to our system. Also, the centralization, not being able to see somebody in our area, has contributed to that problem.

I remember good work by the opposition a year or so ago, discovering a warehouse of computers, \$30 million, that sat there for a year and a half unused, unallocated because of centralization. I heard stories of local hard-working front-line workers. When they need a little thing of glue, a whole case comes out of Edmonton; the rest gets thrown away. In Medicine Hat when you can't get out of the parkade because the parking arm is broken, six hours later someone comes from Red Deer and fixes it. Or how about the \$800,000 piece of equipment that arrives unexpected – no one's trained for it – and sits in the corner? These are the things that local decision-making can improve, and doing so would improve the morale of our hard-working front-line staff, our professionals and give the quality of service that smaller urban municipalities and our rural municipalities so deserve and so need.

My first question to the government is: of this 7 and three-quarter billion dollars that's allocated for the next few months, is any of it to make our system more responsive? Is any of it to give our system more local decision-making?

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Thank you to the hon. member for raising a number of points in his introduction to what I hope is our 20-minute banter. It's an honour and a privilege to rise on the interim supply estimates currently before the House and to have an opportunity to ensure that Albertans will continue to access the health care services they need and deserve.

In the weeks and months ahead our government is committed to fulfilling what Albertans told us during the election was important to them. This includes restoring stability in the health system, focusing on patients, opening new long-term care beds, using hospital space that sits empty to serve patients better, and reducing wait times. Interim supply estimates that are currently before the House will help us accomplish this and more, with these additional dollars reversing the previous government's cuts to front-line health services. I think the hon. member will be happy to hear that. This additional money will ensure stable, predictable funding for acute care in our hospitals. It also puts in place the necessary resources to meet Alberta's growing population.

Interim supply estimates include, as the hon. member mentioned, \$7.8 billion for Health to cover expenditures from July 1 to November 30 if need be. This adds an extra \$500 million over what the previous government allocated for Health in its proposed budget and subsequent interim supply bill. This additional money will restore \$160 million in previous government cuts to the health care system. The remaining money will ensure that the health system can meet the demand of the population growth. Just like we have 12,000 new Alberta students who need teachers, we'll have close to 70,000 new Albertans who need front-line health care workers like physicians, nurses, and health care aides.

3:40

Madam Chair, there is no doubt that Albertans would have been negatively impacted by the cuts proposed by the previous government's budget. Staff would have been laid off, and much-needed front-line care would have suffered. With these additional dollars our government has taken the steps necessary to ensure that money is there to cover things like volume increases for the increasing number of people moving to Alberta, who need health services, more babies being born in our province, more seniors, those with chronic disease needing care, and the escalating costs of drugs that are so very needed by Albertans. The bottom line is that our government is taking action to ensure that Albertans receive the timely care that they need and that they deserve.

Our Premier has been very clear that stability and protecting public health care are our highest priorities. We're meeting that commitment. We're committed to ensuring that the services families depend on are protected, including those affecting seniors and the health care system. In other words, our government is putting Alberta's health care as our first priority through this bill. Universal, accessible, high-quality health care must be there for Albertans when they need it. We know that this is only a first step, that more does need to be done, and more will be done.

Madam Chair, this doesn't mean that our efforts to find efficiencies and savings will stop. Alberta Health Services will continue to look for ways to deliver health services more efficiently and will continue to do analysis of all health spending, including past experiments in privatization, as we put together a new budget for the fall. In the coming months we'll be developing a new health budget that, line by line, will be centred on the health needs of Albertans and Alberta families, and it will include much-needed investments in home care and long-term care, which will include stable and predictable funding for our overall health care system.

Madam Chair, each and every one of us needs the health system at some point in our lives. When we have family or a friend or a

loved one who is in need of medical attention, we want assurance that the health system will be there for them, and it's clearly not acceptable to put their lives at risk through reckless spending cuts. We need to make sure our hospitals, clinics, and health programs have the resources they need to meet the demands of a growing population. Albertans know there's nothing more important than the care of their loved ones, and on May 5 Albertans elected a government that's committed to ensuring that public health care is protected and strengthened.

I look forward to working with all members of this House to find ways that we can be more efficient, but in terms of the expediency of this bill we need to make sure that we can move forward and continue to plan for the growth that we have, to ensure that Alberta's health care is stable and available in the time to come. So I urge all hon. members to vote in support of stable health care for Albertans. Vote in support of Bill 2.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Madam Chair. I've talked to several stakeholders that tell me that one of the quick ways to make our health system more responsive, better for the patient, more efficient for cost is if we can do something to improve our electronic health records and the interface between the physician, the patient, and the specialist. I'm also told that one great big system, more centralization wouldn't be the best compared to smaller systems. Is any of this \$7.75 billion headed in that direction?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you for the question. These are the types of conversations I hope that we have an opportunity to explore in the months ahead and work collaboratively on. This, as I mentioned, is really about restoring the \$160 million, that was proposed cuts, as well as making sure that there is money for the 70,000 new patients. It isn't really about investing in new technology or systems in that way. There might be opportunities to explore that as we move forward, but this is making sure that there is an allocation so we can continue to plan for growth.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you again.

One of the freedom of information requests that our great staff got for us a short time ago was: 110,000 employees at Alberta Health Services; 9,600 of them are making over \$100,000. Is this \$160 million – was that the number? – going back into the system? Is any of that \$7.75 billion going to hire more high-level bureaucrats?

Ms Hoffman: Thanks for the question. Of course, the focus is on making sure that we have front-level service providers. Just like in education the money's intended focus is around making sure that there are teachers, education assistants, and custodians, in health care our intention is to make sure that we have front-line service providers, so physicians, EMTs. We know that there are a number of different initiatives. The wait times that we've had for ambulances are something that needs to be addressed. This is about adding front-line capacity to meet the proposed 70,000 Albertans who will be coming here. I think that's roughly the size of Red Deer. We want to make sure that there are front-line service providers to meet their needs.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you.

Again, in the last Legislature it was discovered time and time again, the neglect that some of our important infrastructure is in. Is any of this money going to fix the Misericordia hospital, which is long overdue?

Ms Hoffman: Of course, capital projects are something that the Minister of Infrastructure – I was looking to see if maybe he wanted to jump up – and then, in my case, the Minister of Health work on together, collaboratively. In terms of this plan we haven't got massive financial commitments in terms of infrastructure. This is about making sure that we continue on with the interim supply that was passed previously, with the additions to Health. Health isn't the budget line item that houses the big infrastructure projects. We do have some money for some essential supplies and those types of things, maybe equipment, but the money for brand new construction and major modernizations will be something that will be well debated in the fall budget should there be an increase to fund some of those initiatives. So this is operational.

Mr. Barnes: Okay. Thank you.

I talked to a number of stakeholders, and absolutely we have one of the most fantastic acute-health systems in the whole world. Thanks to all our hard workers for that. But the amount of money around prevention, mental health, managing chronic conditions: has your government pinpointed more of this important, hard-earned taxpayers' money towards prevention, towards managing chronic conditions and mental health issues?

Ms Hoffman: Thanks for the question. In the platform mental health was definitely one of the key pillars. In terms of being able to do something under the current financial structure that we have, we've reached across the aisle and asked the Member for Calgary-Mountain View to help evaluate and work with us in terms of large-scale recommendations moving forward in terms of systems.

In terms of immediate action there are the naloxone kits that are being distributed throughout the province. Really, when I think of naloxone – and it relates to mental health because it's addictions related – it's basically for somebody who's in a situation where they might be overdosing. It's the equivalent of an EpiPen for somebody who is having a chronic attack, an allergic reaction. So it's really about having those life-saving resources on the front lines.

Then, of course, once we save countless lives – well, not countless; we'll count them – with those resources, we'll be able to make sure that the mental health patients, for the most part, who are suffering from addictions have resources down the way through the review so that we can continue to expand service for them.

Mental health and home care – I think it was mentioned – are definitely pillars in our platform and components where we look forward to bringing about more robust change as we move to having a real budget, a whole budget. This is about day-to-day operations. I wish it could meet the desired outcomes for everyone in a very immediate fashion, but this is really about making sure that we can continue to provide the services we have today with the ability to expand for growth in the fall.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you.

I believe you announced \$30 million for home care this year and \$60 million in years going forward. Very commendable, a very, very good idea. Of course, our party, the Wildrose, had \$50 million in our campaign promises for home care, that we thought was important. Is \$30 million going into home care from these interim supply estimates? One of the concerns I hear about: although Albertans think it's a very good idea, they want to know that the proper level of service is met for the recipients. Is that part of this issue? Is \$30 million from here going to home care?

Ms Hoffman: Thanks for the opportunity to provide a little clarity around my remarks. What I was asked about is whether we're

committed to fulfilling that platform piece. In the platform we talked about how those were steps that we were planning on rolling out. These will definitely be components that we'll be able to hold onto in the fall budget, when we actually have an opportunity to look at it more fulsomely. There will be components for growth in home care, just like the allocation for 70,000 new patients is being worked into the budget. That's how we're going to get some of that home-care money out immediately and, hopefully, to a variety of regions throughout the province so that we can support the people in need of supports in their home, where they live, rather than having them relocate. The component around the growth is where the timely home-care piece will come from, and then in the fall we'll be able to talk specifically about line items as they relate to home care.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you. A wonderful idea.

The last government was going to put the Calgary cancer centre at the south campus. The Premier said the Foothills and apparently has changed her mind. Is any of this money, is any of this interim supply that we're voting on looking at the value, the cost-benefit analysis, as to exactly where this should go for the citizens of Calgary, who have been waiting too long for this?

3:50

Ms Hoffman: A reporter asked me earlier today when we should expect an announcement on the Calgary cancer facility, and I said: 10 years ago. I think we'd agree on that. The Premier did say during the election campaign that the Foothills was the desired location. For the most part, we think that's probably still the best location, but I think we owe it to Calgarians and to all Alberta taxpayers to make sure that we review the evidence and that it aligns with our goals for Calgary and consulting with Calgarians.

The number of cancer patient advocates as well as cancer physicians who've reached out to help us make sure we have the best evidence to make this decision as we move forward has been amazing. I've had the opportunity to visit the current Tom Baker and see first-hand what they're doing with a less than ideal space that they're operating under. They don't just serve Calgarians. They serve Albertans and a number of people from other neighbouring provinces and territories as well. This, of course, will be a priority, and I look forward to working with my colleague the hon. Minister of Infrastructure to be able to bring something forth in the fall budget. Again, this is operational focus, so we don't have money in this budget around capital announcements. This is about making sure that we can continue to plan for the growth that we have going forward.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you.

In addition to the needs in Calgary and the needs in the Misericordia hospital here in Edmonton, the Wainwright hospital is in serious concern of having a problem and maybe patients having to be relocated. Fort McMurray, Northern Lights, and Boyle were other communities that I remember off the top that had similar issues. You've already said that none of this is for capital. Is part of this money in the interim supply for maintenance, and is any of this for an allowance in case, heaven forbid, something very, very serious happens and temporary places have to be looked at? Are there any contingency plans for that kind of thing for our rural communities, which have just as great a need but maybe are not as well known?

Ms Hoffman: I really appreciate the question. In terms of capital investment there's \$32.5 million for capital investment and \$27.7 million for financial transactions. That's actually capital investment going towards equipment specifically to treat cancer, so it doesn't

look to me like it's specifically around additional deferred maintenance. Whatever the deferred maintenance allocation would have been in the proposed budget back in the spring, this \$500 million is a top-up to basically grow those line items in the interim by their relative percentage.

It wouldn't likely be sufficient to address all deferred maintenance throughout the province. This is a problem that's been building for decades and that we're not going to be able to solve overnight, but there will be additional resources going out to facilities to be able to do minor upgrades and some basic operational infrastructure maintenance in the next four to five months. Hopefully, we'll be able to work collaboratively on bringing forward a capital plan that will, through the sunshine list, meet the needs of all communities throughout the province. It's not going to be easy.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you again. I appreciate all your answers and your willingness to answer.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

We now enter into the final 20-minute segment for the Official Opposition. The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Do you wish to continue back and forth?

Mr. Strankman: Yes. If I could, I'd like to continue with the back and forth.

The Chair: All right.

Mr. Strankman: I have several ministers that I'd like to question. Primarily, it relates to my Agriculture and Forestry shadow portfolio. It's somewhat of a situation, Madam Chair, like déjà vu for myself and, I'm sure, the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat to be debating the interim supply estimates here because we did that in the spring thanks to the management skills of the now third party. We're going to do the best we can.

I'd like to direct some of my first questions to the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry. I see that under the previous interim supply estimates bill, Bill 18, which I'll refer to as interim supply version 1.0, the amount was approximately \$180 million. That was for what I understand to be an approximately three-month period. Going forward, version 2.0 has the indication from several of the ministers to be a five-month period, but the amount of the funding in 2.0 for Agriculture and Forestry, to my understanding, is \$340 million. Could the minister please correct me on that if my math is inaccurate?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you for the comments as well. The approved operating expense, interim supply, for April to June was \$221.899 million. The July to November submission is for an additional \$336.121 million, which brings the total 2015-2016 interim supply to \$558.020 million. This reflects almost 77 per cent of the published operating budget.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you for that going forward.

In the old interim budget \$586 million was the budget allocation totally for 2012-13, but \$707 million was the amount for '13-14, and \$704 million was the amount for '14-15. I was just wondering if you could tell me: are you expecting these levels to stay the same as we reach the total budget going forward?

Mr. Carlier: Madam Chair, interim supply amounts were calculated using historical spending patterns, scheduled major grant payments, and cash spending profiles of capital budgets. All the listed amounts include spending associated.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Minister. It's well appreciated.

Madam Chair, I want to go through it somewhat line by line going forward here because I'm trying to get a sense for how the portfolio is going to be managed. It was not even mentioned in the budget. I believe from our conversations that we would both agree that agriculture is an important portfolio for the province. I'd like to talk about section 2 there, and this is from the previous Bill 18, interim supply, and the supply estimates previous to that, where we talk about economics and competitiveness, international marketing, and market attraction. Could you give me some information in regard to proper funding for that? We've had our discussions in regard to, for example, Mr. Minister, the Rahr malt plant at Alix. Will there be any funding to allow for those types of developments to go forward?

Mr. Carlier: Madam Chair, a lot of those details I think have yet to be worked out. I haven't been briefed on a lot of the questions you have, but I will endeavour to find those answers to your questions as soon as I can.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you again.

A similar question to that. Under agriculture and innovation it has a line item there: budget funding for agriculture environment and water. I understand that to be the issue with the Rahr malt plant. Have you had any chance to learn about that and what funding might be available for them for that situation?

Mr. Carlier: I have not. I haven't that in front of me, but I've been briefed on that. Again, I can come up with those numbers, you know, at a later date and give you a better, a more fulsome answer to that.

Mr. Strankman: Thanks again.

Madam Chair, I'd like to continue on to item 4, food safety, animal health and welfare. Food chain traceability is an important thing, and the amount that I saw in the recent supply estimates was actually down from \$6.5 million to \$5.2 million. I understand that to be an important concern. You see some of the marketing things going forward with food suppliers in the province. Can the minister give us some understanding of whether that funding will be continued or increased or decreased? I mean, we're debating an \$18 billion budget here, and it's significant to try and understand what sort of a trend might be coming forth.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you. There is a lot of, you know, consideration on the different aspects of your question. Again, I do apologize; I have none of those figures in front of me. I haven't had the opportunity to consult with my colleagues in cabinet, but I will endeavour to get those for you.

4:00

Mr. Strankman: Well, I too, sir, am looking forward to that. I understand, Mr. Minister, you have a stakeholders' meeting coming forward in the very near future, that I think is extremely important for industry.

Going forward, industry development, \$2.61 million in '14 and '15: can we expect that trend to continue for rural development? After we spoke recently about our mutual desire to diversify agriculture, at least in my opinion, can you give us sort of an indication of what that trend may be?

Mr. Carlier: Madam Chair, rural development continues to be, you know, an important aspect of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. We're looking at not decreasing any funding for rural development, whether it be agricultural societies to 4-H or whatever that might be. Again, no solid numbers, but I'm looking to get that for you.

Mr. Strankman: Thanks again. I'm just trying to, as I keep saying, get a trend because as you well know, Mr. Minister, this is recorded in *Hansard*.

Mr. Minister, with the potential of a 50-year drought coming up in the province, have you given any consideration to the funding available under agriculture insurance and lending assistance? Even going forward, several of us have had in our constituencies issues with wildlife damage and the management of that. That, too, is interrelated to ESRD, but there's a certain component that does relate to agriculturalists.

Mr. Carlier: A couple of issues there. I think one was on the drought. You know, it's continuing to be dry conditions in the province. There has been and still continues to be the crop insurance program with Agriculture Financial Services Corporation. There are systems in place, that have existed in the past, for helping farmers and producers with issues when there is going to be drought. We all pray for rain. Hopefully, that will alleviate a lot of our issues.

The other on the wildlife. My understanding is that there are currently programs in place for compensation when, for instance, people lose livestock when there's predation happening and that kind of thing. That will most certainly continue.

Mr. Strankman: That's not what I was driving for, Mr. Minister. AFSC has crop insurance policies that relate to crop damage, et cetera, et cetera, from wildlife. In some areas it's becoming very onerous, the influx of animals, the ungulates like elk and such. I was wondering if you have given any consideration to that going forward in your portfolio.

Mr. Carlier: The AFSC does have insurance programs that are available to farmers. I understand that the seed producers, the people that plant, you know, wheat, canola, et cetera, are close to about 75 per cent insured. So I believe the program is robust and continues. My understanding just as of today is that there are some producers that are not going to qualify for some of this insurance because of their small size. As well, for instance, farmers in the Hutterite colonies don't take part in the insurance programs. Otherwise, my understanding is that the program is robust and operating as it should.

Mr. Strankman: I'd have to disagree with the minister on that, and we'll discuss that at a later date.

The other thing I have here is the livestock and meat strategy, sometimes known as ALMA. Can you give me any idea of the direction of the mandate of that part of your portfolio? There's a significant number of dollars that are spent in that. I was just wondering, with our time of somewhat fiscal restraint, if that might be reduced or managed differently.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you for that. ALMA's total 2015-2016 budget has been reduced by \$4.8 million, to \$32.3 million. This year's ALMA budget has more than \$32 million to help support projects focused on research and innovation, industry development, and enhancing food safety. Since January 2009 ALMA has provided more than \$190 million for projects that enhance and support our

livestock industry, with a total projected value of nearly \$781 million.

Mr. Strankman: The point I was trying to make, Mr. Minister, was that that fund, in some people's eyes, is controversial. I was wondering if you've given that any consideration or will be reviewing the direction of the funds that are allocated to that organization.

Mr. Carlier: You know, I have talked to some stakeholders as well as some producers. This is the first opportunity I've heard any criticism of the project, but I think it's worth pursuing. As the Speaker himself alluded to, there is an opportunity to speak to stakeholders even later this month. So I think that dialogue will continue, but for now the ALMA program has had their budget reduced.

Mr. Strankman: To a somewhat unfamiliar field but somewhat relating to agriculture. In our old budgets and estimates I see where there is approximately some \$42 million allocated for the expenditures relating to forestry. I was wondering if the minister has any new and innovative ideas going forward there. I have some questions that I'll be bringing forward at a later date in that regard, but I was wondering if he has any ideas about whether that's sufficient or needs to be adjudicated, too. There are issues with such a thing as pine beetle and those sorts of things going forward. Or do you feel that that sort of an influx would fall under the purview of, potentially, Environment?

Mr. Carlier: Madam Chair, I suppose there is a lot of overlap with Environment and with Forestry, but the Forestry operating budget includes, for instance, the fight back against mountain pine beetle. The operating budget of Forestry is a set amount. Anticipating perhaps another question, then we're asking for emergency funds to fight the actual forest fires, the wildfires, which we've had an abundance of this year.

Mr. Strankman: That's what some of my questions will lead to later on.

My next question is to the Minister of Finance. It may possibly be more of a statement. I know, being a Calgary resident, where I'm a rural resident, having lived my whole life six miles from what some people describe as a social experiment called Saskatchewan . . .

Mr. Mason: It is now.

Mr. Strankman: It's, well, better than it has been for the last 60-plus years, Minister of Infrastructure.

The question I wanted to ask was that they made comment in regard to keeping the trains running. I was wondering if that would pertain to something that might be in the jurisdiction of Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Ceci: No. It was a metaphor that I was using to say that government needs this appropriation to keep providing the services that it is providing now to the citizens of Alberta, which they rely on and which need to keep happening.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the clarification.

My next comment is to the Minister of Health. She made a comment, and I'd just like to ask for clarification. She talked at some point in her answer there about acute-care beds, and that has

been a gigantic issue for my constituents in the village of Consort, where the previous Minister of Health in 2011 actually promised the reinstatement of those acute-care beds. I was wondering if some of your comments would relate to rural health care issues like the situation in Consort.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, hon. member, for the question. For those who are curious at all, I actually spent three years of my life living in the same small community just six kilometres from the border as well, so it's nice to have a neighbour in the House. I was about one to three, I think, during that time, so I don't remember a lot of the details around access to the Consort hospital.

Part of what we're doing, of course, is looking at where there's existing space, where there are needs, in particular, for long-term care patients to have access to long-term care spaces and a way that might create opportunities for us to move forward in an efficient way with our commitment to the 2,000 new long-term care beds as well as freeing up some acute-care space down the road. I look forward to learning more, and when we discuss the rural health review, I am sure that'll be one of the pieces that we mention.

Since I've got the opportunity, I just wanted to add one thing. When I spoke earlier about the \$32.5 million for capital investment, I'd talked about the cancer treatment. It also includes some funding for information technology as well as medical equipment replacement. My apologies for not adding that to the record. Glad to have the opportunity to do it now.

4:10

Mr. Strankman: Thanks. I certainly appreciate it.

My next comment is to the Minister of Education. We've spent some time in the Chamber, too. I haven't heard a specific comment – certainly, to these estimates I know we're using broad strokes – but I'd just like to make confirmation with the minister that he's aware of remote, rural school funding and the difficulty that they have with the fuel costs, the disparity in those areas.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Thank you so much for the opportunity to speak on this issue. We know that there are extraordinary costs associated with small-centre schools and, truly, rural schools as well. We would like to address that more fully as we move through the fall. I have had discussions already, though, with people, school board trustees from the PSBAA, describing to me the fuel concerns that they have and troubles getting the leases for people to take the contracts for busing. I am going to continue meeting with them this summer to look for a way to make sure that subsidy is in place so that the rural bus contracts can be met.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you to the minister for that. His experience here does tend to lead to that, but because of the short time that we have for this vast amount of money, it's important to get some of these comments, in my opinion, at least on the record.

My next comment is to the Minister of Transportation. I know that he's fully aware of some of the issues in the rural areas. I was just wondering if you could give us any idea of what funding allocations, if any, might be available for rural bridge construction and maintenance going forward.

Mr. Mason: I'll get the hon. member the answer to that question.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

That concludes the first hour of our discussion, and we now move into the next 20 minutes, where the members of the third party can engage in a dialogue with the minister.

Do you wish to do a back and forth as well?

Mr. McIver: Madam Chair, can I share my time with some of my colleagues in the caucus?

The Chair: You can do it that way.

Mr. McIver: Okay. Then we'll go back and forth if that suits you.

The Chair: All right. Sure.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I have a number of questions here. A lot of questions have been asked, and not that many have been answered, but we'll carry on. Some of the questions that I would like to know in the estimates – and I've got quite a shopping list, so I'll try not to say it too fast. How much in the estimates is to go toward flood mitigation, the Calgary cancer centre, the Calgary southwest portion of the ring road, the completion of highway 63, road repairs and maintenance, the twinning of highway 2, the schools committed to? How much is coming in and out the heritage fund, different than what was previously budgeted? As well, any changes to seniors' facilities? That's quite a shopping list, but the bad news is that I'm not done.

While I was listening to the previous questions and answers – and I'll try not to repeat them because if you didn't answer before, I'm guessing you're not going to answer now. Just a wild guess. But I did hear in several of the answers from the ministers, Madam Chair, references to the NDP platform. So I looked it up, and I have it on my screen. One of the promises in the NDP platform is to create a women's ministry. I don't see a separate ministerial line item here, and there's very limited information for that. So if you could explain where that is because that's one of the promises. I'm wondering where the funding for it is.

Again, trying to be sensitive to the time of the House and, most particularly, to my colleagues and caucus that have a lot more questions, at some point, preferably today, but I've got a pretty strong – I will read you 5.3. “We will create a Women's Ministry to lead initiatives for greater gender equality in Alberta.” I certainly don't see that ministry listed here. So I think that's a fair question. I would say that if you go through your platform, which I hope you have memorized – I apologize. I haven't got it quite memorized. You have line items. That one I just gave you is 5.3. All of the itemized numbers – 1.1, 1.2, all the way up to the end – if you could cost those out for us here in the Legislative Assembly, I think that would be appropriate, particularly since a lot of the answers that I heard from your ministers were: we're focusing on the stuff in the platform. So because you're focusing on that, I'm guessing you have those numbers at your fingertips.

Ms Hoffman: I'm going to start with responding to the last couple of questions and then pass the response to my colleagues on the first ones. We'll start with the last. In the terms of the ministry responsible for the status of women we absolutely have created that area. There is not a deputy minister for it. The amazing minister who has that under her responsibilities is the minister responsible for environment, and that's something that's she's taken under her responsibilities now and will for who knows how long. That's something that she continues to do, but there isn't a separately funded line item for it because it's work that's happening through her office currently. There isn't an additional cost right now.

In terms of the platform this is the four-year road map, and there are a number of immediate steps that we're taking. When the fall budget comes up, you'll be able to see a direct reference to a number of the commitments and how the progress is on the road map that we're taking in the first year. Reversing the cuts was how I referenced the platform, and definitely it was something that we

heard loud and clear through stakeholder engagement and through the voting process. It's around reversing the cuts that were impending in the past budget. These are the four areas that we're doing that in through interim supply.

Mr. Ceci: Regrettably, I can't provide answers to all the questions on spending lines that you asked previously. We really just did take these government estimates, divide by 12, and multiply by five. We have five months of spending in here that were estimated back in March, and we've added four things into it. That's how we came up with the continuation that's in all of these line ministries that are here before you.

Mr. Mason: I want to respond as well, if I can.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Yes. Well, I just wanted to supplement what the Minister of Health and the Minister of Finance have said and just indicate that this interim supply with four specific exceptions is based on the interim supply and the budget that was prepared by the outgoing government. I would think that the hon. leader of the third party would have an intimate understanding of what is in this budget. However, having said that, I will endeavour to get him specific answers to the list of line items that he has requested. But, hon. member, to be really clear, this is still your budget.

Mr. McIver: I thank you for that. If I wasn't paying attention, I apologize, but to me, that is the clearest way that's been said, that this is the previous budget divided by 12 and multiplied by five.

Mr. Mason: Plus four items.

Mr. McIver: Okay. Plus four items.

I'm not sure, Madam Chair, that that's been said out loud before, so I thank the minister for sharing that with the House. Sometimes when you pry at the edge, the top pops off eventually, and that was one of those moments, so I'm grateful for that. I have a lot more questions, but my colleague the hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway has some, and I would like to yield some time to him.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I, too, would like to go back and forth with just very brief, quick questions. First of all, I will point out the fact that this is a rather slim document. The last interim supply document was 72 pages, and that's a heck of a lot more than what we have here today.

An Hon. Member: That's efficiency.

Mr. Bhullar: Yeah. In terms of efficiencies, sir, I don't think so. We had line-by-line items with prices attached.

Secondly, I do remember members opposite, that now occupy the front bench, complaining constantly about the lack of time that we had to debate some things. You know, some things change, Madam Chair, but they don't really change. I just find that rather amusing.

4:20

Ms Hoffman: Would you like us to respond to that?

Mr. Bhullar: No, I wouldn't like you to respond because we have many other questions, the first of which is that you say that this is the previous budget, essentially taking us until the end of November. However, you have added money back into specific departments. That money was taken out of some departments to

make sure that we bend the curve on spending. You are adding that money back. The largest cost pressures on government are salary negotiations. Are you then telling departments and telling unions that all bets are off and that they can come to the table looking for 4, 5, 6 per cent raises once again because the government is open to spend more and more and more?

Mr. Ceci: To the hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway: no, we're not telling any labour groups anything like that. What we are doing is sticking to negotiated agreements, and we're sticking to them where the previous government didn't stick to them with regard to opted-out employees. So we are supporting the agreements that were made with opted-out employees. As far as the other negotiations coming forward in due course, when they come forward, we'll negotiate with them. But for the time being there's nothing that's in this interim supply that is any different except the agreement to address the opted-out employees' contracts, and that money is being found within the CHR department, the human resource department. So we're good on that basis, and we're not changing things, and we don't have to because we're not negotiating right now.

Mr. Bhullar: Madam Chair, I'd like to point out to the minister that in any given year about 20 per cent of the government and the government's partners' contracts come up for renewal. So by reinstating a whole heck of a lot of money, what you're essentially doing for 20 per cent of contracts, that are coming up for renewal this year and next year, is that you're saying that the government is in the money again. The government is in the money again. We've got money to spend, and we're not going to hold the line on spending as we have been.

But moving forward to other questions. I am going to start with some specifics if we can get short, quick answers back and forth, starting with the Minister of Agriculture. The capital project for water projects was reduced by \$2 million in the last budget. Is that still being reduced by \$2 million, or has that been beefed up here?

Mr. Carlier: Madam Chair, again, I don't have those exact figures in front of me, you know, in terms of the supply plan going forward. I don't have those details. Sorry.

Mr. Bhullar: I hope the minister will be able to provide us with the details.

Next, moving on to the Ministry of Education. There are \$671 million in capital investments. How many schools does the minister have under construction today? What stage are they at? What are the completion dates? Will the phase 3 schools that were being expedited to be open at the end of 2016 be funded in this interim supply?

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you for the question. Certainly, as we've distilled a more elegant way of describing the budget, the hon. member can certainly see that we are using the same schedule for building schools. The three phases, as I've kind of divided them up in a working way to my department: the Stelmach phase, the Redford phase, and then the Prentice phase; one, two, and three. We have not seen any deferments towards the schools up to this point, and certainly we are moving ahead aggressively on the same timetable as the previous government.

Thank you.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much. Minister, if you could just provide me with specifics. If you don't have it at your fingertips, that's fine.

Mr. Eggen: It's on the website as well.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you.

Next, to the Minister of Energy. In the last estimates there was \$33 million in financial transactions. I'd like to know what happened to those.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Could you be more specific? I'm not sure which ones you're referring to.

Mr. Bhullar: There's expenses, there's capital investments, and then there's financial transactions. These are essentially payments that come out, payments that go out, collected in a variety of different ways. You had \$33 million worth of these in the previous estimates. You don't have those now. So I would ask you to provide us with the details of that at your next available opportunity.

I'm going to move on here to Environment and Parks. Is there money for the Springbank flood mitigation project? I've recently learned that perhaps your party is reconsidering this compared to what you said in the election.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you for the question. On the subject of flood mitigation we continue to review our options. I'm pleased to share with the member, as Minister Bilous has, that we are reviewing all of our options. We are also reviewing our election commitment to the McLean Creek project because we want to make sure that we have all of the information before we proceed with this very large piece of public infrastructure and public investment.

Madam Chair, these are decisions on the order of hundreds of millions of dollars, as the member well knows, so that's why we're taking the time to review our options with respect to McLean Creek, Springbank, and other flood mitigation options. As I understand it, for interim supply these allocations are for ongoing operations in the department.

The Chair: Just as a reminder, hon. members, we don't refer to others by their name.

The hon. member.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much. Minister, they're there for the operations of the department as well as capital and expenditures. But I guess I'll take that as: there is no new money for it, so the money that we had committed for it is still in the budget. That's great to know because it's a good project.

To the Minister of Health: how much is currently allocated in your capital investments budget for the cancer clinic, and where do you suspect you'll be able to find potentially anywhere from 800 million to 1.2 billion additional dollars to locate the project at the Foothills site?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you to the member for the question. I wanted to add that I think I misspoke. There is some allocation for the ministry responsible for the status of women, I believe, housed in Human Services. Back to that.

The work around the capital projects, I'm really thrilled to say, is not actually in the Health ministry budget, I don't believe. I believe that the major capital announcements, the line item, is in the Infrastructure budget. So right now Infrastructure hasn't had any additional funding allocated to it. This is, like I said, the interim supply just to get us through until the fall, so there isn't an additional allocation in this budget around where that cancer facility would be located. My understanding is that major infrastructure announcements like that – maybe you can help me understand this process – are in the Infrastructure minister's budget, actually, not the Health minister's budget.

Mr. Bhullar: Major project funding, Minister, through the chair, can be in the Infrastructure budget; however, the policy rests with the Ministry of Health.

There were dollars allocated to emergency room expansion. These are much-needed projects. I believe there were five of them across the province. These projects really cannot wait four to five months. They need to get started immediately. I can speak of the Peter Lougheed alone. It is bursting at the seams, a very important project. Will this project have to wait until the end of November to see progress, or is the money in here so we can continue to make this happen?

4:30

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my understanding that it is in here. If I'm wrong on that, I will get back to you in writing in short order. My understanding is that those are the types of projects, doing the divided by 12 times five, that are allocated in this current budget. If I'm wrong, I will respond in writing.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much.

Through the chair, to the Minister of Human Services. Given that the economy is slowing down and perhaps some of the economic policies of your government could cause the economy to slow even further, which means greater case demand on your department and Alberta Works, how many additional resources – I mean, for these next four or five months, if you're saying that you've kept the budget the same, how do you plan on meeting additional caseloads if you have not allocated any more dollars in the budget?

I think this is the first time you're going to be standing up in the House, so congratulations as well.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Member for Calgary-Greenway, for providing me with this opportunity. Finally, somebody asked a question toward a very important ministry.

The budget allocation. There will be an increase, and that increase will be around \$39 million. That will be used to provide and maintain and enhance the services which are already existing.

The other thing I want to clarify. The Member for Calgary-Hays asked about the women's ministry. There is an allocation within that increase that Human Services is getting, and we will be allocating \$1 million, as promised in our campaign, to that ministry. The minister responsible for the status of women will be rolling out the priorities, how that will be used, but I can tell the House that money in that ministry will be used to enhance gender equality, to promote that research, and programs directed at the betterment of women.

Thank you.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Minister.

I would like to know: of that \$39 million increase, how much is to address, quote, unquote, the cutback, and how much of it is for caseload? If you could provide that information for me.

The last question is to the Minister of Seniors. The ASLI program, a very important announcement: seniors need these beds. We can't wait four months. Is the money going to be forwarded to ensure that seniors' homes are constructed in Alberta before the end of November? We need to start these projects immediately.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Our time has expired for the questions by the third party. We now enter the next 20 minutes, where members of any other party represented in the Assembly or independent members may speak.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Madam Chair. Based on mutual agreement amongst the three of us, I understand that we have 20 minutes, and I will take nine of those minutes. I will cede some time to the Member for Calgary-Bow and also the Member for Calgary-Varsity to follow on.

I understand that the government needs to get it right when tabling their first budget. I also understand that the objective of interim supply is to keep the lights on. Of course, I would appreciate, as other members have said previously, that we would get a more detailed breakdown of where the money is being spent. Accountability, of course, and transparency we would hope would be hallmarks of this government.

I will adopt a particular focus in the first part of my comments and questions and appreciate some back and forth with the ministers and then will ask some more general questions, and I will focus on flood in particular. There is a \$7.2 million allocation, I understand, from the previous budget, in Aboriginal Relations related to flood in particular. Through the chair, to the minister responsible for Aboriginal Relations: is this a cost-sharing program with the federal government? Do you know what specifically those dollars will be spent on and what the outcome of those will be?

Ms Ganley: Thank you for the question. I don't seem to have those exact figures in the numbers before me, particularly in terms of what the federal government contributed because those didn't go into interim supply, but I will get back to you with those.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Minister.

Through the chair, then, to the Minister of Education. I'm curious. There's, again, another similar amount of money, in fact, \$7.2 million in funding, which I assume and believe would be related to the repair or rebuild of schools, in particular Elbow Park school in the fantastic constituency of Calgary-Elbow. Can you confirm that that funding is, in fact, in place for the rebuild of Elbow Park school?

Mr. Eggen: Yes. I appreciate the question, and it's very nice to see the member up and running. We certainly will do so. There's a listing on the website already, the different phases of both renovations and construction, where you can look at those as well. We've not changed any of the timelines by which we would undergo either renovations or, in this case, restoration, but if there is an exception to that, I will endeavour to get you that information immediately.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Minister.

Moving on, then, to obviously a significant one, the Minister of Environment and Parks. There is a significant budget allocation for flood mitigation. My question will be similar but perhaps a different take than the Member for Calgary-Greenway. I understand that you are still reviewing, and I just want to state for the record and before the House how much I appreciate your spending time with me this morning to bring me up to speed on where you are with that project, with the Springbank project, with McLean Creek, with flood mitigation in general, and also to ask for my input. I very much appreciate your taking that very open and collaborative approach. My question is: how much of that money do you anticipate spending this year? Do you anticipate moving forward with a project of some kind in this budget year?

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you for the question. It was indeed a pleasure to have a meeting this morning to discuss our mutual interest in ensuring that we move forward in accordance with public interest and with an eye to all Albertans and safeguarding our financial interests as well. These are very, very large decisions that

we will not make hastily. We will make them with, you know, full consultation with all affected parties.

Now, on the capital investments in the interim supply, those are, as I understand it, commitments that have already been made. I think that once we land on a series of projects in order to appropriately protect against a 2013-like flood for the citizens of Calgary and the rest of southern Alberta, you'll see that plan going forward.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Minister.

Madam Chair, a question for the Minister of Municipal Affairs. In terms of the money you expect to be spending and your government expects to be spending this year, how much of that will be spent on the disaster recovery program? Does it represent an increase, a decrease, and can we anticipate the significant expenditure related to the 2013 floods wrapping up this year?

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and I'll thank the hon. member for his questions. Again, some of the complexity when it comes to disaster recovery, when it comes to flood mitigation, is shared between several ministries, so rest assured that we will be working with the joint ministries and across ministries to ensure, obviously, that we're doing the best to protect Albertans.

To your question, I can tell you that for this interim supply, \$173.7 million is for the cash-flow needs of the disaster recovery program for the 2013 Alberta floods. I think that answers your question. Feel free to comment further if you have anything.

Thank you.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much.

I'll ask now some more general questions. To the Minister of Education. We've talked a lot about the funding for growth and for student growth, which I think is absolutely warranted and very badly needed. I just want to get some more detail on what contingencies or plans you may have made for – perhaps we don't have 12,000 students; perhaps we have 7,000 students; perhaps we have 16,000 students. It's a bit of a moving target where things are going. Is that funding committed on a per-student basis, and if there is a smaller number of students, in fact, do you spend less money?

4:40

Mr. Eggen: Yes, hon. member. That's a very insightful comment, and indeed that's how the ministry, the department, always does fund. In fact, that's why you see some potential for variation, but their estimates are based on population. There's actually a great way to find statistical information on your city or any place in Alberta. Go to the school boards. They have very good estimates on population. So we can expect that \$103 million within range to cover the expected increase in enrolment. It was a necessary thing we had to do with interim supply. We exist as a government to pay for students' education, and we did so.

Thank you.

The Chair: I'd remind hon. members to always speak through the chair.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the reminder.

This will be my final question before I hand off to the Member for Calgary-Bow. To the Minister of Health. Mental health primary care is very important, and there's a program under way called PCN evolution, primary care network evolution, the second iteration of primary care. Of course, we know that primary care and prevention is really the one thing that has been shown over time to bend to the

cost curve of health care. I'm very interested if you are committed to primary care networks going forward and if, in fact, the interim supply reflects same.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Madam Chair, for the question. Last week I actually had an opportunity to have a face to face with the president of the AMA and also with two of the leaders with regard to the primary care network initiatives that are happening throughout Alberta. So we definitely talked to them about some of the challenges and opportunities. Eighty per cent of Albertans are actually registered through a primary care network right now, so obviously this is something that patients are choosing to register with. We need to make sure that we're looking at ways that we can share a number of reserves. We need to be responsible with taxpayer money and make sure that when money is being allocated in a budget year, it's being spent in that budget year to meet the outcomes of that budget year. There have been some problems with that, so we're definitely going to have to work with the primary care networks to make sure that we have an appropriate reporting process and that the funding that is being allocated is being spent responsibly. But I'm excited to work with them and with other health care providers throughout Alberta.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms Drever: Thank you, Madam Chair. The government needs time to table a budget that works for Alberta. However, in the meantime we need to ensure that key services such as education, health care, and social programs continue to be accessible to Albertans. We need a thorough and carefully thought-out budget which reflects what Albertans voted for in the May 5 election. As an Albertan and as an MLA I support the interim supply passing in a reasonable time to ensure that those priority services remain rather than leaving Albertans without those services while we debate over ideology.

Now to the Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thanks, Madam Chair. A pleasure to rise and speak to the supply bill. I would have to be a little bit repetitious, having been here a while and seen the same story repeated several times with huge critique from the current hon. House leader on the other side complaining about the absolute lack of time to debate massive budgets. So a simple request to the House leader to review the standing orders and see if there is a way that we might expand the time for debate on this and, in the interests of building cross-party solidarity around the important decisions that they're going to be making, extend an olive branch to all parties to allow the research necessary, the options out on the table, the opportunity to have meaningful discussion on what is a pretty major decision we're being asked to make.

I could make a motion. I haven't written it out, and we'd have to think about how to word that. But it seems to me that it is in the power of the Legislature to expand the amount of time dedicated to a particular debate. I'll leave that to the House leader to think about.

There are already signs, let me say, that this new government is hedging its bets on some of its commitments in its campaign promises, whether it's on education or the cancer centre or flood mitigation. I guess many Albertans would like to know what you're going to deliver on, and at some point I think it's important for you to come clean about what you're going to deliver and what you're

not going to be able to deliver because of the realities of the current situation. That's a preamble that I wanted to say.

I also appreciated the Finance minister's clarity about where the budget comes from. It's simply the old PC budget, and it's continuing on the same. One would hope that some of the bad decisions that were made in the last budget would be corrected in this interim budget.

Several questions for the Health minister. The last budget cut \$75 million from PCNs. I hope that's something the minister – and I may have missed it because I wasn't here earlier in the discussions. Clearly, that is funding that was targeted at essential management change in the PCNs. The PCNs have been told to change. They've been working towards more efficient and measured outcomes. They cannot continue with the effective, efficient changes that were in process if that \$75 million is cut. They're already at \$62 per patient, which has not been changed for several years. They're on a very tight budget. We want primary care networks to thrive. If you can comment on that.

Also, the 42 PCNs seem to be managed independently. Are we going to try and see some more consistency in how those financial decisions for each of the 42 PCNs are going to be made? I hope we can move to that quickly so that there is a sense of fairness and capacity building.

Also, what is your thinking about shifting some of the massive acute-care funding that we see into home care, community care, prevention? Is there not some low-hanging fruit there that we could at least be beginning discussions on? I hesitate to talk about some of the rural hospitals that are no longer functioning as hospitals but redesignating them for what they are doing, which are in some cases community health centres, in some cases seniors' centres, and ensuring that some of that funding, then, could be available for other support programs, including mental health and prevention supports. Perhaps the minister would like to comment on those few.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the member for raising a number of points that give us an opportunity to begin some of the dialogue on these issues.

Primary care networks are doing a lot of good work. There are also a number of challenges that they're facing. I believe that it was \$50, and it was adjusted to \$62. We actually need to do a fulsome review and see what is actually adequate because I think that these have been targets that have been chosen without actually doing a lot of analysis around what it actually costs to operate these facilities. So where a typical physician might see a thousand patients, they would have \$62 times a thousand to provide some additional supports. There might be 200 physicians in a primary care network. We're not talking about small budgets here. The physician allocation I believe is still primarily fee-for-service. Anyway, we definitely have some work to do. The primary care networks have come to the table very willingly. I think they were the ones who initiated the first meeting, wanting to make sure we can work on that.

I also can't help but think about similarities between some of the ways that budgets have been allocated to them and the ways we've allocated financing to schools districts in the past. For example, under my past hat we would have 200 individual schools in Edmonton public schools, and our collective responsibility is to meet the needs of all those students, just like the PCNs' collective responsibility is to meet the needs of all their patients. I think we need to have a bit of a dialogue around how we use those allocations to equitably meet the needs based on geography and other types of challenges that might be in place.

In terms of mental health I am really glad that the hon. member will be part of the advisory committee that reports to me. We will have details specifically around mandate and terms of reference in the days to come, as we will around additional information relating to the primary care networks.

I always cringed when I'd hear ministers say, "Stay tuned" in the past, but I find other words difficult for me to find. I look forward to discussing this and revealing more details in the days to come.

4:50

Dr. Swann: And the \$75 million that has been cut from PCNs: I didn't hear you comment on that.

Ms Hoffman: I will but not today. I'm sorry. I can't today.

Dr. Swann: You can't cut, or you can't comment?

Ms Hoffman: I can't comment on that today. We're talking about the whole line items. I'll be able to provide more details in the days to come. [interjections] I can say whatever I want; I'm choosing not to comment on this today. I will be very happy to provide additional detail in the days to come.

Dr. Swann: I appreciate that. I look forward, when you can, to hear word of that.

I'd also like to hear what in the budget, if anything, infrastructurewise is allocated to the Calgary cancer centre. I may have missed it. Has there been anything?

Mr. Mason: Madam Chair, I wanted to respond to that question. We are in the process of reviewing in detail options for the Calgary cancer centre so that we can as soon as possible inform members of the House and of the public what the best option is to go forward. Given the amount of money that's involved and the importance of this issue to the people of Calgary and southern Alberta, we decided that we would take a very close look at this. I've been doing that in conjunction with my colleague the Minister of Health in order to provide the best possible option and to be able to justify that option. That will be forthcoming, I hope, very soon.

Dr. Swann: Finally, with respect to the flood mitigation infrastructure is there anything in the budget that relates to the major projects that have been raised upstream?

Mr. Mason: Well, as a matter of fact, there are two items, Madam Chair, with respect to this in terms of the flooding. One on the operational side is \$23 million to support flood recovery and rebuilding efforts in southern Alberta. Work continues in 2015-16 on key initiatives such as the floodway relocation program, cleanup and remediation of the flood-related damages at the Hidden Valley Golf Resort site, and the construction of the High River community resource centre. There is \$6 million included in these interim supply estimates in capital investment allocated to the flooding program as well. So \$23 million on the operating side and \$6 million on the capital side.

Dr. Swann: Does that include the rehabilitation fund for some of the in-city commitments that the government has made?

Mr. Mason: I can get back to you, hon. member, with that information. I will provide that to you and all members of the House.

Dr. Swann: Thanks very much.
That's all, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

We only have three seconds left, so we're moving into the next segment. For the next 20 minutes we have the opportunity for private members of the government caucus to question the minister.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Mr. Connolly: Thank you, Madam Chair. I know you're all anticipating it. This government was left with an enormous problem in regard to the number of students there are per teacher in our public schools. In Calgary many public high school teachers have between 40 and 50 students per class. Many of these students require one-on-one time with their teacher. However, with so many students per classroom it is nearly impossible for teachers to give students the time they need and the time they deserve.

When I was in high school, Madam Chair, which many of my colleagues are no doubt aware wasn't too long ago, I had 44 other students in my English class. If everyone showed up, there weren't enough chairs for everyone to sit in. After recently consulting with teachers who work in schools all over Calgary, I have learned that things have changed for the worse thanks to the previous government, who now sits on the other side. Classes are now exploding with students, and we neither have the infrastructure nor the number of teachers to cope with this exorbitant number of students. Additional cuts from the previous government would have only worsened the situation for many teachers and students in our public school system.

My question for the Minister of Education is as follows, and all my questions will be to the Minister of Education. What in this government's interim supply bill will help to alleviate overcrowding in our public schools?

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the member for his question. Again, it's very important for us to differentiate between our interim supply budget, which is our interim funding, I should say, and then the overall budget on which we are overlaying that other document.

We certainly knew full well before the election was even called that there was a serious shortfall of funds to meet the needs of more than 12,000 or thereabouts students entering into the school systems this next year. So we knew that one of our first acts of government had to be to restore that funding to ensure that there were teachers in front of these young people and that there was a support system available to provide that education.

But Albertans must understand – and I think the school boards, teachers, parents, and students ultimately do understand – that this is a restoration of funding that more or less put us back to where we were last year in regard to class size and inclusion of students with special needs, with varying degrees of supports, and the maintenance of buildings and so forth. So we still have lots of work to do. Certainly, by including this \$103 million or so into interim supply, we have the opportunity to at least stop the trend of much larger class sizes and so forth.

I also want to say, Madam Chair, that as a teacher – for 20 years I taught, and of course many of my colleagues are still teaching – I am just absolutely astounded at the increase in class size over the last decade or so, especially in high school. We know that if you want to look at improving learning outcomes, if we want to improve math skills, language skills, and so forth – my colleague opposite is a teacher of long standing as well – there's nothing better that you can do than to have a lower ratio between students and teachers in a classroom. I mean, there's a certain point, but certainly that's the first step that you would take in a triage, so to speak, of trying to

improve our outcomes to equip our young people for the essential math and language skills that they require and to send them on their way for a bright and prosperous future.

So the short version of it is that, yes, we did provide some mitigation in regard to a larger process that I think was heading in the wrong direction. Certainly, we ran strongly and received a very strong mandate to fix education here in the province, to invest in the next generation. As I said previously this afternoon, that's really the cornerstone of why we exist as this legislative body, to provide that education, health care, and infrastructure for the people of Alberta to live and prosper.

Mr. Connolly: I'd like to thank the hon. minister for his answer. I have a couple more things. Can the minister please detail for me the actual impacts an Alberta family will see as a result of the money that is supplied in the interim supply bill?

Mr. Eggen: Well, again, just very quickly, we know that there are certain students at more risk, that are more likely to be affected by the negative effects of not having that \$103 million in there to provide the education for an additional 12,000 or so students. I think one of the critical areas that we reinvested in was the restoration of grants for English-language learners. We have unprecedented immigration into the province of Alberta, not just from other parts of Canada but from all over the world. Again, often language learners are the most vulnerable if they don't find their feet and have that extra help to be successful in a regular classroom, so that restoration, I think, is absolutely important.

5:00

The second area where I know that we can find tangible and immediate benefit from the restoration of funding is around First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students in our schools. These are the areas where we are having the least success in terms of completion rates in regard to the acquisition and retention of essential math and language skills, so the restoration of funding will definitely have an immediate and significant impact on First Nations, Métis, and Inuit student programs that we will be further working on over these next weeks and months.

Mr. Connolly: Thank you once again. This is my last question before I'll be giving the rest of my time to the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie. What is the plan moving forward to continue addressing the funding needs of school boards in the province?

Mr. Eggen: Well, it's very important that we, Madam Chair, recognize the integrity of these democratically elected bodies to make decisions that can most directly and effectively impact the education of the students to which they are charged here in the province of Alberta. So it's very important that we take that feedback. The very first groups that I've been meeting with are school boards from around the province, and as we empower them, both with decision-making but also on a consultative basis, I think that we will get a better return for our allocation to the boards.

Again, this does extend to all the ways by which we deliver education here in the province of Alberta. I know there's been some sound and fury around home-schooling and with charter schools and private schools, but, I mean, we are responsible to all students in this province, and to ensure that there was adequate funding was one of the first things that I did when we did build this funding, to make sure that it's going right across in equal measure to fund all students here in the province. I think that as we move along, that is a solid way to look at how we should exercise our responsibility in the future. I know that we'll have many discussions around this, but certainly I wanted to provide security and the surety to know that

all students in this province would be funded and the school boards would have some sense of long-term stability that they could make better plans with.

The Chair: I recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Loyola: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's an honour and a privilege to be here in the Legislature, as it was an honour and a privilege for me to serve and work at the University of Alberta for the past seven years before being elected to this House. My questions are going to focus on postsecondary education.

While at the University of Alberta I was also elected president of the Non-Academic Staff Association, and it was a pleasure to serve as a support staff there. But while there serving on the NASA executive, we experienced a number of challenges due to the past government and their cutting to postsecondary education. It was an incredible shame. There was so much pressure put on the administration of the University of Alberta that they even felt the need to come to us and ask us to open our collective agreement just because of the financial pressures that the past government put on them. So the question that I have for the hon. Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education is: how are we going to help the institutions address their financial challenges as we move forward?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much. Thank you to the member for the question. Certainly, it's a significant concern of this government that postsecondary education has been underfunded for many, many years, and we are going to address that this year. We're moving to restore funding, the 1.4 per cent cut that the previous government had put in; to freeze tuition and support educational institutions to have funding for the shortfall from that so that the institutions aren't, you know, as they have been in the past, underfunded regarding that; and also to support them to make sure that they have the funding for market modifiers and noninstructional fees because we're freezing all of those also. We certainly see the concerns that postsecondaries faced and absolutely are moving on this and will restore funding.

The Chair: Just a reminder, hon. members, to please speak through the chair because it also helps with the microphone for *Hansard*. If you're turning a different direction, they can't hear you.

Mr. Loyola: Thank you for that reminder, Madam Chair, and thank you also to the minister. Because of past cuts the institutions announced program and staff cuts due to unpredictable government funding, so with the new funding that this government will provide, can students expect those programs and staff to be restored, hon. minister?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you. Thank you, Madam Chair. Regularly institutions review the programs that they offer to students, and, you know, on a regular basis some may be cut, some may be expanded. Those are going on, and some of that has already been done, so there may be some programs that will be restored, and some may not. It will depend on what the reasons are for the closure or the suspension. We expect that institutions will revisit their budgets and make appropriate decisions after this new injection of funding.

I want to reiterate, too, that the ministry reviews all proposals for suspensions and closures from institutions to ensure the system-wide Campus Alberta continues to meet students' needs. So some will; some won't.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Loyola: Thank you. You previously mentioned market modifiers, hon. minister, and at the time the previous government claimed that market modifiers were necessary to maintain the quality of the programs. But what will be the impact of this new funding on programs and enrolment, hon. minister?

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much. Institutions are going to receive funding to compensate for the market modifier rollback, to a total of \$22 million. Our government would also amend the regulation, which will freeze tuition at 2014-15 levels for two years. The compensation is on top of the restored funding of the 1.4 per cent cuts and an increase in base grant funding for cost of living. Due to the increased funding government is providing, there should be no need for institutions to adjust enrolment levels. Additionally, with increased funding we expect that institutions will maintain their plans to improve and increase program quality as they would have under the market modifiers.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Loyola: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the minister for that answer. We know that there is continued and increasing demand for skilled trades and a lack of spaces for students. Hon. minister, through the chair, what are you planning to do about apprenticeship seats?

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much. Madam Chair, you know, we have a commitment to ensure that all apprentices have seats in Alberta. We know that the demand for apprentices has gone up 70 per cent in the last decade in Alberta, and we know that we want to have enough trained tradespeople to work here in Alberta, because there is a lot of demand. We're absolutely investing in that and ensuring there are seats.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Loyola: Thank you, Madam Chair. I have no more questions at this time.

The Chair: Is there any other member to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

5:10

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll be asking questions to the Minister of Human Services. As many will know, I was a social worker that worked for Human Services for the last 10 years as a child protection worker, and I've seen the demand that's happened within the Ministry of Human Services in a variety of different areas and how those are impacting Albertans. To the Minister of Human Services. You indicated prior that there will be increases to the budget for Human Services. Can you indicate in what areas those increases will occur?

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Member, for asking the question. The first thing: I can assure that a portion of that increase will go to the area our member was working in, to improve the outcomes in that area. Secondly, the funds will be going toward the women's emergency shelters. Thirdly, the funds will be going to FCSS programs, which is a partnership between the municipality and the government to provide services to the municipalities. So those are the three main areas that we campaigned on, and those are

the areas we will be focusing on to improve and to allocate these funds.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Madam Chair. Can the minister please clarify in regard to child intervention how these funds will improve the outcomes for the child intervention stream?

Mr. Sabir: I think these new funds will be allocated to improve the children's services. We believe that kids are better served when they are raised in the community, so funds will be allocated for outcomes which are measurable so that kids are spending time in the community. Then these funds will be allocated toward the outcome that kids who are in temporary care are able to go back to their family and be reunited with their family. Wherever that's not possible, we will allocate funds to make sure that they get a permanent home and stability as soon as possible. These funds will also be allocated to improve services directed at the transition of youth into adulthood. These funds will also be directed at the services for indigenous communities, to make sure that services are provided to them in a culturally and traditionally appropriate manner.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Madam Chair. As we know, within Alberta, although we are a province that has benefited greatly from our resources, we also have seen that many Albertans do not have stable housing. Can the minister tell the House how these funds will be used to strengthen the shelter networks within Alberta?

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Member. These funds will be used to fund the second-stage housing of the women's shelters. In fact, I attended the AGM of the shelters' network two or three days ago, and the idea is that the absence of these houses, the absence of these places for women to turn to, reinforces and compounds the problem of family violence, because they don't have a place to turn to. These funds will be directed towards creating more spaces like second-stage shelter spaces so that they have the needed spot.

Thank you.

Ms Sweet: Thank you.

The Chair: That concludes the 20 minutes for that piece. We are now entering the final segment, where the rotation repeats the cycle. Speaking times are reduced to five minutes each, but that means you can combine your time with the minister for a total of 10 minutes of back and forth. We'll start with the Official Opposition. If they chose to share that time, that's all right, but you'll only get 10 minutes.

That being said, I will first recognize the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Chair. First of all, I just want to get some clarity. The Minister of Finance said that the way they were able to drive their numbers was to take the past budget, divide it by 12, and times that by five so that you get the five months you're looking at. Then there are four items also that you added into that.

The question I have for you. I'm not sure whether you or the Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour wants to answer this. In 2012-13 the operational budget for Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour, the amount for that, was \$143 million. In 2014 it was \$166 million, and this year it's \$74 million. With the projected or possible increases in unemployment with the low oil and with some of the policies that we deem not as advantageous for our economy as

maybe your side would, are there any provisions that you're taking into consideration to be able to make up for this possible increase in unemployment?

Mr. Ceci: We know the unemployment numbers are going to be rising. There's been a lag behind the decisions by major energy companies and their layoffs, so those kinds of EI numbers will be in our interim supply and addressed through the budgets that we have there. Yes, we're going to be addressing those.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you. I appreciate the comments.

How does it work with EI being a federal program and your role in that?

Mr. Ceci: Our role in that is to be conscious of all the numbers and the number of people who are leaving employment, going to EI, and subsequent to EI, if they need additional supports for Human Services to support them, we take that up. Social assistance numbers may be going up as a result, and we would be addressing those through this interim supply bill, that will give the money to the Human Services budget.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Chair. I don't want to be a stickler on this, but is that not just passing on the cost of that program to the federal government?

Mr. Ceci: Well, if you're talking about Human Services, no, we're not passing that on at all. We're addressing that through our service provision at the ministry. If people come to us and need help of last resort, this province delivers that through their many programs throughout Alberta. We have those dollars addressed in the Human Services budget.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Chair. Maybe I need to address this to Human Services. Is there money allocated for these provisions in order to be able to address this issue of rising unemployment?

Mr. Sabir: Madam Speaker, as the Minister of Finance indicated, there is a lag behind those layoffs and the timing of the pressure that will be felt from them. At this point there is an increase in the allocation, and that will help us sustain those services. When we come to the fall budget, we will have a better idea of what those pressures are so that we can build that into our budget and can provide for those pressures.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Chair. I think I'll have to move on from this one, then, and hope that we get some more clarity there in the future.

One of my questions. I live right next to the largest reserve in Canada, the Blood reserve, and there's a lot of need for educational programs to help them out of poverty and the struggles that they're in. The previous government committed \$600,000 to aboriginal development programs and partnerships. Will this government be increasing that amount, or will they be decreasing that amount?

5:20

Ms Ganley: Thank you for the question. At present I have numbers in front of me that deal only with interim supply, and in terms of

interim supply they've moved forward with the previously allocated budget.

In terms of developing the budget in the fall, as my colleagues have said on so many occasions, we are going to do a fulsome review of what's needed and what's available in order to move forward.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you for that.

Madam Chair, labour relations was previously budgeted at just under \$2 million. Are you expecting to raise this amount?

Mr. Ceci: Sorry, I didn't catch the last bit of your question. What was it?

Mr. Hunter: I apologize. Labour relations was previously budgeted at just under \$2 million. Are you expecting to raise this amount?

Mr. Ceci: Are we expected to raise this amount?

Mr. Hunter: Yes.

Mr. Ceci: I don't know. I don't think so. I can get back to you.

Mr. Hunter: Madam Chair, one of the concerns that will be coming up in the near future is the issue of workers' compensation and OH and S with farmers. Obviously, this is something that's going to be debated in the future, but given that your government is proposing increasing the number of people that will be going into workers' compensation with that increase in farmers and their workers, are you planning on increasing funding to that? What is your approach to this workers' compensation funding?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair. We're looking at interim supply right now. For this period the budget is not changing. It is going ahead as it was. There is going to be no new funding right now. In the new budget, that's coming out in the fall, we'll be looking at where we need to go from here. But at this point, for this interim supply, there is no new funding.

The Chair: Hon. member, you've concluded? You still have two minutes left in the 10 minutes. You're fine? Okay.

We will then move on to the next segment of the rotation, to the third party.

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you for the opportunity to speak on interim supply. I will preface my comments also by saying that I find it disappointing that the new government has elected to reduce the amount of debate to three hours. It's certainly a complete about-face. It may just have something to do with the chairs over on that side; I'm not just sure. But I will say that certainly it is a complete and total change from what you were preaching not six months ago, and it's a little disappointing to me that you've decided to take that approach.

Furthermore, I do want to reiterate what my colleague the hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway stated, and that is that the total lack of any detail in this is very frustrating. Quite frankly, in the limited three hours that we have, we're wasting a lot of it just asking, trying to get that detail that should be in the documentation that we're provided. Once again, I look back at the documentation that was provided back last spring, and it was considerable. It went department by department, what the changes were. If there are, in fact, only four adjustments, I think, you know, that certainly could

have been provided to the members on both sides of the House so that we could dig into that a lot more clearly.

But I would like to investigate into that. We have \$1.8 billion in additional spending. So far I've heard of \$103 million in Education and \$500 million in Health. Can the Minister of Finance detail to the House where the other portions of the \$1.8 billion are? In what departments? In what programs? What amounts are being spent?

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much for the question. I can say that the new money I think they're focusing specifically on. We have Education, Health, Human Services, and Innovation and Advanced Education as those target areas. The adjustments are in the range of \$45 million for Education. Health is half a billion. Human Services is \$39 million. Innovation and Advanced Education is \$40 million. Those are the ones that are the biggest buckets before us that we're investing in.

Dr. Starke: Well, Madam Chair, I must confess that it's a little bit unclear to me how that, then, arrives at \$1.8 billion, but I want to move on to some other specific questions.

With the Minister of Health we just got cut off, but I really do want to hear and have it on the record with regard to the ASLI grants. These were important grants that were announced, you know, just before the election, but quite frankly in the service and the needs of housing for our seniors across the province I think they were very well received. I just would like your confirmation that the ASLI grants that were announced are still going to go ahead under your government's program.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you for the question. Madam Chair, one of the first meetings we had was with the Continuing Care Association. I think that they understand, given some of the language that was in our platform, which your hon. colleague has referenced, around our desires around making sure that we're providing publicly funded and publicly delivered supports in the long term, that we're in a process right now where we're looking at some of those grants. I have communicated to get word out to them in a timely fashion. Right now I can't say definitively yes or definitively no, to be completely honest, but know that this is something that 22 days in I've made a priority to make sure that I familiarize myself with and can provide some clarity to the people who heard announcements made by the past government around what we can do moving forward. I don't want to say: stay tuned.

Dr. Starke: Well, Madam Chair, the subtext to that that I'm hearing, though, is that if there is a proposal that was approved for ASLI funding that is not publicly delivered – i.e., if it's being done by a private operator – those projects will be given a lower priority. Can the Minister of Seniors confirm that that is the case?

Ms Hoffman: Madam Chair, that is not the case. What we're doing right now is trying to make sure that we review all of the grants that have been announced previously, align them with our priorities moving forward, and work with the delivery providers to make sure that we're meeting the long-term needs. I want to make sure that every decision we make going forward we can hang our hat on and be proud of the science and the facts that went into making those decisions moving forward. Maybe "science" isn't the right word.

I want to make sure we're doing evidence-based decision-making, that there isn't political interference, and part of my responsibility to Albertans is to make sure that I take the opportunity right now to ensure that any decisions we make moving forward we will stand by. When we make announcements, you can count on that they'll be funded. Right now I just need to make sure that I have a little personal time to review those. Twenty-two days

hasn't been quite long enough, but I'm working quickly to try to make sure that I can provide some direction. So I can't do that today.

Dr. Starke: Well, Madam Chair, I can appreciate the time constraints that the minister is working under, but I can assure you that the ASLI grant that was announced for Vermilion-Lloydminster I'd be happy to provide you with all kinds of background information on and assure you of the merit of that particular application.

I'd like to move on to the minister of parks and recreation. One of the things that we heard during the course of the election campaign was that certain revenue enhancements would be rolled back, and one of the areas where revenue was actually changed was in, believe it or not, camping fees and cottage lease fees. These have lagged behind the market rates and what is being charged in the private sector, and as a result of that, it becomes difficult for the parks area to retain its overall ability to be viable. What I'd like to know is: are the camping fees going to be rolled back as you have rolled back other fee increases, and if so, what effect does that have on the overall parks budget?

Mr. Ceci: I think I'll take that by saying that, yes, we're rolling back a number of fees. I can tell the hon. member that the breadth of those fees, the actual fees that we're rolling back, will be the subject of some information shared in the very next few days. It's not here before us right now, but there are several buckets, several things that we are rolling back. You know about the health care levy. That one we're rolling back as well as . . . [interjections] Keep going? You want me to keep going on fees?

I will tell you that a number are being rolled back. We're going to have an announcement about those things in the next few days, and they amount to several hundred million dollars.

5:30

Dr. Starke: Well, Madam Chair, if I could offer a little bit of input, although it sounds like the decisions have already been made behind closed doors. One of the fee increases, for example, was the maximum fines for speeding through construction zones, the maximum fines for speeding past ambulances or police stopped on the side of the road. I mean, I'd like to know that those are not being considered for rollbacks. I do think that those were justified.

A question for whoever is answering on behalf of the Minister of Transportation, and it has to do with the water for life program. That's important in terms of delivering critical water infrastructure to rural communities. Some of these projects have been ongoing and require the ongoing funding from the Transportation department. I'd like someone to answer, if possible, what the status of water for life is. Has their funding been changed as a result of these interim supply estimates?

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much. I'll do my best to attempt to answer on behalf of the Minister of Transportation. It's my understanding that, again, the dollars that were allocated in the previous government's budget for water for life have not been changed, but I will make a note of it and ensure that the Minister of Transportation notifies you and members of the House.

Dr. Starke: Madam Chair, just as a final comment, I will mention that I'm hearing from a lot of stakeholders in my constituency that there is a great deal of uncertainty from this government. They're saying on the one hand that nothing has changed and in fact the budget will be going ahead with the allocations that have been listed, yet a number of projects and a number of issues have been

told: "You're on hold. Don't go anywhere. There's nothing certain. We have some decisions to make." I'm just going to encourage the government to make the decisions as quickly as possible because this level of uncertainty is not helpful to anybody. It's not helpful to you and your reputation as a new government, and it's not helpful to the constituencies.

I'd like to cede the rest of my time to the hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway.

Mr. Bilous: Madam Chair, can I respond, please, on behalf of the government?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: I'd like to respond to that. I appreciate the member's remarks, but I do want to remind the House that this is an interim supply. This is not a budget. This is designed to ensure that government keeps running and not just government but programs and services that Albertans rely upon. We will very much so be bringing out a budget with much detail this fall, that will go through exactly how our government plans to spend and the programs that we plan to deliver for Albertans.

Again, this is an interim supply bill that, obviously, as members can appreciate, needs to go through this House, through this process in order to continue our services and programs past June 30. Therefore, you know, we ask that members in the House be patient with their responses.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

That brings that segment to an end. We'll move once more through the rotation.

I can recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow if you're in agreement. Do you want to share the 10 minutes? You can do that as well.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Madam Chair. I will be brief. I just have a question for whoever is answering on behalf of the Minister of Transportation. Perhaps the Minister of Environment and Parks may want to answer this question. Previously it was noted that there's \$23 million in interim supply to continue the floodway buyout program. This is one of the most odious and ill-considered policies that I've perhaps ever seen. We haven't achieved any clear public policy objective that I can see, yet we've wasted over \$100 million.

I will take some time here to speak slowly, as I see the minister returning to his seat. I'll reiterate my point here. As I talk about the floodway buyout program and as I look through the communities in High River and the communities in Calgary that have been hollowed out by this ill-considered policy, where people were given a full market value buyout on their homes, barely a hundred people of the 254 homeowners eligible for this program chose to take the buyout. But those that did cost the taxpayers and the people of Alberta over \$100 million. At the same time, we have not cleared the floodway. The purpose of that program is to move those impediments out of the fast-flowing waters in the time of flood.

Well, whether we like it or not, over the last hundred-plus years we've built in places we probably shouldn't have built. However, that has left our communities hollowed out, and it has not made us at any less risk because now there are still two-thirds of those houses in the way. It's going to hit the next one, and it's going to take a sharp left-hand turn, and it's still going to devastate those communities. My question, then, through the chair, is: will the minister consider reversing that buyout, not spending that \$23

million that have been allocated, and instead dedicate those resources to upstream flood mitigation to ensure that all people, not just in those communities but the business owners and residents in other areas that are at risk of flooding, are protected?

Thank you.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you for the question. What the interim supply is meant to do is keep the business of government moving so that we can conduct a more full review of flood mitigation as we are going forward. I am not inclined to give a hundred per cent stamp of approval to the previous government's policy initiatives with respect to flood mitigation. As I have said previously, I'm loath to claim that all of their decisions were terrible. I'm equally loath to give them all the stamp of having acted in the public interest. So, Madam Chair, as we review our flood mitigation options, this program will be part of that, but in this interim supply period what we are debating here are the ongoing operations of the government. But those programs are certainly under review.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm glad to hear that those programs are under review. This one, in particular, I think offers us an opportunity, as we review those programs, to identify an area where we can really make some change by reversing it. So I'll ask the same question of the minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. Will you in fact reverse that and not spend those dollars on the buyout program and find a better use for them?

Thank you.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much for that question. I think it's a very good question, a reasonable question, and a thoughtful question. I am obviously not going to give you an answer right now because I would like to provide you with a reasonable and thoughtful answer, which requires some time to look at these things we have. As you could no doubt guess, there are a hundred or more issues in each of our departments – and many of us have two departments – that we need to become familiar with. But I will take the point that the member is suggesting. I will discuss it with my colleagues and in due course will provide you with a specific, detailed, and reasonable answer.

Dr. Swann: Just a couple of questions with respect to perhaps Human Services, specifically. I didn't see anything related to either early childhood development enhancements or affordable child care, which were pretty strong commitments of this new government. Can the minister elaborate a little bit on what their vision is? If not in this budget, where are they going with early childhood development enrichment and affordable child care?

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Member, for raising this question. As indicated earlier, the numbers in this budget are based on the previous budget, so what we have done is added \$39 million. That amount will be used to sustain and improve services. Insofar as child care is related, we understand that it's a very important issue. I even heard my caucus colleagues talking these days about how they're looking for child care spaces. We have committed to providing \$25 a day child care. In the coming days we will be looking at that in a more fulsome manner, and we will be able to provide more clarity and more information on that.

Thank you.

5:40

Dr. Swann: The last Minister of Education funded \$5 million research called the early childhood mapping project. Very impressive results: almost 50 per cent of children under the age of six delayed in one parameter out of the five major parameters for milestones in the preschool years. I hope the minister will take that under advisement, that this is an urgent priority. Many of these organizations across the province that did the baseline research are ready and willing and able to provide some of the early childhood resources if they have support from government. It would be a great loss to this province if we were not able to provide some of those resources to sustain the great work that's been done for five years in early childhood development mapping, that now has identified the problems, and there are no resources to deal with up to 50 per cent of children who are not meeting the milestones.

I want to put that on the record. I want to put it on your agenda and make sure that we find some shift of resources, perhaps. Whether it's from your department or Health, we need to ensure that. This is a primary prevention opportunity that again we're missing.

To shift gears just a little bit, the other area I wanted to raise was the early intervention in cancer identification. With respect to the health system there are tremendous opportunities if we were to be more systematic about screening programs, if primary care networks were given those resources that appear to have been cut. I've heard from the primary care networks that they are told to cut the \$75 million from their budgets this year. Prevention efforts, early intervention, health promotion, wellness: all these things are being sidelined again because of the priority of acute problems, so we are again missing a tremendous prevention opportunity if we cut this \$75 million from primary care networks and a tremendous opportunity in early childhood development if we don't identify high-risk families and get the resources to the community that could potentially deal with this.

One final comment more than a question has to do with the corporate survey in Human Services that year after year after year shows low morale, shows lack of confidence in management, shows real challenges within the department. Somehow resources need to be found to address some of the staff needs. It needs to be part and parcel of any budgeting to ensure that we start to address some of the demoralization of Human Services staff for whatever reasons, many different reasons. I do not want that to be lost in discussions about money, that people in the department have tremendous potential for improving their productivity if their concerns and frustrations and disappointments and overtaxed resources, in some cases, are not being addressed.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

We now will go to this side of the House for the segment of 10 minutes if we have speakers.

The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Chair. As many in the House may know, I've been a registered nurse for over 17 years, so I'd like to direct my questions to the Minister of Health. During the campaign I heard many questions from my constituents and even from people from other constituencies with concerns regarding health care. Will the interim funding help make sure that people in rural communities are able to access primary care?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, colleagues, for your attention as I engage in responding to this important question raised by my colleague.

In terms of the \$500 million that's being injected back into this budget, obviously we know that Albertans resoundingly rejected the past budget that was being proposed, which would have seen \$1.1 billion in cuts in the budget moving forward, and that's why we have this reinjection of the \$500 million. That will be provided throughout the province to ensure, like I said, the patient growth and to reverse that \$136 million, I believe it was, in cuts. So this is money for growth, and in rural areas where there's growth, there will of course be funds to follow those patients.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Chair. I also would like to ask the Minister of Health how the interim supply funding for Health will deal with wait times as certainly wait times for procedures have been a concern. So how will the interim supply funding ensure that wait times do not get worse?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, hon. member, for the question. [interjections] I know you guys don't want me to waste time, but I'm having a really hard time being able to respond when I hear your questions louder than my own voice. Thank you.

I want to make sure that – see, now I'm off track about the question. Wait times. In terms of the past budget that was proposed in the spring, there were, like I said, these \$1.1 billion in cuts, which we know would have impacted our ability to deliver on the front lines in terms of physicians, nurses, EMTs, other front-line service providers. By this House today reinjecting this \$500 million to make sure that we can continue to fund growth moving forward, we will have the resources necessary to be able to serve the needs of these 70,000-plus new Alberta patients that we're expecting to come into our system, because not only are babies being born, but people continue to move here from other places, around Canada and internationally. So we need to make sure that we continue to offer the type of public health care that they so rightly deserve, moving here to Alberta.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Madam Chair. As many of you may know, my role was as a public health nurse, and working with fellow home-care nurses, there was much frustration about access to home care. So I would like to know: will the additional funding make sure that people are able to access home care?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Madam Chair. Again, a big piece in the platform related to health care – we talked about mental health, we talked about long-term care, we talked about wait times, and another big piece of that is around home care. As was laid out in the platform and as we're so proudly moving forward on, these additional allocations today will have some room for us to grow in that area. In the fall and in subsequent NDP budgets we'll have an opportunity to look specifically at those line items and to be very proud of the investment we're making as legislators here to meet the needs of Albertans, especially those who are in a variety of different situations and want to be able to age in place.

Thank you.

The Chair: Is there another hon. member wishing to speak on this side?

If not, then we will continue on with the rotation, and we'll return to the Wildrose caucus. I have next on my list the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Sorry; he's not here. Oops. The hon. Member for Highwood. I get myself in trouble.

Mr. W. Anderson: Oh, great. Put me up just before dinner. Here we go. I'm holding you up.

Anyway, thank you, Madam Chair. Interestingly enough, I've been sitting here patiently listening for the last two hours and 50 minutes to talk about spending money, allocating funds, interim budgets. These are great words – I love them all – but I never heard the word “savings.” Nowhere has anybody talked about saving money.

Now, for those who don't know me, I come from the private sector. I've managed to go through a few mergers and acquisitions in my past and been able to grow a couple of businesses with my esteemed colleagues in the private sector. But typically when there's a change of management, a change in an organization such as this – and congratulations, my esteemed friends on the opposite side of the House, but you can obviously see that my friends on the left, no pun intended, have been downsized a little bit. Downsizing is something that we don't look negatively at in the private sector, but when it does happen, typically there's duality of process, there's systems change, intellectual capital changes, people change, bricks and mortar change. These changes are often good.

I have to commend my esteemed colleagues on the other side of the House. A lot of you have taken on dual portfolios. Congratulations. That's a heavy workload. In doing so, what you've done is that you've reduced the size of your ministry obligations, i.e. the cost of those. But typically when that happens, there are usually some savings involved. Duality of process, intellectual capital, bricks and mortar: these are things that cost money. If you're collapsing the size of your ministries, where are the savings? I haven't heard anything about savings. Can the Minister of Finance tell me: what are you doing with that money?

5:50

Mr. Ceci: I appreciate the hon. member's question. This is an interim supply bill, so we are supplying money to the programs and services of the different ministries that require it. We are already hard at work on a budget, and that will put Alberta's families' priorities first. But I can tell you that we expect all departments to look at all options through this budget process that we're engaged in and to address the savings that the hon. member is asking for.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. W. Anderson: Thank you, Madam Chair. I look forward to those dollar amounts. Thank you very much.

I want to just put this on the record. I know that my esteemed colleague to the left of me managed to talk about the water for life program. The town of Okotoks is in my constituency. This town has approximately 30,000 people. For the last two years they have been looking at being provided with what we call potable water, or drinking water. They've applied through the water for life program for a pipeline from the city of Calgary. It was denied and turned down. The water for life program I think has been decreased by about – I forget – \$30 million in the last budget. I just want to put on the record that I want to know from this government that they will be providing additional funds to the water for life program. Keep it on the record for the town of Okotoks.

Thank you.

Mr. Mason: We'll certainly be making that decision in the fall budget. I appreciate that the hon. member, in theory, is looking for savings, but in the end, like all the others, he's asking us to spend money.

Mr. W. Anderson: Well, you've got to get the money from somewhere. Hopefully, it's not just tax and spend again.

One last question. I want to put this to the minister of services. In your interim budget you've got allocated budget for capital of \$12 million. I'm just asking the question: is that for newly announced projects or for existing projects? Can you clarify that for me, sir?

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much to the hon. member. I'm just looking to see if I can quickly see what the capital investment is, and I think, unfortunately, that you're either going to have to give me a couple of minutes, or I will get back to you in writing exactly with some details as far as the capital investment. You're talking about Service Alberta, just to clarify. I will get back to you shortly here, and I appreciate your patience. Sorry; through the chair.

Mr. W. Anderson: I'd like to turn the rest of my time over to my esteemed colleague.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you so much. It's a pleasure to rise.

An Hon. Member: Time is a-ticking.

Mr. Cooper: We've got all the time in the world. Unfortunately, for this evening we have five minutes before we get to have dinner, and I'm so pleased that we get to come back to conclude this whopping amount of time that the government has so graciously allotted for us to debate this significant piece of supply, that we'll be able to do after the dinner break.

I just wanted to quickly double-check here. I know that I'm new, generally speaking, around these halls. I am particularly new to the Chamber. I was a little perplexed yesterday, but the Government House Leader implied that we should be familiar with this supply bill because 90 per cent of it is the same. I just wanted to remind him that, well, 90 per cent of the bill may be the same; 70 per cent, whatever it is, of the House has never seen this. So, you know, to imply that we don't really need to debate it because 90 per cent of it's the same as the last guy's is a little bit untoward. It would have been great for all of those who wanted to speak – and I can tell you that there are number of others in our caucus who didn't have the chance – to have allowed them that opportunity.

But I wanted to quickly just clarify two things, particularly with respect to the interim financial policy that the government seems to be working from. I'm just curious if the Finance minister or whoever would like to speak to it would clarify for us why the interim financial policy that you're working off is directly attributed to a budget that was never passed in this place and not to a budget that had been passed and introduced, three Premiers ago, by the former Premier Redford.

Mr. Ceci: I'd liked to respond through the hon. chair. It's really the only thing we had to work from. The previous work that had been done by the previous government is what we looked at. We didn't have time to produce our own budget, so we needed to work with the best estimates before us, and those are here save for the additions that we have put in and talked about, save for the additional expenditures, the elimination of fees and levies that we're not going to bring in. So that's the best work that we had to work from, and we've put it before you.

Mr. Cooper: I will add that I think it's a little unfortunate, working from a document that in many respects doesn't really exist because it never was passed. While it was presented, it certainly never became law and never became the direction of this government.

Mr. McIver: It's on the Internet.

Mr. Cooper: It is on the Internet. I've seen it there.

I'm seeking a little bit of clarification. We understand that 90 per cent of this is exactly the same and that 10 per cent is a change. I understand that we've talked about 12 divided by five plus four new items, and the four new items make up the 10 per cent. I'm just curious to know if the Finance minister would be willing to try and

provide some clarification, perhaps even be willing to provide a line-by-line for this House, certainly before we vote on what very likely will become the appropriations bill, on exactly what that 10 per cent is and perhaps in the moments remaining provide some clarification around exactly what that spending is going to be for.

Mr. Ceci: Madam Chair, through you to the hon. member: I think I identified the focus for those . . .

The Chair: Hon. members, I hesitate to interrupt, but the clock is now 6 p.m., and this committee is recessed until 7:30 tonight.

[The committee adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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The 29th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

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Day 3

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

First Session

Wanner, Hon. Robert E., Medicine Hat (ND), Speaker
Jabbour, Deborah C., Peace River (ND), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Feehan, Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (ND), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Cooper, Nathan, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (W),
Official Opposition House Leader
Cortes-Vargas, Estefania, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (ND)
Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake (W),
Official Opposition Deputy Whip
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (ND)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South West (ND)
Drever, Deborah, Calgary-Bow (Ind)
Drysdale, Wayne, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (PC),
Progressive Conservative Opposition Whip
Eggen, Hon. David, Edmonton-Calder (ND)
Ellis, Mike, Calgary-West (PC)
Fildebrandt, Derek Gerhard, Strathmore-Brooks (W)
Fitzpatrick, Maria M., Lethbridge-East (ND)
Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (PC)
Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., Calgary-Buffalo (ND)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (ND)
Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (PC)
Gray, Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (ND)
Hanson, David B., Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills (W),
Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
Hinkley, Bruce, Wetaskiwin-Camrose (ND)
Hoffman, Hon. Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (ND)
Horne, Trevor A.R., Spruce Grove-St. Albert (ND)
Hunter, Grant R., Cardston-Taber-Warner (W)
Jansen, Sandra, Calgary-North West (PC)
Jean, Brian Michael, QC, Fort McMurray-Conklin (W),
Leader of the Official Opposition
Kazim, Anam, Calgary-Glenmore (ND)
Kleinstuber, Jamie, Calgary-Northern Hills (ND)
Larivee, Danielle, Lesser Slave Lake (ND)
Littlewood, Jessica, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (ND)
Loewen, Todd, Grande Prairie-Smoky (W)
Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (ND)
Luff, Robyn, Calgary-East (ND)
MacIntyre, Donald, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (W)
Malkinson, Brian, Calgary-Currie (ND)
Mason, Hon. Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (ND),
Government House Leader
McCuaig-Boyd, Hon. Margaret,
Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley (ND)
McIver, Ric, Calgary-Hays (PC),
Leader of the Progressive Conservative Opposition
McKittrick, Annie, Sherwood Park (ND)
McLean, Stephanie V., Calgary-Varsity (ND),
Deputy Government Whip
McPherson, Karen M., Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill (ND)
Miller, Barb, Red Deer-South (ND)
Miranda, Ricardo, Calgary-Cross (ND)
Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (ND)
Nixon, Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (W),
Official Opposition Whip
Notley, Hon. Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (ND),
Premier
Orr, Ronald, Lacombe-Ponoka (W)
Payne, Brandy, Calgary-Acadia (ND)
Phillips, Hon. Shannon, Lethbridge-West (ND),
Deputy Government House Leader
Piquette, Colin, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater (ND)
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie (W)
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (ND)
Rodney, Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC)
Rosendahl, Eric, West Yellowhead (ND)
Sabir, Hon. Irfan, Calgary-McCall (ND)
Schmidt, Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (ND),
Government Whip
Schneider, David A., Little Bow (W)
Schreiner, Kim, Red Deer-North (ND)
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-Centre (ND)
Sigurdson, Hon. Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (ND)
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (W)
Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC),
Progressive Conservative Opposition House Leader
Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (W)
Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (W)
Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (ND)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (ND)
Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (W)
Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (ND)
van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND)
Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)
Vacant, Calgary-Foothills

Party standings:

New Democrat: 53 Wildrose: 21 Progressive Conservative: 9 Alberta Liberal: 1 Alberta Party: 1 Independent: 1 Vacant: 1

Officers and Officials of the Legislative Assembly

W.J. David McNeil, Clerk	Stephanie LeBlanc, Parliamentary Counsel and Legal Research Officer	Brian G. Hodgson, Sergeant-at-Arms
Robert H. Reynolds, QC, Law Clerk/ Director of Interparliamentary Relations	Philip Massolin, Manager of Research Services	Chris Caughell, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms
Shannon Dean, Senior Parliamentary Counsel/Director of House Services	Nancy Robert, Research Officer	Gordon H. Munk, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms
		Janet Schwegel, Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>

Executive Council

Rachel Notley	Premier, President of Executive Council, Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations
Deron Bilous	Minister of Municipal Affairs, Minister of Service Alberta
Oneil Carlier	Minister of Agriculture and Forestry
Joe Ceci	President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance
David Eggen	Minister of Education, Minister of Culture and Tourism
Kathleen T. Ganley	Minister of Justice and Solicitor General, Minister of Aboriginal Relations
Sarah Hoffman	Minister of Health, Minister of Seniors
Brian Mason	Minister of Transportation, Minister of Infrastructure
Margaret McCuaig-Boyd	Minister of Energy
Shannon Phillips	Minister of Environment and Parks, Minister Responsible for the Status of Women
Irfan Sabir	Minister of Human Services
Lori Sigurdson	Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education, Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Coolahan
Deputy Chair: Mr. Schneider
Anderson, S. Jansen
Carson Larivee
Fitzpatrick McKitrick
Gotfried Schreiner
Hanson Sucha
Horne Taylor
Hunter

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Ms Miller
Deputy Chair: Mr. Nielsen
Cyr Piquette
Ellis Renaud
Malkinson Taylor
Miranda

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Sweet
Deputy Chair: Mr. Smith
Goehring Pitt
Hinkley Rodney
Jansen Shepherd
Littlewood Swann
Luff Westhead
Orr Yao
Payne

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Ms Woollard
Deputy Chair: Mr. Dach
Bhullar Nixon
Connolly Shepherd
Cooper Sweet
Cortes-Vargas van Dijken
Kleinsteuber

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Wanner
Deputy Chair: Mr. Schmidt
Cooper McLean
Fildebrandt Nielsen
Goehring Nixon
Luff Piquette
McIver

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Ms McPherson
Deputy Chair: Mr. Kleinsteuber
Anderson, W. Hinkley
Babcock Littlewood
Connolly McKitrick
Dang Rosendahl
Drever Stier
Drysdale Strankman
Fraser

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Dr. Turner
Deputy Chair: Ms Fitzpatrick
Carson Loyola
Coolahan McPherson
Cooper Schneider
Ellis Starke
Hanson van Dijken
Kazim Woollard
Larivee

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. Fildebrandt
Deputy Chair: Ms Gray
Barnes Malkinson
Bhullar Miller
Cyr Payne
Dach Renaud
Gotfried Turner
Hunter Westhead
Loyola

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Ms Kazim
Deputy Chair: Mr. Loewen
Aheer MacIntyre
Anderson, S. Rosendahl
Babcock Schreiner
Clark Stier
Drysdale Sucha
Horne Woollard
Kleinsteuber

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, June 17, 2015

Committee of Supply

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I'll call the Committee of Supply to order.

Interim Supply Estimates 2015-16 (No. 2) General Revenue Fund and Lottery Fund

The Chair: As per our rotation earlier this afternoon we're just going to finish up. We have eight minutes left. This next segment will be for the third party if someone wishes to speak. The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thanks, Madam Chair. I've got a few questions here. One deals with the government's platform. I'm referring this time to item 6.1, which reads:

Large profitable corporations will contribute a little more. We will cut the PCs' wasteful corporate tax breaks, by increasing Alberta corporate tax to 12% (from 10%), retaining the current small business tax rate and no sales tax.

My question is: how does the government delineate between large profitable corporations and medium profitable corporations and small profitable corporations?

Mr. Ceci: To the hon. member: the same way I think the third party did when they were in government. We're not changing any of that. The tax rates will stay the same for small businesses up to \$500,000, and then for those over that it'll change. We're bringing that bill before this House tomorrow.

Mr. McIver: So is that small corporations under \$500,000 that will still pay the 12 per cent? Is that correct, Minister?

Mr. Ceci: I think businesses.

Mr. McIver: I'm asking about corporations, Minister, quite specifically.

Mr. Ceci: Sure. Sure. I'm getting lots of nods of agreement on this side.

Mr. McIver: So corporations under \$500,000 won't pay the 12 per cent. Is that what I'm hearing?

Mr. Ceci: On the first \$500,000 they pay 3 per cent. [interjection] For small businesses 3 per cent.

The Chair: Hon. members, for the sake of order we need one person speaking at a time and only one standing.

Mr. McIver: I'm going to defend the government right now. I think we agreed to go back and forth, so I'm not offended by what happened there. I don't mean to be out of line, Madam Chair, but we did agree to go back and forth. So I'm going to defend them. If you want to give me heck, that's okay. Well, that is important to me.

Now, the other question I have is that I heard that Treasury Board is meeting later tonight. Madam Chair, I'm going to be less kind to the government now. Could it be that the government, who is in control of the whole schedule, including when Treasury Board is meeting and including when estimates happens – did they

intentionally put Treasury Board after this so they'd have fewer answers for us now? I'm going to ask the question.

Mr. Ceci: No. Treasury Board, as you know, hon. member, for us usually happens on Thursdays every other week. We have some caucus business that we need to attend to tomorrow at the time that Treasury Board usually meets. Unbeknownst to the chair, it was moved to 6 today so that we would get it in and deal with important business that had nothing to do with the kinds of things that you're concerned about.

Mr. McIver: Then, Madam Chair, you'll have to forgive me if I remain suspicious.

It was mentioned by the Minister of Human Services that there would be additional funding for FCSS. What percentage of additional funding do you anticipate, or are you going to increase, based on these estimates?

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you for the question. We will be increasing the existing funding, which is at roughly around 76. We will be adding \$10 million more to it, and it will be based on the same 80-20 split formula; 80 per cent will be funded by the government, and municipalities will be required to come up with their 20 per cent.

Mr. McIver: So that's a \$30 million increase?

An Hon. Member: No, that's \$10 million.

Mr. McIver: A \$10 million increase. And on a percentage of what's currently funded it's . . .

Mr. Sabir: Currently it's an 80-20 split. The government provides 80 per cent, and the municipalities are required to put in 20 per cent. So that will remain the same.

Mr. McIver: I think I'll have to ask the question another time. How much time do I have left?

The Chair: Three minutes.

Mr. McIver: Three minutes. Then I will say that we have more questions and we'll continue, but before we're finished, I will say that I know there were a lot of complaints, quite a few complaints, about not having enough time. But I will say that the Official Opposition didn't use all the time they were allotted earlier on. They passed some on to us, so we will use it because we actually have enough questions to fill all the time.

Madam Chair, my question is . . . [interjection] I think it is my time now, Madam Chair. I will say that there is a remark in the platform of the government that says that they will get rid of private business that the government has. I think they used the word "experiment." Which things are you going to make public that the government now does business with privately, please?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you for the question. In terms of the platform it talks about experiments in privatization of health care. What we're referring to is a lot of the experiments of the caucus that the hon. member is a member of over the last several years. What we're talking about is making sure that we don't continue around bringing us toward an American, corporatized health care system. We are really proud of what we have here in Alberta, and we want to make sure that it continues to serve Albertans through not just public funding but public delivery.

Mr. McIver: Madam Chair, I'm quite pleased that the Health minister is very proud of what our government had going before they took over. I thank you for the compliment. It means a lot to me; it means a lot to our caucus. That was a wonderful endorsement that you just gave.

But it does lead to my next question. Are you going to privatize the PCNs? Because that's what it sounds like. I think the PCNs deserve to have an answer to that based on what I just heard here in the House.

Ms Hoffman: No.

Mr. McIver: Well, Madam Chair, that might be the first full answer we've received all night, and I would be remiss if I did not thank the Health minister for such a forthright answer without delay.

Now, Madam Chair, one of the other questions that I had – and there were comments about what is and what isn't – was about forest fires. To the minister of ESRD or the President of Treasury Board, either way: is there money allocated in the additional estimates for forest fires? We know from our time in government that that can be unpredictable. There have been a large number of forest fires now. Are any of those forest fires represented in these supplementary estimates?

Vote on Interim Supply Estimates 2015-16 (No. 2) General Revenue Fund and Lottery Fund

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, but pursuant to Government Motion 8, agreed to on June 16, 2015, the allotted time of three hours has lapsed, so I must now put the following question. After considering the 2015-16 interim supply estimates No. 2 for the Legislative Assembly for the fiscal period ending March 31, 2016, support to the Legislative Assembly, \$33 million, are you agreed?

[The voice vote did not indicate agreement]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 7:38 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, S.	Gray	Miranda
Babcock	Hinkley	Nielsen
Bilous	Hoffman	Payne
Carlier	Horne	Phillips
Carson	Kazim	Piquette
Ceci	Kleinsteuber	Renaud
Clark	Larivee	Rosendahl
Connolly	Littlewood	Sabir
Coolahan	Loyola	Schmidt
Cortes-Vargas	Luff	Schreiner
Dach	Malkinson	Sigurdson
Dang	Mason	Sucha
Drever	McCuaig-Boyd	Swann
Feehan	McKitrick	Sweet
Fitzpatrick	McLean	Turner
Ganley	McPherson	Westhead
Goehring	Miller	Woollard

7:50

Against the motion:

Aheer	Hanson	Schneider
Anderson, W.	Hunter	Smith
Cooper	Loewen	Starke
Cyr	MacIntyre	Stier
Drysdale	McIver	Strankman
Ellis	Nixon	Taylor
Fildebrandt	Orr	van Dijken
Fraser	Pitt	Yao
Gotfried		

Totals: For – 51 Against – 25

[Support to the Legislative Assembly was agreed to]

The Chair: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Madam Chair, I would request the unanimous support of the House to shorten the interval for the bells to one minute for the remainder of the evening.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Chair: Moving back to the process on the vote. Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:
Office of the Auditor General \$11,000,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:
Office of the Ombudsman \$1,400,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:
Office of the Chief Electoral Officer \$1,000,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:
Office of the Ethics Commissioner \$425,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:
Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner \$2,852,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:
Office of the Child and Youth Advocate \$5,632,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:
Office of the Public Interest Commissioner \$525,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:
Aboriginal Relations
Expense \$84,800,000
Capital Investment \$10,000
Financial Transactions \$32,115,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:
Agriculture and Forestry
Expense \$336,121,000
Capital Investment \$9,804,000
Financial Transactions \$982,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:
Culture and Tourism
Expense \$174,910,000
Capital Investment \$2,092,000
Financial Transactions \$3,610,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:
Education
Expense \$1,988,400,000
Capital Investment \$671,100,000
Financial Transactions \$7,687,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:
Energy
Expense \$160,000,000
Capital Investment \$2,500,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:
Environment and Parks
Expense \$256,378,000
Capital Investment \$111,046,000
Financial Transactions \$41,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:
Executive Council
Expense \$9,475,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:
Health
Expense \$7,746,317,000
Capital Investment \$32,494,000
Financial Transactions \$27,700,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:
Human Services
Expense \$1,803,518,000
Capital Investment \$2,279,000
Financial Transactions \$305,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:
Infrastructure
Expense \$228,500,000
Capital Investment \$440,000,000
Financial Transactions \$28,100,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:

Innovation and Advanced Education	
Expense	\$1,203,669,000
Capital Investment	\$21,440,000
Financial Transactions	\$437,000,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:

International and Intergovernmental Relations	
Expense	\$14,680,000
Capital Investment	\$10,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:

Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour	
Expense	\$74,469,000
Capital Investment	\$500,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

8:00

Agreed to:

Justice and Solicitor General	
Expense	\$473,905,000
Capital Investment	\$25,960,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:

Municipal Affairs	
Expense	\$105,402,000
Capital Investment	\$4,246,000
Financial Transactions	\$173,704,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:

Seniors	
Expense	\$263,096,000
Financial Transactions	\$10,211,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:

Service Alberta	
Expense	\$116,916,000
Capital Investment	\$12,268,000
Financial Transactions	\$6,379,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Agreed to:

Transportation	
Expense	\$339,712,000
Capital Investment	\$641,462,000
Financial Transactions	\$32,552,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

For the Department of Treasury Board and Finance for the fiscal period ending March 31, 2016: expense, \$62,840,000; capital investment, \$1,135,000; financial transactions, \$4,197,000; transfer from the lottery fund, \$386,929,000. Are you agreed?

[The voice vote did not indicate agreement]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 8:03 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, S.	Gray	Miranda
Babcock	Hinkley	Nielsen
Bilous	Hoffman	Payne
Carlier	Horne	Phillips
Carson	Kazim	Piquette
Ceci	Kleinstauber	Renaud
Clark	Larivee	Rosendahl
Connolly	Littlewood	Sabir
Coolahan	Loyola	Schmidt
Cortes-Vargas	Luff	Schreiner
Dach	Malkinson	Sigurdson
Dang	Mason	Sucha
Drever	McCuaig-Boyd	Swann
Feehan	McKitrick	Sweet
Fitzpatrick	McLean	Turner
Ganley	McPherson	Westhead
Goehring	Miller	Woollard

Against the motion:

Aheer	Gotfried	Schneider
Anderson, W.	Hanson	Starke
Cooper	Hunter	Stier
Cyr	Loewen	Strankman
Drysdale	MacIntyre	Taylor
Ellis	Nixon	van Dijken
Fildebrandt	Orr	Yao
Fraser	Pitt	

Totals: For – 51 Against – 23

[Support to the Department of Treasury Board and Finance was agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The committee shall now rise and report.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Ms Gray: Madam Speaker, the Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

The following resolutions relating to the 2015-16 interim supply estimates, No. 2, for the general revenue fund and lottery fund for the fiscal period ending March 31, 2016, have been approved.

8:10

Support to the Legislative Assembly, \$33,000,000; office of the Auditor General, \$11,000,000; office of the Ombudsman, \$1,400,000; office of the Chief Electoral Officer, \$1,000,000; office of the Ethics Commissioner, \$425,000; office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, \$2,852,000; office of the Child and Youth Advocate, \$5,632,000; office of the Public Interest Commissioner, \$525,000.

Aboriginal Relations: expense, \$84,800,000; capital investment, \$10,000; financial transactions, \$32,115,000.

Agriculture and Forestry: expense, \$336,121,000; capital investment, \$9,804,000; financial transactions, \$982,000.

Culture and Tourism: expense, \$174,910,000; capital investment, \$2,092,000; financial transactions, \$3,610,000.

Education: expense, \$1,988,400,000; capital investment, \$671,100,000; financial transactions, \$7,687,000.

Energy: expense, \$160,000,000; capital investment, \$2,500,000.

Environment and Parks: expense, \$256,378,000; capital investment, \$111,046,000; financial transactions, \$41,000.

Executive Council: expense, \$9,475,000.

Health: expense, \$7,746,317,000; capital investment, \$32,494,000; financial transactions, \$27,700,000.

Human Services: expense, \$1,803,518,000; capital investment, \$2,279,000; financial transactions, \$305,000.

Infrastructure: expense, \$228,500,000; capital investment, \$440,000,000; financial transactions, \$28,100,000.

Innovation and Advanced Education: expense, \$1,203,669,000; capital investment, \$21,440,000; financial transactions, \$437,000,000.

International and Intergovernmental Relations: expense, \$14,680,000; capital investment, \$10,000.

Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour: expense, \$74,469,000; capital investment, \$500,000.

Justice and Solicitor General: expense, \$473,905,000; capital investment, \$25,960,000.

Municipal Affairs: expense, \$105,402,000; capital investment, \$4,246,000; financial transactions, \$173,704,000.

Seniors: expense, \$263,096,000; financial transactions, \$10,211,000.

Service Alberta: expense, \$116,916,000; capital investment, \$12,268,000; financial transactions, \$6,379,000.

Transportation: expense, \$339,712,000; capital investment, \$641,462,000; financial transactions, \$32,552,000.

Treasury Board and Finance: expense, \$62,840,000; capital investment, \$1,135,000; financial transactions, \$4,197,000; transfer from the lottery fund, \$386,929,000.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

I would like to alert hon. members that Standing Order 61(3) provides that upon the Assembly concurring in the report by the Committee of Supply, the Assembly immediately reverts to Introduction of Bills for introduction of the appropriation bill.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 3

Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2015 (No. 2)

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I'm rising to introduce Bill 3, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2015 (No. 2). This being a money bill, Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to this Assembly.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 3 read a first time]

Consideration of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

Mr. Connolly moved, seconded by Ms Kazim, that an humble address be presented to Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows.

To Her Honour the Honourable Lois Mitchell, CM, AOE, the Lieutenant Governor of the Province of Alberta:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank Your Honour for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

[Adjourned debate June 16: Mr. Mason]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Yes?

The Deputy Speaker: You still have 15 minutes left to speak.

Mr. Mason: No. I'll cede my time. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Then the next member is the hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am truly honoured to have been chosen as the Member for Airdrie. I grew up in Airdrie, and now I raise my family there. Airdrie is a city of over 60,000 people, a very rapidly growing city, and it's full of lots of young families. Small businesses are the beating heart of my community, and they're responsible for so much of our volunteerism and our charity support and kids' sports programs.

We are a community that comes together when there is a need. When southern Alberta suffered devastating floods, the people of Airdrie came in droves with supplies, strong working hands, and

loving arms. When teenagers are bullied, they are welcomed with kind notes in the form of positive Post-its. The campaign against bullying: that started in Airdrie. When families suffer hardships, fundraisers are quickly arranged and local food bank shelves are stocked greatly. When a mother's child dies because an adequate health facility was not close enough, Airdrie takes its own action and forms a health foundation so this will never happen again. That is with the government's help, of course.

I am very proud of my city, but I also represent rural parts of Alberta, too: Bottrel, Helmsdale, Madden, and Nier, all vibrant, beautiful communities and with much concern over property rights. Airdrie has a beautiful walking and biking pathway system that treks through many wonderful parks, playground areas, and ponds. We have really neat regular wildlife. There's a blue heron family that actually lives in the pond behind my house and really cute muskrats. We've named one Henry. There are plenty of family-run restaurants, ice cream and gelato parlours, delightful coffee shops where a lot of local business owners meet and some – most – call it their second office. A lot call it their first.

Airdrie has recently hosted the Alberta Summer Games as well as other great events such as the Airdrie air show, Airdrie Pro Rodeo, the bikes and bulls event, empty bowls festival, and Artember.

8:20

Now, when I say adequate health facility, Airdrie has seen tremendous growth over the last 10 years. The infrastructure has never caught up. As I already said, our population is over 60,000, and if you get sick after 10 p.m., your option is to drive to Calgary to an extremely overcrowded hospital or to the hospital in Didsbury, which is much farther away. This is unacceptable, not for a town, for a city of 60,000 people and the affected communities like Crossfield, Beiseker, Bottrel, Madden, Helmsdale, and Nier. Residents from north Calgary frequent the Airdrie facility as well for their health care needs.

In response to the Speech from the Throne I have grave concerns for the vibrant business community in Airdrie as many of our small businesses will be forced to lay off employees, take on more hours themselves, and raise the price of goods and services to comply with the minimum wage increase. These are businesses that are vital to Airdrie's community as they're generous and they give so much. They support our charities, our children's sports programs, and so much more. Sadly, this will cease to exist to comply with the probable wage increase. I've been told over and over again by our business community, and some will even have to shut their doors.

Also in response to the Speech from the Throne I agree with and applaud your recognition for Alberta to have a long-term plan for health care and education, and both need predictable, sustainable funding. The problem we face is the allocation of funding. With a centralized system of big government we are not addressing the concerns of wait times or patient care. Bureaucrats really just get larger and richer, front-line service remains the same while the number of patients increases, and patient care fails. This large system leaves smaller cities like Airdrie in the dust, forgotten and hopeless. As a mom this scares me to my core. As a daughter I see no proper future for my aging parents in this too large of a system. In time my hope is for a better working system of communication, co-operation, and achievement for the people of Alberta that elected us to be here.

To restore Albertans' faith in government and increased voter turnout rates. I was very saddened while talking to the people at the door who just gave up voting altogether. They just didn't care. They gave up on democracy, and that, folks, is the biggest fear that we

all should have, the demise of democracy because people just don't care, and that's our fault.

Now, none of this would have ever been possible without the support of my wonderful husband, my two children, and my loving parents, who always thought that government as an institution was important. My parents, both coming from immigrant families and whose parents strived to become proud Canadians, know the dangers of trampled democracy, centralized government, and the need to defend the rights and freedoms of all individuals. They taught me everything I know, the importance of being humble, never forgetting to thank the people who helped me to get to where I am today. They taught me to love unconditionally towards others, and they taught me to stay true to my principles, my word, and my beliefs. Through their actions they have shown me how to give back to our community and be a good wife, a good daughter, a good sister, a great mother, and a friend. It is these values that I hope I can stay true to as MLA for Airdrie over the next four years.

There is no shortage of work to do. We all know that. Alberta, indeed, is facing unprecedented challenges. The size of government has grown too big, too fast, and now Albertans will have plenty of tough choices to face over the next several years.

I will speak passionately on the need to protect the future of our children by bringing down our rapidly expanding provincial debt. I will always argue for the need for eliminating waste and inefficiency without asking our vulnerable and core government services to do the heavy lifting. I will fight every day for a truly patient-centred health care system that focuses not just on dollars spent but on patients cured.

As a mother I will fight to protect the choice on the best way to educate my children and ensure that they have enough space in our schools, without bursting outside of the classrooms.

To close, I want to say thank you to my beautiful family, who has supported me. I will rely on you in the tough times, share in the good, and I will always do my best to make you proud.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for a five-minute question/comment should any hon. members wish to take advantage. The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Yeah, Madam Speaker, I would. I really would. I'd really enjoy speaking and asking the member, being a lifetime Albertan and born and raised in Airdrie: I'd like to get her to expound on the idea of small business and how wages may affect that.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you for that great question. I've had a lot of people coming into my office recently, a lot of small-business owners and representatives of local networking groups and business organizations, very, very concerned over the minimum wage increase and how it's going to directly affect their businesses and their lives, from taking away or having to pull back on employee benefits, laying off their employees and taking over for themselves full time – these are 12-, 16-hour days for these guys – having to raise the price of their goods and services, which will put them out of business because we can't afford to shop there.

Airdrie programs rely on Airdrie businesses for their donations to keep their programs going. It is our food banks. It is our community links, which provide so many services. These are children, right? This is really important; \$15 an hour minimum wage is going to destroy us. I just urge you guys to take a second look because this is a big deal. You're going to see these small guys go out.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other member wish to speak on 29(2)(a)?

If not, I will invite the hon. Member for Calgary-East with her statement.

Ms Luff: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm honoured to be able to rise in this House for the first time today as the Member for Calgary-East to respond to the Speech from the Throne. I'd like to thank Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor for the remarks brought to this Chamber. I'd also like to congratulate you, Madam Speaker, on your election to this Assembly. I believe the Assembly will benefit from your wisdom and experience, and you've been doing a great job so far.

I also congratulate my colleagues on both sides of the Chamber for your election to this House. We've been entrusted, through democratic elections, with the great privilege of representing our constituents, the people of Alberta. If the calibre of debate today and yesterday was an indication, I think we're really off to a fabulous start.

I also want to thank the Premier for the opportunity to rise in this House to speak to the people and the priorities of Calgary-East. I'm so thrilled to be able to represent the communities of Calgary-East. These include Marlborough, Marlborough Park, Penbrooke, Radisson Heights, Albert Park, Mayland Heights, Forest Heights, and my neighbourhood, Southview.

I chose to move to Southview six years ago because of its close proximity to downtown, great parks, mature trees, access to transit, and walkability. There's a plethora of fabulous restaurants, and let's face it, as a young family, there were affordable houses there. The people of Calgary-East are diverse and largely working class. Many work in the trades, transport, and in sales and service. Nearly a third are recent immigrants to Canada. They speak English, Cantonese, Mandarin, Vietnamese, Punjabi, Spanish, Kamai, Tagalog, French, and many others. Many are small-business owners.

On the doorsteps during the election they told me that they were concerned about making ends meet and about everybody having a fair shot at success. They were concerned about access to quality education for their children and quality care for seniors. The people in my riding are excited about a \$15 an hour minimum wage. This will do so much to ease the burden on new Canadians and single mothers, who disproportionately fill low-wage jobs in our communities.

8:30

The priorities laid out in the throne speech are the priorities of the people of Calgary-East: stable, predictable funding for schools so parents know their kids will have the supports they need and a fair progressive tax system. We can all benefit from the wealth in this province. People I met at the door spoke of the need to ensure a prosperous future for their children and for a government that would work to reduce the growing inequality that we face. They voted for a government that would provide these things. They voted NDP.

It's a riding that is historically an NDP riding, as much as that's possible in Calgary. Parts of Calgary-East were represented by both Bob Hawkesworth and Barry Pashak, and many folks I ran into when door-knocking referred to the late '80s as the good old days. In his maiden speech Mr. Hawkesworth said that he and Mr. Pashak were only the first of many NDP MLAs to be elected from Calgary. Well, it's been a long time coming, but I'm happy to be here with my colleagues from Calgary to fulfill Bob's bold prediction.

The people I represent are passionate volunteers who are active in their community associations. They're creating safer and more inclusive communities, and they're working to foster relationships across cultural lines. They're building opportunities for youth,

creating spaces for arts, forwarding poverty reduction strategies, helping new Canadians, and promoting local businesses. Some of these organizations include Momentum, the 12-community safety initiative, the Calgary Immigrant Educational Society, the Calgary Centre for Newcomers, and the Cornerstone Youth Centre.

At the heart of our riding is 17th Avenue S.E., or International Avenue, and its motto is Around the World in 35 Blocks. I'm not sure there's anywhere else in Calgary that you can eat dinner at an Eritrean restaurant or Vietnamese restaurant or Ethiopian restaurant, then head over for dessert at a German bakery and then finish off your night with some karaoke at a Filipino bar. The 17th Avenue BRZ has worked tirelessly over the years to promote our area and has some amazing plans for improvements in the future. They're working towards the eventual improvement of International Avenue into a multimodal boulevard with dedicated transit lanes, wide, safe sidewalks, and bike lanes. The BRZ and community have worked tirelessly to propel the area into the award-winning vision that was brought forward a number of years ago through the International Avenue design initiative. Improvements are much needed as the street is central to the 50,000 residents that live near the avenue.

Other projects to reduce poverty are under way. A positive step in the right direction is work that the communities have brought forward on limiting payday loan lenders. The interest on these loans can be a huge burden and contributing factor to the incidence of poverty, and this is a piece of work that I will continue to work on at a provincial level.

Now, there is still much work to be done. Reading through the past speeches of Mr. Hawkesworth, Mr. Pashak, and Mr. Amery, I see that my riding's issues have not changed much in 40 years. We still have high numbers of children living in poverty, high numbers of constituents without a high school education, and there are still issues with crime in the area. I have much hope, though, that in co-operation with the community groups that we've mentioned, our new NDP government can make a difference. We can initiate plans that will bring all stakeholders together to create a pathway to success to ensure that these are not still issues 40 years from now. In the past Calgary-East has seemingly been a footnote in the considerations of various levels of government. It is my intention and my passion to change that. It is my passion to change Calgary-East from being a footnote to becoming a headline. Our focus on education, poverty reduction, and fairness, as mentioned in the throne speech, will make my riding a better place for all of its residents.

I got into politics for a few reasons. As a teacher in the Calgary public board I was tired of the lack of care paid to education by the previous government. I was tired of larger class sizes, less education assistance, less prep time, and less support for the 70 per cent of my students with ESL needs. As a scientist and social justice advocate I was tired of a government that always put the priorities of industry over those of the environment and our First Nations brothers and sisters. I was tired of unnecessary tax on our working people. I think Mr. Hawkesworth put it well in his maiden speech when he said: I want a society "where quality education and opportunities are available to all Alberta children, regardless of the economic circumstances in their home environment ... where people are valued for being people, not valued simply by what they produce or [what] they earn. I want a society which recognizes ... the true value of labour [and] its ability to give expression and meaning to the human soul."

The NDP also runs in my blood. My grandfather Alan Bush ran against Grant Notley in 1968. He did lose that race and was subsequently run out of Grande Prairie, which is why I grew up on

Vancouver Island and not in Alberta, but his passion for democratic socialism lived on.

I want to take this opportunity to thank my amazing husband and partner, who helped me tirelessly on my campaign, shares my vision for the future of Alberta, and is at home right now with our two small children. I am so lucky to have his unwavering support.

I'm so proud to be a part of this new NDP government, that is breathing life into politics in this province, a government committed to caring for our air and our water, a government committed to investing in the future through education, a government committed to reducing inequality. As a mother of young children, just 10 months and two and a half years old, to have a ministry for the status of women is no small thing, and I'm very hopeful that Leg. daycare is forthcoming.

I'm truly grateful and humbled to have the opportunity to represent the people of Calgary-East. I thank them for the trust that they have placed in me. Calgary-East and Alberta are amazing places to live, and I promise to work tirelessly for you with the NDP government to make them even better.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Any hon. member wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)? Questions or comments? The hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Well, I grew up in Marlborough Park, and I understand those challenges. My father was a single parent. We grew up in Georgian Village. I went to Dr. Egbert school, and – you know what? – not everything in Calgary-East was bad, as much as sometimes it gets a bad rap. I'm living proof of that. So as we debate bills in this House, as we debate law, know this. Somebody from Calgary-East wants to see the very best of Calgary-East come true.

Talking to my fellow mate here from Calgary-West, him being a police officer, myself being an advanced care paramedic, I spent a lot of my first part of my career at Forest Lawn, 12 station, so I've seen the best and I've seen the worst from that community. What I can tell you, again – and I'll go back – one of the inspirations for me as a kid: half of the guys I grew up with are in prison or worse. Half of the guys I grew up with are either police officers or they're paramedics, they're physicians.

Some of them have been in Legislatures. You know what? Our dear Premier, I think we can all agree, has served us well, whichever side of the House you come from, and that's the hon. Ralph Klein. That gentlemen came to my school, encouraged me. We saw him in that community all the time. So as we move forward, as we talk about past governments, as we talk about possible new governments, governments that just were and new governments like yourself, we should be talking about the very best this province has to offer, collectively how we can make it better.

And just when you think you couldn't imagine it, there's a kid from Marlborough Park, from a single parent, you know, who had paper routes there. My dad had a small business there. You know what? I thank the government. I thank the courage of the people in this House, past and present, to work on behalf of Albertans. I'm a success story because somebody cared. Let's continue that. I'll be happy to work with you in that, so thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Yes. Thank you, Madam Speaker. I, too, would like to talk to the hon. member about the minimum wage because back in the time when the Member for Drumheller-Stettler had hair, there was a young fellow who went out to work for \$2.50 an hour and was pleased to do it simply to get the experience. I did not

demand the wage. I took it, and I earned it. I worked long hours, and I got expenses, and I learned experience from that. I'd like the hon. member to explain to me how she feels that demanding a certain wage will create that experience.

8:40

Ms Luff: I feel positively about the \$15 an hour wage, and people in my riding feel positively about this. My husband teaches ESL for many new Canadian immigrants, and many of them are working 16-hour days just to make ends meet, and they're not demanding that \$15 an hour wage. They're working. But they have to work 16 hours a day and then go to an English class so that they can possibly, maybe, make it to go to a university to get an education where then they might be able to get a job that pays them more than \$15 an hour so they might be able to spend some time with their family. The fact of the matter is that we're not really talking about the 16-year-old kid here. We're talking about single mothers who don't have an option, who have to work two jobs, who don't have time to go home.

There are plenty of studies, as was mentioned by some of my colleagues earlier, that a \$15 an hour wage actually creates retention. My husband, previous to teaching ESL – as I mentioned, he's a stand-up guy – managed a liquor store and wasn't able to retain any staff and was having to train new staff all the time because the owner refused to pay more than \$11 an hour. The fact of the matter is that people making \$11 an hour are constantly going to be looking for more because in Calgary to make a living you have to make at least – I'm not exactly sure of the number, but I think it's even higher. I think it's 17-something.

The fact of the matter is that it's just not feasible for most people to make that wage. We're not talking about doing it overnight. We're talking about doing it gradually, in consultation with business so that they have time to prepare for it. Many people in my riding, as I mentioned, are small-business owners, and they are with me on this.

The Deputy Speaker: I'll now recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to the throne speech. A truly historic time in our province. I'm also proud to be part of this important time in Alberta and a fresh, new possibility for Alberta that hopefully will leave a legacy that we can all in this House be very proud of.

I want to thank the people of Calgary-Mountain View, first of all, who elected me for the fourth time in spite of all my failings. [some applause] Thank you. I remember in the 2012 election a young New Democrat opponent in the campaign said to the people in our debate: friends, are you going to vote for this man when he's been here for eight years and hasn't changed the government yet? I apologized for not achieving a change of government in eight years, but we've now done it, and I'm very proud of that. With all due respect to many of the colleagues in the former government, it was time for change, and Albertans were very clear about that, and I think we will all be better for it.

I want to be a little bit historic here. I'm in my 66th year. I've worked from South Africa in my early years in medical practice to the Canadian north, Inuit, Métis communities, for six months. I've worked in the Philippines for a year and a half with my young family and in Asia for another brief period. What that really opened my eyes to was the profound impact of public policy, the profound impact of good politics and bad politics. For good or ill, politicians create the conditions for health, and they create the conditions for waste, disease, turmoil, and collapse.

We have a really important role, that is hard to measure, and many of us have avoided politics for some of those reasons – we’ve realized how profound it is, or we believe it has no significance to our lives – and many of the young people, including my own children, fail to see what relevance politicians have to their lives. So there’s this interesting dichotomy: profound impact on the one hand, the perception of profound impact, and a sense of trepidation to get into it; on the other, a real sense that it’s a waste of time, that it’s a game, that it’s, quote, politics.

Well, politics has a bad rap because, for me, politics is negotiating the public interest in the long term. Now, there are many different definitions of politics, but for me, whenever I talk to groups about the meaning of politics: we are negotiating here, folks. Everyone has an interest. Everyone has a vision. Everyone has a desired route to get there. We are here to negotiate the common interest for the long term. I think that if we keep that in the forefront, we will make good decisions, and we will be proud when we leave this place, whether we’re carried out or whether we’re kicked out or whether we leave voluntarily. We will be proud of what we’ve done here.

I guess I want to emphasize just how critical these times are in our world: the turmoil in the Middle East; the crisis we’re facing economically, with the oil prices and the job losses and those sorts of issues; the growing concerns about climate and the growing number of extreme weather events; refugees migrating out of their countries in desperate attempts to find a home and a secure place to raise their families; poverty, widespread poverty. I know that something like 20 per cent of the planet, 2 billion people, lives without fresh water and on a dollar a day, that sort of thing.

We have a huge responsibility to work together here as well as we can and to not let partisanship undermine good decisions in the public interest. We have a real opportunity to set aside some of that, think about our children, our grandchildren, our province, the province we love so dearly and want others to come to and have opportunities. We cannot squander this opportunity, particularly now, when there’s so much at stake on the planet. Everyone, I think, realizes how blessed we are in Alberta. Most Canadians realize the great potential of Alberta and of the rest of the country, but I think many of us have been frustrated by the partisanship that has in some ways undermined our best efforts as a team of people that are really looking for the best that we can bring forward for our future.

Really listening, respecting each other, genuinely looking for solutions, not being right but being honest, finding the truth as opposed to winning and losing: I really look forward to that possibility. Many of us felt that the past government had lost a sense of that. They projected a sense that they had the answers, that they weren’t prepared to really listen to changes because things were going pretty nicely the way they were, and they were benefiting from the way they were, so why wasn’t everybody happy with the way they were?

Well, we didn’t have a fair tax regime. We weren’t addressing the growing poverty and inequality in our society. We just weren’t. Access problems to education and health care were growing. We weren’t shifting to a preventive, community focus, that would be a tremendous financial savings. Human suffering would be reduced. And then we weren’t serious about climate change, the biggest crisis to hit our generation. So we needed change, and notwithstanding the fact that Albertans tried to give them a second, a third, and a fourth chance, any government at 44 years is past its best-before date. I dare say that even a Liberal government should be changed at 44 years, and I even said to people in my campaign: every century, you know, you should try a Liberal government.

Conscious Albertans are really aware of our domestic and international threats. They really are hoping that we will put our

minds and hearts together and come forward with really thoughtful, wise policies, longer thinking than just these next few years. So when the New Democrats say to me, “We need time to put a budget together,” I say: “Take your time. Do it right. I don’t want a fast budget; I want the right budget.” But do your homework, use the best evidence, call in good experts, and I don’t mean Jack Mintz. There’s a guy that gets hundreds of thousands of dollars from Imperial Oil and runs the Calgary School of Public Policy. I’m sorry. I’ve told Jack that. I think he has to temper his comments in support of the oil industry. Am I getting off track?

8:50

We are now, hopefully, in a transient economic downturn. But make no mistake; the growing evidence suggests that our way of living, our way of working, our way of planning is failing. On a global level we are failing the future. We have to do better. We have to start thinking differently and working differently together. The war on carbon grows across the planet, and we must actively plan for a different future before we’re forced to in Alberta, before we have to tell the oil companies: “Sorry to see you go. Are you not going to clean up the mess?” We’ve got to start planning now and put in place a conservation plan, a new technology plan, and really move forward so that when they do finally have to move on, we have a strong economy and a strong energy future.

Our most pressing need, though, is to learn to live and work together respectfully, with genuine appreciation, as if our lives depended on it. They do. Our lives depend on finding some new ways forward together, ways that we don’t necessarily know and haven’t experienced fully yet in our homes, in our communities, in this Legislature. We may have to find some new ways to meet and talk, eat together, talk together, sort out our differences, and get on with what really is needed by Albertans.

Various populations around the world taught me that we must include the planet because, whether or not we’re ready, they’re coming to us, and we cannot turn them away forever. We have to have resilient, broad-thinking, creative ways of including them in our culture that really support them to the point where they can actually be successful and contribute to our society. Many today – I know them in Calgary – are very frustrated. They get six months’ funding, and suddenly they’re expected to function fully, and they cannot. They need more support than that. So one of the areas that I want to see improved is how we treat newcomers and engage them and help them transition, integrate into our society.

More than ever we legislators have to work together for long-term well-being. One hopes that our sophisticated public will not tolerate opposition for pure political advantage and will appreciate and vote for genuine cross-party meetings, consultations, knowledge sharing. Some of my Wildrose colleagues have tremendous things to teach me about small business and economic opportunity. My New Democrat colleagues across the way will teach me about how we can be more inclusive in our communities and support longer thinking and planning around our human potential. We have seen positive steps on this already, and I congratulate the government on some of those steps, that we’ve all talked about; for example, a mental health system, which I’m very privileged to be part of helping to hopefully shape and move forward.

Moving from opinion to facts and values is part of what I think our challenge is. We’ve operated a lot on opinion here in this House. We’ve operated a lot on ideology. We’ve operated a lot, in some cases, on political opportunity. We have not been focused on evidence, science, facts, and values. Let’s make sure we include all of those. Facts, science, and values have to be part of good public policy. I know that many people can say that, but at the end of the

day, we have to acknowledge that some of our policies might not look as good for our party, but it will be better for the long term. We have to start biting the bullet, and that's what our job is over here, to hold you accountable when you think you're going to get away with something just because it may serve your short-term political interests.

Parties must show willingness to engage in the difficult questions of where the market, with limited foresight and no conscience, and where short-term profit fit into the larger issues of saving our future and ensuring that environmental limits are respected in development decisions.

Small business does have needs, and I know that, and I caution the New Democrats on how fast they're moving forward on the small-business tax. I, too, have heard from a number of people in my community, especially the Chinese restaurant down the street who says that they will lay off two of their people right away if it jumps to \$15. Now, it's not going to \$15 right away, but it's a significant increase for them, and they're just scraping by in this Chinese restaurant. So I don't know how you're going to measure that, but we think you should go slowly and measure impacts as you go and decide in the next two years whether to go to the full extent of where you're going.

I don't mind a government that changes its mind if it's got evidence and it comes to us and says: we've changed our mind because we see impacts here and there, and they're not what we thought. I respect a government that does that. Don't feel that you have to follow through just because you have said so without full evidence. All of us create platforms without full evidence. That's why we call in scientists and experts.

Our First Nations have to be included in any of our planning, and I certainly will be including them if I get a choice in this mental health review. They are the fastest growing population here, and they have to be meaningfully engaged. They cannot be tokens. They are tired of this so-called consultation where they come to the table, are told the facts, and then asked to agree or disagree, and then have to end up in court to actually get any resolution because they haven't really felt listened to. They have many challenges that we will never, never, never understand or appreciate fully.

The latter, as I mentioned, are the fastest growing population, and they continue to be at serious and increasing risk of illness, violence, and premature death: a tremendous opportunity for both greater contributions to our society if we help them to make it, and a tremendous opportunity for crisis and cost and chaos if we don't do a better job of integrating them into our culture.

It's equally clear that jobs and the new economic opportunities are there, and the government can provide some incentives without picking winners and losers. You have an opportunity to help small businesses move from the experiment to the full business opportunity and to stop the breakdown between that chain. I've met some people who are really helpful in that.

Thank you for the opportunity to say a few things. I have much more to say.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, any questions or comments under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. My question to the hon. member is with regard to consultation with other experts around preparing for the budget. Obviously, we're going to have him facilitate part of that consultation around mental health, but did he have any other recommendations for health care consultations?

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you for the question. That's a very thoughtful issue to raise. I think we have a lot to learn from countries like Sweden, Scandinavian countries. They have put people, seniors and the poor, very much at the centre of a lot of their planning. They realize that there are billions and billions of dollars to be saved when we put people at the centre of our economic planning, let alone our social supports. As a result, they save billions of dollars on poverty, on homelessness, on seniors who are feeling neglected and isolated and depressed. They put serious investment in high-risk families before they get into the breakdowns and the drug addictions and the suicides.

They don't do everything right, but I have seen evidence in the literature and from talking to people who've lived there and worked there that they have come a long way in providing a culture of well-being, support, a sense of community, a mutual responsibility, that we've lost in this culture, a sense that health and prosperity begin – sometimes it ends – with a sense of community. When you feel supported, when you can lean on people, when you can gather ideas from other people, it opens up a lot of opportunities, economic and social, and even environmental changes that we all know would help create better – an example locally is the whole cosmetic pesticide issue that Calgary and Edmonton are debating. They want to continue spraying these chemicals over dandelions. Well, dandelions don't kill anybody, but chemicals do.

9:00

In the 21st century I can't say that I know what Scandinavia is doing about pesticides, but they're making longer term decisions. They're thinking longer term about innovation and wise use of resources, minimizing risk where they can, and putting up with minor inconveniences like dandelions when they realize that the cost benefit is so much in favour, and the long-term future and health are affected by that.

I think we could learn from First Nations about health. They have lived on the land. They have lived together. They have made decisions in a different way than we do. Their organizations tend to be flatter and less hierarchical. There are all kinds of values, spiritual values as well, respect for elders. There are a lot of things that First Nations, I think, could teach us about health and well-being.

Costa Rica has one of the best health – or did have; I haven't looked in the last five or 10 years. They spend a third of their budget on prevention. We spend 3 per cent of our budget on prevention and community. They have close to, maybe not really close – our infant mortality rate is somewhat similar to Costa Rica's, and they spend one one-hundredth per capita on health care that we do because they focus so much on community, mutual supports. They know they have little money, and they put it into water, sanitation, breastfeeding, immunization, kinds of basic home-care services that they can provide. So a third-world country like Costa Rica might have something to teach us about where to find that balance between high-tech medicine and the basics of keeping people in the community supported and well and active.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other comments under 29(2)(a)?

If not, I will recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. As one of the new members of this Assembly it is both an honour and a pleasure to rise today for the first time on behalf of the residents of Edmonton-Decore to address the Assembly and respond to the Speech from the Throne. I'm happy to begin by offering my sincere congratulations to all of my colleagues in this Assembly on their

election victories and the hard work that they put in as well as the volunteers who supported them in those campaigns. With those victories, of course, comes great responsibility to represent each of our constituents and to represent all Albertans. I have no doubt that each of you will make them very proud.

I'd also like to congratulate you, Madam Speaker, on your appointment as well as our Speaker of the House. I have no doubt that your appointments to lead this great House in Alberta will be nothing less than stellar. I'm honoured and excited for the opportunity to work with both of you and all the new chairs of the committees.

I'd also like to thank my partner and soon-to-be wife, Natalya, whose love and support has kept me going since this journey began a little over two years ago. It seems, of course, like just yesterday that it really started, but the calendar actually has expired two years later.

I would also like to thank my friends and campaign team. Without them this maiden speech, of course, would not have been possible.

Madam Speaker, as the new Member for Edmonton-Decore I must say that I feel like the luckiest individual in this Assembly. I have been given the trust to represent an area that is a microcosm in the diversity of Alberta, with mature neighbourhoods in the south of the riding like Killarney or some of the newer neighbourhoods in the north like Crystallina Nera as well as everything in between like neighbourhoods such as Delwood, which will be celebrating their 50th anniversary here right away, and Evansdale, which is where I live.

Edmonton-Decore was of course established back in 2012 and named after Laurence Decore, who served as the member for then Edmonton-Glengarry as well as the Leader of the Official Opposition following a distinguished career in municipal politics. With a population of over 44,000 I have great pleasure interacting with people from all walks of life, all different age ranges, and all kinds of different backgrounds. Knocking on thousands of doors over the past two years, I was able to meet small-business owners, plumbers, accountants, oil patch workers, government employees, retired seniors, teachers, health care workers, lawyers, students, our military personnel, and so many others making a wide range of contributions to life and the economy here in Alberta.

What I found was a common theme among these diverse residents, a theme that was repeated over and over again door after door. They were looking for a government that would ensure that health care is there when they need it, a government that would ensure that quality education is available for all our children, a government that would look after our seniors as they looked after us when we were all younger, a government that treats everyone fairly and equally, including our indigenous and our LGBTQ sisters and brothers, a government that honours the contributions of those who have lived their lives in this province, and a government that ensures new futures for those freshly come from other places.

My pride in the responsibility of being the MLA for the people of this constituency is that these themes are ones that matter deeply to me personally. As I bring the voices of my constituents here, as I take the information about our decisions to them, I know that together we will be building an Alberta that will be a model of justice and success. Madam Speaker, I am so very proud to stand before you and this Assembly today as the representative for Edmonton-Decore because I know that the qualities that my constituents are looking for can and will be provided by the members of this Assembly and by the government that was elected for the people of Alberta by the people of Alberta.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under 29(2)(a)?
The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and address the Assembly for the first time. I'd like to beg the patience of all members of the Assembly because I'm winging it here. I'd like to offer my heartfelt congratulations to the Member for Edmonton-Decore on his victory. I know that he's been working hard for a long time on this. You know, if I can share something with you, Member, in this private setting: I didn't think you were going to make it, but I'm very pleased that you did. I'm incredibly pleased that we're surrounded by a number of colleagues to assist us in our work. To watch the Member for Edmonton-Decore work single-mindedly on achieving the goal of being the elected member for his constituency has been inspirational. I know that this perseverance and dedication that he brings to the Legislature will serve the people of Edmonton-Decore and all of the people of Alberta very well indeed.

9:10

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Any other member wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)?

If not, then I will recognize the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Well, here we go again, Madam Speaker. I'm honoured to rise today to speak as the new Member of this Legislative Assembly for Strathmore-Brooks. It is truly a privilege to be a member of this great Assembly and to be heir to its traditions, its history, and its heritage. I was selected by the people of Strathmore-Brooks to be their representative in this House, and I will do my utmost to serve them well.

Strathmore-Brooks represents what has made Alberta great. The city of Brooks, the town of Strathmore, the county of Newell, and the county of Wheatland are as Albertan as Alberta gets. Its people are enterprising and hard working. They are rooted in the best of our traditions and our heritage, but they also are forward-looking and not afraid of change. They don't care if your great-grandfather came across the prairies in a wagon or if you landed at Calgary International in a WestJet 737. They do care if you work hard, contribute to your community, and do your best. They are ranchers, farmers, small-business people, and oil patch workers. They are the key sectors of our economy in Strathmore-Brooks that I will defend everyday.

I will stand up for keeping taxes competitive on local businesses. No society has ever taxed and borrowed its way to prosperity. It was as true in British Columbia and Ontario during the early 1990s as it has been in Greece over the last decade. It would be ignoring the evidence to believe that it will be any different here in Alberta today.

I was raised in a family where freedom and liberty were the ultimate political values instilled in me. My oma, Charlotte Fildebrandt, and opa, Gerhard Fildebrandt, were both forcefully expelled from their homelands and lived under the brutal oppression of socialism and communism in East Germany. I can remember my oma telling me about working on a farm under Stalin's rule. With the state confiscating most of the wealth produced on the farm, even it was a hungry place to be. They escaped to Munich and then to Canada because they never wished to live with war, with tyranny, or with socialism again.

They lit Wyatt's torch behind them as they left, refusing to be instruments that exist merely for the state's production quotas. They believed that at the root of a free society was the rule of law, where the government is constrained from itself, where the people

understood and defended their freedom and were not willing to bargain it away for comfort or political correctness. Those deep beliefs were passed on to my father, Gerald, my sister Samantha, and myself.

My mother's side of the family brought another set of values. My great-grandmother was a Scottish war bride and, most unfortunately, an Old Labour socialist. [some applause] That may be the first and only time I am applauded by the NDP side and not my own members.

It seems the Fildebrandts would live with socialism again after all.

But she did have some redeeming qualities. She was Scottish. [some applause] From the Scots in the back here.

My grandparents on that side, Patricia and Gordon Graham, were typical of the people you'll find in the Ottawa Valley, where I'm from: hard-working, community-minded, and owners of a large stockpile of unregistered firearms. They passed on that deep passion for their community and their family to my mother, Kimberly, and my sister and myself.

Strathmore-Brooks is a place where you know your neighbours, where you know your local policemen and the teachers at your local school, where community matters. One of the most important ingredients to maintaining a strong local connection to communities in Strathmore-Brooks is ensuring that residents have access to proper, quality long-term seniors' care. The people of Strathmore have been promised and denied a quality seniors' care facility since 2008. They are tired of broken promises. They need a long-term seniors' care facility that has access to proper medical services. I want to work with the new government to ensure that this long-lost promise is finally fulfilled.

In Bassano the Newell Foundation has done incredible work to bring together people from the city of Brooks, the county of Newell, the town of Bassano, and many other community organizations. They have contributed hundreds of hours to putting together a plan for a truly visionary aging-in-community facility. They seek to give seniors from the region the independence, the choice, and the support that they need. The Newell Foundation and its volunteers have already done the work. All they need is for the provincial government to follow through with the final agreement. I will be reaching out to the Minister of Seniors and of Health to ensure that this community initiative does not fall through the cracks involved in a transition of power. It truly has the potential to become a model for seniors' care in rural Alberta right across this province.

Fighting for your constituents involves fighting for specific goals like these, but it also involves fighting for your principles more broadly. Too many people are elected to places like this and forget their principles at the door. This is not to say that we cannot make an honourable compromise in the name of getting a proverbial half-loaf of bread, but it is to say that we must never allow re-election to become our only goal. We must stand firm for the reasons that we came to this place. Now, this piece of advice is only meant for my Wildrose colleagues. My NDP friends' principles are most clearly incorrect, and I will spend the next four years trying to convince them of the error of their ways.

I've generally had a healthy distrust of politicians for most of my life. Serving six years with the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, I routinely made a pretty good time out of skewering politicians for wasting this and stealing that and generally being a bunch of weak-kneed careerists who would say or do anything just to keep their jobs. Then I started to get to know a group of folks in the previous Wildrose caucus. I began to trust many of them, believing them to be on the right side of history, perhaps even friends. Boy, I was wrong. I saw every single stereotype of the morally corrupt, self-serving politician confirmed before my eyes. I nearly gave up

everything to do with public life and democracy, and I nearly even swore off voting.

Instead, I and my fellow caucus mates made the decision to prove them all wrong. We stuck to our principles when the going was tough. We refused to do the easy thing. We stood up for democracy, and we stood up for conservative values, and I will not check those values at the door. I will fight for limited government, for fiscal responsibility, for property rights, for gun rights, for freedom of speech and freedom of association, for individual liberty, for the right of the minority to be wrong no matter what the majority might think of them.

When my cynicism with politicians was turning towards doing something positive about it and running to represent the people of Strathmore-Brooks, I asked my wife, Emma, to keep me grounded. I asked her to never let me become so accustomed to this place, so entitled to my seat, or so blinded by my office that I would do what some of our predecessors did before us. I asked her to never let me lose sight of why I am here, others. I will do my outmost to do honour to the electors of Strathmore-Brooks, who entrusted me with their representation in our government.

God bless Alberta, and God bless Canada.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under 29(2)(a)?
The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

9:20

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. It felt so good to speak once, I thought I'd take the opportunity again. I have a question for the Member for Strathmore-Brooks that I hope is taken in the good-natured spirit in which I intend it. I know that the organization that he used to represent, the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, was well known for travelling a debt clock around the country that continued to count how high the debt was going. Given the fact that NDP governments are proven by Statistics Canada to have the best record of fiscal responsibility of any political party across the country, I was wondering if the Member for Strathmore-Brooks knows if that debt clock goes down, because they're going to need it.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Well, Madam Speaker, in four years, when I've got his chair, it will go down. [interjections] Enough from the peanut gallery.

Madam Speaker, the most fun I've had in my career was travelling to every single corner of this province with the Alberta debt clock, where I got a bunch of people to sign a pledge, which they promptly broke. Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, the Member for Drumheller-Stettler, and the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat were the only three members who were incumbents of the House to sign the pledge who actually made it back here.

Madam Speaker, some NDP governments have balanced the budget from time to time; some have not. I grew up in Ontario under the Bob Rae government. He crossed the floor. In British Columbia, in Ontario, in Nova Scotia we have seen what NDP governments can do to balance the budget. But, you know, I generally hope for the success of this government in doing so. I genuinely do.

Now, I will say this. Some PC governments have not had a particularly good record of balancing the budget. But I'll say that the statistic he is referring to nationally lumps in PC as the word "conservative," which I might take some umbrage with. All Liberals across the country would include the B.C. Liberals. Many Liberals would take issue with that. But I would say that that statistic nationally does not include the Wildrose, and we will be 100 times out of 100.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much. I want to make just a comment to the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks in congratulations on your first speech in the House. I want you to know that I have been the recipient of two letters of commendation from the Canadian Taxpayers Federation. I wish I'd saved them.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Madam Speaker, there is something good in everybody.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wish to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Ms McKittrick: I just wanted to let the Member for Strathmore-Brooks know that he has a friend on this side of the House. It has been my pleasure to work in your constituency and to do a lot of the research that you alluded to around seniors and the need for senior housing in your riding. I know that the people of Brooks also need things like affordable housing, and they need employment, so I look forward to working with you from this side of the House to make sure that people in your constituency have the help that they need through some of the policies and the things that we are going to implement as the NDP government.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I move that we adjourn debate.

The Deputy Speaker: With respect, hon. Government House Leader, you have already been recognized on the Speech from the Throne, and you can't adjourn debate. Someone else can, but you can't.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Bilous: I now move to adjourn debate on the responses to the Lieutenant Governor's Speech from the Throne.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: I'd call the Committee of the Whole to order.

Bill 1 An Act to Renew Democracy in Alberta

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Madam Chair. It is my honour to rise and speak to Bill 1, An Act to Renew Democracy in Alberta, which will amend the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act. This bill will ban corporations and unions from making political contributions in this province and give back Albertans their voices in the Legislature.

During second reading I was glad to hear a number of positive comments and some proposed amendments. Albertans want these changes, and it's good to see that my fellow Members of the Legislative Assembly want them, too. I also appreciate the comments and questions raised. That's what good democracy is about, the opportunity to debate and the freedom to express opinions. I responded to many of the comments and questions during second reading, but at this time I'd like to highlight a few key points and expand upon my answers.

With respect to loans some of the hon. members brought up the section in the act that deals with loans. There were questions about the correct reporting consequences of prohibited contributions. There were also concerns expressed about the fact that interim financing was not excluded from this bill. Political parties, constituency associations, candidates, and leadership contestants are allowed to take out loans but only from authorized financial institutions. This is not new. It exists in the current legislation. What is new is that there are consequences if the borrower fails to reimburse corporations and unions who have made payments directly to those loans. If the borrower fails to reimburse the corporation's or union's payments on a loan before the borrower is required to file their financial statements under the act, then the loan payment is deemed to be a contribution. The borrower will have to reimburse whomever made the payment on their loan on their behalf.

The Chief Electoral Officer could also recommend prosecution. If prosecution proceeds, fines up to \$10,000 could be imposed. Alternatively, the Chief Electoral Officer can impose administrative penalties.

Regarding the questions about the mechanisms to ensure correct reporting, hon. members will be reassured to know the Chief Electoral Officer requires detailed contribution receipts, including dates. As for loopholes, corporations and unions will not be able to funnel donations through individuals. Individuals are prohibited from donating funds that do not actually belong to them. A breach of these rules can be subject to administrative penalties and fines, similar to the consequences of making other illegal contributions.

As to why loans were not excluded in this bill, the loan provision is part of the existing legislation. This legislation, the new legislation, prohibits corporate and union donations. It does not make any changes to the existing ability of candidates to obtain loans. They will not be able to obtain donations from corporations or unions, but through interim financing they will continue to have access to temporary assistance to get their campaigns off the ground.

9:30

With respect to the June 15 effective date, Madam Chair, several hon. members expressed concerns that the effective date of the bill, June 15, 2015, could open the government up to possible court challenges. In a free and democratic society anyone can challenge legislation in court. That is their right. However, we are confident that these changes will stand up in court. Hon. members have suggested that it would make more sense to have the legislation become effective in July, at the end of the writ period. This would probably be easier, but it wouldn't be fair to Albertans. A deadline so far in advance would give political parties plenty of opportunity to fund raise from corporations and unions. This goes against the spirit of the bill, which is to refocus our politicians on Albertans and not on how much money could be collected as quickly as possible before a deadline.

With respect to the other suggested changes, there was also a discussion about other topics such as third-party advertising, campaign contributions, and government announcements during elections. Some said the legislation doesn't go far enough, and this government agrees with that statement. Bill 1 is just the beginning of our efforts to fulfill our campaign promises to reform democracy in Alberta. For this reason we have proposed a special legislative committee to look into all aspects of Alberta's elections. They will be reviewing aspects of the bill that haven't already been covered, including areas like third-party advertising and government announcements during election periods.

There is a lot to review, and it won't be a quick process. We knew this, but we wanted to ensure that this crucial change was included

among our first pieces of legislation and fulfill a campaign promise near and dear to our hearts and the hearts of all Albertans. So to those who feel this bill doesn't go far enough, I encourage you to work with us. More changes are coming.

Madam Chair, this is an important piece of legislation that brings much-needed improvements to Alberta's democratic process. Albertans are the ones who brought us here. Our citizens deserve to have their voices heard. That's why I'm pleased to stand in support of Bill 1, and I urge all members to support it.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Chair. I have an amendment that I'd like to table. I'll wait until . . .

The Chair: Please do.

This amendment will be called amendment A1.

Go ahead, Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you again. I'm grateful for this opportunity to rise and contribute to the Committee of the Whole on this discussion of Bill 1, An Act to Renew Democracy in Alberta. We are certainly moving through this process at a rapid pace, Madam Chair. I hope that we will still be able to give such an important piece of legislation the attention it deserves. The last thing we want to do is rush and do a haphazard job.

With that in mind, Madam Chair, I would like to make a few remarks on some of the particulars at the issue of this bill. Specifically, I would like to take time for a closer look at the retroactivity of this bill's provisions. I believe that there is a potential problem here, one that we have raised but which the minister has not adequately addressed, and that is why our caucus would like to propose an amendment to this bill with respect to the date it comes into effect. We would like to see the effective date of this bill changed from June 15 to July 6, which will be the first day after the election period we presently find ourselves in.

I understand that this government wants to avoid a run on donations, but we also think that it would be a shame for this bill to encounter a hang-up simply because of a rush to pass this in the middle of the election period. In principle, of course, we in this caucus support the intent of the bill, Madam Chair. We do not want to see it derailed on legality.

Perhaps we should take a moment to look at how donations during an election period work. During an election period donations are the sum of money without a date attached to them, unless it is a cheque, but dates on uncashed cheques are not exactly ironclad either.

Now, Bill 1 in its present form cites the date of June 15 as the effective date for corporate and union donations to be banned. An election period runs two months after the polling day. This year, since the polling day occurred on May 5, the last day of the election period will be on July 5. Clearly, June 15 is right in the middle of the current election period. The obvious question at hand is this: how would this ban on corporate and union donations, effective in the middle of the current election period, possibly be enforceable? This is especially concerning when we consider that donations during election periods have no dates attached to them unless they're deposited. How can we possibly expect the Chief Electoral Officer to track when donations were made in order to determine whether they occurred before or after the date of June 15? I can foresee this will be ripe for controversy, Madam Chair.

In addition to the enforceability, there seems to be a legitimate issue in fairness, particularly when it comes to candidates and CAs who have campaign debts. A candidate could very legitimately have planned to spend the next two weeks asking unions or corporations who may have supported him or her or even pledged money to help him or her pay for campaign spending. I assume cheques written before June 15 but not cashed yet are okay. But what about promised donations?

The problem with rules like this is that they can't be enforced. It actually rewards those willing to bend rules by getting donations backdated. It's all a bit messy. It seems a bit unfair and perhaps, worse yet, is potentially subject to court challenge. We want to avoid the eventuality of candidates making a legal issue out of this in the event that they were counting on unions and corporations to pay off deficits run up in the course of an election. If that were the case, the entire bill would be in danger of being tossed out. This would not be good for anyone, Madam Chair, particularly the mover of the bill but, really, for all of us. As this is our first bill that we pass in the Assembly, it will reflect on us.

9:40

As is well known, the Wildrose has long been an advocate of restricting donations to Alberta residents. In fact, my colleagues here all campaigned on it. We do not want this bill to be rejected on the basis of a court challenge. Given how ambiguous the legalities are surrounding the effective date of June 15, it seems odd that this date was pinpointed in the first place. Would it not be more effective to select a date after the election period has expired? We have a really hard time believing that the Chief Electoral Officer agrees that this is the best way to go. We've heard from people in his office that this is, in fact, problematic and that July 6 would be a much cleaner date.

We want this bill to be successful, Madam Chair, and this small change could easily contribute to making sure this bill passes without undue controversy and court challenges. It would be a shame to go through all this work for such a worthy cause only to have its sound principles defeated on a mere technicality. We believe that Albertans would be far better served if the date of this bill was pushed back to July 6, after the expiry date of the current election period. Albertans deserve this legislation, and waiting just a few more weeks for it to take effect is worth while. It ensures that confusion of the retroactivity can be avoided.

Confusion aside, Madam Chair, we need to revisit the question of enforceability. By pushing the date back to July 6, we enact legislation during a period in which donations can be tracked and documented far more thoroughly. As I've said, donations during election periods often have no dates attached to them, making the tracking of them much more difficult for the Chief Electoral Officer. From July 6 onward that problem disappears.

It would be embarrassing for us all but particularly the government if the first bill we were to pass in this legislative session ends up getting bogged down in court proceedings. It would be even worse if it was ruled unconstitutional. We want to help this government to get off on the right foot and to make sure of delivering on promises of positive change for the province of Alberta. Clearly, an unconstitutional bill would not be a good way of doing this. So let's stop the potential problem before it becomes a real problem.

Madam Chair, this is really a minor amendment. It does nothing to change the principle of the bill, which, as our caucus has noted repeatedly, is more than sound. Albertans have waited a long time for this, and we want to help to ensure that they get it in a form that is efficient and effective. We want to make sure this principle

becomes law. If anything, this amendment should only strengthen the principle of this bill.

At the end of the day we are advocating for transparency and accountability. Does making legislation effective as of June 15 contribute to transparency and accountability? I don't think it does, Madam Chair, not when accurate dates are not attached to donations made, not when it is impossible to even enforce. In order for a piece of legislation to be both transparent and accountable, it must be enforceable and it must be dealing with hard, measurable facts. By having this legislation be effective as of early July, we can achieve both of these goals.

We think that supporting this amendment will help the government to pass a law that reflects democratic principles to the strongest degree possible. Government members who value accountability ought to support this amendment. Also, I certainly hope that the Justice minister will lead the way to help us correct this bill. The minister has a chance to take a good idea from the opposition and use it to improve her bill. One little change can make Alberta politics all the better. We have a chance here to remedy the shortcomings of this bill for the good of Albertans.

The bill is a promising first step, Madam Chair, but we should always be looking to do better. The next step towards improvement is adopting this amendment. Political influence is rightly placed in the hands of Albertans, not in those of unions or corporations. We all know this on both sides of the House, so let's reflect that with this piece of legislation. Let's pass something that can be enforced. Let's make this bill effective July 6, not in the middle of a current election period.

We are in this together, Madam Chair. It is in all of our shared interests to ensure that union and corporate donations are eliminated from the electoral process. At the very least, let's do it right. I will certainly be giving my support to this prudent amendment. I would encourage all of the hon. members from all of the caucuses to do the same.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you for the comments. I remain of the view – and I would encourage everyone to support this – that the effective date of June 15 better serves the purpose of this legislation. Not only does it prevent a run on donations; we remain of the opinion that this would withstand a court challenge. We do have confirmation from the Chief Electoral Officer that donations, when made to political campaigns, are made with dates on them, and those dates are usually reflected in the tax receipt received. So I'm not really sure how I can further address that.

In terms of the constitutionality it's my understanding that the presumption against retroactivity is a principle of statutory interpretation and not a constitutional principle. I'm not really sure what can be meant by saying that it's not constitutional.

I will close by saying that the June 15 date supports Albertans. It supports them in having their voices heard right away and in having this legislation come into place as soon as it was proposed to prevent a sort of rush on donations. Ultimately, we don't believe that it will be subject to successful challenge. Whether or not it's subject to challenge is obviously not in our hands.

I would encourage everyone to vote against the amendment. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to rise today and speak in support of this amendment. Madam Chair, I fully support

Bill 1. Wildrose believes in putting democracy in the hands of everyday Albertans. We believe that banning corporate and union donations is a critical step towards doing that. Pay-to-play politics is the way that politics have been done here in Alberta for quite awhile, and we want to put the power of democracy back into the hands of Albertans regardless of their financial backing or their ability to donate. This is the Wildrose policy, and we're grateful that the NDP have adopted it, but we believe this bill needs a few changes, and we would like to help fix some of the problems.

I'm a bit worried about the date the bill goes into law. The concern is that the retroactivity could leave . . .

The Chair: Sorry. Hon. member, I need to recognize a point of order.

Point of Order Factual Accuracy

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, but under 23(h), (i), and (j), particularly (i), "imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member," I just wanted to remind the member and the House that the New Democratic Party has had this policy for a very long time, and it was recently adopted by the Wildrose Party.

Thank you.

9:50

Mr. Cooper: Madam Chair, here we are. It's coming up to 10 o'clock on the second night of this great Legislature, that we had the pleasure of being elected to, a position where we were assured we would not be debating legislation well into the evening while my children are sleeping and most of Edmonton is thinking about getting into bed. We have heard all sorts of statements from the government talking about how wonderful the NDP policy is. We've heard statements from the opposition about our policy.

Clearly, this is not a point of order and merely a matter of debate. It's totally ridiculous to rise in this place and say: we had the policy before you had the policy; look how awesome we are. This is a matter of debate. It is not a point of order. It's one thing to rise in this place and say: it's our policy. It's another to rise on a point of order to dispute who had the policy first. It's neither here nor there. It's a wonderful Wildrose policy. We're glad we've found some common ground.

Let's get on with the important matters of the House and not quibble about who had a policy first. This is a matter of debate and not a point of order.

The Chair: Hon. members, this issue seems to be more of a disagreement about facts, and I don't think it's a point of order. However, thank you for clarifying the record.

The hon. Member for Airdrie to continue.

Debate Continued

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Madam Chair. Just to finish here, I find that this is odd to have the date of this bill take effect immediately, even before the campaign period is over. I urge all members here to join me in voting in favour of this amendment to change the date that the law would take effect from June 15 to July 6.

Thank you.

Mr. Mason: I'm informed by the table, Madam Chair, that my motion in committee to shorten the bells to one-minute intervals does not apply to the House. Can I just have some clarification? Because I'm happy to move it again if I need to.

The Chair: Yes. The word is that the motion you made only applied in Committee of Supply, so if you want to do that again, you would have to make another motion.

Mr. Mason: May I do that now?

The Chair: Okay. All right.

Mr. Mason: Then I would seek unanimous approval from the House to shorten the bells to one-minute intervals.

The Chair: For the balance of Committee of the Whole.

Mr. Mason: For the balance of Committee of the Whole.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Chair: Moving back to debate on the amendment, any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to speak in favour of the amendment. Unfortunately, there are issues with the legislation the NDP has proposed. That is why we have Wildrose. We are here to help the government make legislation stronger and fairer than what has been proposed. It would be wise to make the effective date early July, when the campaign period officially closes.

Madam Chair, sometimes when you make ad hoc announcements and changes in the middle of an established, legislated timeline, you get yourself in trouble. In general we oppose the idea of retroactive legislation. In this case it would change the rules governing the current election period before it even closed, which might get the whole bill thrown out by the courts. This legislation is too important to get sent to the courts so early on. No one wants the government to be liable to court challenges from candidates or other parties who are counting on unions or corporations to pay off election debts. It would be an utter embarrassment for the governing NDP and the Wildrose Official Opposition, but mostly for the government, if this first bill ends up getting challenged in the courts or even ruled unconstitutional. Let's not let that happen, and let's pass the amendment.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other member wishing to speak on the amendment?

Mr. Schneider: Madam Chairman, I rise to speak to Bill 1, An Act to Renew Democracy in Alberta. Kudos to the NDP government for adopting a policy long advocated by the Wildrose, the banning of corporate and union donations. Wildrose has tried to make this happen in the past only to be scuttled at every turn by PC majorities. This is a chance to level the political playing field. The big money from business and big labour puts a perception of undue influence in people's minds. We live in an era where perception is reality. As such, we need to curb the influence of these special interests. The PCs neglected the grassroots because they became dependent on big money. I congratulate the NDP for being selfless and willing to forgo the union donations that they are known for.

That being said, Wildrose has identified a risk here with the legislation as proposed, and we wish to prevent embarrassment to the government. It would be an utter embarrassment for the governing NDP and the Wildrose Official Opposition, but mostly the government, if the first bill ends up getting challenged in the courts because someone decided to arbitrarily change a date before the existing legislated date came to pass. This legislation is too

important to get sent to the courts so early on. No one wants the government to be liable to court challenges from candidates or other parties who are counting on unions or corporations to pay off election debts.

Let's not make that happen, Madam Chairman, and let's pass the amendment. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other member wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Madam Chair. It is a great privilege and honour to stand in the House for the first time to join in the debate on Bill 1 and speak to this amendment we have proposed. First of all, I'm very glad to see this legislation brought before the House. I don't think it's possible to overstate just how important it is that we begin to restore trust, ethics, and integrity to our political system. Bill 1 aims to do that in part, and I am very supportive of its goals and measures. I'm proud to be part of a caucus that has long believed in limiting special interests, interests with vast financial resources, from exercising undue influence on political parties and, by extension, our democratic institutions.

Albertans spoke loudly and clearly with their ballots and pencils this past election. We said that we wanted a political system we could trust. We wanted accountability, accountability of our government to the people, and we wanted the assurance that those who represent and serve Albertans act with integrity and honesty. As an everyday Albertan and especially as an elected representative I found it disheartening to hear from so many who lost faith in the system. It is discouraging when those you represent feel that their voices cannot be heard fairly.

10:00

As appreciative and excited as I was to be elected on May 5, I know that the voters put us to work that day. They gave us our marching orders and sent us to the Legislature to begin the important task of rebuilding confidence in our political system piece by piece. One such piece in this rebuilding of trust is Bill 1. It goes straight to the fundamental democratic principle of putting the citizen, the Albertan, at the top of the political machinery rather than being caught under its weight.

We certainly expect and deserve accountability from our government, and we are truly committed to that principle. We must ensure that government serves the people and not the other way around. To this end, we must ensure that our political system is influenced by Albertans, free individual citizens, and only Albertans. I am pleased to be here discussing a bill which strives to accomplish just that by removing the potential for undue and improper influence on political parties by corporate and union special interests, and I'm encouraged by the constructive debate which has accompanied it in this House.

In the interest of strengthening the bill, I will be supporting the amendment put forward by my colleague. Make no mistake; my desire to see the bill amended is in no way a reflection of any disapproval of the spirit of the legislation and the principles it represents. My desire is only to see this legislation strengthened, and I implore all members here to do the same by voting in favour of this amendment. I have spoken about this legislation as being a key piece of an overall move to improve the health of democracy in Alberta. Given its importance we ought to double our resolve to get this bill done right.

I am concerned that the good work this House has set in motion may be undone by a court challenge regarding the retroactive provision of the bill. I worry that we will expose the legislation to legal battles over its constitutionality by setting the effective date in

the midst of a campaign period, a campaign period that has still not ended. I believe that it would be wiser and more prudent to amend the effective date to the end of the current campaign period in early July. As important as it is to get those corporate and union limitations into law, we should be judicious and fair about applying this new law to those candidates who were operating under the old rules.

I also question how enforceable the retroactive provision would be given that contributions are not required to be reported with dates attached. Again, with the potential for court challenges it would not be wise to expose this legislation to turmoil and uncertainty over a provision that might not even make a practical difference.

Again, I am proud to stand and endorse a piece of sensible legislation that we as a party have been willing to fight for in the past. This is proof that we can work together on common ground to make improvements to our political system and the governance of the province. Let's continue the spirit of co-operation and constructive debate by supporting respectable, measured, and reasonable amendments such as this one. Let's show Albertans, who sent us to work, that we can produce meaningful, lasting, and effective change. Let's strengthen our democratic institutions by voting in favour of this amendment.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you for allowing me to rise and speak to this amendment. Bill 1 is a historic piece of legislation in that it is the first government bill to be tabled by a party other than the PCs since 1971. You should be congratulated. It's always easier to read about history than to write it, but today we are debating a piece of history. It's interesting that one of the amendments that the Wildrose is proposing stops the government from trying to in effect rewrite history by introducing retroactive legislation. In general, the Wildrose opposes the idea of retroactive legislation because it changes the rules in mid-game.

Now, I've been a teacher for 30 years. I've been a basketball coach for 30 of those years. As a basketball coach I can imagine what would happen if we changed the rules in mid-stride, if after game 2, say, of the NBA finals with Golden State I was suddenly told that the three-pointer was no longer allowed. This would have serious consequences. While I don't see the political equivalent of a Steph Curry or Golden State in this Assembly today, the point is that changing the rules mid-season is not considered fair, and that's why leagues don't do it.

In the same way, this government proposes to make this bill retroactive to a date that is in the middle of the election period. While I support Bill 1 in principle, in its present form it cites June 15 as the effective date for corporate and union donations to be banned. But, Madam Chair, given that an election period runs for two months after the polling, which this year was May 5, the last day of the election period is July 5. It makes much more sense to have the bill become effective after the current election period comes to a close.

I can see what the intent was, to avoid encouraging more last-second donations from unions and corporations, but this goal is not worth the many problems in terms of a level playing field and legal challenges that arise from making the bill retroactive to June 15. As far as fairness goes, I'm thinking predominantly of candidates who may have campaign debts. That goes beyond party lines. They may have had pledges of support that they were counting on but couldn't or hadn't collected yet or plans to hit up corporate or union supporters in the final push to clear their debts, and this is pretty unfair to them.

Situations like that make me think that a lawsuit is going to challenge this law. It would be a real shame to have the first piece of legislation, a historic piece of legislation by your new government and the first piece of legislation this 29th Legislature will pass, get tied up in the courts or even ruled unconstitutional, just as unfortunate as if the NBA board of governors had changed the rules mid-playoffs to change the historic outcome of the NBA finals this year. I therefore speak to and will support this amendment.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just have a quick two questions for the minister. While I am certain that the CEO of Elections Alberta told you that technically there is a date on donations, did he tell you that those dates would be accurate, and did he agree or think that your retroactive date would not be problematic? That's not what we're being told.

The Chair: Hon. minister, do you wish to respond?

Ms Ganley: Just to respond very briefly to those questions, political entities are required to report the date on which they receive donations. Whether or not they're doing that or whether or not they choose to break the law, I mean, I can't really speak to that. I can only speak to what the law says, and that is that they are required to report the date on which they receive donations.

In terms of the second question – I'm sorry; I'm going to ask you to repeat it.

Mr. Nixon: The question is simple. When you talked to Elections Alberta, did they think that retroactively putting in this legislation was not going to be problematic? Every indication that we are having from them is that it will be.

10:10

Ms Ganley: In terms of the legal opinion on the fact that the challenges to the bill would unlikely be successful on that basis, those were from the department. What we had asked the Chief Electoral Officer was whether or not parties are required to record the dates, and the answer to that question was yes. They are required to record the dates on which donations were received.

Mr. Nixon: Did he say that he supports the retroactive date?

Ms Ganley: I think the point on this front is not whether or not – honestly, I don't have the e-mail in front of me. What I can tell you is that we are confident that this date is supportable and that it will withstand a court challenge.

Mr. Nixon: So it would be fair to say they didn't support the date?

Ms Ganley: No, that wouldn't be fair to say. I said that I don't have the e-mail in front of me in terms of what exactly we canvassed.

Mr. Nixon: Did you discuss the fact that you were going to bring in retroactive legislation to deal with the Election Act with Elections Alberta, and if you did, did they have concerns with bringing in retroactive legislation in the middle of a writ period? It's a very simple question.

Ms Ganley: And I will once again give my very simple answer, which is that we are confident that this bill will withstand a court challenge as presently worded.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak on amendment A1? The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Madam Chair, I would like to ask the Minister of Justice on what date she consulted with Elections Alberta.

The Chair: Yeah. This is kind of drifting away from the amendment itself. It's to be a debate on the amendment, and this going back and forth is not really going anywhere.

No other members to speak on the amendment?

We're going to call the question on amendment A1, as proposed by the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

[The voice vote indicated that amendment A1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:13 p.m.]

[Two minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Hanson	Schneider
Cyr	Hunter	Smith
Drysdale	Loewen	Stier
Ellis	MacIntyre	Strankman
Fildebrandt	Nixon	Swann
Fraser	Orr	van Dijken
Gotfried	Pitt	Yao

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Gray	Miranda
Babcock	Hinkley	Nielsen
Bilous	Hoffman	Payne
Carlier	Horne	Phillips
Carson	Kazim	Piquette
Ceci	Kleinsteuber	Renaud
Clark	Larivee	Rosendahl
Connolly	Littlewood	Sabir
Coolahan	Loyola	Schmidt
Cortes-Vargas	Luff	Schreiner
Dach	Malkinson	Sigurdson
Dang	Mason	Sucha
Drever	McCuaig-Boyd	Sweet
Feehan	McKitrick	Turner
Fitzpatrick	McLean	Westhead
Ganley	McPherson	Woollard
Goehring	Miller	

Totals: For – 21 Against – 50

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Chair: Back to the main bill. Are there any further comments, questions?

Some Hon. Members: Question.

The Chair: The question has been called. All those in favour of Bill 1?

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Chair: My apologies. I forgot that there are three parts to this bill. We'll have to just start again.

Are you ready for the question on Bill 1, An Act to Renew Democracy in Alberta? On the clauses . . .

Mr. Cooper: Madam Chair, we have some significant amendments that the Government House Leader has agreed would be heard this evening. I don't think I saw a call for other amendments or speakers, just moving to the question. I would suggest that this is out of order and that we should be able to proceed at Committee of the Whole.

The Chair: Hon. member, I did ask if there were any other members who were wishing to speak or comment on the bill.

10:20

Mr. Mason: Madam Chairman . . .

Mr. Cooper: Time allocation now, too, or what's the plan?

Mr. Mason: Do you want me to change it, or do you just want to keep talking?

Madam Chairman, it is true that we knew the Wildrose opposition had more amendments. It was unfortunate they were not in a position to make them when they were called. But since the House leader is now here, I propose that we allow them to move their amendments.

The Chair: All right. Are there any further speakers on the bill? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm glad to rise again to address another aspect of Bill 1. Along with it an amendment we would like to propose will better enable this bill to fulfill its intent. To reiterate, we appreciate what the government is trying to accomplish by bringing this bill before the House, and that is admirable, but that is not to say that we can't make it better. So directly to the point, our caucus would like to amend Bill 1 to more clearly restrict donations-in-kind so unions and corporations can't indirectly donate to parties by supplying their workers, equipment, or property to political campaigns. I have 95 copies here of an amendment that Parliamentary Counsel has approved, and I'd like to add a definition of contribution to help resolve the ambiguity currently in the act.

I will wait for them to be distributed.

The Chair: This will be amendment A2.

Mr. Cooper: Madam Chair, for the ability to expediate this process, would you mind if the hon. member continued while the amendments were being passed out?

The Chair: Yes, I was just going to ask for him to continue. Please.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you. Given that we're prohibiting direct donations from unions and corporations, the matter of indirect donations becomes even more important. The matter is something people at the chief electoral office have confirmed is already too much of a loophole. It is not unusual to hear of unions and corporations giving office materials to political campaigns. It is also not unusual to hear of union staff or corporate staff being sent during work hours to help the candidates campaign. Neither case ought to be acceptable.

Now, it is one thing to ban direct donations to political campaigns, candidates, constituency associations, and so on. That is comparatively easy to monitor and enforce if we get it right. But it is another matter to address the problem of indirect donations. We need to be much more vigilant and explicit when it comes to indirect donations as they are often far more innocuous. There is presently a section elsewhere in the act, section 22, which addresses the topic of giving real property or goods to a campaign or party. However, it contains nothing clear with regard to donating staff or services,

nor is the topic addressed anywhere else in this act. It strikes me as odd, Madam Chair. This is because we all know perfectly well that such donations occur now.

Should this bill pass, and union and corporate monetary donations be made illegal, donations of a more indirect nature can be expected to become even more commonplace. We in this caucus do not think it is appropriate, and I'm sure everyone here would agree that it goes against the spirit of the bill. If such donations were to become even more commonplace, this would risk giving the perception of undue influence of unions and corporations in the political process, thereby defeating the entire purpose of this proposed legislation. It is clear that we need to address this adverse consequence of the bill as it's currently written. We are here to help the government, and to that end we encourage the hon. members opposite to support this amendment. Surely we can agree that donations in staff and materials are clear forms of political contributions. In ways this is worse than monetary donations. By donating staff, unions and corporations take valuable work hours and direct them to influence the democratic process. At this point they might just as well be a political party in their own right.

Let us not forget the risk of employee coercion inherent in this practice. Unions and corporations are capable of putting undue pressure on those that they employ, sometimes even without conscious or malicious intent. It is very important that Albertans not feel pressure to engage in political activities not of their choosing. This is fundamental to freedom of speech, the very foundation of our democratic principles. Albertans need to feel unrestrained regarding the policy viewpoints they chose to endorse or oppose. It is not the place of unions and companies to tell their employees or members how to vote let alone who they should actively campaign for or which policies they should advocate for. Our members opposite, for example, might be surprised to find out how many of their unionized colleagues actually support us in the voting booths. This is all in addition to the obvious unfairness of candidates leveraging the resources of entire nonpolitical organizations for political purposes.

Madam Chair, the ability of unions and corporations to make these types of indirect contributions to political causes was already a significant loophole in the existing legislation. It is important to note that indirect contributions are still contributions nevertheless. A contribution can refer to money, real property, goods, or services. Just because we term them "indirect" doesn't make them any less impactful in the real results and consequences. Addressing this issue is long overdue, and this bill is incomplete and ineffective if it does not include provisions that close this gaping loophole. Given that we will be taking away the ability to make direct donations in monetary forms, it will be even more important to tighten the loopholes, allowing indirect donations right away; otherwise, this legislation would not achieve its aim. We have a real chance to make this meaningful piece of legislation here. Let's not waste it. We have a real chance to strengthen the voices of Alberta residents in this election. Let's not pass that up.

I urge the government to accept this amendment. Thank you, Madam Chair.

10:30

The Chair: Anyone wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thanks, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to rise this evening and speak to the amendment, an amendment that I think is sound and reasoned, that has been well thought out when it comes to strengthening a piece of legislation. I spoke yesterday in this House about the best idea winning and not being about partisan

politics or our idea or your idea. Where the idea originates is not what's key. What's key here is that we can all agree that getting unions and corporations out of politics is a positive step forward for all Albertans and certainly for those who have elected us. I just think that while we have the opportunity, we might as well go ahead and do everything that is within our power to ensure that that's exactly what happens.

Here we have some situations that I have been informed of where some significant law offices in downtown Calgary had encouraged employees to have the afternoon off work if they would go and campaign on one particular campaign or another. We have a significant gift from a corporation to a political campaign that's taking place, and this gift has the ability to influence the outcome of an election. I have also heard reports of large union organizations strongly encouraging their employees to do the same.

Let me be clear. I have no problem with a union member or an employee of a company that wants to engage in the political process on their own time. In fact, I think we should be doing more to encourage all Albertans to engage in the political process. But when it comes to a corporation, a law office in downtown Calgary, a union, or any large company encouraging employees with, "We'll pay you to take the afternoon off provided that you go work for this campaign," that in anyone's terms is a contribution, and here today in this House we are making the effort to ban those types of contributions.

In fact, I'm quite surprised that it appears that the government doesn't also want to ban these types of contributions. If the government is truly serious about going all the way, about allowing the best idea to win, then they, too, will support this reasoned amendment that is based on ensuring that we get corporations and unions out of the political process and focusing on the things that they do best.

You know, I look at members in this Assembly, and I'm curious to know if there are, in fact, folks who may have received donations in kind from unions or corporations. I don't know the answer to that question. Perhaps some other members are also curious. I think what's fundamental this evening is that we have the opportunity to make a bill even stronger for our province, to get unions and corporations out of politics and focusing on the things that they do best.

I strongly encourage all members of the Assembly to consider the amendment thoroughly, to consider that we have the opportunity to create a culture in this place where ideas come from all sides of the House. I can tell you that in the last three years the Official Opposition caucus, the Wildrose Official Opposition caucus, sat in many of these desks. There were two amendments accepted by the previous government. I believe that it's very possible and, in fact, quite likely that we had many more good ideas than two.

I think we can start off this Legislature with the right foot, the left foot if you prefer, but one foot in front of the other and agree together that this bill can be strengthened, and I encourage you to do that.

The Chair: I'll recognize the hon. minister and then the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Given the lateness of the hour I will make the comment once and I won't address it further. My friends can continue to raise the point if they like. There are many things that this bill doesn't do. There are many changes that this bill doesn't make. This bill bans corporate and union donations. In addition to this bill, there will be a committee going forward that will propose additional amendments and additional changes.

In the present case, in terms of the definition of services, off the top of my head I can come up with a couple of complications. For instance, I was working a full-time job when I was campaigning. During the course of my campaign I happened to have some times when I was off work when normally I would have been expected to be at work. Potentially, that would put my employer on the wrong side of this legislation; i.e., having made a donation of services in kind to a political candidate, that being me.

The point is that, much like many of the other amendments having to do with third-party advertisers, maybe some of these things are good ideas, and maybe they will come up in committee, but for right now our intention was to put forward a bill which banned corporate and union donations, which fulfilled a very clear election promise that we made and which, I think, has support of the House.

I would urge everyone to vote down this amendment.

Mr. Clark: Madam Chair, I rise to speak against this amendment. I agree with the comments of the hon. Minister of Justice that this bill doesn't do everything, and I know that we didn't intend it to. There is an opportunity to have this conversation, a broader conversation about this in the committee, because I think it is an important conversation.

However, I see several problems with the concept itself. It is very difficult to track and prove what is in-kind donation. The hon. minister has come up with one example. If a postal worker does a literature drop for your campaign, is that something that needs to be counted? If my wife, who is a physician, puts a Band-Aid on the scraped knee of a campaign worker, does that salary for that moment in time count against your campaign? Can an accountant be your CFO? Could a lawyer interact with Elections Alberta, providing guidance and advice to your campaign? These are all things that we've dealt with in our campaigns, and it adds a remarkable complexity.

10:40

I understand the rationale behind the amendment, and I understand what we're trying to achieve here, but I really worry that we'd be overly constraining participation in the democratic process in doing this. How do we define what is on one's own time? While we may hear stories of law firms or others granting people time off to work on a campaign, I think that is actually a legitimate democratic expression of what people and organizations choose to do. It is an idea where perhaps when we have the time to discuss in the special committee further changes to campaign financing and democratic renewal, we can discuss it further at length.

With that, I will end my remarks and say that I'm going to vote against the amendment. Thank you.

Mr. Cooper: You know, perhaps the hon. member, the independent member from Calgary-Elbow, didn't like the example that I gave. But let's say that a corporation donated, say, a bus for a political organization to use for their campaign. This is a sizable donation in kind. They haven't asked for any compensation, they're not being paid, but they've donated a significant asset to a political campaign, perhaps a minivan for a leader of a political party to drive around in or, you know, a bus, an aircraft.

An Hon. Member: A Winnebago.

Mr. Cooper: A Winnebago. A Winnebago is a perfect example of a corporate donation that, moving forward, wouldn't be allowed.

So we're not just talking about an employee being asked to take time off work. There are all sorts of assets of gifts in kind that one could give, and they could amount to a significant amount of

money. You know, I know that the hon. member from wherever he's from, Drumheller-Stettler, has a very . . .

Mr. Mason: You mean a lot to him.

Mr. Cooper: It's just where he lives that doesn't mean that much.

He has a very sizable riding, and if he needed to, say, get from one side of the riding to the other in some expedient manner for some reason and somebody wanted to donate the use of a helicopter, for example, to perhaps fly a banner – who knows what the gift in kind is that comes from a corporation? This is the challenge, that we are creating a significant loophole – not in the words of the Chief Electoral Officer but the words of people from his office – where corporations and unions can find a way around the legislation that we're passing.

While I fully agree that the purpose of the bill was to ban corporate and union donations, which we've said on numerous occasions we're in support of, we need to seize the day. Today is the best opportunity to make the legislation right. I can assure you that if past practice has anything to do with this House – and it certainly seems that there's that chance given that we're here now – bringing these things forward is not the easiest thing for a government to do. So make it right today; ban donations in kind from corporations and unions. We're not talking about someone who's taking their own time to engage in the process. There are limits on these sorts of things. The rules can be followed. Do the right thing and support the amendment.

Mr. Mason: In perhaps a vain attempt to urge members to deal with this amendment before it gets really, really late, I would just offer the following. I think that the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow was quite right. We are not finished with the reform issues that need to be brought into play in a wide range of areas, including in electoral financing. We've never said that this was the final word. We wanted to provide a bill that was an initial step that could be defended and did not require an extensive amount of work to deal with the complexities. As you get into other areas of electoral reform, you will find that they become more complex and they require more study and they require more time. We wanted to bring in a bill in the very first session to set out the direction of this government with respect to democratic reform and that had a simple goal of eliminating financial contributions by unions and by corporations, and that's what we've brought forward.

The Premier has worked with the Leader of the Official Opposition to work on an all-party committee that will allow the study of a wide range of things in terms of improving democratic reform in this province, greater transparency, and openness. On an all-party basis all of these things can be considered. We have never said that this bill is our last word, but it is the thing that we thought that we could get, a defensible piece of legislation, within a matter of a couple of weeks to bring forward at the First Session of the Legislature.

So we'd urge hon. members to please understand that we are not necessarily finished here, but we believe that this bill as it is should be passed by the House, and then we can get on with the broader task of a deeper and more thoroughgoing reform of our democratic institutions in this province. I'd urge members to please let us move forward in a timely fashion tonight, and we can finish the debate in the committee stage not today but tomorrow, as soon as possible.

Thank you.

The Chair: I'll recognize the hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Sorry. I just wanted to make one point of clarification because I think we've sort of gotten a little bit confused. Currently

in the act section 1(1)(e) reads, “‘contribution’ means . . . money, real property, or goods or the use of real property or goods,” so I believe that the Winnebago would already be a problem.

The Chair: Thank you for that clarification.

Any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Make no mistake, Madam Chair. The Wildrose intends on supporting this bill. This is the part where you guys clap. But my parents used to tell me that if you're going to do a job, do the job right. I would also say that I think that my dad, who is a wonderful man – and because of the hour I won't go into how great he is – would have called this a Halfway Harry. We're half, two-thirds of the way there. We just haven't quite got there. You know, I think we have that chance. I think that there is lots of opportunity, but my concern is that – again, I recognize that there is the committee coming, and there's the possibility that we can bring these things back to the House, but I do have some concerns. I ask that hon. members will indulge our discussion just a little bit longer this evening while we work to encourage the government to consider the breadth of the bill.

10:50

Mr. Fildebrandt: Madam Chair, I will attempt to be brief. This bill is near and dear to my heart. I think this is critical to getting the influence of undue big money from big corporations, big unions out of politics in this province. It has had a corrupting influence in this province for far too long, where businesses have felt that they can make the right political donations and then get the right sole-source contracts or favours and access to the government. It's wrong, and I commend the government for making this the first bill that they put forward. We in the Wildrose truly believe in the spirit of this bill. We genuinely want to help make this better legislation. It doesn't matter that it came from us. We're not going to hold it against you. Maybe a bit. We want to make this good legislation today.

Now, we can already see from across the aisle that they're not terribly open to accepting the amendment to this bill. The Government House Leader has indicated that the special committee that has been struck between the Leader of the Opposition and the Premier will be travelling the province working on other issues of democratic reform, which appears to leave the window open to the idea of this amendment.

I believe we should make it today and get it right on day one. My question would be, and I would ask the Government House Leader, if he would agree with the spirit of our amendment. I will also ask a second, slightly more loaded question: would the governing party assure the House that they will not be accepting donations in kind during the Calgary-Foothills by-election?

Mr. Mason: With respect to the first question we are open to the public view on what is important to democratic reform. I am not going to commit to you now that we would support this in principle. I think that that would be an overstatement. What we will do is commit to a process whereby these matters can be explored, and we can work together in areas of common agreement to bring forward beneficial changes.

I'm certainly not in any position to make any comment whatsoever about the Calgary by-election, hon. member, and I think you probably know that.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Madam Chair. I want to also affirm that I really do believe in the bill, I believe in the spirit of the bill, and I

congratulate you for bringing it forward. I am urged to speak to the amendment as well, though, for a couple of reasons because I really believe that without it we do defeat the spirit or the intent of it entirely. Why not take to the public something that is truly enforceable rather than something that's only half there? Furthermore, I feel like we probably will leave the door wide open to corporate and union influence in ways that become untrackable and unmeasurable.

In addition to some of the areas that have been suggested, it concerns me that now we not only leave the door open but probably encourage, by the nature of the bill, that office spaces, for instance, will be donated to campaigns; automobiles by businesses that are willing to offer cars; computers, to set up computer offices. Why would a business or a union not go ahead and buy all of your signs for you and just give them to you in kind? Why not encourage volunteers to show up by offering them coffee and T-shirts and movie passes and anything else that you want? It just opens the door to an endless number of things that I think will be extremely difficult. If we really want to keep corporations and unions out of the election process, we should not allow all of this to happen. It will just corrupt campaigns immensely.

I'm concerned further that we should defer it to a committee. My accountants have always told me for years that the best way to deal with taxes is to defer – defer, defer, defer – and if you defer long enough, you can actually almost defer them forever. Why should we leave till tomorrow the good that we can do today? I would just like to ask the government: in the interest of a co-operative spirit and working together, would it be that hard to add an amendment that actually will make you look better before the public by adding this bit to the bill and actually making it that much cleaner?

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Chair, thank you so much for recognizing me once again this evening. The Government House Leader has done such a fine job of pointing out that I've been on my feet five times tonight, so it's a pleasure to rise and ask a couple of quick questions as I believe we're wrapping up debate here on the amendment.

I'm thankful that we have this all-party committee to discuss much of these important issues about accountability, ethics, transparency. I look forward to the motion before the House forming that committee in the coming days. I understand that there has been some discussion around that. I look forward to the committee being very active over the summer.

I guess one of my concerns – you know, sometimes governments do some things through self-preservation. Sometimes they do things for the betterment of Alberta, hopefully more often for the betterment of Alberta than the previous. I guess I just have a quick question. I want to ensure that the governing party is not so adamantly opposed to this particular amendment of gifts in kind because they have absolutely zero intentions of receiving gifts in kind from unions or corporations during the anticipated Calgary-Foothills by-election.

The Chair: Any other hon. members?

Mr. Clark: Maybe the point I want to make is that if corporate and union donations of all kind are banned – donations in kind are clearly defined in the act, as the minister has said, and we all know that in many of our campaigns we've taken some donations in kind from corporations, be it a Winnebago or a campaign office or some goods rendered. If that's no longer acceptable as corporate

donations – I presume that's not allowed based on the contents of Bill 1. The question to the Minister of Justice is: if cash donations from corporations are not allowed, will donations in kind from corporations and unions also not be allowed under Bill 1?

The Chair: Hon. minister, do you wish to respond to the comment?

Ms Ganley: Yes, I do. I guess in response to that I would say that, again, I mean, it's my understanding that the present definition in the act of contribution includes money, real property, goods, or the use of real property or goods. So I would say that that would include donations in kind.

The Chair: Any further speakers to the amendment?

If not, we'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Chair: Back to the bill. Are there any further questions or comments on this bill?

Mr. Cooper: I move that the committee rise and report.

Mr. Mason: No, we don't want to do that. Do you not have more amendments, hon. member?

Mr. Cooper: No. They're not ready.

Mr. Mason: But you do want to introduce more.

Mr. Cooper: Yes.

Mr. Mason: Do we rise and report? Okay. You're right. [interjection] The correct motion is to move that the committee rise

and report progress when we're not done. Otherwise, you would have ended the committee, and, you see, I didn't want to let you do that.

[Motion carried]

11:00

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Northern Hills.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Thank you. Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 1. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Mr. Mason: Madam Speaker, I want to thank all members of the House for some excellent discussion and debate tonight and the progress that we've made on Bill 1 and on responses to Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech from the Throne.

I think that given the hour and the good progress that we've made, I will move to adjourn until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 11:03 p.m. to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday afternoon, June 18, 2015

Day 4

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

First Session

Wanner, Hon. Robert E., Medicine Hat (ND), Speaker
Jabbour, Deborah C., Peace River (ND), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Feehan, Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (ND), Deputy Chair of Committees

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Rocky View (W)
Anderson, Shaye, Leduc-Beaumont (ND)
Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (W)
Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (ND)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (W)
Bhullar, Manmeet Singh, Calgary-Greenway (PC)
Bilous, Hon. Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (ND),
Deputy Government House Leader
Carlier, Hon. Oneil, Whitecourt-St. Anne (ND)
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-Meadowlark (ND)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, Calgary-Fort (ND)
Clark, Greg, Calgary-Elbow (AP)
Connolly, Michael R.D., Calgary-Hawkwood (ND)
Coolahan, Craig, Calgary-Klein (ND)
Cooper, Nathan, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (W),
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Cortes-Vargas, Estefania, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (ND)
Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake (W),
Official Opposition Deputy Whip
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (ND)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South West (ND)
Drever, Deborah, Calgary-Bow (Ind)
Drysdale, Wayne, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (PC),
Progressive Conservative Opposition Whip
Eggen, Hon. David, Edmonton-Calder (ND)
Ellis, Mike, Calgary-West (PC)
Fildebrandt, Derek Gerhard, Strathmore-Brooks (W)
Fitzpatrick, Maria M., Lethbridge-East (ND)
Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (PC)
Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., Calgary-Buffalo (ND)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (ND)
Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (PC)
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Hoffman, Hon. Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (ND)
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Larivee, Danielle, Lesser Slave Lake (ND)
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Loewen, Todd, Grande Prairie-Smoky (W)
Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (ND)
Luff, Robyn, Calgary-East (ND)
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Mason, Hon. Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (ND),
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Schreiner, Kim, Red Deer-North (ND)
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Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC),
Progressive Conservative Opposition House Leader
Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (W)
Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (W)
Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (ND)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (ND)
Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (W)
Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (ND)
van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND)
Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)
Vacant, Calgary-Foothills

Party standings:

New Democrat: 53 Wildrose: 21 Progressive Conservative: 9 Alberta Liberal: 1 Alberta Party: 1 Independent: 1 Vacant: 1

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Shannon Phillips	Minister of Environment and Parks, Minister Responsible for the Status of Women
Irfan Sabir	Minister of Human Services
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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, June 18, 2015

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Hon. members of the Assembly, as we reflect today, I would like to make a slight introduction and then the reflection. In Islamic tradition today marks the beginning of the holy month of Ramadan, which runs from June 18 to July 17, 2015. This is the sacred time of fasting, prayer, almsgiving, and family gatherings. We express gratitude for the contribution that the Muslim communities make to the social fabric of our Alberta. Let us take a moment of silence to experience peace, which is the objective of every spiritual practice. May the source of all compassion and mercy teach us the ways of wisdom, care, and love. We join our Muslim sisters and brothers in learning the disciplines that overcome our egotism so that we may live in harmony with every person alive today.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for . . .

Ms Larivee: Lesser Slave Lake.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the gallery today we have visiting with us Heidi Gould, a strong advocate for nursing and for client care within the health care system. She's here partway on behalf of herself but also for the United Nurses of Alberta and as one of the many active health care workers for Alberta Health Services. Welcome to Heidi for coming here to take part.

The Speaker: The Minister of Environment and Parks and minister responsible for the status of women.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today in the Assembly to introduce to you and through you to all members of our Assembly members of the Environment and Parks planning branch. The planning branch leads our ministry's work in developing and implementing the seven regional land-use plans as outlined by the land-use framework. They help usher these important plans from the conceptual stage all the way to realizing them on our landscapes, working collaboratively with other areas of government along the way. They develop the objectives and strategies to manage our environment and resources and ensure a balance between protecting our natural landscapes and responsible development. Their work includes the development of regional management frameworks for air, water, and biodiversity and to issue specific plans to address environmental or resource management issues.

In the House today we have, if I could ask them to rise as I read their names: Chad Willms, Laura Polasek, Nicole Keef, Cassidy van Rensen, Fiona Slessor, Wen Xu, Karen Sundquist, Tracy Price, Sarah Depoe, Aaron Petty, Marika Atkinson, and Samuel Wahab. Mr. Speaker, I'd like to acknowledge the hard work of the planning branch, that they undertake in helping shape the future of our great province, and I ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have four introductions today with your indulgence. Eric Musekamp and Darlene Dunlop are here for their final day in the Legislature to honour the ninth anniversary of the death of farmworker Kevan Chandler, killed in a silage elevator, who, without workers' compensation, left a young widow and two children in poverty. Lorna spent the next six years in court thanks to a compassionate lawyer and finally received a settlement. They're here again hoping the government will be able to in this legislative session ensure that no more paid farm workers are injured or killed without compensation, by immediately regulating workers' compensation for all agricultural operations with employees.

Next to them is the inimitable Dr. Judy Johnson, an emeritus professor in psychology at Mount Royal University, former chair of Friends of Medicare, on the board of directors of the Canadian Mental Health Association, and president of my constituency association. She's accompanied by Carolyn Campbell, a former schoolteacher and now a much-quoted conservation specialist for the Alberta Wilderness Association, also a past president of my constituency association in Calgary-Mountain View. I'll ask them to rise. Give them the warm welcome of the Legislature.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to introduce to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly three students and their teacher visiting our province from El Salvador as well as their sponsor here from Calgary. The students are Sandra Patricia Cortez Henriquez, Eduardo José Ortiz Cornejo, Maria Odilia Vasquez Gonzalez, and their teacher Jorge Adalberto Barahona Avelar. Thank you, and also special thanks to the Member for Calgary-Cross for his agreeing to meet with students and introduce them to members of Calgary's Salvadoran community.

The students are joined by their sponsor, Doug Frenette. Doug formed a group to assist the students and many more with their education in El Salvador. Doug really is a true example of the generosity of spirit Albertans are known for all around the world. It is my honour to introduce you to my friends and colleagues in the Legislative Assembly. I ask that you please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Minister of Health and the Minister of Seniors.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you Michael Janz. He's the chair of the Edmonton public school board. Michael and I have worked together since we were both first elected to public office in October of 2010. We were committed to a shared-leadership model and relied on each other to ensure strong fiscal management of public resources, evidence-based decision-making, fair and respectful negotiation with public-sector employees, and equitable resource allocations to address student needs. One of the reasons I felt empowered to run provincially was because I knew that Michael would make a great board chair and that he would continue to put student needs first and make Edmontonians proud of their public schools, and I want to say that we are. Please join me in giving a traditional warm welcome to the guest.

The Speaker: Do I understand that the Member for Edmonton-McClung has a guest?

Mr. Dach: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. Through you and to you I have the honour of introducing a gentleman who has just arrived in the galleries, Mr. Myles Thrift, a childhood friend who has now recently retired from 35 years of service with Canadian National Railway. Mr. Thrift has always been an outgoing and sports-minded individual. He in the early '70s was on CBC television, having completed his goal of meeting 10,000 people in person. He is also known as the Prince George Cougars superfan, hailing from Prince George. Now he has also been a seniors masters award-winning diver. He's in town to enjoy the FIFA World Cup games. It is my pleasure to have Mr. Thrift stand and receive the warm welcome of the House.

1:40

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The Member for Banff-Cochrane.

2013 Southern Alberta Flood

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to rise for my first time in this Assembly to address an issue that is top of mind to many in southern Alberta and certainly those in Banff-Cochrane, which was ground zero for the tragic flooding event that occurred nearly two years ago.

In 2013 Albertans witnessed the extreme power of Mother Nature. Communities in the river's path experienced damage on an unprecedented scale. Many are still trying to recover and move on with their lives. During this event, in the midst of the chaos, we also witnessed the extreme power of our communities, our families, our friends, our neighbours, and complete strangers. In response centres those in need of assistance found volunteers willing to help them get back on their feet again. Albertans proved, as they have in other disasters, that they were up for any challenge.

Much work remains to be done to recover from the 2013 event as well as to protect homes, businesses, families, and communities from future catastrophes. We must learn from this and other flooding events to make wise and careful decisions about how we can ensure the safety and well-being of all Albertans.

Flood mitigation is a complex issue, which stirs the emotions, which are still raw. Getting this right in the best interests of all Albertans will require us to work together in this government and with our opposition colleagues. We must also work closely with the many stakeholders, including indigenous peoples, landowners, businesses, and homeowners. Together we can work to address the uncertainty and fear of those at risk and put an end to the nightmares that some still experience every time it rains.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Highway 28

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Not a day goes by that I don't hear from a local constituent from my riding that tells me about the awful commutes that they have between Cold Lake and Edmonton on highway 28. In fact, it has become so unbearable and dangerous that they have stopped using the shortest, most direct route in favour of a longer, slower alternative to avoid the potholes, the missing shoulders, and the general disrepair. It is becoming completely undriveable. Highway 28 is the key artery to the Cold Lake oil sands, which produces over 12 per cent of Canada's daily oil production. East of Bonnyville alone the traffic count is 7,000 vehicles per day.

The Wildrose believes that infrastructure is critically important to the well-being of Alberta. The Wildrose has advocated for a long time for a fully prioritized public infrastructure list. In fact, we campaigned on it. It's great to see that the NDP government has adopted another Wildrose proposal, and I'm very glad that we're on the same page. It is high time that the priorities be made available to all Albertans. At the very least, Albertans need assurances that the highways they regularly use are scheduled for repair.

My constituents want to know when highway 28 will be addressed. They need to know when highway 28 will be addressed. This affects more than just my constituency. The residents of Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills and Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater also have a big stake in seeing this highway addressed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Flood and Drought Damage Mitigation

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On June 20 river communities in Calgary will be getting together to celebrate the spirit that brought so many people together during the 2013 flood. Stories will be shared about recovery, resiliency, and the power of community in Calgary.

But two years on, while some local measures have been taken by the city to reduce risk along the Bow and Elbow rivers, much remains to be done to reduce the risk from the next inevitable flood. Two years on and with many consultations and reports Calgary has yet to see a comprehensive upstream mitigation strategy for the Bow and Elbow rivers.

Excellent work has been done by groups, including WaterSmart solutions, most recently the impressive room for the river process, which provides cost-benefit scenarios. It's time to make decisions. In fact, all Albertans living in the South Saskatchewan River basin deserve to see evidence-based watershed management, beginning in the eastern slopes, from this government.

Part of the solution is the long-awaited land-use plan. This defines priority development and conservation activities in relation to our major waterways. This needs new momentum as well. Clearly, for the Bow a long-term water management agreement is needed between TransAlta, which manages all the dams, and the province that takes into account both flood and drought mitigation, and it must be public. No more backroom deals.

Ironically, drought this year appears to be more likely than flood in southern Alberta and is highlighting the need for all stakeholders, including irrigation districts, to be at the table. The financial and human cost of both floods and droughts can be minimized through a range of evidence-based, upstream, natural and engineered developments, and this will be a defining task for this new government. On behalf of my constituents in Calgary and all Albertans I call on this government to make flood and drought mitigation a priority.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ramadan

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to have the opportunity to rise and wish Ramadan Mubarak to all. Ramadan is the ninth month in the Islamic calendar and depends on the moon sighting. In some parts of the world today is the first day of Ramadan, while in others it's the second day. It is the month when the holy book, the Quran, was revealed to Muslims. It is the month

when Muslims were given this holy book, which is the complete code of life for Muslims and thus a benediction for Muslims.

It is the month when fasting is practised by Muslims all over the world by abstaining from food and drink during daylight hours, but more than this, it is the month when followers of Islam learn to abstain from all the deeds, desires, and activities that contribute to illicit human character. Fasting is one of the five pillars of Islam, followed by shahada, which means the faith in the oneness of God; salaah, which means praying five times each day; and zakat, meaning almsgiving; and preceded by a pilgrimage to Mecca. A fast fosters strong will, teaches patience and self-discipline and the ability to bear hardship and tolerate hunger and thirst.

The word "Ramadan" came from the Arabic word "ramad," which means to burn. Therefore, according to Muslims this month is an opportunity for the believers to burn away wishes and unhealthy thoughts and acts and cleanse the human body, heart, and soul. In medical science the advantages of fasting have been proven scientifically. Fasting helps retain the acids in the stomach during hunger and thirst that help kill germs causing different diseases. Each day's fasting ends after sunset with a time of joy and hospitality.

Once again, Ramadan Mubarak to all.

1:50

Oral Question Period

Provincial Fiscal Policies

Mr. Jean: While the Premier doesn't want to introduce a budget until after the federal election, we are getting some ideas about this government's fiscal plans. Yesterday, for instance, the Government House Leader said that 10 per cent of the \$18 billion in interim supply is new spending. That works out to almost \$2 billion, a lot of money. The NDP's platform shows that they will actually bring in less in tax revenue this year than Prentice had planned. Where's the money coming from?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As all Albertans know and knew and discussed over the course of the last election, Alberta is facing a fiscal challenge, and they were offered different ways of dealing with it. Some people wanted to slash and burn and take billions and billions out. Other people wanted middle-class and lower class Albertans to pay more while sending 12,000 kids to school without teachers. We ran on a plan to make sure those kids had teachers. We ran on a plan to make sure our health care system worked, and we ran on a plan to pay for it with progressive and fair taxes, and that's what this side will see more of later today.

Mr. Jean: Thank you for the applause, and thank you for that clear non answer.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans are going to need some help making sense of these numbers. The most experienced minister told us that this government was taking on \$1.8 billion in new spending that has not been debated by this Legislature. Today four cabinet ministers held a press conference and gave us details on less than \$700 million of that spending; \$700 million does not equal \$1.8 billion. Can someone over there please tell us where the other billion dollars in new spending is going?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think that the member opposite may have confused what the hon. House leader may have said in debate yesterday. What I will say is that our

interim supply bill is actually on the Order Paper today, so I don't really want to get too involved in it, but in principle it talks about meeting the promises that we made in this election. Where it was debated was over 30 days of a provincial election in this province. The money coming forward you'll see more of this afternoon.

Mr. Jean: Albertans might have been worried that the NDP government would be a tax and spend government. Now we know. They are a tax and spend, spend, spend government. Alberta already spends more per capita than any other province in Canada. When you adjust for population, for instance, we spend \$8 billion a year more than British Columbia. Now this government announces almost \$2 billion in new spending but much less than that in revenue. How much debt is the Premier going to make future generations pay back?

Ms Notley: Once again I take issue with the hon. member's numbers. What we are planning on putting forward is funding to ensure that those, for example, 12,000 kids who are coming to our schools in September have a teacher. Now, I appreciate that under the platform that the hon. members opposite ran on, those 12,000 kids wouldn't have had a teacher, nor would probably another 12,000 on top of that because you can't take \$5 billion out of a system and not have it show up on the front lines. That's not what Albertans voted for. They voted for our plan, and I'm very proud of it.

The Speaker: Second main question.

Pipeline Development

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, yesterday I wanted the Premier to confirm that her government will not oppose Keystone pipeline. Her answer wasn't clear. I asked her to confirm that her government would support all new pipelines that get energy to markets safely. Her answer wasn't clear again. That's not helpful. Alberta gets most of its wealth from energy. Doesn't the Premier agree that her role as Premier is to champion efforts to get our energy to market?

Ms Notley: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, as I've said all along, we understand that our energy sector contributes a great deal to jobs in Alberta, and that's our fundamental priority. Moreover, what we want to be able to do as the stewards of this resource is make sure that we get as many jobs as we can from our resource before we ship it out. That's our job because we represent Albertans. We represent voters. Sending natural resources away as fast as we possibly can without thinking about ways to incent job creation is not good governance.

Mr. Jean: This Premier has confirmed that pipelines are, in fact, the safest way to get the product to market. She certainly knows that pipelines are the most environmentally friendly way to move energy. Alberta's economy depends upon getting our energy to new markets, not just existing ones, yet the Premier has been saying that upgrading is her top energy priority. Is the Premier suggesting that shovel-ready pipeline projects will get less support from her than hypothetical upgraders?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, what I'm saying is that we're going to work with industry to ensure that our oil and gas sector is sustainable, effective, and that it creates jobs and that we are also able to grow in an environmentally responsible way. Now, I've talked about working with our colleagues in B.C. and our colleagues across the country to talk about environmentally responsible ways to get our product to market, and I will certainly continue to do that.

Mr. Jean: You know, Wildrose really wants to help this government. [interjection] We do. Can you not tell? But this government is digging itself into a deep hole on energy policy, and it's confusing. I have a very simple question, and I really hope the Premier can answer it thoughtfully. Maybe I'm missing something, but I don't think I am. Some day in the future, when we get these upgraders and refineries that the Premier really wants and wants, won't we still need more pipelines in all directions so that we can get the upgraded product to market?

Ms Notley: There's no question, Mr. Speaker, that going forward we do need to ensure that we have access to pipelines to get our product to market. There's no question about it. However, as the member opposite knows, shipping unprocessed bitumen, that creates the lowest number of jobs per barrel extracted from our province, actually takes 30 per cent more pipeline space. In fact, the more we upgrade, the fewer pipelines we need. It doesn't mean that we're not going to work with industry to get the pipelines that they need going forward, but we're going to do it responsibly and carefully in the interest of those Albertans who want . . .

Mr. Jean: With respect, the Premier is wrong. The more you upgrade, the more pipelines you need.

Market Access for Energy Resources

Mr. Jean: For two days now we've asked the Premier some very important questions about pipelines. For some time market access for our energy products has been the top international and inter-governmental issue for Alberta's government. You're the minister for that. Wildrose has always been helpful and supportive on this file, as we are on all files. Can the Premier confirm that building more pipelines to move Alberta's energy to new markets remains this province's top intergovernmental and international priority?

Ms Notley: Quite honestly, the previous government's record in that regard has gotten us nowhere. I would suggest that when we're talking about our international and intergovernmental priorities, maybe what we really should be doing is developing a record on the environment such that those new markets will actually accept our product, because that's a problem, and that's what's been ignored for a very long time.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm certain that the Premier knows that getting our energy to a coast, any coast, means that we get the higher world Brent oil price rather than the lower western Canada select price. That means more royalties and thus more schools and more hospitals for Albertans. That's helpful. Getting new pipelines built is really important to Albertans. How often has the Premier spoken with the Deputy Minister of IIR to discuss our market access strategy or the Canadian energy strategy? How many times? How often?

Ms Notley: It's a bit of a strange question. I've met with my deputy minister to talk about a number of issues in IIR, including the Canadian energy strategy, including trips outside of the country to talk about other partnerships. I can't actually count how many times, at least five or six at this point. And we'll continue to do that because that's my job. I am here to ensure that the interests of Albertans, when it comes to job creation and economic stability, are represented.

Mr. Jean: Eight questions, eight waffles. I feel like I'm having breakfast.

Alberta has 13 international offices that exist to promote Alberta's interest in other countries and, of course, to help Alberta companies access new markets. In my opinion, no office is more important than the Washington office, which has led our efforts to secure American approval for the Keystone pipeline. Question: has the Premier spoken to Rob Merrifield, our senior representative in Washington, and if so, what instructions has she given him? How about an answer this time? We've had eight up; one good one would be nice.

Thank you.

2:00

Ms Notley: I think the answer to the last question was five or six. So, you know, I think that's fairly answerly. Nonetheless, let me just say that no, I have not yet had a chance to talk to any of our staff in our different international offices. I'm a little bit focused on getting us through the session, but I look forward to doing that. We'll be reviewing all our international offices, and I anticipate them continuing to do the good work that's necessary to promote economic opportunity and growth for all Alberta industry.

The Speaker: Calgary-Lougheed.

Aboriginal Relations

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is Aboriginal Awareness Week. The new government is committed to adopting the UN declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission report outlines 94 recommendations for all levels of government across Canada. Both require great co-ordination between numerous Alberta government ministries and beyond. To the new Premier, with respect: why was there not even a single specific commitment in the throne speech to either the UN declaration or the TRC report?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member raises a very, very important issue. We did of course talk about the role of indigenous people in the history of our province within that throne speech, and we've been already meeting with indigenous representatives since we were first elected and indeed had them at a cabinet meeting. So we will be moving forward on a number of very complicated but important files over the next few months, and I look forward to speaking about them in this House after we've had a chance to meet with indigenous representatives.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It would have been nice to see some of that in the throne speech.

My first supplemental question is to the Premier or the new minister who's responsible for the file. All Albertans do deserve to know: what specific timelines will your government commit to here in the House today for evaluating and implementing the TRC report recommendations?

Ms Ganley: Thank you to the hon. member for the question. Currently our focus is on working to build respectful partnerships with indigenous peoples. We're working on a number of memoranda of understanding to engage going forward and to deal with issues that are important to both indigenous Albertans and all Albertans, so right now our timeline is to work to get those under way. They will

be coming online very soon, and from there we'll set some goals and move forward.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Premier or to the minister: can you please tell us, every member of the House and all Albertans, what specific mechanisms you will make available for all Albertans to hold this government accountable for implementing the recommendations?

Ms Notley: As the minister has said, our government will work with First Nations as a true partner in building a relation of respect and engagement. We are in fact very committed to developing a renewed relationship with aboriginal peoples and communities through improved understanding and collaboration. We'll be working with Alberta's indigenous people to build a relationship of trust. We'll be moving forward on that as quickly as possible. As you know, there's a national aboriginal leaders' meeting in mid-July, and I anticipate being able to make some very encouraging announcements before that time.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Public Appointment Process

Dr. Swann: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Revelations that former Ethics Commissioner Neil Wilkinson claimed \$450,000 in honoraria while chair of the Capital health region highlights the urgent need to revamp Alberta's discredited public appointment system. While in opposition the Alberta NDP echoed Liberal demands for an end to patronage in government appointments and called for the adoption of the Ontario model, whereby an independent commission manages the recruitment and vetting for prospective appointees. To the Premier: will you do better than simply promise to appoint people strictly on merit, as the previous regime did, and establish an independent public appointments commission in Alberta?

Ms Notley: Thank you very much. That's a good question. Mr. Speaker, like members opposite, I have been very troubled by the information that's come forward about the recent spending excesses with respect to certain former public officials in the previous government. That being said, in fact, we were very concerned about those issues going into the election, and that is one of the reasons why we said that we would do a review of agencies, boards, and commissions, including their compensation packages, and that will be coming soon.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Dr. Swann: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Well, again to the Premier: when will the review of agencies, boards, and commissions started last year be made public?

Ms Notley: Well, in fact, the review of agencies, boards, and commissions that was started last year by the last Premier, we have since discovered, was never really completed, so there's not actually much to be made public. However, within the next few days or weeks we will be making an announcement about moving forward to do exactly that, to get the job done. We know that we have a problem in this province, and we want to deal with the issue of the sunshine list, we want to deal with the issue of compensation, and we want to deal with the issue of the efficacy of the many, many boards and agencies that we have in this province.

Dr. Swann: Thank you. Again to the Premier: since your party previously demanded that prospective appointees should have to disclose their qualifications, possible conflicts of interest, and remuneration, are you going to bring in rules requiring this of all appointees?

Ms Notley: Well, I think this is one of the issues that will be discussed, I suspect, with the select all-party standing committee on conflict of interest as well as democratic renewal and whistleblower legislation. This is exactly one of the things that I advocated for when I was an opposition member, ensuring that those conflict-of-interest provisions applied to the many staff and appointees at agencies, boards, and commissions. It is absolutely my intention to ensure that we move forward with that and that all those transparency mechanisms are applicable to the many people in agencies, boards, and commissions.

The Speaker: I'll just remind the House that there are no preambles on supplemental questions.

Municipal Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduction

Ms Payne: Mr. Speaker, the impact of climate change on our environment has not received the attention it deserves. Albertans have been waiting for their government to take action on this critical issue. Can the Minister of Environment and Parks tell the House what investments their ministry has made on this important issue?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, during Environment Week I was pleased to announce an increase in support for municipalities to undertake energy efficient projects that reduce greenhouse gas emissions at the local level, and that's why our government announced an additional \$2 million in funding for the Municipal Climate Change Action Centre. That funding will create good local jobs, reduce energy costs for taxpayers, and in turn it frees up more resources for investments in the priorities of Alberta families.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the same minister elaborate a little bit more on how this program will help municipalities to create jobs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you for the question, hon. member. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, the action centre has already demonstrated encouraging success in this area, and this is why we moved quickly to expand the program. We've had some success stories like the town of Beaumont, which retrofitted their town hall, their fire hall, and their RCMP detachment through this program, which is managed through the climate change and emissions management fund. We've also had success stories like the city of Calgary, which tapped the program to undertake efficiency upgrades to three buildings. Those are the kinds of successful partnerships, with communities big and small, that we need to build on if we are to succeed . . .

2:10

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the same minister tell the House how this program will help municipalities with their energy bills?

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you for the question. You know, this announcement is a sign of things to come, Mr. Speaker. We did make a commitment in the election to take leadership on the issue of climate change, and we are doing precisely that. We have made the commitment to take international and national leadership. We will be leading those conversations moving forward, engaging with Albertans and industry because we understand, unlike other parties in this House, that getting it right on climate change means getting it right for the economy.

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

Minimum Wage

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday I asked the minister what her plan was for helping those who will lose their jobs due to the dramatic increase to minimum wages. The answer was less than fulsome, I might add. But what's really troubling me is that in a meeting with the Canadian federation of small businesses this government told them that they had done no economic impact analysis on the potential effects of this policy. Minister, bluntly put, why are you putting thousands of jobs at risk without even doing the necessary research first?

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you to the member for the question. We know that Alberta families are better off when all Alberta families are better off, so that's why we're moving ahead on our platform of \$15 an hour by 2018. We also know that we are looking to diversify our economy. I also am the Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education, and we're working with stakeholders. I toured NAIT recently, and they're doing amazing work on green energy and technology. We've just invested in postsecondary education today. We're supporting people to have good jobs here in Alberta.

Thank you.

Mr. Hunter: I certainly do applaud this government's intent on this issue. However, their approach is simply an ill-conceived gamble with people's livelihood. This gamble is not going to hurt the corporate bigwigs; instead, it's going to hurt the very men and women who cannot afford to lose their jobs. They need a champion and not a politician looking to score points at their expense. Minister, Albertans want to know – no; they need to know – before you implement this policy: how many Albertans are going to lose their jobs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and again thank you to the member for the question. Alberta has the lowest minimum wage of any province in Canada, tied with Saskatchewan. We know from small-business owners that it actually reduces their costs in recruitment and training when they pay a higher level because they're more likely to retain those workers, and there are studies that have shown that. We are also helping more vulnerable populations, like women.

Thank you.

Mr. Hunter: Minister, yesterday a big labour group with close ties to the government issued a press release demanding that the minimum wage be increased 25 per cent by October of this year. [interjections] Even in the three . . .

The Speaker: I might have mentioned yesterday that I'd like to hear the question. To all of the House: please.

I would also remind the House about the lack of a preamble in this set of questions.

Mr. Hunter: I appreciate that.

Even in the three cities in the United States that are also trying to implement this experiment, they are slowly increasing the minimum wage over seven years. Knowing that this government has shown no concern for the impact on the economy for the job losses, can the minister assure . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Premier and I met last week with industry leaders, with labour, and with advocacy groups to hear their input on this, and we're going ahead with those consultations.

We will be speaking shortly about where we're going to go, and we're moving forward to work together on this with all partners.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

Flood Damage Mitigation in High River

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This weekend marks the second anniversary of the Alberta floods, and a tremendous amount of work has been done by Albertans, particularly those in Municipal Affairs, ESRD, and the Alberta Emergency Management Agency. Many of those people are heroes who previously served in our military, and once again they acted during the floods. As you can imagine, those folks were extremely disappointed to hear their new minister characterize their efforts as a gong show. In the town of High River much of the mitigation work has been completed in partnership with this province. To the Minister of Environment and Parks: will you commit to completing the mitigation work in High River even though you consider it a gong show?

Ms Phillips: Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to talk about the former PC government's record on preparing for the 2013 floods, which is that they did not adequately prepare for those floods, and those floods then devastated Calgary and other communities. They waited for a catastrophe to start work on flood mitigation. Now, when it comes to protecting residents of Calgary and their property from flooding, we have only one chance to get it right, and that is why we are carefully considering all of our options before us as we move forward with an appropriate flood mitigation plan for this province's future.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you. To the same minister: given that you're the minister in charge of the Alberta community resilience program, will you commit to complete and full funding to this program so that communities can help protect themselves and identify their own risks?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. Right now we are reviewing our approach to flood mitigation. We need to make these decisions in the public interest. I have said this over and over again. The reason that we need to take that approach is that we need to have an evidence-based approach to all of our decisions going forward. We are asking our officials to

fully brief us. We are asking outside officials to fully brief us. We are ensuring that our final decisions will be based on science. They will be based on good public policy. They will be based on careful deliberation of the public interest.

Mr. Fraser: I'm hoping, since they've looked at our record in predicting disasters, that you'll come out with a complete, full list of where the next disaster will happen.

Again to the same minister: given that you now lead the department in charge of mitigation and ACRP, can you assure these hard-working Albertans that, in fact, their efforts were not a gong show and that you will defend their actions and these workers and their departments before the Auditor General?

Ms Phillips: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that Albertans levelled their verdict on May 5 on what they thought of this government's efforts on flood mitigation, and it has very little to do with the workers. It has everything to do with the record of a government that did not adequately take the time to protect the citizens of Calgary or southern Alberta, which is why we are going to ensure that any decisions that we take will be based on science, based on good public policy, based on careful deliberation moving forward.

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

Transportation Infrastructure Priorities

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A well-maintained provincial transportation network is essential to ensure the safe movement of Albertans and our commodities. The government's own performance measure clearly indicates a rise in the number of highways and bridges in very poor condition. What is this new Minister of Transportation doing to stop the deterioration of the provincial transportation network?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you. Thank you, hon. member, for that question. It's a very good question and, I think, a very pertinent one. I agree with you that there's been a deterioration in the condition of many of our roadways under the previous government. We're taking a very close look at this. We're developing a capital plan that I think will meet the transportation needs of Albertans going forward, and I am certainly willing to discuss with any member on any side of the House any issues relevant to their constituencies and see what we can do to help, bearing in mind that there's a long, long, long list of priorities, and we will not be able to deal with all of them at once.

2:20

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, in order to get the politics out of the capital investment process, both the Wildrose and the NDP have advocated for a prioritized list of infrastructure and transportation projects. I was happy to hear the minister state yesterday that they are establishing a sunshine list so that everyone will know which projects and what time. When can we expect this list to be published?

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much for that question. We do want to let the sunshine in when it comes to capital projects. We've seen with the previous government manipulation of capital priorities in order to further electoral chances of individual ministers, and that's something that, like our Wildrose colleagues, we deplore, so we will be working to develop a sunshine list at the earliest opportunity. I'm sorry I cannot give you a date, but I am looking forward to bringing that forward, probably sometime in the fall.

Thank you.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you for the answer, hon. member, and I look forward to being able to help with that.

Surely, this new Minister of Transportation is not content to continue downloading onto municipalities the funding responsibility for over 8,000 bridges. Will this Minister of Transportation help rural Alberta and restore funding to the local road bridge program?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To the hon. member: that's something that as a critic I met with the AAMD and C executive on. We discussed rural bridges on a number of occasions. I recognize that there is a very serious problem with respect to that, and I've asked my department to take a look and let me know what things we might be able to do to assist. But I should note for the record that there are very serious problems with the bridges under provincial control that also need to be addressed. There are many, many demands on the capital budget, and I know that with the Wildrose's . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Need I remind both sides of the House about preambles. On both sides I've noticed it. Please eliminate it in your supplemental questions.

The Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Flood Damage Mitigation

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's hard to believe, but it's already been two years since one of the worst floods in Alberta's history devastated homes and communities right across the province. The Wildrose just wants to help the government get this right. I couldn't help but notice that the NDP candidate in my riding had very little to say during the election campaign. I'm hoping the minister can clear this up. What is your government's plan to address flood mitigation that helps communities right across the province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. These are very, very grave decisions that face us. We have been left with some choices to make, and we will undertake the appropriate time and the appropriate review to make those decisions. These are decisions that require hundreds of millions of dollars of public investment. They are decisions that require environmental assessment. They are decisions that require negotiation with communities and landowners. That is why we will take the time to review all of these matters before us. That is why we are being briefed by experts who are giving us . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, the minister should know that in March this year the Auditor General released a report that said that the province doesn't even have up-to-date flood maps. That means communities like Sundre, Medicine Hat, Fort McMurray, Red Deer, Drumheller, High River, Rocky View, and Calgary all remain on the front lines when the next flood strikes. Will the minister commit today to updating these flood maps and making sure that these communities are no longer left exposed?

Ms Phillips: Well, Mr. Speaker, I very much appreciate the question given that the hon. member has been doing an excellent job, as other hon. members in this House have, over the last few days of representing his constituents on this matter. We are

committed to reviewing the flood mapping issue along with all of the other issues with respect to flood mitigation that have been pushed onto our plates as we have inherited this situation from the previous government. We are reviewing all of the matters associated with flood mitigation to ensure that we are using the best science and the best public policy moving forward.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, given that my constituency of Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre has often faced flooding and given that in March the government announced flood projects all over the province but denied funding requests for Sundre, Drumheller, and Medicine Hat, saying that we needed another engineering study even when a number have already been completed, to the minister: will your government reverse the decision to reject Sundre and other impacted communities' flood mitigation applications so that residents will be protected before there is another flood?

Ms Phillips: I'm very pleased for the question, and I thank you for raising this with me. I am happy to discuss this matter and have a meeting with the hon. member afterwards so that we can follow up. I have had other requests to review previous decisions, and I am happy to do so and report back to this House when we have finalized the matter.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Urgent Health Care in Beaverlodge

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As outlined in the rural health review, there was strong feedback that there needs to be better access to health care services in rural areas of Alberta. Beaverlodge is home to one of Alberta's oldest rural hospitals. In the latest budget the government promised \$2 million to design a new urgent health care facility in Beaverlodge. The new facility in Beaverlodge was to be used as an example for future facilities in Airdrie and Sylvan Lake. My question to the Minister of Health: will this government commit to funding this much-needed urgent health care facility in Beaverlodge, as was promised to them?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. We have heard a lot of discussion around decisions being made by the past government that weren't actually based on evidence, and I think we owe it to the people of Beaverlodge and to the people of Alberta, who are all taxpayers, to make sure that we are considering all options while we move forward. So I won't be able to make that commitment. Unlike other governments, when I make a commitment, you can count on it.

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: given that yesterday in the interim supply debate you said that the plan to adhere to original funding for Beaverlodge, or the capital plan in the original 2015 budget, you would stick to as proposed, can you commit to the funding for the Beaverlodge facility and indicate the specific time, considering there have been seven years of study on this already?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. I like the fact that the third party, who was actually the government at the time, is highlighting the fact that they've stalled for seven years on commitments that they wanted done.

Mr. Drysdale: Well, Mr. Speaker, seven years just proves that we weren't making them for political decisions. This facility replacement is much needed, and I wish this minister would commit to this facility and the design that's going to be used across all rural Alberta.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you to the member for the opportunity to basically supplement what was asked of my hon. colleague the Minister of Infrastructure. He has mentioned that we're working on ensuring there's a sunshine list. The sunshine list will demonstrate that this government is taking evidence and fact in making their decisions moving forward on behalf of all Albertans.

The Speaker: Before I acknowledge the next hon. member, there have been a number of requests about extensions of time. As we all ease into this process, today is the day that we begin not to acknowledge that, and I would therefore ask the Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose to stay within his allocated time.

2:30

Mr. Hinkley: Excuse me. Stay within the time?

The Speaker: Within your time, please.

Mr. Hinkley: Mr. Speaker, I will try to be brief, then. I wanted to start off with a number of compliments to the House for the conduct of members during Committee of Supply yesterday. I was very impressed and wished that the media, the audience, the school students, and our international friends could actually have seen that excellent behaviour.

Aboriginal Entrepreneurship

Mr. Hinkley: I will try to be quick, but I also want to give a compliment to our hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View for his eloquent and insightful comments about First Nations people deserving the right to be recognized and respected. In that light, I ask my question. Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of Aboriginal Relations. Some First Nations people . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, could you be very, very brief and ask the question, please. [interjections] Order, please. Order. Thank you.

Could you in five seconds or less address your question.

Mr. Hinkley: My question is to the Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

The Speaker: Five seconds.

Mr. Hinkley: Many First Nations businesses are not able to access capital through the credit of lenders . . .

The Speaker: Does the minister have an answer?

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much to the member for the question. It's true; many First Nations people do have difficulty starting new businesses because they have difficulty accessing capital. This government is committed to a true partnership with aboriginal peoples, including First Nation people living on reserves. I agree that there's a need for greater participation by aboriginal peoples in the economy, and we are developing several programs and initiatives to address these barriers, including the aboriginal economic partnership program, which works directly with communities to support economic and small-business development.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I want to advise that you have one supplemental question left.

Mr. Hinkley: To the Minister of Aboriginal Relations: that's all fine and good, but does the ministry provide any actual funding to help budding entrepreneurs?

Ms Ganley: Thank you to the member for the question. Mr. Speaker, there's a long-standing program to support aboriginal entrepreneurs. There are grants and loans through the federal government, but still sometimes those businesses need additional supports to help develop plans and access these programs. Aboriginal Relations works with partners in First Nations and the federal government to offer programs on-reserve that are complementary to this funding such as contracted services for workshops to teach small-business skills and the drafting of small-business plans. Our service providers would provide First Nations entrepreneurs with the advice and support that they need to develop business plans and access other sources of funding.

Thank you.

The Speaker: It's been suggested that I gently remind all of you to sit when the Speaker stands.

I would like to acknowledge the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Health Facilities in Wainwright

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents rely on the Wainwright health centre for fulfilling their medical needs, but this facility is falling apart. Reviews were undertaken and updated by Alberta Health Services in 2002, 2008, and 2011. In all cases significant problems were found, and a new hospital was called for. To the Health minister: what will you do to address the serious situation at the Wainwright health centre?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you to the hon. member for the question, and thank you for the opportunity to be able to address it. As has been mentioned by my colleague the Minister of Infrastructure, we're in the process of developing a sunshine list for a number of different capital projects, including hospitals and other health care facilities. I've already set up meetings with the critic from the opposition party to discuss some of their needs, so feel free to communicate them through your critic.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of Infrastructure: given that the last government politicized hospital infrastructure all over the province by keeping its infrastructure priorities secret and this caused serious harm to communities – I think we can both agree that this was wrong and unethical – and given that your government promised to do things differently, is a new Wainwright health facility currently on the list of infrastructure priorities, and if not, why not?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I'm going to have to take that question under advisement, and I can get back to the hon. member. I can assure you that when a sunshine list is published, you'll be able to see all of the projects that are potentially funded on the list in the order of priority that they've been ranked.

But with respect to your specific question I will supply you with the answer as soon as I have it.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Speaker, back to the Minister of Health. Given that Alberta Health Services determined that the infrastructure at the Wainwright health centre is falling apart and needing replacement and given that the people of Wainwright know this, they want to know: are there any specific plans to build a new hospital in Wainwright, which your own government says needs to be done? The Wildrose has long petitioned for a priority list. When will this list be released?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. As has already been answered in question period, we're doing our utmost to make sure that we do bring forward a sunshine list in a timely manner. We'll be creating opportunities to have a public dialogue around that once it's published, but we're making sure that they're evidence-based decisions moving forward. I believe my colleague said that we're aiming for the fall, so we'll do our absolute best to do it as quickly as possible.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Affordable and Special-needs Housing

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise for the first time in this House with a question to the Minister of Seniors which has been asked before but which I will seek a straight answer for once again. Will you and your government commit to delivering funding of \$180 million to the 2,612 units previously approved under the affordable supportive living initiative?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. I have answered this question, and I can answer it again and again and again, but the truth is that we know that there was political interference. I'm not saying specifically with regard to the ASLI projects, but we know that the past government has a proven track record of political interference from the party that just asked the same question. When we make announcements and when we make decisions moving forward, we're going to make sure that we can stand by those. I owe it to the people of Alberta to be confident in the decisions that we're making.

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, a point of order.

The Speaker: The point of order is acknowledged. I'd like to consult with the Clerk, with the permission of the House.

First supplemental.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister: given that there was also a commitment of \$357 million to the Alberta seniors' benefit announced in support of approximately 150,000 seniors to allow them to live with dignity, will you and this government remain accountable to low-income seniors by committing to maintaining this funding?

Ms Hoffman: Absolutely. Funding for ensuring the dignity and respect of seniors is a priority for this government. We put that in our platform, and we're committed to delivering on that.

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: given that this House had designated \$200 million for the Alberta Social Housing Corporation, including \$143 million for seniors' housing and rent supplements, what amounts, if any, will your government commit

to the Alberta Social Housing Corporation in support of Alberta's low-income seniors, individuals, families, and those with special needs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the question and to the member for raising it. Yesterday we had an opportunity to debate the interim supply bill. That's about making sure that we can continue to operate as a government in the days ahead.

In terms of specific line items we've made it very clear that we'll be presenting a full budget in the fall, and we'll have a thorough opportunity to debate every one of those line items at that time.

2:40

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: Hon. members, I would advise that we have two members' statements left for this afternoon.

The Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

World Refugee Day

Mr. Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to stand today and recognize World Refugee Day, which occurs on June 20 each year. With my father, mother, and older brother I came to Canada, fleeing our homeland due to violence as a result of the September 11, 1973, military coup in Chile. I happened to arrive in Canada on Canada Day in 1976. I often tell people that coming to Canada as a refugee is not the same as coming as an immigrant. Refugees under threat of persecution and violence are fleeing their homes, leaving loved ones, and they long for the opportunity to return home. However, that being said, soon after arriving, my parents decided that we would stay in Canada and apply for citizenship so that we as children could attend postsecondary education, an opportunity we would not have had if we'd stayed in Chile during the dictatorship.

Alberta has good organizations providing assistance to refugees. I couldn't name them all, but I do want to recognize the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers, Catholic Social Services, and Edmonton Immigrant Services Association.

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees there are more than 50 million refugees around the world. Half of them are children and women. Today I ask that we honour the courage, strength, and determination of people forced to flee their homes. I also ask that we recognize the contribution of these refugees to their new communities. Today let all members of this Legislature and all Albertans reflect on the human right to a secure place that each person can call home.

I am thankful I was received with open arms by fellow Albertans in 1976 and that since then I was able to access education, health care, and other services to become a fully engaged and productive member of society.

Refugees have much to contribute, and I know that this government will respect the dignity of each of them and ensure each of them a full opportunity to contribute and be supported.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Freson Bros. 60th Anniversary

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me take us back to October 20, 1955. On that date Freson Market Ltd. began when Frank Lovsin opened a butcher shop with two partners, Frank Resek and Frank's father, Leo Resek, from Edson. The name Freson was

derived from a combination of the letters in the three partners' names. It is now the 60-year anniversary of this strong, committed company.

This started in Hinton, Alberta, with a butcher shop. Throughout the 1950s and the 1960s Freson Bros. expanded to new locations within Alberta, always looking at the horizon. The chain of businesses the grocers became in communities can be attributed to the entrepreneurial spirit Albertans have always enjoyed, as demonstrated by these people, and to a commitment to providing quality products, good value, a clean shopping environment, and outstanding customer service for the people of Alberta.

This Alberta-founded, family-owned business is a shining example of Alberta and the qualities we as Albertans aspire to. Throughout Alberta we never need to look far to find successful businesses of every sort making social and economic contributions to the strength and health of our communities. As stated in the throne speech, "Albertans are working together to build a prosperous, entrepreneurial, diversified economy full of opportunity for us all."

Freson Bros. holds its own in a fight above its weight class. National and multinational conglomerates are the competitors that they and their approximately one thousand workers face every day. These Albertans face this fight with grace. Freson Bros. is an ethical, fair employer, with employees ranging from teenagers with after school jobs to those getting ready to exit the workforce.

I commend Freson Bros. for the determination and grit it takes to not just survive but to flourish in this tough industry, and I also commend and recommend them and their gorgeous and tasty flagship store in Stony Plain.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 2

An Act to Restore Fairness to Public Revenue

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present Bill 2, An Act to Restore Fairness to Public Revenue, for first reading.

This bill is an important step in restoring balance and fairness to our taxation system and allows us to better invest in hard-working families. The proposed bill has two distinct components, one that affects corporate income tax and the other that affects personal income tax. With this bill CIT will be changed from 10 to 12 per cent, a change that will take effect on July 1, 2015. On the PIT side there'll be five new tax brackets that we'll introduce, restoring balance to our system of taxation, with implementation beginning on October 1, 2015.

Mr. Speaker, these tax measures restore progressivity, balance, and fairness to our revenues while maintaining a provincial tax system that is competitive and responsible. These measures will allow the government to invest in services for all Albertans.

I would encourage all members to support the bill on first reading, and I look forward to the coming debate. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 2 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

Bill 201

Assuring Alberta's Fiscal Future Act

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce Bill 201, Assuring Alberta's Fiscal Future Act.

I'm humbled to have the opportunity to sponsor this private member's bill and bring the best representation possible to my constituents and Albertans at large. This bill will charge the government to save a specified percentage of nonrenewable resource revenue. It will charge this government to immediately strengthen the Alberta heritage savings trust fund. Nonrenewable resource revenue should not be treated as a right. It is not a right that was promised to us, and it is not a right that will continue to flow forever. The federal government intends to phase out carbon emissions, which means that saving now has become more important than ever.

The time has come when we must commit more of this wealth to the future of Alberta. This bill asks the government to introduce a bill of their own that gives effect to the contents of Bill 201. Bill 201 outlines the savings of 25 per cent of nonrenewable resource revenue into the heritage trust fund until the fiscal year where operational revenue is projected to exceed operational expenses. For the next fiscal year that percentage increases to 50 per cent for that year and every subsequent fiscal year after that.

I look forward to fulsome debate on the future of Alberta. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 201 read a first time]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

2:50

Bill 202
Alberta Local Food Act

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request leave to introduce a bill being the Alberta Local Food Act.

This act is designed to ensure a resilient, sustainable, strong local economy and agricultural land base in Alberta. The establishment of the Local Food Act will work towards several important goals for Alberta and our agricultural industry in this province. It will establish an advisory committee on food and agriculture to review the current state of our local food systems, develop a local food and agriculture strategy, improve and maximize economic return and food security here in Alberta, and establish a local food awareness week. Bill 202 will promote the purchase of local foods by public-sector organizations.

I'm proposing this bill for many reasons. Local food and agriculture are important to my community of Strathcona-Sherwood Park. My constituency is home to many farmers that face barriers to connecting with larger markets. It's a common problem throughout the province. The advisory committee proposed in this bill will consult with individuals and organizations with experience and interests applicable to the local food market such as farming and food systems, agricultural associations, organic farming associations, municipalities, First Nations and indigenous organizations.

I am proud to be presenting my first private member's bill on this issue, and I look forward to discussion and deliberation with all colleagues. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 202 read a first time]

The Speaker: Points of order.

The hon. member.

Point of Order
Imputing Motives

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I rise on a point of order, specifically the citation of Standing Order 23(i) and (l). I will quote

these as soon as I put my glasses on. You'll appreciate that with aging, you need to do this. It reads:

(i) imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member;

and

(l) introduces any matter in debate that offends the practices and precedents of the Assembly.

During the course of answering the question from the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek with regard to funding of ASLI projects, the Minister of Health – and I don't have the Blues in front of me – used a phrase, something to the effect of: we know that this party had political interference with the selection process. Mr. Speaker, I think all of us in this Assembly, even after only four days, can appreciate the zeal of the hon. Minister of Health and her desire to make her points very strongly. Nonetheless, there are limitations upon that zeal, and that zeal cannot be expressed in such a way that casts negative aspersions on other members within the Legislature.

With regard specifically to the standing orders that we operate under and to the custom that we all call each other hon. members, she specifically indicated that at least three members of our caucus had been involved in improper practices. We have three former ministers of Infrastructure in our caucus. We have two former ministers of Transportation. When she uses the phraseology, "We know that this party," as opposed to that it is an allegation or a suspicion or something that they just believe to be true, then it is stating that as fact, Mr. Speaker, and I would suggest that those are facts that are not presently in evidence.

Mr. Speaker, you know, like I say, I think that it is just simply a matter of the minister being very zealous in her duties, and that is certainly something that I think we can all appreciate. Nonetheless, there are procedures, precedents, and privileges within our Assembly that need to be honoured, and I would simply ask that the member withdraw the comment and apologize to the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Having had an opportunity to speak to the hon. minister with respect to this, she's indicated to me that in her enthusiasm she went a little too far, and on her behalf I'm happy to indicate that she's willing to withdraw the remark and to apologize to the House.

The Speaker: I would like to acknowledge the comment made by the member as well as the appreciation of the Speaker for the withdrawal of the comment. I would use this as an opportunity. While we've read the details of these standing orders, the issue that you all committed to was one of respect, and we must continuously practise that.

Thank you.

Orders of the Day

**Consideration of Her Honour
the Lieutenant Governor's Speech**

Mr. Connolly moved, seconded by Ms Kazim, that an humble address be presented to Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows.

To Her Honour the Honourable Lois Mitchell, CM, AOE, the Lieutenant Governor of the Province of Alberta:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank Your Honour for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

[Adjourned debate June 17: Mr. Bilous]

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

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's a great honour to rise to present my response to Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor's speech. I do want to acknowledge the Government House Leader and thank him for the opportunity to do so.

Well, it's been quite a journey getting to this moment, but here I am and here we all are to do the important work of the people of Alberta. It is a new day in the Alberta Legislature, and I again want to congratulate the Premier and her government and all of the members of the House.

When we run for office, our families run with us. I want to thank my wife, who somehow manages to keep things on track for our daughters while also working full-time plus, doing her important work as a palliative care physician, helping those in their time of great need. To my daughters: thank you for putting up with all of this. It might not always seem like it, but I am doing this for you. I know that all members of the Assembly are also spending a lot of time away from their families as we work together in our shared goal of making Alberta even better than it already is.

Now, I'm not the first in my family to seek elected office. My grandmother Alberta Clark – and, yes, her name really was Alberta Clark – was the 35th woman in Alberta history to run in a provincial election, standing in the constituency of Calgary in the 1952 general election. My grandmother taught me that perseverance, service to community, and commitment to family are what really matter. Also, my father sought the seat of Calgary-Elbow in 1989. He lost narrowly to one Ralph Klein. My father tells me that he wants all of you to know that the cuts to health and education in the 1990s were not his fault.

It is indeed an honour and a privilege to represent the people of Calgary-Elbow, the place I was born, where I was raised and I've lived my entire life. Parts of what are now Calgary-Elbow have been home to five Premiers, including Premiers Redford, Klein, Lougheed, Manning, and Aberhart, as well as two Lieutenant Governors, John J. Bowlen and Grant MacEwan. It is a diverse community, home to some of Calgary's oldest and newest neighbourhoods, co-op housing, and homes that are historic landmarks. In all parts of the constituency the people of Calgary-Elbow enjoy a strong sense of community and connectedness to their neighbourhoods.

This was tested two years ago, almost to the day, when we experienced one of the worst natural disasters in our country's history. In the days and weeks after the flood we showed the world what we're made of. Thousands of people pitched in to help total strangers dig out their basements, and neighbours with less damage helped those worse off than themselves. We showed the world, but more importantly we showed each other what it means to be an Albertan. While we should remember the positives that came out of the aftermath of the flood, we must not be complacent. Another flood is coming. We just don't know when.

3:00

Let us never forget the five people who lost their lives in the flood and count ourselves lucky that the number was not much higher. Also, think of the first responders who risked their lives running towards danger while the rest of us sought safety. Think about the economic impact. The 2013 flood was the most expensive natural disaster in Canadian history. The flood waters came within inches of entering downtown from the south. If that happens again, the damage could be tens of billions of dollars in lost business, and the impact on the thousands of people living and working downtown would be immeasurable. We can and must build flood mitigation, and we must do it quickly to ensure the continued economic

viability of downtown Calgary and ensure that the residents of Calgary-Elbow and other communities never have to live through another devastating flood.

While flood mitigation is important, it certainly is not the only reason I'm here. I stand before you in the Legislative Assembly of Alberta because of my daughters, because I have a deep and abiding desire to ensure that the Alberta they inherit has even greater opportunity and even greater equality than we enjoy today. I worry that this might not be the case. If we do not ensure that our province continues to be an attractive place for entrepreneurs, with a competitive tax regime especially for small business, if we do not pursue purposeful, market-driven economic diversification and we do not ensure that our government delivers well-managed and efficient public services, my daughters and all Albertans will not share in the prosperity that is possible in this great place.

We are truly fortunate to be Albertans, and I am endlessly optimistic about the future of our province. Alberta was built by forward-looking people who were optimists and risk takers at heart. We Albertans believe in ourselves and our families, families of all shapes and sizes. The real Alberta doesn't care whom you love, only that we treat each other with dignity and respect. We want the best for ourselves, but we also want the best for our neighbours, for our children, and for each and every one of the 4.3 million people who call Alberta home. This includes First Nations and Métis peoples, whose culture and heritage help define who and what Alberta is and what it can be. We must work together as partners to truly consult, to listen, and more importantly, to hear.

The people who built this province persevered. They didn't take no for an answer. They didn't let a failed crop or a dry well or a failed business stop them. They dusted themselves off, learned from the past, and moved forward, looking to the possibilities of tomorrow rather than bemoaning the failures of the past.

Albertans have always made the impossible possible. People more than a century ago were told that it was an impossible task to establish farms and homesteads on this bald prairie or even to survive an Alberta winter. Oil sands pioneers were told that it was impossible to overcome the technical challenges to produce bitumen economically. Medical researchers at the University of Alberta were told that nothing could be done to improve the lives of people with type 1 diabetes. Doctors at the University of Calgary were told that every stroke is a death sentence. They didn't give up. They didn't take no for an answer, and our province, our world is a better place for it. That's who we are as Albertans, and that is something to be proud of. Our work in this Assembly must be focused on ensuring that continues to be the case for future generations.

At the same time, we must recognize that many Albertans are going through difficult times and our province is facing an historic deficit. We must find more and more stable sources of revenue, but more spending cannot be the only answer. We must transform Alberta's public service and operate our government more efficiently and effectively. A new government is an opportunity to make our public service more transparent and less expensive.

I have had the privilege of listening to many responses to the Speech from the Throne, and what strikes me is that each and every one of us is here because we believe passionately in making Alberta a better place. I think we would be wise to heed the advice of the Member for Calgary-Mountain View. Let's make this Assembly a place of negotiation, always focusing on the best interests of Albertans.

We have a remarkable opportunity. We have the chance to define ourselves by our ideas, by our vision for Alberta, not by what we oppose, by who we are rather than what we are against. This new Legislature gives us a chance to look at old problems with a fresh

perspective. I hope we all take this opportunity to show Albertans that we are ready to govern differently.

I make the same commitment to you that I make to my constituents in Calgary-Elbow, to my family, and to myself. I will be reasonable, rational, and forward looking. Where I believe government policy is good for Albertans, I will support it. I will never oppose for the sake of opposition. Where I disagree, I will say why, and I will propose clear alternatives. My hope is that we as members working together will ensure that the Alberta spirit of looking out for our neighbours and rewarding hard work, of shared prosperity and a focus for the future continues today and for many generations to come.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. Clark: I've been asked to remain standing and move adjournment of debate on consideration of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor's speech.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 3

Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2015 (No. 2)

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

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to move second reading of Bill 3, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2015 (No. 2).

The Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2015 (No. 2) will provide funding authority to the offices of the Legislative Assembly and to the government for the period from July 1, 2015, to November 30, 2015, inclusive. The approval of this act will provide the funds needed to continue the business of the province while the government and the Assembly take the time necessary to prepare, present, review, debate the government's 2015-16 budget plan. Through the passage of this supply act this government will reinvest in health care, education, advanced education, and human services. I respectfully urge my colleagues in this House to support the bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I'll recognize the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've completed a mere three hours of debate on this bill. We've been allotted only three hours, the minimum legal time allowed under the standing orders of this House for interim supply. Now, the government appears to have taken its cue from the previous government in forcing debate down to one and a half hours for second reading of this bill under Standing Order 64. They are forcing a vote at a quarter after 4 today, effectively cutting debate in half. All of my colleagues would have liked to have spoken to the bill today. The government is not allowing even the minuscule promised debate.

3:10

Yesterday in Committee of Supply I asked the government some very basic questions that I truly believe should have been answered and could have been answered. My colleagues asked questions

pertaining to some of their shadow ministerial portfolios. Each and every one of my colleagues representing a shadow ministry should have been allowed to ask their ministers opposite detailed and probing questions with regard to spending in their ministries. Not that it would have done us any good. Again, most of the ministers had a very strange way of providing details on their ministries. The government has been vague about when the budget itself will be released. According to this interim supply it goes until the end of November, even a month after the scheduled federal election. This document, as I have stated before, is a blank cheque. It is asking this House for permission to spend without accountability, without scrutiny, without any guidance from the Legislature. It is asking for us to rubber-stamp it and just trust them.

I asked the Minister of Finance yesterday five very simple questions. I'm going to ask them again today. One, how much money will this government spend during this fiscal year? Two, how much revenue will this government collect during this fiscal year? Three, what will be the deficit for this fiscal year? Four, what will be the debt at the end of this fiscal year? Five, what will be the province's net financial assets at the end of this fiscal year? If the minister is unable to answer these questions, he is asking us to give him an \$18.6 billion preloaded gift card.

The former government ran up \$12 billion of debt in a few short years, squandered the sustainability fund, and planned to run up another \$5.7 billion for just this year alone in the budget that they tabled before calling an election. Now in addition to the \$5.7 billion that the previous government had intended to add to the provincial debt during this fiscal year, our best estimate of the government's numbers – and we are estimating because it appears that they haven't even begun to estimate – is that the new government will add an additional \$2 billion to that figure either in the form of drawing down the last pennies of the sustainability fund, now called the contingency account, or by adding it to the provincial debt. Draining away the remaining pennies of the rainy-day fund is the same as putting it on the credit card.

The Government House Leader spoke out on March 15, just a few months ago, when the former government tried to pass a similar bill for less money for a shorter period of time and allowed even more debate than the current government is allowing. Now, is it that the government does not see its inconsistency? This government is spending faster than it can tax, and they need to explain where these additional – what is it now? Is it \$1.8 billion or \$700 million or \$682 million? – dollars are going to come from. I'm not sure. It depends on which press release from the government you're checking and at what hour.

This government does not have a plan, and it has not shared the details for the rationale of the spending plan. If the NDP wants to spend \$682 million – let's just go with that figure for the sake of argument today – of taxpayers' money, then Albertans deserve to know where it's coming from. The Minister of Finance was clear that the NDP are still reviewing the spending decisions of the previous government. How can they possibly announce new spending and be confident that the money is improving services for Albertans instead of propping up a bloated bureaucracy?

The NDP platform called for \$1.8 billion in new spending for the fiscal year. This was confirmed by the Government House Leader just a few days ago. [interjection] Yesterday, even better. That is confusing. I think also yesterday – and the member will correct me if I'm wrong – they also said that figure was \$700 million in interim supply. Now it's \$682 million. It's quite confusing. It's confusing to us, but it still appears to be confusing to the government itself.

Now, I am looking at a summary of NDP budget changes, taken from their own platform. For the fiscal year ending 2016, they list the following revenue changes, some of which myself and my

colleagues wholeheartedly agree with. Removing the PC health care levy: \$396 million for this fiscal year is removed from their revenue projections. Removing user fees: \$184 million. Restoring the charitable tax credit: \$90 million. These are three measures that we fully support, but money must come from somewhere.

Now, this is where the NDP committed to bringing in an extra \$1.1 billion in personal income tax revenues this year. This seems to be a rather difficult task to obtain when the Canada Revenue Agency is highly unlikely to allow these changes to come into place retroactively for this fiscal year on July 1. Perhaps the minister will clarify if that figure will be \$1.1 billion, zero dollars, or somewhere in between.

Business taxes. The government committed to bringing in another \$805 million a year in business taxes by hiking the rates. We've just seen Bill 2 before us now. Now, again, it is highly unlikely that, under tax collection agreements with the Canada Revenue Agency, the government would be able to retroactively increase taxes for this fiscal year to July 1. Let's say for the sake of argument that the government was able to raise taxes for half this fiscal year. That would make it \$402.5 million compared to the \$805 million they were promising.

Now, they promised another \$100 million this fiscal year for delinquent business tax collection. They haven't even begun really writing their budget; I'm not sure if they've gotten around yet to grabbing businessmen by their ankles and shaking them upside down for money they haven't paid yet, a favourite practice of the NDP, I'm sure. That is \$100 million. They might eventually be able to collect that, but again it's doubtful that they would be able to collect it this year. But let's be generous and say that they can. They also added a railway fuel tax adjustment, that would collect \$10 million under their plan.

So the most likely figure for new taxes and revenue collected this year under the NDP plan, not that I particularly endorse any of it, would be \$402 million this fiscal year. At the high end, the highest likely figure they would possibly collect, would be \$512 million. The new government has committed to spending \$1.8 billion in new spending this fiscal year alone. If they're going to spend \$1.8 billion in new spending but are likely to collect at the high end \$512 million, that leaves a \$1.3 billion black hole in their budget. Mr. Speaker, that scares the hell out of me.

Now, there is quite a differential in many of their numbers. That \$1.8 billion in new spending commitments is for the full fiscal year. If they're saying that they're going to collect \$512 million at the very high end, but the \$682 million that they are referring to is only for this fiscal year and that they were merely confused, then that leaves still a differential of about \$170 million.

Mr. Speaker, the point is that the numbers don't add up. Now, that's nothing new to this Legislature, but at least the government had a PR plan before they presented it. This all to say that this government is spending faster than it can tax.

3:20

The government does not have a plan, and as much as I and my colleagues have patiently asked, they have not provided details on a rationale for this additional spending, and they have not provided details about where the money is going to come from other than thin air. If the government wants to spend \$682 million of taxpayers' money, taxpayers deserve to know where it's going to come from.

Now, the new spending promised by the government amounts to \$650 per family. They might particularly like that. Some people might like that. But the money must come from somewhere. Because the government has thus far refused to provide details on its total expenditures, total revenues, its deficit, its debt, and net financial assets, we must assume that this money will come from

one of two places, even higher taxes than the government campaigned on during the election or an even higher debt than the government campaigned on during the election. Since Bill 2 is before us today, I think the answer to that is most likely going to be higher debt than they campaigned on and an even deeper draw on the contingency account.

The NDP platform is confused about how much it's going to spend, and the minister has not done anything to clarify this for us yet. Now, I genuinely am looking for some answers. Oppositions like to embarrass governments, but we don't want to do that. We genuinely would like some answers. We've been asking for them for two days now despite the minuscule amount of debate time that has been allowed, despite the fact that my colleagues have not been allowed to ask legitimate, probing questions of the ministries that they shadow.

Mr. Speaker, we face a \$2 billion black hole in the NDP budget in addition to the \$5.7 billion consolidated cash deficit projected by the PCs. We know from looking at other jurisdictions that spending more does not necessarily equal better outcomes. Their plan is to spend more, tax more, borrow more, and let the budget run wild. They are driving in the dark. These announcements might sound good, but the money must come from somewhere. It does not grow on trees. According to the numbers announced this week, we are likely headed for an entire summer and probably another two months in the fall without a budget.

So, Mr. Speaker, I am going to close by giving the minister another chance to answer questions that have been asked in good faith, that Albertans deserve, that taxpayers need, that businesses deserve. They promised \$1.3 billion in new revenue, but clearly the government is not going to meet the number this year. Again, I will ask: how much revenue will the government collect, how much will it spend, how much will it borrow, what will be the net financial assets at the end of the year, and will they commit to a budget before the federal election?

The Speaker: Is there another hon. member who would like to speak? The hon. member is recognized.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak to Bill 3, Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2015 (No. 2). I have several questions with respect to this bill but will focus on my shadow cabinet, Aboriginal Relations. It's a wonderful first step to say that with this bill the government is taking steps to ensure Alberta families have access to essential services upon which they rely. But what families are you addressing?

Community members living on reserve and on Métis settlements across the province are concerned about what supports they may see coming out of Bill 3. While we have received information that shows specific supports to education, postsecondary education, health, and human services, we're still in the dark about what our First Nation and Métis communities can expect from this budget. How about education for Métis students and students on reserves? How about supports for First Nation and Métis students as they consider postsecondary education away from their communities or sometimes, if they're lucky, within their communities? How will human services be extended on reserves and into settlements? How about health services on reserve and in settlements? There is a large group of community members who are in the dark about what Bill 3 will mean for them. I would like to make sure that their voice is heard today as we debate Bill 3.

Specifically, Mr. Speaker, the breakdown of the funding going to Aboriginal Relations is almost \$85 million in expenses, \$10,000 in capital, which seems to be a pretty specific number, which should be easy to zero in on exactly what that is for, and over \$32 million

in financial transactions for a total of almost \$117 million. That's a lot of money. But what are those expenses? What services are included? To whom? Where? Is there any band- or settlement-specific funding targeted in this bill? What are the capital investments? Where are these investments? Who is going to benefit from them? What are financial transactions? We need some clarifications. That's all we're asking for.

Further, Mr. Speaker, what is the intended distribution of these expenditures across the province? How will the government ensure that there is fair use of these funds across the province? How will community members know what may be addressed for their community? There are no specifics. Who will be accountable for the projects and services that come out of these expenditures?

If the NDP wants to spend this much money, the Alberta public, including our First Nations and Métis community members, deserve to know where it is coming from and, just as importantly, where it is going. Mr. Speaker, I need to be able to go back to my community and be able to communicate with my First Nations and Métis communities across the province to assure them that this bill, as problematic as it is, may yet provide some locally determined, carefully planned supports. But first I need some information.

Thank you.

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

Mr. McIver: Hays.

The Speaker: Is this applying with respect to 29(2)(a)?

Mr. McIver: No, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a), as I understand it, is that you now have an opportunity for up to five minutes to ask questions or clarifications for the last speaker with respect to his comments, and if there are none, then we would move to the next member.

The hon. House leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today, and I just would like to thank the hon. member so much for his thought-out comments. It's very clear to me that he has a passion for the people in his constituency and in particular the people that are affected by the Aboriginal Relations portfolio. I guess I'm just a little bit curious to know if he would be willing to expand just a little bit on – you know, many of us are new in the House – the process of how we arrived here today. Do you feel like we've had a fair amount of time to debate this, or do you feel like it may have been rushed?

3:30

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. Yes, being new here and being a fiscal conservative, it concerns me when we try to rush through a bill of this magnitude that's going to spend so much of Alberta's money, so much of taxpayers' money because that's where it eventually comes from.

Mrs. Pitt: Shame.

Mr. Hanson: Shame.

I would not in my own personal life make an expenditure on, say, buying a house or an apartment from a picture off the Internet, which is pretty much a snapshot of what we got of this budget. We have a lot of issues in my constituency. You know, although I'm against spending uncontrollably, some of these areas do need to be addressed. With our Métis and First Nations peoples there are a lot

of people there that have very good ideas about promoting their own self-sufficiency, and I think that this government has a real opportunity to address those issues. Specifics in this budget could have done that, but again we've had no specifics. It's been just a snapshot of a budget.

We're talking about \$18 billion of taxpayers' money, my money, my kids' money. They all work for a living. We need to address this, get more specifics on it so that we can go back to our communities and tell them how much money they're going to be getting, where it's coming from, who's going to be watching how it's spent so that we can control this in the respect of all taxpayers of Alberta. No more snapshot budgets. Let's get a full walk-through video. It's all available.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Are there any other questions under 29(2)(a)? The hon. member.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate this opportunity to rise and talk about Bill 3. I appreciate my colleagues' comments here in the House. As time goes on, some things stay the same, and some things are different. I think what was pointed out is that the past government provided more time for questions, which is the same, but what is different is that the past government actually gave more detail so that the House had something to question on.

One thing that's the same is that the opposition sometimes has some very good questions, and another thing that's the same is that after complaining about the time, the opposition didn't use all the time available after complaining about not having enough. That hasn't changed.

Mr. Cooper: Two minutes, sir. Two minutes.

Mr. McIver: I thank the hon. member for agreeing with me.

Nonetheless, Mr. Speaker, the opposition has some good questions, and I thank them for asking those good questions.

What is the key question, Mr. Speaker? We asked ministers yesterday a lot of questions, got next to no answers with any meat on them. I think I actually thanked one minister yesterday when I got one straight answer, and I'm grateful for that one straight answer though I asked a lot of questions and my colleagues did. But while I don't expect any answers today because we didn't get any yesterday, the number one question that I think Albertans will be interested in and that I think all members of this House should ponder and talk to our constituents over the weekend about when we get there, because I know I will be, is that the government acknowledged yesterday that they brought forward \$1.8 billion in new spending.

We acknowledge that the government has the right to do that. They have the right to take that money from Albertans as a result of the recent election. They have that right. We acknowledge that right. We acknowledge the rights that come with winning an election. But I'm going to take just a second or two to remind the government of the responsibility that is attached to that. The responsibility, Mr. Speaker, that's attached to that very, very directly is to tell Albertans, whose money you're spending, what you are spending it on.

Now, the government says that they're going to give a budget here in the fall. October, I think, is what the Premier said yesterday, and I have no reason to doubt that the Premier is telling the truth on that. But the government took the money yesterday, or today, when this bill passes. Before this session ends, the government will have taken the money, effectively, out of Albertans' pockets without an explanation. They didn't borrow a buck for a coffee. One point one billion dollars unexplained: there's your question. There is your

question, Mr. Speaker. Why are you taking \$1.1 billion of Albertans' money without explaining?

Well, there are a thousand questions. Members across, whether they're on the front bench, the middle bench, or the backbench, you maybe should be asking your ministers so that you can tell your constituents where the \$1.1 billion is going. I'm guessing that some of your constituents will be asking you that, and I can tell you that when my constituents ask me that, I'm going to tell them that we PCs fought for the answer, that we PCs asked for the answer because we care about where \$1.1 billion of Albertans' money is going. No answer yet has been offered in this House, Mr. Speaker.

I will close by posing that question one last time: what are you going to do with the \$1.1 billion thus far unexplained?

The Speaker: Are there any questions or observations under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Mason: Under 29(2)(a) I just want to respond to the hon. member and leader of the third party. In fact, there are four areas where the government has added additional money to fund things that Albertans voted for in the election. There are four. All have been the subject of public announcements.

First of all, there was more money for health care, and I thought I had the actual numbers. I was going to give the hon. member the actual numbers. I'll get them. I'll get back up. We've got a little bit of time here. There was some for health care, there was some for Education, some for advanced education, and some for Human Services. I will go into more detail when I have that chance.

The interim supply bill provides \$500 million in Health to ensure that we can restore front-line funding that was cut in the previous government's budget. That was a cut in the previous government's budget that has been restored. There is \$39 million in Human Services in order to ensure that there are additional services to vulnerable families in Alberta. There is \$45 million for Education that enables us to make sure that school boards are able to hire the teachers to meet enrolment pressures in the school system. There's \$40 million for Innovation and Advanced Education to allow the government to impose a tuition freeze at institutions across the province, a rollback of market modifiers which were introduced back in 2004.

That is the bulk of the additional \$1.1 billion. I will just indicate to the House that the situation that we found ourselves in – how's my time, Mr. Speaker?

3:40

The Speaker: Two and a half minutes.

Mr. Mason: Two minutes.

We found ourselves in a situation. Normally a budget is presented to the House by a government in March or April. The previous government presented their budget in March and April and, instead of debating it in the House and passing the budget, decided to call an election and run on that budget. Of course, the result of that election is well known.

Then this government took office 24 days ago. The interim supply that the previous government had approved in the Assembly runs out at the end of June, and then the government can't operate because it has no authority from the Assembly to pay its employees, to pay for the programs that it has to operate, to pay bills to keep the lights on and the heat on in the hospitals and schools and all of that. We needed to put together an interim supply bill that would allow the government to continue to operate while the government organized itself and took a look at the books and began the process of developing a budget.

Now, we've had argument from the Wildrose members that we should do it in September. We're going to do it in October. They seem to think that this month is of critical importance. But the fact is that we need some time to put together our own budget. In the meantime we're operating along the lines of the supplementary supply that was passed by the previous Legislature at the request of the previous government, with these additions. There are a few more. I realize that these numbers don't come to \$1.1 billion. I'm going to get them and stand up again.

That's the situation we're finding ourselves in. We run out of money to operate the government at the end of the month. The timing of all of this is not our choice. It is not our doing. We have inherited it as a result of decisions of the previous government. But the government must continue to operate, and we are doing a responsible thing by bringing in an interim supply while we can develop a responsible budget as a new government.

You will understand, I'm sure, hon. members from the third party, that creating a budget for a government is a large task that requires a lot of responsible thinking.

The Speaker: I'll recognize the hon. House leader of the opposition.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and speak to Bill 3. I just want to take a quick moment to talk about where we are and how we got here. I recognize that this bill is important, and I recognize that the government needs to keep running. As a number of my colleagues have highlighted today, you know, passing a piece of legislation that's \$18 billion with such limited debate has created all sorts of challenges, particularly on this side of the House when it comes to being able to ask questions. I know that a number of my colleagues – in fact, in the three hours of allotted debate yesterday, other than the two minutes that we offered up to some of our other colleagues in the House, I believe that the Official Opposition was allotted five speakers to speak to \$18 billion in spending.

Then we find ourselves on a beautiful Thursday afternoon in June, and the government has made a choice to introduce second reading of Bill 3 at 3:05 or whatever it was, knowing full well that at 4:15 the guillotine would fall on second reading, again preventing the opportunity for my colleagues in the opposition to speak to the bill and, essentially, limiting debate. I would be hesitant to utilize the words around time allocation. I know that the government when they were in opposition was certainly wildly opposed to such tactics. But here we have a situation where at a critical stage in debate, again, the time is limited for the opposition to raise the valid concerns of our constituents. It's not just about standing up and carrying on. It's about limiting our ability to act accurately and openly, to represent our constituents, that have sent us to this place.

In fact, members of the government regularly took the opportunity when they were in opposition to rise and speak specifically to this type of behaviour in the Assembly. I would just like to point to you one particular day in November last year, when there was a member of this House – and I quote from *Hansard* for you – that said:

Part of it comes down to the courtesy that the government should be extending to the opposition as far as giving us as much time as possible to work through a bill and its process.

I think, you know, something that's very interesting about this House is the process of how the opposition acquires the bill, obviously after the first reading, but the time seems, at least this week, the speed at which we are blasting through pieces of legislation – I'd like to remind all the members of the Assembly that we're enacting laws that affect this year more than 4 million people. Down the road – I mean, we're expanding very quickly here in the province. We should be taking the time to go through

this and have a thorough debate. I don't think rushing legislation does anyone any favours.

And who said that? I was about to refer to someone's presence in the House, so I'll just withdraw that part and say that the Minister of Municipal Affairs is the one who had uttered those words in this House just last year.

You know, when we look at what has happened this week, we've seen supplementary supply introduced on Tuesday, with a massive undertaking for the opposition to be prepared on less than 24 hours' notice to debate that in the House for three hours yesterday, and now some would say the ramming through of second reading of Bill 3 here in the Assembly.

I can go on with some additional quotes when it comes to the now government. This is from December 8, 2014.

Like our friends in the Wildrose, we have a number of amendments that we want to bring forward, but I think it would be better to do this out in the open and involve the opposition and have some real discussion about how we can improve this bill with the people that do that.

That is from the Government House Leader only last year.

One more I'll leave you with, also from a colleague of yours and of ours and, I will say, an all-around good guy.

I just wanted to remind Albertans that with many pieces of legislation, when they are done hastily, when they're done without adequate consultation [or debate], when they're done without input from the opposition, we find ourselves in this situation.

Again, the Minister of Municipal Affairs just last year, in fact in December.

It's a real shame that we arrive here today to debate a critically important piece of legislation with massive ramifications for our province, with massive amounts of increased spending and minimal amounts of debate. For our province I hope for the best, and I hope for the best for all Albertans, that a renewed commitment can be found in the fall Legislature, where this type of behaviour and tactics on behalf of the government will be put aside and fulsome debate on all of the important issues will be able to be heard.

3:50

The Speaker: Are there any observations or questions under 29(2)(a)? The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much. I just wanted to supplement my earlier comments, Mr. Speaker. In addition to the \$624 million that I indicated for additional program spending, there's approximately \$400 million due to the cancellation of the health care tax, and there is over \$200 million for cancelled increases to various fees and so on that were increased in the previous government's budget. That is approximately \$1.2 billion over and above what was in the previous government's budget. So it's not only increased spending on one side, but it's actually giving up tax revenue where we didn't agree with the tax increases on the other side.

Mr. McIver: That must have hurt.

Mr. Mason: We don't agree with all tax, hon. member.

The Speaker: Hon. member, regarding 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Fildebrandt: Yes, Mr. Speaker. The Opposition House Leader makes some excellent points about the size and scope of this debate and how it's been limited and about the comments of former members of the opposition, now on the government side, and their consistency with their previous remarks.

Now, speaking of remarks from those on the government side, perhaps they can just nod in agreement when these numbers are

read as correct. The Government House Leader had indicated that of the new spending, \$500 million was for Health, that \$45 million was for Education, that \$39 million was for Human Services, and that \$40 million was for advanced education. Mr. Speaker, that adds up to \$624 million. If I'm not mistaken, that is the fourth figure we've seen in two days on new spending from the government. I believe just a few hours ago the government said that the new spending added up to \$682 million. Now, scratching my head here, I think that's a \$58 million differential between 10 o'clock this morning and five minutes to 4.

That is the fourth figure we've heard. We have heard \$1.8 billion. We have heard \$700 million. We have heard \$682 million, and now we've heard \$624 million. Now, I don't know about you, Mr. Speaker, but I'm starting to get very confused. I think Albertans are starting to get very confused. Perhaps someone from the government side would like to take this time to explain their fourth new spending figure in 24 hours.

The Speaker: Other comments or observations under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. member.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to rise and thank the hon. member for the comments, and I think it would be impolite of me if I didn't thank the hon. Government House Leader for answering part of the question. The last time I stood here, I said – and nobody seems to have quibbled with it – that the government owes an explanation to Albertans for \$1.1 billion. Due to my badgering, I suppose, the hon. Government House Leader – and let me repeat my thank you to him – stood up and explained \$600 million of those dollars and then said that it comes out to \$1.2 billion. I had \$1.1 billion, so what's a hundred million between friends?

How much time do I have, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: You have about 35 seconds.

Mr. McIver: Thirty-five seconds is enough to reframe the question.

Due to the information that the government just provided a few seconds ago, the same question that I asked earlier is the one for Albertans, for all of us in this House. Where is the other \$500 million to \$600 million going to be spent? It hasn't been answered by the government. They've taken it from Albertans. They have the right to take it from Albertans. They just haven't fulfilled their obligation to Albertans to explain why they need the money.

The Speaker: Are there any other speakers wishing to speak to Bill 3, appropriations? The hon. member.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 3, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2015 (No. 2). I'm disappointed that not all of my colleagues will have the chance to speak as many have a lot of questions and would like to get on record about this spending. There's no need to cut the debate and force this minibudget through, yet it appears that is what we're about to do.

As the shadow minister of Infrastructure it is my job to scrutinize the government spending of Alberta Infrastructure. This minibudget bill allocates \$228.5 million for operational expenses for the next five months in addition to \$147.5 million in operational expenses that were approved for three months. That works out to 64 per cent of last year's operational expenditures.

Operational expenditures cover such things as the big-ticket items, property management, leases of facilities. Yes, it costs money to manage real estate and to pay the rent when leasing buildings from the private sector. All the nice cleaning staff you see

in the Legislature, the guys that change the lights and scrub the windows: these are their salaries. There's even money in here to pay for operations of the one and only Swan Hills Treatment Centre, the only place in Canada to dispose of hazardous materials that are not pathological, radioactive, or explosive. No one can ever say that Alberta is doing nothing for the environment. Alberta takes the worst of the worst materials from across the country to make them safe because Alberta mandates it. Operational expenditures also cover the salaries of the professional, nonpartisan public service.

But, Mr. Speaker, we do not know how much each of these line items is receiving because the government did not treat this mini-budget as a real budget and published those line items as estimates. It is spending without thorough scrutiny. Over in the capital investment vote \$440 million is allocated for the next five months on top of \$153 million for the past three months. That's about 60 per cent of last year's capital spending for Alberta Infrastructure, but I do not know how much is being allocated to the capital construction program, nor do I know how much is going to health facility support. New hospitals are being built across the province, but because the line items are not here, I do not know if hospitals will be completed this year or new ones started or projects stalled in favour of other projects, nor do I know if more land is being released in Fort McMurray for residential and commercial development. This minibudget does not have the details. I'm looking forward to seeing a full budget in the fall to be able to debate the individual line items with the minister in committee.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Any questions under 29(2)(a)?

Are there other members who would like to speak to Bill 3?

The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The plan is seemingly to raise taxes, raise spending, and to forget about savings. These announcements sound good. They sound really good, but the money has to come from somewhere, and it doesn't grow on trees. We must not spend too much money without explaining where it came from. This area where investment is being focused on sounds good, but we do have to pay for this. That's why we are here to help you. We are here to help this government.

In layman's terms we can't max out our credit card because we still have to pay for that interest on that credit card. We don't have mom and dad to pay for that credit card anymore.

4:00

Leaving our budget until after the federal election also impairs this province. Industry and business will have no confidence in Alberta. Investment will slow. Business will disappear. We cannot impair our province for politics. We must strengthen this province. Again, that is why we are here to help you. We're all on the same team, aren't we? We're all elected officials. You can just ask us to come on over. We're all paid already. [interjections] No, no. Not cross. Not cross. No, no, no. The Wildrose will help you to run a fiscally responsible government that is transparent and accountable. [interjections] Oh, no, no, no. Four years. Four years. We'll be there.

We are talking about billions of dollars in debt, not a thousand bucks, not a hundred bucks. We're talking billions. The interest on this is just phenomenal. We can't sacrifice future generations to pay for some nice-to-have stuff when we know that there is space in our budgets to cut before we spend.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Any questions or observations under 29(2)(a)? The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just can't resist. I want to thank the hon. member for his offer to have some Wildrose members cross the floor to the government, but given what happened to the last government as a result, I respectfully decline.

The Speaker: Are there any other questions? The hon. member.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for letting me speak to Bill 3. As a . . .

The Speaker: May I interrupt a moment. The chair recognized you, hon. member, believing you were speaking under 29(2)(a).

Are there any other members wishing to speak under 29(2)(a)?

To speak to the bill, the hon. member.

Mr. Smith: As a public school teacher for 30 years and as one that has just had to leave the classroom I speak from my heart here. You don't teach for 30 years without having a great love for kids and for the public education system that I served.

An Hon. Member: The best education in the country.

Mr. Smith: Absolutely.

Now, I guess that's why, with my 30 years of teaching, I stand. I've seen what happens to a public education system when funding is severely affected by government mismanagement. You know, when we aren't wise stewards of the public money, it's not some mythical person that is affected in the public school system. It's the kids, and it's the teachers. I've seen what happens to teachers' wages, and I've seen what happens to teachers' jobs, and I've seen what happens to teachers' pensions when debt is irresponsibly accumulated in this province. I've seen the impact on my classes when you cannot fund public education as it should be funded. I've seen the larger classes, I've seen the fewer resources, I've seen the students with fewer supports, and I've seen the schools with fewer janitors.

We have a responsibility in this Assembly, if we truly care about our publicly funded systems, if we truly care about public education, to ensure that we do not drive this province into deeper and deeper debt. It saddens me and it frustrates me as a new MLA when I'm faced with an interim supply bill here that will obviously sink this province into deeper debt. I don't want to have to go back to my constituents and I don't want to have to go back to the kids that I've been teaching this semester or to their parents and have to explain to them why we're getting increasingly into debt. I don't want to have to have the conversation: where is the money going to come from for public education? So I would ask the hon. members in this institution, if you really care for public education, to stop and think about how deeply in debt we're going to go as a province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Any comments under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, thank you so much for recognizing me. I really appreciate the words and the passion with which the member speaks. Clearly, his care for our children and those being educated in our province is at the fore. I also know that he is a big advocate of parents being able to be in charge of that education, and I wondered if he would just take a moment or two to expand upon how he thinks large amounts of debts that are incurred in the province might have a negative impact around, you know, different types of education as well.

The Speaker: Proceed.

Mr. Smith: Thank you for your question. Obviously, one of the joys about living in Alberta is that we understand that there are many types of families and there are many types of kids and there are many types and ways of educating our children, whether that's charter schools, whether that's home-schooling. I chose the public school system. I see a value in the public school system. But I have also taught kids that have come in from home-schooling that have been very well prepared for my classroom. I have had kids that I know in my community that have gone to charter schools and to independent schools and to a wide range of educational facilities and choices.

We live in a province where the parents should be able to make those choices and decisions, and your point is well taken. I mean, I focused on public schools because I was a public school teacher. But the decisions that we make as a government and the decisions that we make in this Legislature will affect all of the students in this province, all of the kids, and all of the choices their parents make. So we have a responsibility to be very careful with the way that we spend our monies.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Further comments or observations under 29(2)(a)? Member, proceed.

Mr. W. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Closing off on this portion, I just want to bring back a thought about interim supply. It reminds me of a story about my son when he was in college. Usually on Friday afternoons I'd get a phone call. "Dad, I need some more money for books," and I'd go: "Books? Again?"

The Speaker: Hon. member, I need to clarify, so that you and I are on the same page, are you speaking on 29(2)(a), to the earlier comment?

Mr. W. Anderson: Yes. I am.

The Speaker: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. W. Anderson: Anyway, we're on interim supply. "I'm talking about money for books." "Okay. Fine. Additional money for books. Let me think about this. How much of it is going to go for beer?" "No. I'm not going to buy any beer, Dad. I'm just going to use the money for books." I was always trying to manage what the truth was behind the story, always looking for the details.

The challenge that I have with what I've heard in the last couple of hours is that I am not hearing anything about any cuts or any savings. I am hearing all about spending, where the money is being allocated to, funds being allocated to different areas, but I am not hearing about any areas of cuts or any areas of savings. That troubles me because as a taxpayer I'm not hearing about anywhere where there's any fiscal responsibility in managing the money. It's just about spending the money.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:10

The Speaker: Are there any members who would like to speak on Bill 3, appropriation? The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a mom of a special-needs child my son's funding was cut on a regular basis. It's one of the first things to go when there's an issue with any government spending. So I urge our government to take a look at where this spending is going. We have to take a look, line by line, to see where those initiatives need to go and how that money is going to be spent.

We have to take a look at what's important and prioritize from that point of view. Many of you would understand; many of you are parents. You understand how important it is for your children to get the appropriate education, whether that's through home-school, whether that's through a charter school, whether that's through a public school, whether that's through a private school. There are so many, many options, and we're very, very grateful to have those options.

Having said that, in these situations when these things happen, the very first things to go are aides and care workers and all of the other things that happen in schools. We need to understand, from our side, where those dollars are going to come from, and there needs to be a priority and a sensibility in terms of how that money is being spent. It's wonderful that you're allocating money here, there, and everywhere, but we need to understand how that money is being spent. We need specific numbers. We need to be able to go back to our constituencies and say: this is where this education money is coming from, and this is where it's going.

It is a responsibility all of us have taken on as members in this Legislature, to take back to our constituency, so that they understand that the government actually has their best interests. We are actually here to help. I know you keep hearing that; you may not believe it. As a mother and as a person who has lived in her constituency since 1979 I have a responsibility. I have an 18- and a 16-year-old who we have raised to have fiscal responsibility within our own house. Maybe we should take a leaf out of our own books on how we run our own houses. This is the house of Albertans. Our responsibility here is to run it the way we would run our own house. We don't run deficits at our house. We make sure that the money that we have only goes to a certain point. We don't run a deficit.

An Hon. Member: No mortgages? Did you buy your house with cash?

Mrs. Aheer: Mortgages are fine, but I have to pay those mortgages off. Everybody has to. [interjection] That's absolutely right.

Having said that, I'm held accountable for that debt. That's on my shoulders. So if we as a government are going to take responsibility for that debt, let us know what's going on. There's an accountability and a transparency that's not there. My bank knows when I have a mortgage. My bank knows when I have a car payment due. I'm on the hook for that.

I'm also on the hook to make sure that my constituents get what they ask for, and that's what we're asking for. We need to understand what's happening with the money in this government. We need to understand the transparency and accountability. We deserve that. As members in the Legislature, as members of this province we have that responsibility to make sure that the people know and, like I said, as a mother I want to know.

Thank you so much.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you so much. I really appreciate you rising today as we move closer to the time allocation at 4:15, that has been imposed by this government. One thing I think that's very clear that we've seen today . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, are you speaking to 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Cooper: Yes.

The Speaker: Okay.

Mr. Cooper: As we move closer – I think we'll all find that 29(2)(a) is questions and comments, and clearly I'm making a comment.

One thing I think that's clear is that each and every member of the House is passionate about making the province better for Alberta. I'm excited to be a part of a team on both sides of the House that wants to make Alberta better, and . . .

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, but in accordance with Standing Order 64(3) the Speaker is required to put the question to the House on the appropriation bill for second reading.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:15 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, S.	Gray	Miller
Babcock	Hinkley	Miranda
Bilous	Hoffman	Nielsen
Carlier	Horne	Payne
Carson	Jabbour	Piquette
Ceci	Kazim	Renaud
Clark	Kleinstauber	Rosendahl
Connolly	Larivee	Sabir

Coolahan	Littlewood	Schmidt
Cortes-Vargas	Loyola	Schreiner
Dach	Luff	Shepherd
Dang	Malkinson	Sigurdson
Drever	Mason	Sucha
Eggen	McCuaig-Boyd	Sweet
Feehan	McKitrick	Turner
Fitzpatrick	McLean	Westhead
Ganley	McPherson	Woollard
Goehring		

Against the motion:

Aheer	Jansen	Smith
Cooper	Loewen	Starke
Cyr	MacIntyre	Strankman
Drysdale	McIver	Taylor
Fildebrandt	Nixon	van Dijken
Gotfried	Orr	Yao
Hanson	Schneider	

Totals:	For – 52	Against – 20
---------	----------	--------------

[Motion carried; Bill 3 read a second time]

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, wonderful progress today. The government will continue and not be shut down. Given the joyous nature of the occasion, I move that we adjourn for the weekend. We'll call it 4:30.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:29 p.m. to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 29th Legislature - 1st Session (2015)

Activity to June 18, 2015

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 1 to 200 are Government Bills. Bills numbered 201 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills numbered with a "Pr" prefix are Private Bills.

*An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If a Bill comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel, Alberta Justice, for details at (780) 427-2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned chapter numbers until the conclusion of the Fall Sitings.

- 1 An Act to Renew Democracy in Alberta (Ganley)**
First Reading -- 9-10 (Jun. 15, 2015 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 30-38 (Jun. 16, 2015 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 85-94 (Jun. 17, 2015 eve, adjourned)
- 2 An Act to Restore Fairness to Public Revenue (Ceci)**
First Reading -- 104 (Jun. 18, 2015 aft., passed)
- 3 Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2015 (No. 2) (\$) (Ceci)**
First Reading -- 77 (Jun. 17, 2015 eve., passed)
Second Reading -- 107-114 (Jun. 18, 2015 aft., passed on division)
- 201 Assuring Alberta's Fiscal Future Act (Fraser)**
First Reading -- 104-105 (Jun. 18, 2015 aft., passed)
- 202 Alberta Local Food Act (Cortes-Vargas)**
First Reading -- 105 (Jun. 18, 2015 aft., passed)

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Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, June 22, 2015

Day 5

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

First Session

Wanner, Hon. Robert E., Medicine Hat (ND), Speaker
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Feehan, Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (ND), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Anderson, Shaye, Leduc-Beaumont (ND)
Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (W)
Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (ND)
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Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (PC)
Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., Calgary-Buffalo (ND)
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Sigurdson, Hon. Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (ND)
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Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (W)
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Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (ND)
Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (W)
Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (ND)
van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND)
Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)
Vacant, Calgary-Foothills

Party standings:

New Democrat: 53 Wildrose: 21 Progressive Conservative: 9 Alberta Liberal: 1 Alberta Party: 1 Independent: 1 Vacant: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, June 22, 2015

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Hon. members, yesterday, on June 21, Albertans all across our province celebrated the contributions made by the nearly one-quarter of a million First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people who reside in our wonderful province. I would ask the members to bow their heads and contemplate and give thanks for the rich culture, traditions, and gifts that our first people have contributed to our province. Amen.

Please remain standing for the singing of our national anthem as led by Mr. Robert Clark.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
Car ton bras sait porter l'épée,
Il sait porter la croix!
Ton histoire est une épopée
Des plus brillants exploits.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you some very special guests, and I would ask that they rise when I say their names, please. Peacha Atkinson is the mother of the late Nina Courtepatte, a beautiful girl who was lost to us in 2005. Bernice Martial is the grand chief of Treaty 6 and a strong advocate for missing and murdered indigenous women. Charles Weaselhead is the grand chief of Treaty 7 and chief of the Blood Tribe in southern Alberta. Chief Isaac Laboucan-Avirom is the deputy grand chief designate of Treaty 8 and is chief of the Woodland Cree First Nation. Audrey Poitras is the president of the Métis Nation of Alberta and a member of the Métis Women's Economic Security Council. Stan Delorme is the vice-president of the Metis Settlements General Council. Muriel Stanley Venne is the founder and president of the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women. Wilf Willier is from the Sucker Creek First Nation and is the founder of the Nechi institute and served for three terms as a councillor with the town of High Prairie. Peggy Richardson is an Inuit elder and a member of the First Nations Women's Economic Security Council. Tanya Kappo is the acting grand chief liaison with Treaty 8 First Nations of Alberta and on the national collective as a helper with Walking with Our Sisters, a commemorative art installation to honour the lives of missing and murdered indigenous women. Allan Pard is a member of the Piikani First Nation and a ceremonial elder, and he is also a senior adviser with the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations. Koren Lightning-Earle is the co-chair of the First Nations Women's Economic Security Council and a lawyer from the Samson Cree Nation. Grace Auger is the co-chair of the First Nations Women's Economic Security Council and a lawyer with the Legal Aid Society of Alberta at Siksika Nation.

Mr. Speaker, some of these individuals and many of the other special guests with us in the public gallery today are residential school survivors. All are advocates for missing and murdered women and, quite simply, outstanding members of their communities. I would like to draw your attention to members from treaties 6, 7, and 8 as well as from the Métis Nation of Alberta Association, the Metis Settlements General Council, the First Nations Women's Economic Security Council, and the Métis Women's Economic Security Council. Also in the gallery are Marianne Ryan, deputy commissioner of the RCMP K Division, and Chief Rod Knecht of the Edmonton Police Service.

I am touched that everyone took the time to join us today, and I would ask all members of this Assembly that you give them the warm welcome of this House. [Standing ovation]

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Tracy Bear. Could you please stand, Tracy. Tracy is a PhD candidate at the University of Alberta, where she also is an instructor in the Faculty of Native Studies. Tracy is a proud Cree woman from Saskatchewan and has been involved with Walking with Our Sisters since it made its debut here in Edmonton in 2013. She is now on the national collective as a helper. The national collective provides support and assistance to communities as they plan, prepare, install, undertake, and deinstall Walking with Our Sisters. I would ask all members to join me in extending to Tracy the traditional welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to introduce to you and through you to all the members of the Assembly Mr. Maitham Salman Nima and Dr. Azhar Ali, husband and wife, constituents of Edmonton-Ellerslie. I ask them to please stand. Mr. Nima arrived in Edmonton in 1998 as a political refugee from Iraq and was later joined by his wife in 2003. Mr. Nima is an accomplished writer and photographer whom I met through the Mill Woods Artists Collective when he was named the Edmonton public library's writer in exile. Dr. Azhar Ali has been practising veterinary medicine since 2010 in different clinics in Edmonton and surrounding area, including the Edmonton humane society. Ever since she was a child, Dr. Ali has been around pets. The passion has led her to set her dream in life to be a veterinarian.

This June both Mr. Nima and Dr. Ali opened their very own veterinary clinic, called the Summerside Veterinary Hospital, equipped with the latest technology to serve residents and their pets in the city of Edmonton and area. Their business is located in the newly opened Summerside Plaza on 66th Street and Ellerslie Road southwest. I ask all members to greet them with the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

1:40

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all the members of the Assembly my husband, Mr. Jeremy Johnston, and also Mr. Adam Comartin, son of Joe Comartin, MP for Windsor-Tecumseh. Both men have been of great support to me. Adam shares his insight gathered from learning the ropes in politics from his father. Jeremy helps keep my morale up day in and day out, sacrificing his own

sleep in solidarity with the lack of mine, both during the campaign and after. Jeremy is one of the many faces of low-wage earners in the restaurant industry, sacrificing time with friends, missing weddings and funerals, all with the hope of making ends meet at the end of the month. Adam moved to our great province to start a family and share in the profession of being a teacher with his wife, bettering the future of our province through our publicly funded education system. These are merely two stories amongst the great number that we have here in Alberta. If they could both stand to receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there other guests? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all the members of the Assembly my very special guests, Ann Zvonkovic and Iva Sarjas. Ann and Iva are both strong community leaders in Edmonton-Manning and have spent many hours volunteering at the Slovenian Canadian Association to ensure that Edmontonians and their families have learned more about the Slovenian culture. Due to their hard work the Slovenian Canadian Association now has a strong presence in north Edmonton. I would ask my guests to rise and receive the traditional welcome.

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

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly my friend Mr. Jamie Post. Mr. Post is a long-serving community volunteer. He's a board member for Edmonton's Food Bank, the chair of the Edmonton Naming Committee, and a board member for the Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues. In his free time Mr. Jamie Post is director of communications and membership for the Alberta Council of Disability Services, a nonprofit association that exists to support service provider members, who, in turn, support people with developmental disabilities and brain injury. I ask that Mr. Jamie Post please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Did I see that the Government House Leader would like to do an introduction?

Mr. Mason: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Due to the large amount of business facing us this afternoon, I'll try and be very brief.

First, I'd like to introduce Susan Petrina, who is my CA. She has been a resident of Highlands for over 10 years, president of the community league, and she is also on the board of the Solar Energy Society of Alberta. Mari Sasano is my caseworker, and she has been active in the community of Parkdale-Cromdale. She is a writer and supporter of arts and theatre communities. I'd especially like to welcome Vera Petrina, who is Susan's 82-year-old mother, visiting from Kelowna, B.C. She has worked for many years as a unionized housekeeper for Kelowna General hospital. She has been retired for many years now but continues to work weekly as a volunteer. I would ask that they rise now, if they were able to be seated – there they are – and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure and privilege to rise today to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly my guest, Mr. Christopher McBain. If you could please

stand. Chris is a passionate and vivacious leader who has advocated for marginalized communities in Edmonton, including the LGBTQ-plus community, HIV/AIDS, and various communities surrounding the issues of disabilities. Through his career and community work he has accomplished much, but his numerous accomplishments include having served as a board member for the Alberta positive living society. He was recently nominated by *Avenue* magazine for Top 40 under 40 for 2015. I would like to ask you all to join me today in giving Mr. McBain the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there any other guests for introduction today?
The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Given the importance of the ministerial announcement and the responses to follow, I'm going to ask now for unanimous consent of the House to permit the leader of the third party and the three independent MLAs to have an opportunity to respond to the ministerial statement made by the Premier. I would also ask for unanimous consent to extend the Routine to complete this item before starting question period.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Truth and Reconciliation

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On June 2 the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada had a special event in our nation's capital. For six years leading up to this, thousands of courageous First Nation, Métis, and Inuit people spoke their truth about the devastating experience of residential schools. We as Canadians were witness to that truth. We were shocked and at times rendered speechless as we learned of the First Nation, Métis, and Inuit children forcibly removed from their homes, placed beyond the protection and the love of their families. We felt deeply for the adults who shared their journey to come to terms with the broken child within. They have given us their truth. Now as Albertans and Canadians it's up to us to become part of this healing journey through acts of reconciliation. As Justice Murray Sinclair so poignantly stated, "We have described for you a mountain. We have shown you the path to the top. We call upon you to do the climbing."

Mr. Speaker, Alberta is ready to follow the path. As our first step we want the First Nation, Métis, and Inuit people of Alberta to know that we deeply regret the profound harm and damage that occurred to generations of children forced to attend residential schools. Although the province of Alberta did not establish this system, members of this Chamber at the time did not take a stand against it, and for this silence we apologize. These schools broke the connection between children and family, between community, between language and culture. These children too often lost the ability to connect again with their families, losing their identity and the confidence to pass on their traditions to their own children. With that, we also deeply regret the intergenerational damage that perpetuates itself in poverty, neglect, drug addiction, mental health issues, and great despair.

Today, Mr. Speaker, we are joined by many proud members of the First Nation, Métis, and Inuit communities of Alberta. Many are residential school survivors. All are advocates for missing and murdered women and, quite simply, outstanding members of their communities. To these honoured guests and to the residential

school survivors of Alberta I would like to say: as children you entered these schools alone and frightened; this past is too painful to endure on your own; in the journey of reconciliation you no longer have to walk alone; your truth has woken our conscience and our sense of justice. True reconciliation will only be achieved if we as governments and citizens are willing to make a fundamental shift in our relationship with the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples of Alberta, and we will do that.

Now, yesterday was National Aboriginal Day. On the longest day of the year we shone the light on the distinct cultures, histories, and heritage of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit people in Alberta. Today I want that light to illuminate the hearts of all Albertans. I want the issue of missing and murdered aboriginal women to come out of the shadows and to be viewed with compassion and understanding in the clear light of day.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission spoke to a devastating link between the large number of missing and murdered aboriginal women and the many harmful factors in their lives such as domestic violence, poverty, and the number of aboriginal children in the child welfare system. Mr. Speaker, the executive summary report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission also stated that this complex interplay of factors is part of the legacy of residential schools, and this must be examined alongside the lack of success that police forces experience in solving these crimes against aboriginal women. In short, too many indigenous women are missing, too many indigenous families have suffered, and too many communities don't have the answers that they need.

1:50

When Helen Betty Osborne was murdered in The Pas, Manitoba, it took more than 16 years for charges to be brought forward. During those 16 years there were people who knew who was guilty but said nothing. It was called a conspiracy of silence. That was 43 years ago. Today, out of that long, unsettling silence, a strong and determined voice has emerged, and we hear that voice across our province in the growing movement within the hearts and homes of Albertans, from family members and friends of those who are gone, and in moving art exhibits by those who were touched by the tragedies of our silent sisters.

Mr. Speaker, today our government joins these voices. Today Alberta joins the call for a national inquiry into missing and murdered aboriginal women. Our hearts and a strong sense of justice and humanity compel us to speak loudly and clearly for these young beautiful women, who were mothers, daughters, sisters, who were deeply loved and are now deeply missed. We join the families, national aboriginal organizations, the provinces, the territories to lend our voice to the call for a national inquiry because it is the right thing to do. Together all of us in this House must openly face the root causes that place aboriginal women and girls at such high risk. Harsh realities like poverty, racism, inadequate housing, and lack of educational opportunities are amongst those realities, and until these root causes are addressed, the violence will continue.

Mr. Speaker, the Alberta government will develop a renewed relationship with aboriginal peoples based on trust and respect and take true action on these root causes because we understand that true reconciliation is a matter of action, not just words. There is good work being done out there. Alberta is working with aboriginal communities and organizations to improve the lives and the safety of aboriginal women through local solutions such as supporting the Moosehide campaign, which is aimed to take a stand against violence towards aboriginal women and girls.

Alberta Justice and Solicitor General is working with our federal, provincial, and territorial counterparts on a justice framework to address violence against aboriginal women and girls and analyzing

the data from community engagement to determine the best practices for a culture of safe victim services response. Our government is working with aboriginal communities to address issues with early intervention supports to help keep children safe and to keep families together, to involve the extended family and the community when a child first becomes involved in our system. We also work with the First Nations Women's Economic Security Council and the Métis Women's Economic Security Council on the issue of trafficking of women and girls in Canada as it relates to missing and murdered indigenous women. Mr. Speaker, our government will continue to work with aboriginal communities and organizations until aboriginal women in Alberta can see a future for themselves that is safe and fulfilling.

So in this time of summer solstice we will not let the light dim on the crisis that is taking place across our province and across our country. With full conviction we lend our voice and our conscience to doing right by the women, their families, and their communities. The silence that once was has long since passed, and now is the time for their voices to be heard by all Albertans and all Canadians.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

As per the motion passed earlier, there is unanimous consent, so for a reply to the ministerial statement I would call on the hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Premier, for your remarks. Hozu anejá. Hai, hai. In Dene: great job and thank you.

It is a pleasure to rise and speak to National Aboriginal Day. As a lifelong resident of northern Alberta I've grown up around our First Nations communities my entire life. I played ice hockey with the Janvier reserve Falcons for many years and have many family throughout Alberta on many reserves: the Janvier aboriginal band, the Fort McMurray aboriginal band, and the Mikisew band from Fort Chipewyan. I'm the youngest of 11 children in a blended family, and most of my brothers married First Nations women. I'm very proud to have many nieces and nephews who are aboriginal and who grew up on reserves and are both treaty and status aboriginals. They are very proud of their culture, proud of their treaty, as I am proud to have them in my family.

I've watched with pleasure in northern Alberta as I've seen many aboriginal communities make tremendous progress in becoming integrated into the broader economy while still maintaining their culture, their pride, and their sense of community. Just as there is no better social program than a job, there is no better way to preserve a culture than to have its members decide what to preserve, to make sure they're wealthy enough and successful enough to preserve exactly what they want to preserve, without interference from outsiders.

I was present in the House of Commons just a little while ago, over seven years ago, in fact, when the Prime Minister apologized to our aboriginal communities for residential schools. A complete tragedy. It was very heartfelt. Most people in the House did not have dry eyes. I was there that day. I've never been prouder of Prime Minister Stephen Harper than that day. In fact, I would suggest that it took great integrity and humility for him to do that particular apology, which was long overdue and no other Prime Minister had done.

The separation of aboriginal children from their parents caused incredible harm, and our First Nation communities are still suffering the consequences right across our country and province. We broke up families. It is unacceptable. We created a generation whose personal demons meant that they couldn't parent the way

they wished to parent, as all of us have the choice to do in our own families. That was unacceptable. An apology is necessary, and an apology is given.

Many of the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission provide an opportunity for healing, for forgiveness, and most importantly for how to improve our future as a country and as Canadians. We now fully understand what happened to families and entire communities as a result of the residential school system. There is no road map for how Canadians can begin to heal from the history of residential schools, but I find some comfort in the importance that the commission put on education. Better education is the key for all of us. It is certainly the key for our aboriginal Canadians. It is a place where the government of Alberta can make a real difference because, of course, that is within the Alberta government's jurisdiction. We need to do a better job of educating non-aboriginals about aboriginal culture, and we need to do a much better job to make sure that aboriginal Albertans have access to higher quality education.

My dream for our aboriginal communities, for my family is a future where they are led by a generation of talented, well-educated, and principled leaders from within their own communities, a future where aboriginal communities are very well integrated with the broader economy, based upon their own choice and choices, a future where they preserve their culture and share it with pride with other Albertans and Canadians, and a future where all Albertans and Canadians respect and appreciate the contributions of aboriginal culture to a diverse fabric of our society.

2:00

Let me quote from the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. "In every region of the country, Survivors and others have sent a strong message . . . Canada must move from apology to action." The Premier today called for something which is in the federal jurisdiction. It is not action. What we need is action.

The average judicial inquiry takes many years to complete and many years to issue reports. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission made recommendations that are in the provincial sphere, that the Premier could take action on today, and we would encourage her to do so. We could provide the requested annual reports on the number of aboriginal children in provincial care. We could provide more clarity for the reasons for the apprehension and the continued apprehension of aboriginal children.

Measuring something is the first step to making it better. We have that opportunity. In fact, we could improve the standards of care for those aboriginal children in provincial care. That is action, and we call for that action from the Premier. We could do more to address the special needs of the aboriginal offenders with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder. That is action, and we could start that action today.

If the Premier really wants to take action and make a difference on missing and murdered aboriginal women, she could act within provincial jurisdiction, of which she has complete control at this stage. She could reallocate or dedicate more resources to the RCMP's Kare, which investigates missing and murdered vulnerable persons, the overwhelming number of whom are aboriginal women from across this province. A \$2 million investment in Kare would make a big difference.

Let me end with a quote from the end of the truth and reconciliation report. "Reconciliation calls for federal, provincial, and territorial government action." Hopefully, in the future we will see provincial action rather than a speech calling for action from the federal government.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays. I would remind hon. members that I believe we are at a three-minute comment.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, thank you, and I want to thank the chief elected official of Alberta, our Premier, for her words and her actions today as well as the Leader of the Official Opposition for his statement. I think it highlights how important this issue is to everyone in this House. The truth and reconciliation report is one that ought to set a future path for our province and our government, and I'd like to hope that today will be the start of that. I would like to hope that today will be a part of us all working together to do what we can do.

I had the opportunity during my time on city council in Calgary, Mr. Speaker, to work with the aboriginal peoples, specifically the Tsuut'ina Nation. Through that relationship over a land negotiation for a road that the city needs, I had the great pleasure to become friends and, subsequently, as a minister of the government of the day to actually successfully negotiate an agreement that was outstanding for 59 years as well as other agreements with the Stoney Nation that were outstanding for about three decades.

I'm proud to carry an Indian name. You may not know that. It is Goes into the Night. I'm sorry to tell the members that it's not Goes Quietly into the Night; it's just Goes into the Night. The elder that bestowed that upon me, Mr. Speaker, said that that's because in the culture sometimes there's fear of the dark, and the elder felt somehow that I had less fear than some people do. I don't know whether that's true, but I'm honoured by the name.

Mr. Speaker, there are so many things that we can do together, positive changes that we can make. We know that aboriginal people are overrepresented in our criminal justice system, particularly in youth justice. We know that aboriginal persons on average have poorer quality of life and poorer health outcomes than non-aboriginal people. In social services we need to keep working to train government officials and social service workers to make sure that they have the cultural competence to work with our First Nations and aboriginal partners, our sisters and brothers.

There is so much work to be done. I could go on, but you gave a time warning before I started. I'm going to try to honour that, Mr. Speaker, but let me say this. Our party believes, as I believe all members of this House believe, that aboriginal people, aboriginal women want, need, and deserve nothing less than the full measure of satisfaction from the judicial system that everybody else gets, from every other way that a government operates. To provide less than a full measure of service, a full measure of investigation, a full measure of the considerations that non-aboriginal people get, is unacceptable and reprehensible, and we stand by providing nothing less than that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of the Liberal caucus let me begin by complimenting the Premier on her moving words and her commitment in a historic apology today, a good first step to real healing and more successful lives for our First Nations.

Here on Treaty 6 traditional land, Mr. Speaker, we gather to reconcile and begin a process that will address the chilling and shameful history of racism and cultural genocide. Through the actions and inactions of the government of Canada thousands of children were removed from their homes, subjected to neglect and physical, emotional, and sexual abuse at residential schools. These children were told that their lives and their traditions were evil, shameful, and savage. They were beaten or starved for speaking their language. For these and the many other abuses that the Alberta

Legislature stood silent on over the years, the Liberal caucus joins in the Premier's apology.

Too many of the scars left by residential schools have never healed and never will, and the damage done at those schools continues to manifest in poverty, mental illness, addictions, and learned violence passed from generation to generation. This dark legacy includes the failure of our health care and education systems to provide culturally appropriate services when needed by our indigenous communities.

Only by working together can we hope to heal these wounds. We must all commit as treaty people to working with our indigenous peoples to implement all the recommendations of the commission, including, importantly, a national public inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women. They deserve nothing less. If we are unwilling to address directly the reality that more than a thousand indigenous women have been lost with no adequate investigation or understanding, then we will have learned nothing from the years of work of the TRC.

We must now begin the journey to a reconciliation. It is my deepest hope that we have taken another step, perhaps a small step but a critical one, towards healing and reconciliation today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I acknowledge today that we stand in traditional Treaty 6 territory, and I offer my welcome to the distinguished guests of treaties 6, 7, and 8 and to representatives of the Métis nation.

Today is a historic day in the Alberta Legislature, and I want to thank the Premier for taking a strong stand in support of First Nations people in Alberta and in all of Canada. I offer my complete and unequivocal support for the Premier's statement. For too long this Assembly has been silent, and for that I join in this apology to all who have been impacted by injustices of the past and to those who continue to suffer from a cycle of poverty, addiction, abuse, and lack of opportunity that is a direct result of Canada's residential schools.

2:10

I am proud to be a member of the Assembly that has taken this important first step. This statement and these words of apology and support are incredibly important and show that we wish to share in this journey of reconciliation, but this is only one step in a long journey, and as important as these words are, they must be backed by action.

This is a statement that should have been made by the federal government. What we heard today should have been the federal government's response to the findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Now is the time for the federal government to commit to an inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women and girls. The federal government needs to show that they're willing to back words with actions, but if they are not, Alberta should lead. If the federal government chooses not to act, let us come together with our counterparts in B.C., Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and elsewhere to conduct our own provincial inquiry. Alberta can lead and become an example of what we can accomplish when we set out to do more, to be more, and finally do the right thing.

It is time to break the cycle and remember those whom we have left behind or forgotten. Working together as Albertans, as Canadians, and shoulder to shoulder with First Nations peoples, we can take action to start a journey towards healing and reconciliation that will ensure First Nations communities thrive as true equals.

Thank you.

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

Ms Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the House for allowing me to speak on this matter, and I would like to thank the Premier for her words of support. I would also like to acknowledge that we are here on Treaty 6 territory.

This past week Canadians celebrated National Aboriginal Day, a day to celebrate the diverse history and cultures of indigenous peoples across Canada. In Alberta we honour and learn from the many different First Nations and Métis communities that make up the rich heritage of this province. My riding of Calgary-Bow is on Treaty 7 territory and borders the Bow River, the river where Treaty 7 was originally signed some hundred kilometres east of the Blackfoot Crossing.

This past week multiple organizations partnered and worked together for Aboriginal Awareness Week Calgary, hosting events throughout the week to share and celebrate. I would like to thank all those who contributed to the many events and thank all those who attended. Working together to share a collective history and learning from the many histories of Calgarians is an important step on the path of reconciliation.

Beyond National Aboriginal Day ongoing projects like Making Treaty 7 are important for better understanding our collective history and the history of First Peoples. On National Aboriginal Day we celebrate the diverse cultures of indigenous peoples, but we must also reflect on and learn of the trauma indigenous peoples have experienced because of colonialism.

The truth and reconciliation report, generated over six years by the federal Truth and Reconciliation Commission, has collected thousands of stories, histories, and experiences from survivors of the residential school system, a system that perpetuated cultural genocide on Canada's indigenous peoples. In Alberta the last residential school closed in 1975, a very recent history for us all. This report lays out the path not only for the Legislatures and present leaders but also for our future generations to repair the deep wound in our relationships. As Justice Sinclair said during the closing events of the TRC in Ottawa: "We are writing for the future, not just for this government."

This report does not mark the end of the struggle for indigenous peoples. Inequalities between communities must be addressed by all levels of government through partnership and listening to indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples have a strong, proud culture and have a wealth of knowledge to share, and I look forward to working as a House with indigenous communities as equal partners.

Yesterday was a beautiful day of celebration, as was this last week, and I want to thank all indigenous Canadians for sharing their rich cultures, traditions, and history. I want to wish all a happy National Aboriginal Day.

Thank you.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, this has taken some time and time well spent, I believe, but it does mean that we will not be able to complete our Routine at 3 o'clock, so I would move and request unanimous consent to waive Standing Order 7(7) to allow the Routine to be completed after 3 o'clock.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Oral Question Period

Provincial Tax Policy

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, last Thursday the Finance minister held a press conference to celebrate his raising of taxes on Alberta's businesses and Alberta families. During the press conference the minister was asked if there were any circumstances under which he might possibly roll back these tax increases in the future. His response was telling. He stopped, he smirked, and he giggled. Will the Premier confirm that it is the official policy of her government to never lower taxes?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I've said before, this government was elected during an election campaign where the issue of taxes and, in particular, fair taxation came up. Now, interestingly, as a result of the changes that we are making with respect to tax infrastructure, 90 per cent of Albertans will pay less tax than they would have under the previous government. So, in fact, what we've done is that we've started by increasing fairness and decreasing what most Albertans are paying.

Mr. Jean: That's not very accurate, Mr. Speaker.

At the same press conference the Finance minister was asked about the Alberta advantage, which we're so proud of. His response, and I quote: it's a new orange day. People know we're more than beautiful mountains and trees and things like that. We can do better. It's a new Alberta advantage. End quote. So are higher taxes the new Alberta advantage? Does the Premier really believe that Alberta will have an advantage from having higher business taxes than Ontario, than Quebec, than British Columbia?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, during the election we had a conversation, a very, very robust discussion, with Albertans about what they perceive as an advantage, and let me tell you what they said to me. Those 12,000 kids having a teacher: that's an advantage. Health care for them when they need it: that's an advantage. Making sure that our postsecondary institutions educate Albertans so we can diversify the economy: that's an advantage. Making sure that all Albertans have access to those services: that's an advantage, and that's an advantage that I am very proud to be building here in Alberta.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On economic matters Albertans have become worried with this government. Last week we saw this government prepare to increase spending even faster than they are prepared to increase taxes. That's something. We saw that this government seems keen to increase taxes for the sake of increasing taxes. We were told that being taxed more than our neighbour is an advantage. Why is the Premier pursuing economic policies that are so out of touch with Albertans?

Ms Notley: I think I've kind of answered this question twice. In fact, there are a tremendous number of economic studies out there that say that fairness actually contributes to economic growth, and the farther you get away from fairness, the more you stifle economic growth. Under the previous administration that's what was happening, so what we are doing is ensuring that we promote a strong, stable, predictable system of health care and education. That is the backbone of good, strong economic growth as well as community growth and community well-being, and we'll carry on with that.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Second major question, hon. member.

Pipeline Development

Mr. Jean: Last week, in effort to be helpful, the Wildrose attempted to get this government to back away from radical policy ideas that will hurt Alberta's economy and threaten Alberta jobs. I tried to get the Premier to stand up for better markets for our oil and gas products overseas. That means jobs for Albertans and revenue for this government. Will the Premier please reassure Alberta's energy industry, whether it is raw bitumen or upgraded or refined oil, that she will be a champion for pipelines as a way to get our energy to new markets? A champion.

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know that in general we need to have more pipelines, and, as I've said before, I'm talking to my colleagues across the country, both in B.C. as well as eastward, about the potentials with respect to those pipelines. But we also know that at the end of the day the best outcome for Albertans is that more processing happens here. So does that mean that no bitumen gets shipped? No. But does that mean that we do everything we can to increase upgrading here in this province to create long-term, sustainable jobs that are less vulnerable to the ups and downs of bitumen prices? Absolutely, because that's in Albertans' best interests.

Mr. Jean: More pipelines: a great start.

Last week I tried to get the Premier to clarify that there is no greater intergovernmental or international diplomatic priority for Albertans than getting pipelines approved so that we can get our energy to new markets. The NDP elsewhere gets this. In fact, the Saskatchewan NDP is completely in favour of the Keystone pipeline. Will the Premier please reassure Albertans and Alberta's energy industry that getting approval for new pipelines is our and her top diplomatic priority?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think I've already stated fairly clearly that we understand the importance of pipelines to our energy industry, and we'll continue to work together with them on the areas where we can have an impact. I will also say, however – you know, folks over there might not want to admit it, but we have a little bit of a PR problem with our environmental record, and it's about time that we start taking action so that we can actually develop credibility internationally and enhance our access to markets.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Wildrose is here to help. But this government is committed to radical policy ideas that will simply cost Albertans their jobs. Our shadow minister for labour asked if the government had any plans to help the 118,000 Albertans who might lose their jobs when this government raises the minimum wage by 50 per cent. The answer he got shows that this government does not understand the impact of prices on supply and demand. Does the Premier really believe that increasing the minimum wage will lead to more jobs in Alberta?

Ms Notley: I absolutely believe that increasing the minimum wage will lead to more jobs. There are copious studies out there, Mr. Speaker, that suggest that when you put more money into the pockets of low-income people, they spend it, and they spend it in their local economy faster than anybody else does. In fact, study

after study shows that this actually grows jobs and it grows economic activity.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays. [interjections] How could I possibly miss the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat? Hon. member, my apologies.

Calgary Cancer Centre

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. No worries. Recently the Health minister said that there are no guarantees the NDP government will build the Foothills cancer centre and place this much-needed project under review. But in the last election the Premier herself promised this project, and her party campaigned on it. I want to give the Premier an opportunity to set the record straight. Premier, patients and their families need to know. Will you make good on your promise to build this project on time and on budget, or won't you?

Ms Notley: Well, that's a very good question, and certainly it's one that I know the people of Calgary are very, very concerned about. He's right. There's no question that during the election and even now I've stated that my preference is to move quickly, and indeed my preference is for it to happen in Foothills. However, the fact of the matter is that there are billions of dollars of investment in there, so we as a government and as a cabinet have to do our due diligence, review all the information before us, and then we will be making an announcement in the days to come. We understand that Calgary doesn't want any more delay than they've already had to deal with, so we'll be moving soon.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, circumstances have changed since the last election. The price of oil is a little higher. Taxes are, too. If the government can't build this project today, they definitely couldn't last May, when they pulled this bait and switch on Albertans. To the Premier: why did you make this promise when you knew you couldn't deliver?

Ms Notley: Well, quite honestly, Mr. Speaker, I reject the assumption underlying that question – the price of oil is down, not up – but more to the point, I didn't make any promise that I said that I couldn't deliver or that I at some point have concluded that I can't deliver. That's not what happened. What I said is that we're going to do our due diligence. We're going to review our options, and we'll be making an announcement soon.

Mr. Barnes: Albertans don't want excuses; they want solutions. The due diligence on the Foothills project has been done. The project has been fully studied, reviewed, and costed. If finances are standing in the way, the Premier needs to open the books and work with the opposition to find solutions. Premier, will you share the complete state of Alberta's finances so we can help you build the right project at the right time for Alberta patients and families?

Ms Notley: Well, I appreciate that the members opposite are prepared to give the third party credit for due diligence, notwithstanding that I believe the project has been outstanding for over a decade and it's been promised and changed and changed and promised. There have been a lot of reviews but not one done by a government recently given a majority mandate. What I have done, however, is that I've asked David Dodge to do a review of our overall capital expenditure and our capacity with respect to that, and that's someone whose opinion I think is valuable. We will look at that and other things and get back to you very . . .

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

Public Transit

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm almost blushing from all the compliments that are flowing.

Mr. Speaker, the throne speech gave little mention to municipalities in Alberta, but when it did briefly go there, it mentioned that there is transit to build. I'm sure this made several municipalities pay attention in anticipation of announcements yet to come. To the Premier: when can Edmonton look forward to a new announcement of funding for a desired transit line, or what other details can you share?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Certainly. Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As we've said, there are a number of very complex issues that have been left to us by the previous government, and we are reviewing and prioritizing all the issues that are important to us. Of course, in the campaign we talked about the fact that transit is a critical issue and one that is a major priority for us. So we look forward to getting the best information we can about how to move forward with respect to our capital spending, and we'll be making announcements going forward. Stay tuned.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, the government used to think that running the government was easy when they were over here, and now they think it's complex. That's just an interesting observation.

Mr. Speaker, in Calgary much work has gone into planning their next LRT line, which they have affectionately dubbed the green line. In fact, a community group has formed to educate their neighbours about why it's important, where it will go, and other details. To the Transportation minister: can Calgary look forward to a funding announcement on the much-needed green line as foreshadowed in your throne speech?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for that question. As the Premier has said, transit funding is a priority for this government. It's something that we believe in and something we're going to be looking at very closely. I will be meeting shortly with the mayor of Edmonton, and I hope to meet as well with the mayor of Calgary in the near future to discuss their transportation needs, and when I have a fuller view of the opinions and needs of the city of Calgary, we will be moving forward in due course.

2:30

Mr. McIver: Well, let's try rural Alberta, Mr. Speaker. They also need transit in some cases to get to health care and to visit friends and family in other municipalities. To the Transportation minister. Now, you said a little bit more about this, about doing things in rural Alberta, so can you tell Albertans and this House: what are you going to do for rural Alberta transit as promised in the throne speech, and which municipalities can look forward to which pieces of transit provided by this government?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again to the hon. member for that question. It's certainly clear that when we talked about rural bus service in the election, we talked about the need to improve that and to make sure that we took steps as a government to make sure that people had their transportation

needs met. That's going to be a priority for the government, and that will be something that we'll be considering carefully as we discuss and I get to know and meet with the various mayors of the smaller municipalities in our province. I've had that opportunity to meet with several of them, to talk on the phone, and we'll . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Minister.
The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Flood Recovery and Mitigation

Ms Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My riding, Calgary-Bow, was one of those tragically affected by the 2013 flood. Many residents suffered devastating losses. Hundreds of homes were either damaged or destroyed. Unfortunately, for some who found comfort in the possibility of relief through the disaster relief programs, it has been two years and they have yet to see any financial aid. My question to the Minister of Municipal Affairs is: how does this government plan to address the need for DRP now?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I want to thank the hon. member for her first question in this Assembly. This weekend marked the two-year anniversary of the largest natural disaster in Alberta's history. I want to assure Albertans or let them know that our government is committed to assisting Albertans who've been impacted throughout this natural disaster. Although 95 per cent of files had been closed or completed, I completely understand the frustration of flood victims with the process of their claims.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Drever: Thank you, Minister, as we all know, the fall budget may not pass until December. When does this government plan on funding DRP?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It'll be earlier than December, I can assure the hon. member. What I do want to make clear is that throughout the 2015 year, actually, the money that flowed through from the DRP has totalled \$282 million. I will remind all members of the House that in the interim, which is being debated and before the House right now, there is \$173.7 million earmarked for DRP.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been my understanding that the minister visited Calgary over the weekend and met with the Calgary River Communities Action Group. Could the minister elaborate on what's being done in regard to flood mitigation?

Mr. Bilous: I'll thank the member for the question. It is true that this weekend I visited several flood-affected communities, including the town of High River; I met with the mayor and councillors. I was with the mayor of Calgary this weekend as well in several communities in Calgary – Sunnyside, Elbow Park, Mission – and spoke with those that were affected by the 2013 floods. This government is committed to moving in a very

reasonable yet diligent fashion to look at the best way to mitigate Alberta's future floods and disasters.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Menthol-flavoured Tobacco Products

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last week it was my honour and pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the Legislature representatives from Smoke-free Alberta. They were here to welcome and congratulate our Minister of Health on the banning of menthol from cigarettes. To the minister: can you explain what the link is between youth smoking and menthol cigarettes?

The Speaker: I'd remind the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud that when he gets the next supplemental, there's no preamble.

The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. Let me assure my colleagues opposite that I am well aware of the harmful effects of menthol products and the impact they've had on youth smoking rates. In Alberta the last study was in 2012-13, and at that time it was well documented that one-third of youth who were smoking were in fact smoking menthol products. By making this move, we're going to be removing that option for youth and encouraging them to make healthier decisions.

Dr. Turner: To the minister: how will banning menthol cigarettes reduce health costs for Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Tobacco use is, of course, a serious problem, related to approximately 3,000 deaths in Alberta every year. This banning of menthol as well as previous announcements that were made around flavoured tobacco products in general will of course reduce the smoking opportunities for youth, we hope. Half of Alberta's youth are using flavoured tobacco products, so we're glad to be able to take that motion a little bit further and make sure that we make it fair and also eliminate menthol.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. How is the government making sure that our small businesses have enough time to address these important changes?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Of course, our priority is ensuring the health and well-being of Albertans. To make sure that we don't impact small businesses or any businesses negatively through this decision, we're allowing four months for them to clear their inventory both from their current shelves and from what's in supply. By September we'll be at the point where they are no longer distributing menthol products, but until then they have an opportunity to clear their shelves.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Status of Women

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a mom I know that there's no shortage of issues facing women across the province. Women fleeing the streets need access to resources to be protected from violence and to build new lives. The people in Airdrie are without a women's shelter. We want to help create solutions, but the one thing we don't want is a bigger bureaucracy. How can Albertans be sure that this new department will be more than just funnelling money to a top-heavy bureaucracy?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. Of course, everyone will have an opportunity to debate the thorough budget in the fall, when it will be tabled, and I encourage the hon. members to do so at that time.

Mrs. Pitt: I own a small business, and I hope that all women are able to do what they dream of. I saw the new funding announcement last week. What stuck out to me was the million dollars for the status of women department. To me, that sounds like just a million dollars for bureaucrats to shuffle papers, create new letterhead, and pat themselves on the back. I'm here to help Albertans understand this. Can the minister explain how this million dollars will directly help women?

2:40

Ms Notley: I'm very excited to do that. It's long overdue for this province to have a ministry in charge of the status of women. Unfortunately, during the absence of such a ministry we've had a number of developments occur in this province like, for instance, the largest wage gap between men and women in the country. That is not the way you move forward. That's not the way you promote equality. So that very small ministry will be focusing on that issue as well as child care as well as violence against women and many other important issues that we need to make progress on.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Airdrie – and I mention it across the House as well – I would caution: please don't extend the preambles on the questions.

Proceed.

Mrs. Pitt: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that I know that in Airdrie women don't need bureaucrats in Edmonton just writing memos and policy papers, that they need support for local community initiatives that produce results, that they need legislation that puts the hammer down on criminals and protects our . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I thought that was a preamble. Did you have a question?

Mrs. Pitt: My question is: will the minister detail what programs Albertan women can expect from the \$1 million status of women department?

Ms Notley: Well, in fact, Mr. Speaker, you know, typically memos precede legislation, so I'm just throwing it out there that if you're going to actually provide leadership and develop a comprehensive plan, both legislative as well as policy-based as well as funding-based, then you need to think it through a little bit. For decades this province has not had a plan, so the result is that for decades women have fallen behind. We've said: that's long enough; no more; we're going to make sure that there's a difference.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-North West.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to follow up on a question from the Member for Airdrie. In the recent campaign, of course, the new government pledged to Albertans to create this women's ministry. I'd like to point out that I'm the former associate minister of family and community safety. Women's issues were in my portfolio, and I began the women's equality and advancement framework, so the work was being done. My question to the Premier: do you plan to continue the work that I was working on with some wonderful people in Human Services, and will you commit to finishing the women's equality and advancement framework in this new ministry?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've asked the minister who is responsible for this portfolio to do an inventory of the work that was going on within government, which will include the program that the hon. member speaks of. We'll evaluate what's been going on, and then we'll match that up against our priorities and our focus on outcomes. As we move forward and as the plan for that ministry moves forward, information will be shared with all members of this House.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier. A million dollars is a specific amount of money. We were talking about a framework that we were working on. I went to a first ministers' meeting a year ago in Yellowknife at which the province was lauded for the work we were doing. Can you tell us what kind of initiatives you're planning on working on going forward that build on the work that's already been done?

Ms Notley: The minister has not been in place yet for even four weeks, so we are going to take the time to make sure that we get it right. When we do, we will be sure that all members of this House and the people of Alberta are aware of the priorities that we identify. In the meantime I want to thank the member for the work that she did before that, and those parts of the work that she did that were contributing towards real outcomes in terms of improvements for the status of women in Alberta will be continued, I'm sure.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A final question to the Premier: is a mandate letter going out? Will we have a good sense of what the deliverables are so that we can keep track as the work goes along?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's a very good question, and indeed a mandate letter will be forthcoming to all our ministers over the course of the next few months.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Provincial Fiscal Policies

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When pressed for spending details on their minibudget, the government provided five different numbers. These five numbers came in a span of just 24 hours. The good news is that every time I ask, the number gets smaller. If I keep asking, maybe we'll have a balanced budget by the end of the session. Will the Minister of Finance tell us: is his

new spending \$1.8 billion, \$1.1 billion, \$776 million, \$682 million, \$624 million, or all of the above?

Mr. Ceci: Thank you for the question. It's not all of the above. We are looking forward to each minister coming forward and detailing the exact spending amount. I know those amounts are in the \$600 million area, and that's what we're spending on new programs and services as we go forward.

Mr. Fildebrandt: The \$600 million area: I'm glad we have some clarity.

After years of overspending and debt financing the government and the third party both want to raise taxes on Albertans, but the government's taxes cannot keep up with their new spending. Now, I sent the minister this question a few hours ago because I wanted to help, and I'm hoping that he'll be able to give us an answer. Before committing to new spending and new taxes, will the minister tell this House what he expects total revenue and total expenditures to be this fiscal year?

Mr. Ceci: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for the question. As he can appreciate, we're not going to do a budget on the back of a napkin and bring it for you today. On the revenue side we're taking steps in Bill 2 to address that by addressing taxes in a progressive way, something that should have been done many years ago. That being said, it's far too early to look at what the overall revenue will be. It'll be more than last year because we're going to have a progressive income tax in place, which is the best thing to do, and we're going to have a competitive fiscal plan before us in the fall.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Well, stay tuned, Mr. Speaker: answers coming in about six months.

Now, I've asked the Minister of Finance repeatedly over the last week and a half if he can answer some very, very simple questions about the impact of the new tax-and-spend measures. Given that it would be grossly irresponsible for this House to vote for new spending without this kind of information and to continue spending faster than they can tax, it will only lead to one outcome, even more debt. Does the minister actually know or have any idea what under his plan the deficit and debt will be this year?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much. I expect all ministries to come forward with clear plans about what they need. [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much. I expect all ministers to come forward with very clear plans on what they need. The actual budget is going to be in the fall. I'm not going to tell you what that is now because we don't have those numbers before us, but we'll have them very soon.

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

Landowner Property Rights

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The last government passed several bad bills approximately five years ago that decimated the property rights of Alberta landowners. The Wildrose and the NDP, including the Premier and the Government House Leader, spoke many times between 2010 and 2015 about the problems with these draconian pieces of legislation. The new Government House Leader even spoke as recently as December 2014 against Bill 36, the

Alberta Land Stewardship Act, where he called this act, among others, "stupid legislation." Will the Government House Leader now commit today to repeal the bad provisions in that bill and protect the rights of landowners?

2:50

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for that question. Back when some of these bills were passed – Bill 19 and, I think, bills 36 and 50 if my memory serves well – the Wildrose didn't exist. It didn't have any seats in the Legislature, and it was the NDP opposition that led the fight for a balanced and fair approach to property. What that means to me is that people have the right of appeal, they have the right of due process, and there has to be a pressing need. Those things are important.

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

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Energy, then. Bad property rights legislation has blocked landowner rights to fair compensation and due process and in the case of the former Bill 2, the Responsible Energy Development Act, access to the courts. Minister, will you commit to reinstating section 26 of the Energy Resources Conservation Act, which guaranteed landowners the right to appeal bad decisions by the Energy Regulator board to the courts, and if not, why not?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you for the question. I will be looking into those regulations. They are new to me. I'm still learning all the processes. I understand currently, though, that through the AER there are processes for each individual landowner to appeal. Absolutely, I'll be looking over those and get back to you.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Energy minister: I hope that is the case because that needs to be reviewed.

To the Government House Leader again, then. The Wildrose opposition is prepared to assist the new government and Alberta landowners in formulating and passing an Alberta property rights preservation bill. Will you, the Government House Leader, and your government commit today to working with us on this very important piece of legislation for all Albertans?

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much to the hon. member for the question. We do insist on making sure that people's rights to their property are protected so that fair compensation is provided and there is a due process for people, including a right of appeal. Those will be things that we will be considering in the future.

With respect to the help that the opposition is offering in this particular regard, I think that it is not necessary, but we will make sure property rights are protected.

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

Impaired Driving

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans have consistently shown that they want a common-sense, Conservative approach to crime and justice. The number one cause of criminal death in Canada is drunk driving. These tragedies are a hundred per cent preventable. Sadly, in many drunk-driving deaths the courts give

lenient sentences and thus rock the public's confidence in the justice system. Last week the federal Justice minister, Peter MacKay, announced changes to the Criminal Code that provide a six-year, mandatory minimum sentence for drunk drivers. It is about time that that does occur. To the Minister of Justice: will you today commit to supporting this initiative to stop drunk drivers who cause death?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. The government agrees that there are many senseless and needless deaths as a result of drunk driving. These deaths are tragic, and they are preventable. We are absolutely looking into ways that the province can assist in moving forward and making sure that these deaths are prevented in future.

In terms of the federal legislation, obviously, I don't have jurisdiction over that, but we will certainly be watching with interest.

Thank you.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you. I am, of course, aware that you don't have jurisdiction, but I hope you support the legislation.

The Speaker: I would remind the member: 35 seconds, please.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again to the same minister: given that the convicted drunk drivers who cause death have blood alcohol levels three times the legal limit and that some have been found in excess of 200 kilometres an hour and that families have been devastated throughout Alberta by the perceived lack of justice for the victims, what are you prepared to do for the families of drunk-driving victims?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again to the hon. member for the question. We are aware that a number of families are devastated by these tragedies, and to them we express our deepest sympathies. As I've said, my government is looking into methods to prevent these tragedies going forward. All victims of crime have access to services through the victims of crime funding available. Yes, our intention is to prevent these crimes as much as possible.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much. Those were obviously great initiatives by the PC government at the time. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, finally, to the same minister: given that drivers can be impaired with drugs other than alcohol, will the Minister of Justice commit to lobbying the federal government to amend the Criminal Code to allow approved drug testing devices that can detect drugs in the systems of drivers where reasonable and probable grounds exist to require a sample and keep our roads safe while also supporting additional tools for the police?

Thank you.

Ms Ganley: Thank you to the hon. member. I do want to take this opportunity to deliver the message that no one should be getting behind the wheel if they've been drinking or if they've been doing drugs. We unequivocally condemn that sort of behaviour.

Mothers Against Drunk Driving, MADD Canada, issued a provincial legislative review on June 22, 2015. Alberta led the provinces, with a C plus grade. However, as I have committed to previously, more work is needed, and we are looking into ways to

work with police services to increase enforcement and to reduce the problem.

Thank you.

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

Bail Process Review

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A report into the involvement of the Alberta Crown prosecution service with Shawn Rehn, who shot two RCMP officers in January, recommends a comprehensive review of the bail process in Alberta. The review will look at who should continue to conduct justice of the peace bail hearings and under what circumstances. Albertans deserve to know how this will improve the system. My first question is to the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General. What changes do you expect to implement from this review?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. The report into the bail process will help us decide how the bail process can be changed to better protect all Albertans and, in particular, our first responders. We are proceeding with this comprehensive review to the bail process to answer the question we've asked, which is: would a different bail process help to make our communities safer and better protect police? We are also committed to ensuring that the appropriate representatives of the people appear at bail hearings to ensure that violent criminals are dealt with appropriately.

Thank you.

Ms Renaud: To the hon. minister: if the review determines that Crown prosecution should attend all bail hearings, what will that cost Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. I think the first thing we need to do is figure out what's needed and go forward from there. This is obviously a complicated process given that we must protect both the rights of individual Albertans who are subject to prosecution by the state and the fact that we must protect our Alberta citizens and our first responders. We are committed to going through with the review process and to implementing recommendations that come out of that.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: why are you doing yet another review when the report into the shooting of Constable Wynn has already been done?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. The scope of this review is different than the scope of that review. This is a review of the entire bail process to see if there is any way that we can make it better, to ensure that we are both protecting rights of individual citizens and that we are protecting our first responders in addition to all of the people in Alberta. I can assure the member that the government is committed to public safety and to the safety of our law enforcement personnel.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

3:00 Forest Fire Fighting Contracting

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently concerns from several different constituencies have been brought to my attention about the fire line equipment contractors list. This list provides the department a master list of contractors supplying equipment for use in firefighting in Alberta. To the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry: have you been made aware of any potential conflicts regarding this secret process?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. There's interim budget supply needed for firefighting. The equipment contracts have all been let. After that, then, there is a budget given for emergency firefighting. As far as I know, everything is in place, and there have been no concerns.

Thank you.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister. It is concerning that any process using taxpayers' dollars is not completely transparent and may be open to widespread suspicion and possible abuses. Given that contractors and taxpayers absolutely need to know these rankings, this could lead to a greater level of preparedness and lead time, crucial for the service these contractors provide. Given this would the minister consider a full review of this secret process?

The Speaker: Hon. member, I think I heard a preamble in there. Nonetheless, we are going to let the minister answer.

I want to remind both sides of the House about the preamble portion of the questions after question 5. Thank you.

Mr. Minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our primary concern with forest fires is the protection of people, their homes, and communities. The Department of Agriculture and Forestry is working hard to fight these fires in order to minimize their human, economic, and environmental impact. This fire season has been particularly busy: 887 fires since April 1, which is up an average of 642 over this time last year. We will continue to monitor the situation very closely, and our government will provide any support needed to help our firefighters contain and extinguish these wildfires.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Minister, as acknowledged at our earlier informal meetings, I realize that everyone needs to get up to speed. The Wildrose is happy to provide advice in any positive way we can. Will the minister work with the opposition to revamp and improve the fire line firefighters contract operators list so that it is completely public, fair, and openly transparent?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have a team of dedicated, experienced firefighters, and our experts are working hard to keep Albertans safe. They have our utmost thanks. We'll continue to monitor the situation. Alberta has 84 helicopters and 31 air tankers fighting these fires or pre-positioned around the province ready to fight these fires. Two hundred and thirty-seven firefighters have been brought from out of the province for a total of 1,271. I

thank the member for his offer of assistance, but I do think we have the situation in hand.

Thank you.

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

Corporate Taxes

Mr. Bhullar: That would be me, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much. I'm going to talk about the government's least favourite subject, the economy and jobs. Minister and Premier, there are many things you cannot control on the economy, for example Saudi Arabia. They're increasing production, likely to hit 11 million barrels a day. But you can control your policy responses to the economy. Do you really think now is the right time to implement a business tax hike that can result in upwards of 20,000 job losses?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. For far too long Alberta has not had a fair tax system. Now, going into the last election, that member's party said repeatedly that we face fiscal challenges; we all have to tighten our belts; we all have to chip in. They came up with loads of plans for families that earn \$50,000, \$60,000 a year to pay more. But at the same time they were committed to ensuring that corporations, profitable corporations that were doing well, not chip in. You know what? Albertans said, "We don't like that plan," and look where you are.

Mr. Bhullar: I'm quite happy to be where I am. I represent the people of Alberta, and I'll fight to make sure their jobs are looked after, Madam Premier.

Tell me what your plan is to find thousands of Albertans new jobs when employers pick up and move to Saskatchewan or British Columbia because of your new taxes.

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's interesting because that was another issue that was discussed in the election, and at the time we were the only party that was actually talking about a job creation plan. We talked about a job creation tax credit, and we talked about ensuring that we take steps to increase the degree to which we upgrade our resources here so that we double the amount of economic activity in this province related to the resource which is ours. We talked about jobs; those guys didn't.

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, we have produced record economic growth in this province year after year after year. Madam Premier, it is your opportunity now to protect the economic interests of hard-working Albertans. How, ma'am, are you going to protect a dry cleaner, how are you going to protect a pizza shop owner, how are you going to protect your neighbourhood florist by raising their taxes by 20 per cent?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, one of the things that does ensure that we create and protect jobs is that we get off the royalty roller coaster, another common refrain that those folks used to talk about. One of the ways you do that is that you start stabilizing the nature . . . [interjections]

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The Member for Red Deer-North.

Walking with Our Sisters

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A couple of weeks ago I walked alongside our indigenous sisters who have disappeared or have been murdered. Each step I took gave me pause for thought for these women: the mothers, the aunts, the daughters who are gone, who vanished without a trace.

I took this walk in Red Deer, where I was meeting with the Minister of Aboriginal Relations, my colleague the hon. Member for Red Deer-South, and staff from the Red Deer Native Friendship Society. Together we visited the Walking with Our Sisters commemorative art exhibit, which took place until June 21, 2015. The exhibit was set up on the floor of the Red Deer Museum and Art Gallery, and it was massive. More than 1,700 pairs of moccasin vamps, which are the beaded top parts of moccasins, were set up on a winding path, on fabric lined with cedar boughs. As I bent down to remove my shoes and looked at the path I was about to walk on, alongside the exhibit, I saw the many unfinished moccasins, and was reminded of the many unfinished lives of the women who have vanished.

The installation represented all of these women. It paid respect to their lives and their existence on this Earth, and for me it was a humbling and deeply moving experience. Each of the moccasin vamps was created and donated by a caring and concerned individual, to represent a missing or murdered aboriginal woman. Each set of vamps reminded me that these women were cared for, that they were loved, that they are missing, but they are not forgotten.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

3:10

Mobile Dialysis Service

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Lac La Biche has been promised a dialysis centre for years. In 2010 a mobile dialysis unit was provided as some sort of a compromise to provide services on a rotating basis throughout the area. Mechanical problems forced Alberta Health Services to park the bus in the Lac La Biche hospital parking lot, wheels removed, where it has remained ever since.

However, the bus does not provide reliable service, and some patients still need to travel to St. Paul or Edmonton for treatment. This is a long drive over some of the most dangerous highways in the province. This trip is a terrible burden for people who need dialysis treatment.

The bus is not designed nor equipped to provide comfort. This is especially important during our very cold winter months, when people often have a four-hour treatment three times a week. Being connected to machines in a cold bus is simply not acceptable. More importantly, there is no provision for emergency services. In May a patient collapsed on the bus, and the EMT personnel could not get a stretcher onto the bus. The patient had to endure the indignity of being treated on the floor.

This travesty of health services has got to be changed. We have an opportunity now with this government to address local concerns such as these in a collaborative way. On behalf of my constituents I have written a letter to the Minister of Health asking for a meeting to address this concern, and I would like to invite her to come out and see the dialysis unit first-hand. I will be following up and doing my best to ensure that residents of the Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills riding and others across the area will finally receive the health services they've been promised for so long. I promised my constituents that I would act on their behalf, and that is exactly what I will do on this matter and others as they come up.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North West.

Sexual Health Education Curriculum

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We speak a lot in this Chamber about the right to a high level of competency in our education system. That's certainly been the goal of Education ministries past and present. I believe those educational competencies extend to our children's right to comprehensive sexual health education as well.

When we arm our children with good information about birth control, sexually transmitted infections, pregnancy options, consent, abstinence, decision-making, sexual orientation, and gender identity, we are giving them the tools they need to be happy, healthy, well-adjusted adults. I hope one day to live in a province where all of those topics are included in our sexual health curriculum. Sadly, right now they are not. Sexual health programs vary from school board to school board. Some programs contain bare mentions of birth control options, many contain no reference to LGBTQ identities, and most don't even touch on consent.

Our kids deserve the best sexual health information as they navigate a changing world. When we give them all the tools they need to make smart choices themselves, we are sending them a powerful message: your body, your knowledge, your rights. Now, wouldn't that be the Alberta advantage?

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

Slovenian Canadian Association 50th Anniversary

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to congratulate the Slovenian Canadian Association's 50th anniversary. The Slovenian Canadian Association of Edmonton's goal is to bring openness and build bridges to preserve Slovene culture and to create a sense of community for present and future generations. Their focus is to bring members together through community events, music, dance, and language.

I had the pleasure of attending one of three events that was hosted this past weekend at the Slovenian hall in Edmonton-Manning. Over one thousand Slovenian descendants attended the events throughout the weekend, from small children to grandparents. Throughout the evening I had the pleasure of watching young children perform in their traditional language, while their parents performed dances and their grandparents sang in the choir. It truly was a family event, demonstrating all of the diversity of their culture.

I would like to thank the Slovenian Canadian Association for passing on their culture to their children and ensuring their traditions are part of our great community in Edmonton-Manning as well as enriching the cultural diversity of Alberta. You do both Alberta and your Slovenian ancestors a great service by maintaining these proud customs here in Edmonton. Thank you for continuing to share those treasures of Slovenian culture and for continuing to make Alberta a vibrant, exciting, and welcoming place.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Little Free Library in Beddington Heights

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Saturday, June 20, was the second annual Neighbour Day in Calgary, marking two years since the floods of 2013, that galvanized communities in a time of devastation. Neighbour Day was established to honour the resilience and community spirit that pulled Calgarians together. I was fortunate to attend some Neighbour Day events on Saturday,

including the opening of a little free library in the community of Beddington Heights. The little free library movement was started in 2009 in Wisconsin by Todd Bol as a tribute to his schoolteacher mother. The mission of the movement is to promote literacy and the love of reading by building free book exchanges worldwide. This mission has been a huge success so far, with over 10,000 little libraries registered in over 40 countries. More than 1,650,000 books have been shared.

What I saw at the opening of this little library was a unique way to engage communities. The simple act of sharing books reaches across generations and provides an easy access for people to get to know one another in a meaningful way that connects them. While there was a lot of excitement at the opening of the library, the genius of this low maintenance project is that there is now a permanent way to bring people together. The library will be there on sunny summer days and rainy afternoons and cold winter nights, taking readers off to a faraway land or inspiring a recipe for Sunday dinner or helping someone learn a language and giving the people of the community a chance to share what they learned, what they did, and what they imagined.

I look forward to seeing more of these little free libraries appearing on the streets of my constituency and across Alberta, and I'm extremely proud and honoured and I am humbled to represent the very community-minded people of Beddington Heights, who take it upon themselves to create such a great place to live.

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

Minimum Wage

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to talk about the people in Cardston-Taber-Warner that are concerned about the rising minimum wage. A local restaurant owner, Dan Brown, wrote me the other day. Dan has been running his restaurant for five and a half years, and he is a very active member in my community. He is concerned about the impact minimum wage increases will have on youth employment. Dan is also very concerned about the impact the \$15 minimum wage will have on his labour costs. He is faced with some tough choices. He can reduce hours for existing employees or not hire new staff. Dan doesn't know how he would be able to afford to hire inexperienced staff. The labour costs are already high with training.

Dan would like to see a phased-in approach, some way that his restaurant can adapt to this drastic measure. The thing is that this issue has already been studied for over 70 years. This isn't new. This government knew that there would be harm to local businesses. Sure, a few would be helped, but many, many more would be out of work. Businesses would be in a crunch, some sort of hiring freeze or laying people off. What are they going to do? No one wants to be put in that position, especially Dan. I am proud to bring Dan's concerns to Alberta.

Thank you very much.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to section 5(3) of the Property Rights Advocate Act the chair is pleased to table with the Assembly the 2014 annual report of the Alberta Property Rights Advocate office.

3:20

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Ms

Ganley, Minister of Justice and Solicitor General and Minister of Aboriginal Relations, pursuant to the Metis Settlements Act the Metis Settlements Appeal Tribunal annual report 2014.

Orders of the Day

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 201

Assuring Alberta's Fiscal Future Act

Mr. Fraser: It's a great pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 201, Assuring Alberta's Fiscal Future Act. I move the bill for second reading.

The Alberta heritage savings trust fund was established in 1976 after an act of the same name was given royal assent through this Assembly. Few could have predicted the ebbs and flows, the ups and downs, and what challenges it would have, that it would have lasting and dramatic impacts on the heritage trust fund. The challenges we face today mean that immediate action must be taken in order to secure and increase the strength of the fund and create a legacy that can be utilized by generations to come.

As a private member and a private member on this side of the House I can't introduce a bill that is interpreted as a money bill. A money bill is considered in Alberta to be a bill which in itself has the authority to appropriate a sum of public money to carry out its objectives. Alternatively put, the spending of public money out of the general revenue fund or authorizing public money to be spent before it reaches the general revenue fund is also a money bill. While Bill 201 does not speak of the spending but saving, it would still be interpreted as a money bill because of these very points. That is why we must charge the government to create a bill of their own that gives the effects of the contents of Bill 201. For this, we do not require royal recommendation.

The effects of this bill are simple but telling. This bill does not ask for a commitment to cap the spending of net income on the fund, which is the interest it generates as a result of access to a variety of revenue generators, including global equities, bonds, and fixed income money markets, nor does this bill address the contingency account, which is a separate account that is also made up of nonrenewable resource revenue. These are issues for another time, perhaps.

Bill 201 would call on the government to save a specific percentage of nonrenewable resource revenue into the heritage trust fund beginning from the years 2016-17. The figure would be 25 per cent and will remain at 25 per cent until the fiscal year in which operational revenue is projected to exceed operational expense as outlined in the government of the time's budget presented at the time of main estimates in this Assembly. From the following fiscal year 50 per cent of the nonrenewable resource revenue would be saved into the heritage trust fund for every subsequent fiscal year. Hon. members, this is by no means unachievable.

The province has taken a turn, and this turn will result in higher revenue generation through various levels of taxation. The result of this: that Alberta will now have the ability to put aside more of its nonrenewable resource revenue, and the ability will only increase as we return to a budget surplus in the years to come, as the government has promised Albertans. With firm spending principles in place this government could create the environment needed to ensure that growth of this fund is unparalleled. The real difference to the heritage trust fund will be made when its government returns to a budget surplus; however, there will be no reason why the work cannot begin now.

Some members on this side of the House may not share the belief that saving during recession is achievable. However, I would like to remind them and all other members in this Chamber that when these measures lead to a direct and identifiable return, it's not just achievable; it's a duty that we must live up to. This formula leads to a greater economic development and a vastly stronger Alberta. Colleagues, do not think of this as borrowing to save but investing to save. This province has the credit rating and the access to ensure this method of wealth generation is viable. Let's not waste it.

The fund has contributed over \$34 billion to fund the priorities of Albertans, particularly in regard to health care and education. Do not forget the important work that has already been undertaken and the need to have a strong heritage trust fund as we go into the future. The effects of the fund must be seen as assets, not just to the province but every person who calls Alberta home. Bill 201 would see the market value of the heritage trust fund increase to well over \$20 billion by the end of the 2018-19 fiscal year, and that factors in the government's spending of the majority of the fund's investment income.

The fund has played its part during challenging economic periods, and the results are obvious. We live in one of the wealthiest jurisdictions not just in Canada but in the entire world, and our standards of living are among the highest. However, our focus must shift now to securing the future for future generations to come, and we can only do that by the means and the contents of this bill. The bill would not bind in any way what you can spend from the heritage trust fund, but it sets in motion a framework of saving that would ensure the prosperity of Alberta for decades to come. Bill 201, Assuring Alberta's Fiscal Future Act, tells Albertans that we will not waste the privilege of living in our time.

The right of this revenue will not flow forever, and we must be duly aware of this. The time to make a decision is now. The time to put a system of saving in place is now. I respectfully call on all members of this Assembly to vote in support of Bill 201.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. According to its own report from 1990 the Alberta heritage trust fund was worth around \$12.1 billion at that time. A single dollar from 1990 inflated to 2015 rates should be worth around \$1.86 now. Put another way, if the investments in the heritage trust fund had simply kept pace with the rest of the world while being reinvested and no further money was added or removed, the trust fund should be around \$22.5 billion. From the trust fund's third quarter report for 2014, the newest documents available online, the fund is now worth just \$17.2 billion, so it would seem that we have a gap. The trust fund should be worth at least \$22.5 billion, probably much more since the good people at AIMCo consistently outperform the markets, yet the fund is actually only worth \$17.2 billion.

That means that since 1990 we are missing almost 5 and a half billion dollars, and those missing funds are easily explained. Rather than allow the heritage trust fund to reinvest its own revenues, the government of the day skimmed those revenues off the top year after year. They did this to make up for significant gaps in their own budgets. The third party ran the government throughout those 25 years. Bill 201's sponsor belongs to that same third party, so I would suggest that this bill starts off with a major credibility problem. From 1990 on the now third party never once took seriously the idea of building up the heritage trust fund until just now, the first moment when their hands weren't on the controls. Now, despite the inherent hypocrisy embedded in this bill due to

the third party's past failures on this file, the underlying idea of reinvesting a portion of oil revenues into the heritage trust fund . . .

Dr. Starke: Point of order.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

The Speaker: Point of order has been noted. We'll take it under advisement. My apologies to the member again. Could you state your reason for your point of order?

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, rising on citation Standing Order 23(i) and (l), using terminology that imputes false motives. When the term "inherent hypocrisy" is used to describe the motives of the member within the House, that clearly is a violation of our rules of order. I just would encourage the member to be cautious in her choice of words and perhaps suggest that she apologize and withdraw those comments.

The Speaker: Hon. member, could you cite that section for me again?

Dr. Starke: Standing Order 23(i) and (l).

The Speaker: Hon. member, are you prepared to withdraw your comments?

The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With respect to the hon. third party House leader, I don't accept that this is a valid point of order. What the hon. member simply said is that given the track record of that party while they were in government, it is very much at odds with the intent of this private member's bill and that while they had the opportunity over many years, decades, in fact, to implement the policy that's enshrined in this bill, they failed to do so. Now, at this hour, they've introduced a bill to do what they could have done but did not. The hon. member indicated that in her view this was inherent hypocrisy, not on the part of the member but on the part of the bill that he's introduced relative to the former government's own record.

So with the greatest of respect, Mr. Speaker, I would argue that there is not a valid point of order.

3:30

The Speaker: There is a disagreement made as to the statements. I don't have the opportunity of having access to the Blues at this point. I would take it under advisement and will report back.

The hon. member.

Debate Continued

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The underlying idea of reinvesting a portion of oil revenues into the heritage trust fund remains a good idea and one that I would encourage our government to act upon. However, handcuffing this new government to a fixed percentage, one that the previous government never even tried to make good on, strikes me as foolish and an obvious attempt at a poison pill piece of legislation. If we were to pass Bill 201, then we'd jeopardize this new government's ability to work towards a balanced budget, giving the third party something to complain about. Yet if we don't pass this bill, the third party would crow about the new government's lack of commitment to growing the very trust fund they ignored and took advantage of for so many years.

So we see that this private member's bill is designed to be a darned if you do and darned if you don't scenario. I find it

distressing that while the new government and the Official Opposition are trying to find ways to work together, we have third party members frittering away their limited opportunities to bring forward legislation on gotcha gimmicks like this Bill 201.

I encourage the members of this Assembly to reject such cynical politics and along with that to reject Bill 201. The core idea is good, and in due time I trust that our new Minister of Finance will find ways to reinvest a portion of our resource revenues into our heritage trust fund, but asking him to do so prior to this government's first budget and at a time when we know the province's expenses are exceeding its revenues would be to court fiscal disaster.

Furthermore, we know that this policy contained within Bill 201 is the exact same one that the third party advocated for during the most recent election. While we can debate how likely the third party was to make good on these commitments, the fact remains that Alberta's voters have roundly rejected these same policies that Bill 201 contains. We are here first and foremost to be representatives, so our vote on Bill 201 should reflect the already expressed will of the voters. Just as Albertans voted against this proposal, so should we.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured today to rise to speak to a bill that aims to ensure Alberta's future is secure. The principle of the bill is on point. Unfortunately, this bill's aim is a bit off. There is one very important step that needs to be taken before this bill could hit the mark.

There are dozens of similar funds around the world that look to set the wealth from nonrenewable natural resources aside. Alberta's heritage savings trust fund was one of the first, started in 1976. Unfortunately, it is now worth per capita less than when it was created and less than about 20 similar funds around the world. Initially it was created with the intention of putting 30 per cent of nonrenewable natural resource revenues into savings, 5 per cent more than this bill. At the moment there is no legislation stating how much is to be put into the heritage trust fund.

The Wildrose wants to see the heritage fund grow and become a nest egg for our future generations. In our election platform we outlined how much and what percentage of surpluses we would invest into the heritage fund. We want to invest 50 per cent of all budget surpluses into the heritage fund. I believe that we can all agree that investing into the heritage trust fund is in the best interests of all Albertans, but borrowing money to put into savings is not a good idea. I do not know one financial planner worth his stripes who would suggest to his clients that they borrow money in order to put that money into savings, especially if they are already spending more than they make, if their spending is already out of control, even more so if they have a mountain of debt already.

I'm not unlike most Albertans. I have to balance my own chequebook. I have to pay my own bills. I have to pay my mortgage, my car payments, and my credit card bills. There has not been one instance in my life where I have looked at interest rates lenders provide, whether through a line of credit or a credit card or a bank of dad, and thought: I should borrow money and put that borrowed money into savings. And I never would consider that in a year where I was planning to triple my debt already.

Some previous Finance ministers have argued that the rate of return on the heritage fund is a lot higher than borrowing rates, so it makes sense to invest in the fund even if it means borrowing to do so. Well, the Wildrose has argued for a while that while a guy with a good stock tip might raid his personal line of credit to invest in the odd stock, this would be irresponsible gambling for a government with taxpayers' money. If the market takes a downturn,

as it did in 2009, the heritage fund could quickly lose its value as it lost \$2 billion in that year. The interest paid on the ever-increasing debt caused by the third party and being added to by the current government is growing faster than Albertans can afford.

Again, I support investing into the heritage fund. The Wildrose supports investing into the heritage fund, but we are against borrowing to save. We need to balance the budget first. We need to start paying off our debt first. When Alberta is generating a surplus, then we can invest into the heritage fund. We will support, or at least I personally as a private member will support, the second reading of Bill 201, but we will require amendments that ensure that we are not borrowing to save before we back this bill at later stages. This means the deposit into the heritage fund must be surplus based. This is just common sense. You do not leave bills unpaid just to put money into savings. You do not invest while you are spending far more than you make. Worse is what this bill is suggesting: an equivalent to putting debt on the credit card in order to put that money into RSPs.

A balanced budget is a logical, required first step that is needed to be taken before money can be invested. And let's be clear. As one of the most prosperous jurisdictions in the world Alberta should be running a balanced budget. As the Infrastructure minister said before, Alberta should not be taking on debt. Why are we taking on debt? It's because of out of control spending, Mr. Speaker; \$8 billion a year more than B.C. is what we spend annually, and that is inexcusable.

We are proposing that 50 per cent of consolidated cash surpluses be legislated to go into the heritage fund. If this had been in place over the last few decades, the fund would be worth far more than the paltry sum of today. This will require not only amending the deposit formula but amending the definition of a balanced budget.

In order to make the budget appear balanced, the third party, while in government, opted to change the definition of a balanced budget. The result was the repeal of the Government Accountability Act and the Fiscal Responsibility Act and a focus on balancing only the operational portion of the budget. You see that echoed in this bill today. It says that if the operational budget is balanced, 50 per cent must go to the fund. That means that we could be borrowing an extra \$4 billion to \$5 billion a year on top of capital borrowing just to save.

The third-party changes pushed billions of dollars in capital spending off the bottom line, making it appear that the province's finances were in better shape than they actually were. If I had to guess, this is what the NDP discovered when they were starting to find challenges that are a bit bigger than what may have been featured in the Prentice government's campaign, quote, unquote, from the Premier, namely in respect to what the cash balance is.

3:40

While I was at the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, I made it my business to expose what the third party, the then government, was doing to our balance sheets: cooking the books. As I mentioned, they had separated the budget into three individual smaller categories and required only the operational budget to be balanced. The capital plan, which had been over \$5 billion for a decade, was at first taken entirely out of the equation, and then only part of it was brought back in last year under a so-called consolidated number, but this consolidated number was always somehow billions closer to balanced than the amount of debt they were taking on.

To ensure that we are not borrowing to save, we will need a balanced, consolidated, all-inclusive budget first, Mr. Speaker. No more additional \$6 billion side budgets that don't add up and are quietly paid off with debt. Does anyone here really think that future

generations will be proud of us when we tell them that we built the heritage fund by \$10 billion but handed them a bill of the debt for an extra \$10 billion?

The Wildrose wants to see this government be upfront with Albertans. The Wildrose wants to see a true and consolidated balanced budget. The Wildrose has been proposing to balance the budget for years. With that balanced budget plan comes a plan to reinvest into the heritage fund. The Wildrose surplus allocation strategy would also force deposits just as this bill proposes, but those deposits would only be allocated when we can afford them, when we're running a balanced budget. Surplus-based allocations don't add to the problem in years where we face steep debt and deficits.

With our plan, the Wildrose plan, 50 per cent of surpluses would go to the heritage fund, 25 per cent of surpluses to pay down the \$13 billion of debt run up by the previous government, and the remaining 25 per cent of surpluses would go to infrastructure to help municipalities and regions cope with growth during boom times. Of that last 25 per cent, 10 would go to our 10-10 plan for cities, and 15 to our infrastructure fund for things like ring roads. The key point of the Wildrose plan is that we would be investing in our future in a twofold way. Alberta's future is not secured by putting money into savings when the government is not balancing the budget; Alberta's future is secured by balancing the budget first and putting money into savings second. If these amendments are not made, I will be voting against this bill at its later stages.

We agree in principle. We agree that we must invest in our future, and we agree that we need to put money into the savings fund, but we need to agree that this is done after the budget is truly balanced. Without a balanced budget first, I cannot support this bill.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I agree in principle that it is very good policy to mandate a certain percentage of money going into the heritage savings trust fund. As a province that relies on nonrenewable resource revenues – as we're experiencing now, we know these revenues are unstable. It's very important that Alberta get off the resource revenue roller coaster. What I like about this bill is that it adds structure to what is currently an undefined and ad hoc approach to policy-making as it relates to revenue additions to the heritage trust fund. What I have to say – and this will be the first time, maybe the last, that I am swayed by the arguments by the Member for Strathmore-Brooks. I will say: please don't get used to it. It's distinctly uncomfortable.

In all sincerity, I think he makes a valid point. Borrowing simply to save is taking money from one hand and putting it into the other, and we achieve nothing. I do believe it's important that we enforce fiscal discipline along the way, that we find a mechanism to save nonrenewable resource revenues for future generations to ensure that government spending does not outstrip our ability to generate appropriate revenues, that our government follows good, strong fiscal discipline.

To do that, we need all options. We need new revenues, but more money is certainly not the answer to every question. Finding administrative efficiencies and ensuring that dollars are spent wisely in every area of government are the key to ensuring that our nonrenewable resource revenues can be invested, and only do that once we are out of debt. We need to ensure that we are focusing on economic diversification and other means of making sure that as the world changes around Alberta, we are not overreliant on nonrenewable revenues, that we're not crossing our fingers and simply

hoping that the price of a barrel of oil goes up to ensure that our kids can go to kindergarten.

What else do I want to say here, Mr. Speaker? I believe that we want to ensure that we get to a point where a minimum of 25 per cent of nonrenewable resource revenue is directed directly into the heritage savings trust fund but the rest of it is spent paying off debt, at which point we ensure that at least 50 per cent of future nonrenewable resource revenues goes towards the heritage fund.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The chair recognizes the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed an honour to speak to Bill 201, Assuring Alberta's Fiscal Future Act, brought forward by my hon. colleague the Member for Calgary-South East. Having sat in this House for over a decade now, I've had the opportunity to witness many important debates that have helped form what Alberta is today and the direction for the future. The future is exactly what this bill is addressing. Bill 201 is quite simply proposing to task the government with ensuring that our children have a fund that offers financial security for whatever the future may hold. I'm not naive to the criticisms as to why these savings actions have not been taken in the past. On May 5 Albertans had their say on what they want for the future, and I stand here today with colleagues from across the House looking forward to our future.

What I've heard from my constituents is that the Alberta heritage savings trust fund is a source of great pride dating back to 1976, truly the envy of virtually any other jurisdiction in North America and beyond. This fund has paid for large capital projects that benefit Albertans across the province, including the Alberta Children's hospital in Calgary. Mr. Speaker, I could provide an extremely long list of projects paid for by that fund. It didn't just disappear. But, truly – I timed it – it would take up more than my entire speaking time. Suffice it to say that these projects have benefited Albertans greatly, but I think we all know that we can do more, and we can save more.

Bill 201 simply serves to ensure that this government has a mandate for saving whenever it enjoys a surplus. This bill serves to comfort Albertans that while the government is being attentive to the issues of today, it is also cognizant of the issues of tomorrow. You may know that at the recent G-7 summit there was a commitment made to phase out fossil fuels by the year 2100. This means, of course, for us right here and right now, that this opportunity has a timeline that ends. Mr. Speaker, I know that this government will point the finger back at us – and they have; that's pretty convenient – as to why this wasn't done before.

Great things were done since this fund first began. They might say that Albertans deserve their fair share of resource revenues. I understand that. Well, all Albertans have received the incredible benefit of this resource-rich province, including the lowest taxes in the country. We enjoy world-class public service that receives funding from nonrenewable resource revenue. There's a reason we continually lead the country in economic growth. The government of Alberta just released the population growth report, and once again we're leading the country.

So, Mr. Speaker, there is a reason why people are still flocking to Alberta, and this is why Bill 201 is essential. There must be savings for the future. This government has proposed increased taxes as a source of revenue, which should further strengthen the argument to put away nonrenewable resource . . .

The Speaker: I'm hearing a sound somewhere. Does someone have a phone on?

It seems to have stopped.

My apologies. Please proceed.

3:50

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll just back up half a sentence.

The government has proposed increased taxes as a source of revenue, which should further strengthen the argument to put away nonrenewable resource revenue. My hon. colleague from Calgary-South East has provided flexibility to this government to bring this bill into force in tandem with or shortly after their first budget.

I do hope that members of this House do not dismiss the purpose of this bill. This is not just a request of our caucus; it's a request of Albertans who are proud of this. So I call on all of our members from all sides of the House to join me in supporting Bill 201 as just the first step for us all to work together to secure Alberta's future.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to speak today to Bill 201, the Assuring Alberta's Fiscal Future Act. Certainly, my hon. colleague the Member for Calgary-Lougheed just spoke at some length with regard to the proud heritage of the heritage trust fund, and I would say that people of all political stripes can agree that in 1976, when Premier Lougheed instituted the heritage trust fund, it indeed was a proud moment for all Albertans. Perhaps that was the last point that everybody in Alberta agreed about the heritage trust fund and how it's been managed over the years.

I will say in defence of not only Premier Lougheed but the legacy of the third party that the heritage trust fund has been a legacy that has been extremely valuable to Albertans, and quite frankly the expenditures from the heritage trust fund have assisted and helped this province in many and varied ways and are a big part of the reason why we enjoy what we have in this province today. The heritage trust fund indeed has been used throughout the years to build many different forms of infrastructure throughout the province: airports, seniors' housing, parks, care homes, hospitals, and the list goes on and on.

Specifically, when we're talking hospitals, it includes the Walter C. Mackenzie Health Sciences Centre, here in the city of Edmonton. It includes, as my colleague mentioned, the Alberta Children's hospital. It includes facilities all around our province. There's scarcely an airport that you can walk into in rural Alberta and not see the heritage trust fund bronze plaque – that airport would have been constructed using at least some funding from the heritage trust fund – as well as seniors' housing throughout the province.

In addition to the investments made by the heritage trust fund in capital projects, we also have the heritage trust fund being involved in medical research through the Alberta Heritage Foundation for Medical Research. Indeed, here in the province of Alberta, through the funding provided through the Alberta heritage fund for medical research, we have some world-leading medical researchers who have chosen to relocate from all around the world to do their work right here in our hospitals, in our educational institutions. Groundbreaking work is being done in Alberta in research, for example, into multiple sclerosis.

We have one of the finest research teams anywhere in the world, where there is co-operative research between the University of Alberta, the University of Calgary, and the University of Lethbridge. I had an opportunity just last year to meet with one of those

researchers, who is from the University of Lethbridge. I spoke with her because she had a German-sounding name. As some of you will know, I am of German heritage, and I wished to try to have a few words with her in my mother tongue. She was fascinating, and I asked her the inevitable question: "Why are you here? Why aren't you in Germany doing this research?" She smiled, and she said, "Because the Germans are way behind us." The Germans simply do not have the infrastructure. They simply do not have the research teams for doing this kind of work, that is funded – how? – through the heritage trust fund.

So, ladies and gentlemen, while you can sometimes point to numbers – and I, quite frankly, have to smile when people say, "Well, why don't we have all the money that Norway has?" or "Why don't we have all the money that the Alaska permanent fund has?" Yes, it's true; the Alaska permanent fund has more money in it than the heritage trust fund does. But I had the opportunity to visit Alaska a couple of years ago. It was on a government trip – and the Member for Strathmore-Brooks can check out my expenses if he wishes, but I was sent to Juneau in January, so you can hardly call that an expensive government junket – and we spent two days at the Pacific North West Economic Region meetings, largely meeting with legislators from other jurisdictions. We met a lot of legislators from the state of Alaska.

Now, the state of Alaska is well known as having a considerable amount of nonrenewable resource revenue. In fact, 70 per cent of their operational budget comes from nonrenewable resource revenue. If you can think of a jurisdiction that needs some work with regard to diversification of their economic base, that would be one of them, and that was the question they asked. They said: "In Alberta, how did you do it? You're a resource-rich jurisdiction, but clearly with your infrastructure, with your universities, with the research that you're doing, you are doing better than we are. How are you doing it?" I simply said that we're doing it by strategically investing in initiatives that improve the quality of life in our province.

Now, are those initiatives always right, and do they always result in a positive return? Well, no, they don't, and there are well-publicized instances where those investments did not work out well. If they haven't already been pointed out, I'm sure the members from the party to the right of me, to the far right of me, will point those out. Nonetheless, Mr. Speaker, there are lots of examples where strategic investments by the heritage trust fund have served Albertans extremely well. I will defend those investments, and I will defend, in fact, the legacy of the heritage trust fund.

I therefore am supporting this particular piece of legislation, because it is time that we set aside a specific, given amount annually for the heritage trust fund. Should we have done it sooner? Sure. I'll grant you that. Are there things that in hindsight we can do better? Of course, we can. But we have to always look at things with an eye to the future. We live in the present, and we make decisions for the future. We don't sit here and agonize over mistakes that were done in the past. When mistakes were made – and we saw an example of that earlier this afternoon – we acknowledge them, and we move on. Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, that's what this bill is doing. It's saying: let's move on, and let's make sure that we make these strategic investments in the heritage trust fund going forward.

You know, Peter Lougheed was named as the foremost leader at the provincial level, the greatest Premier of all time in Canada, for a reason. He had tremendous vision, and he had tremendous ability to articulate that vision going forward. When he passed away, three years ago, I remember very vividly one commentator saying that the epitaph that was used for Christopher Wren is perhaps the epitaph that should be used for Peter Lougheed, that if ye seek his monument, look around you. Indeed, the province of Alberta, this

province that we love, this province that has so much in the way of infrastructure and resources and so many things that we can be proud of, I would say, is largely attributable to the vision of one Peter Lougheed, and a big part of what Peter Lougheed instituted was the heritage trust fund.

This bill strengthens the heritage trust fund. This bill imposes on this government and future governments – it might be these folks; we hope that it's us some day – fiscal discipline to make sure that savings go into the heritage trust fund. Let's make sure that we do that. We have that opportunity with Bill 201. To my fellow members, I would encourage you to vote in favour of this bill.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to say that I'll be speaking against Bill 201. I agree; there have been some important investments across Alberta from the heritage trust fund. I say this with the greatest of respect to the Member for Calgary-South East. Any discussion that focuses on being more responsible with the revenue received by government is certainly worthy of debate in this House.

However, any legislation binding government to arbitrary targets for setting aside revenue from nonrenewable resources is premature at best. Under this act future governments would be required to set aside 25 per cent of resource revenues into the trust fund. I do question the member of the third party and of the former government for bringing forward this bill at this time in this session. If they thought it was a great idea, Bill 201 could have been enshrined into law during any of the previous 44 years that they were in government.

It's also contrary to the direction that Albertans chose on May 5. On that day they voted for change. They voted for a government that is committed to openness and transparency. They voted for a government that believes in fairness in taxation. They voted for a government that believes that we need to build a more diversified economy that is less prone to the boom-and-bust cycles of the oil industry. They voted for a government that is committed to protecting health care, education, advanced education, and human services because Alberta families need those programs. Our government is delivering on those priorities.

4:00

In one short week in our first legislative session our very young government has brought historic, positive change to our province. My colleague the Minister of Justice has introduced legislation that would ban corporate and union donations to political parties. It is a bill that the members opposite in the third party did not support, but it is supported by the Official Opposition. It's great a day when legislation can have broad-based appeal and support from members across this Chamber. It's unfortunate that members of the third party didn't support that democratic reform.

Our government also introduced an interim supply bill that would restore funding to health and other critical services that I outlined earlier. As Minister of Finance I am also committed to bringing fairness to the tax system through legislation that asks the most successful corporations to pay a little bit more while introducing a progressive income tax system for all taxpayers. This legislation will also bring much-needed revenue stability to our treasury. That's a lot of work, and many more governments haven't gotten that much work done over many sessions that they've been in government. Mr. Speaker, we're working hard to honour our commitments to Albertans.

Bill 201 is not part of our agenda and is not what voters asked us to do. We believe in fiscal responsibility. We understand that there

is great value in saving during good times so that we have a financial cushion during more challenging times. We also see a great future in our oil sector, one where we will work to keep the energy sector jobs here and not export them abroad or to Texas. Because of the economic policies of the previous government, there is a deficit. Our focus over the next four years will be to return to balance and develop an economic plan that gets us off the boom-and-bust cycle and roller coaster. We can't support legislation that is a distraction to our plan and the hard work Albertans have asked us to do. It's premature until we have completed the royalty review that we committed to during the election. Our government believes in acting responsibly with scarce public resources. When we reverse the slide in this fund that occurred under previous governments, we'll be careful not to make the same mistakes. We'll not squander our resource wealth.

Bill 201 is the wrong legislation at the wrong time, and I would urge people to not support it. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do have to confess that I am somewhat confused as to the real objective here in this motion. The PCs did have many years in which to do this. Instead, they spent both the interest and the nest egg, and now they are asking to increase debt in order to create the appearance of saving. The idea of saving from a party that saved nothing just confuses me as to the motive. I believe in saving. I absolutely do believe in saving. I've been a personal saver all my life. But saving, truthfully, is a function of disciplined spending, and without spending discipline there can be no saving. Until this House gets its spending in order, our province will be profligate and continually in a state of crisis and financial dysfunction.

Most reputable family financial counsellors would advise you with regard to your personal finances that if you have a surplus in cash, you should pay down debt first. It's one of the first principles of financial security, to minimize debt and to control debt. Debt is a great destroyer. I've had to counsel those who have struggled with debt and who are facing the prospect of bankruptcy. The pain, the shame, and the dispossession of bankruptcy is always preceded by debt. It happens in families, it happens in countries, as it is in Greece right now, and we just don't want to go down that path. At the risk of sounding scaremongering, even without bankruptcy debt enslaves. Debt robs you of cash flow. Debt today restricts you tomorrow.

As a last thing I just want to say that borrowing to invest is a zero-sum game. It takes risks that it shouldn't and a dose of delusion, hoping somehow to win. A trustee should never take such risks with other people's money. Actual saving is a good thing, and we need that, but posturing to feel good with borrowed money is not saving. We need real savings, and unless we can see that, I personally cannot support this bill.

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

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today because I will be speaking against Bill 201, and I say this with great respect to the member. I say this because we have to look at this and say that yes, we can have discussion, and yes, it's worthy to have discussion on issues which affect savings and issues which affect the heritage savings trust fund because these are things that matter to Albertans and these are things that we need to focus on. However, right now is simply not the time to do it.

I'm going to echo the statements made by the Minister of Finance and say that now is not the time because right now we need to focus on passing the fall budget. We need to focus on developing these

things, and we need to focus on this without having our hands tied by saying that we must invest these arbitrary numbers that seem to have been pulled out of thin air, that we must invest these numbers that haven't been given a lot of thought because we've only been sitting here for a couple of weeks, that we have to invest all this money. We're going to say: let's just tie the government down and not give them any leeway on how they're going to develop their budget, not give them any leeway on how they're going to develop their plans moving forward for the next four fiscal years.

We look at this and say that yes, our government believes in fiscal responsibility. Our government believes in saving when times are good. Right now is not that time. Right now is not the time to be committing to things that the government cannot foresee. Right now is not the time for the budget to be tied down to something that we simply do not know will happen, when we cannot and will not be able to predict the future. So we say that we can't let this Bill 201, this legislation, distract us from what Albertans elected an NDP government to do. What Albertans elected us to do is to focus on the issues that matter to them and to ensure that we can fund those things in a responsible way moving forward, and that right now is this fall's budget. In the future we may have to re-evaluate these things. So we look at this and say that our government believes in acting responsibly with our scarce resources. We have these limited resources, and we do understand that some of these eventually will have to be invested in our savings and invested in furthering this province. We look at this, and again we say that now is not the time.

We ask that you look and say: how is deciding on these and pulling this number out of the air a good idea? How is that a good idea? You've brought this forward and haven't really thought it through. It's been two weeks. We tabled this legislation, and we say that we don't even know what the budget will look like. We simply have interim supply on the table right now, and that's something we're going to have to move forward with before we can even consider to be squandering our resources in ways that we haven't quite looked at yet.

As the Minister of Finance has said, once we reverse the slide and we reverse what the previous government has done, we can start looking at how we can do these savings, how we can reinvest in our heritage savings fund, how we can start doing that. We won't make those mistakes that the previous government has made. We won't go back and do the same things they've been doing and mismanaging for the last 40-odd years.

Now, what we're going to say today is that Bill 201 is wrong. I urge every member of this Assembly to realize that right now is not the right time. Right now is not the opportunity for us to look at something that hasn't been thought through. Right now I urge everybody to vote against Bill 201 so that we can look forward and focus and let our government focus on investing in things that matter to Albertans, let the government focus on things that matter to our constituents instead of forcing them to do things that they simply cannot commit to in this short fiscal period.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:10

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

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate all the debate that I have heard here in the House today. The hon. member who just finished speaking I think said: why now, and was it pulled out of the air? Well, he was kind of right about that. It was pulled out of the air. There's a draw for these bills. That's why it's right now. You're new here, so you might not have known that, but that's why. We draw for the order of business. That's why. That's when we had an opportunity to bring a bill forward. It's pretty straightforward.

Mr. Speaker, to you and to the hon. House leader from the government who's chirping I will say that this is one of the elements that was in the budget that we brought forward just before the election, to add savings to the heritage savings fund. So it's not out of the air. It's well considered. I guess at the time the government considered that this was the right time to make this change.

There have been a lot of questions asked, you know, about how we got here? I guess I'm always highly entertained when I hear the comment: if we did this differently, there would be more money in the fund; if we did that differently, there would be more money in the fund. To those people who make those comments I would say that they're about half right, simply because if you want to know – people say, well, where's the money that in those people's views should be in the heritage fund? I guess your kids are probably sitting in the schools that that money bought in some cases. You probably drive on the roads that some of that money bought in some cases. Mr. Speaker, Albertans paid lower taxes for decades. These are choices that the government made, to build schools, build roads, have lower taxes. They could have made different choices, to have fewer schools, fewer roads, and more taxes and put more money in there. That also would have been a legitimate policy choice to have made, but the government of the day chose to build schools and roads and hospitals.

It's great, actually, Mr. Speaker, to now hear the other parties chirping because they're all pretty happy when the schools do get built. For the ones who are saying, "You should have built more schools or more hospitals," potentially that would have been less money in the heritage fund, depending on the policy choices that that would lead to. You see where I'm going here? The fact is that – you know what? – they're policy choices that have given Albertans lower taxes, more infrastructure along the way, and Albertans have enjoyed the benefit of those things in the past. In many cases Albertans are still enjoying the benefit of those things today.

I was also entertained by some of the comments from my colleague in the opposition, particularly when he said that no financial adviser would ever advise somebody to borrow money to save. Well, mine did, and that's an interesting fact. I can tell you that . . .

Mr. Fildebrandt: We're not talking about Horner.

Mr. McIver: No, Mr. Speaker. Actually, I'm talking about our adviser from the Investors Group, who advised my wife and I, when we were getting close to paying off our mortgage, to put a couple of hundred thousand on the mortgage at a very low rate and invest more money. I see members of the opposition nodding. They probably got the same advice.

When the hon. member says that no financial adviser in their right mind would say that, I would say that I guess my financial adviser must be out of his mind. The fact is that my wife and I actually made enough money off that investment to pay it back, with tens of thousands of dollars more to secure our future. I will say this in defence of the member who said that. Every time you make an investment, it's a risk. Where I do agree with him, Mr. Speaker, is that if the investment that my wife made or any investment that the heritage fund made had gone down, it wouldn't have turned out so well. I don't take issue with that.

I do think that the hon. member does have faith that investments can turn out well. Otherwise, why would the hon. member say that you need to put a lot more money into the heritage fund? Now, it would be crazy for him to say that, and I don't think he's crazy. For him to say to put a lot more money into the heritage fund if he believed all the investments were going to go down, that wouldn't be a smart thing for him to say. Actually, I think he's a smart person, so I think he considered that.

But it does lay bare, Mr. Speaker, the inconsistency that you can't make money by investing. Clearly, members in this House want to put more money into the heritage fund. I believe that they care enough about Albertans to believe that they think those investments might go up. In fact, if you look at the track record of the heritage fund over the last few years, I think you would find that the results have been investment results that any investor would be proud to have achieved.

When you consider all of that, when you consider that the hon. member is presenting money to go into the heritage fund out of surpluses, it's actually, interestingly enough, kind of consistent with what everybody is arguing for. Yet they're coming to the other conclusion. I will ask you to reconsider what you've said, only the conclusion that you've come to, and to consider, actually, investing in a fund that benefits Albertans, particularly one with a good track record, particularly when it's coming out of surpluses. I think you might have all just talked yourselves into what a good idea Bill 201 is, and I encourage you to support it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak against Bill 201. While the Member for Calgary-South East is to be respected for his current focus on responsibly managing government revenue, legislation that will bind the government – bind the government – to setting aside revenue from our nonrenewable resources is not the best move for Alberta at this time. We certainly understand the value of the heritage trust fund and its potential for our province. While we understand the value of saving during good times for the future of this province, the member presents this legislation at a time when we are in a deficit due to the economic policies of the previous government. It is unfortunate that the member did not bring forward this bill in previous sessions, when the third party actually governed this province, so that Albertans would today have a financial cushion.

As they did not, at this time it is our responsibility and our priority to work hard to restore the balance, to develop an economic plan that moves us away from the boom-bust cycle. At this time it is our responsibility to move in the direction Albertans chose for us on May 5. Albertans voted for a government that believes that we need to support a diversified economy that is less prone to the boom-bust cycles of the oil industry. Albertans voted for a government committed to protecting health care, education, advanced education, human services, the things that matter to your average Albertan.

Mr. Speaker, our government is working hard to do that for Albertans, to stand firm on our commitments that we made. In our very first week of our first legislative session we've already taken a very significant step to move away from the boom-bust cycle by introducing legislation to ask the most successful corporations and individual Albertans to pay a little more to bring more revenue stability to our treasury. As we work to reverse the downward trend that occurred under the previous government, we must act responsibly with the scarce resources that we have and be careful not to repeat those mistakes.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 201, just simply, as previously stated, is the wrong legislation at this time, so I absolutely cannot support it, and I ask that all of you vote against Bill 201. Thank you.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

The Speaker: Hon. members, I do have a ruling on the point of order that was raised earlier in the day. Upon reviewing the Blues, I note that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods stated:

From 1990 on the now third party never once took seriously the idea of building up the heritage trust fund until just now, the first moment when their hands weren't on the controls. Now, despite the inherent hypocrisy embedded in this bill due to the third party's past failures on this file, the underlying idea of reinvesting a portion of oil revenues into the heritage trust fund . . .

I do not see that there is a point of order here based on the language that was used pursuant to the standing orders. However, in the short period of time that we have been in the House, I wish to remind all members of the House that if you wish to be productive, engaged, as you've all said you would like to be, be cautious of the tone that you use. I respect that you will apply that across the House to each other.

Thank you.

4:20

Debate Continued

The Speaker: I think the next speaker that we have is the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat. Proceed.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To start with, I would very much like to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-South East for bringing this motion forward. I think it's very important and very beneficial for all Albertans and particularly us in this House, entrusted with this great resource, to have the opportunity to talk and debate about the best way forward for ourselves and for future generations, and I look forward to being able to add to that. To me, the intent of this bill is almost to be split in two ways, the idea behind saving and the idea behind borrowing to save. At this point in time I will support Bill 201 and hope that we can have a fulsome discussion on some of the amendments that are necessary around the idea of borrowing to save.

The heritage trust fund, as other members have mentioned, has done tremendously good things in our province, from providing medical research, agricultural research, to building many properties that many of our citizens use today. But, to me, the debate centres around Alberta and Albertans being blessed with this tremendous asset of oil and gas, whether it's the oil sands, conventional oil, or natural gas, billions and billions of dollars of net worth. How do we commercialize that, honour the intelligent and hard-working Albertans and Canadians that add the value to taking that oil and gas and those oil sands out of the ground, converting it to a usable product for all Albertans and all Canadians, and taking a fair amount of tax and saving a fair amount for the next generation?

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

There are many, many different ideas around it, but part of where I want to start is with the idea of what some other sovereign funds do. There are some sovereign funds that take the interest that their funds earn and do not invest them in their jurisdiction. The idea behind this is not to cause inflation; the idea behind this is to spread the risk. With our past government, of course, I believe it was \$33 billion in interest over the last 38 years that this fund has earned that has been put into our economy. Has this been the correct process? Has this caused inflation? What it has done, for sure, is that it has left the fund at the same absolute dollar value that it was at when Peter Lougheed started it in the mid- to late '70s, somewhere between \$16 billion and \$17 billion. Our calculations in the Wildrose are that if we had just left that \$33 billion and let it compound and accumulate over the last 38 years, we would have somewhere between \$200 billion and \$220 billion today in the fund.

Mr. Smith: That's a lot of money.

Mr. Barnes: A lot of money.

Mr. Cooper: A lost opportunity.

Mr. Barnes: A lost opportunity.

What does that cost us? I look at today's situation. My understanding is that AIMCo historically makes between 7 per cent and 7 and three-quarters per cent per year. So if we had \$200 billion in the fund, somewhere around \$14 billion, \$15 billion would be earned. Oil and gas royalties in most of our better years were \$8 billion or \$9 billion. In a year like this year, when oil and gas royalties may be as low as \$3 billion or 3 and a half billion dollars, what I'm hearing, that interest instead could go into our general revenues and fund the services we need, whether it's health care or education.

Mr. Cooper: That's stability.

Mr. Barnes: That is stability. That kind of stability leads to diversification. That is the lost opportunity of the 44-year PC government.

I want to tell this government, though, that to diversify the economy, you need more than that. You need low, competitive tax rates. It's an international world. Our companies have to compete with American states and jurisdictions around the world. Low, competitive tax rates bring business, attract capital.

We need minimal bureaucracy. Your government is inheriting a government that consistently was given a D or a D minus by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business for not reducing red tape and bureaucracy in Alberta. I ask that you please address that.

We need stable utility rates, another area of PC failure. Property rights: we need strong property rights to bring certainty and to lead to investment. Again, I ask your government to put this high on your list.

How should we handle increasing the fund? Well, a lot of constituents in Cypress-Medicine Hat think that the number should be around \$100 billion, \$110 billion, the idea being that when the fund can earn 7 or 7 and three-quarters per cent, that generates the \$8 billion or \$9 billion that we put every year into our budget, from what we earn from royalties now, to provide the stability.

How do we get there? The Wildrose members' policy I think is a good way forward and is based on that principle. Let's build the fund to where the interest earned equals what we would make from oil and gas royalties annually to build the stability that we need for our children, our seniors, our social programs. The idea of the 50 per cent of surplus: let's get back to a situation where spending is under control, where the royalties are a real opportunity, and the idea behind putting 50 per cent into surplus will build that fund accordingly but leave the other 50 per cent for what would obviously be growing and increasing needs. If we're having a surplus, no doubt it's a time of high economic business activity, and that would lead to municipalities in other parts of the province having other needs as well, so the other 50 per cent could be used for that.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Let's talk about the spending. As other members have said, on a per capita basis Alberta spent almost \$12,000 per year per person under the last government. The Canadian average for a province is more like \$9,600, \$9,800. That \$2,000 per year per Albertan leads to \$8 billion a year in additional spending, more than if we had just spent the Canadian provincial average. To the new government: please look at bureaucracy, look at corporate cronyism, and look everywhere where our hard-earned tax dollars aren't getting citizens the value that we need.

The Fraser Institute put out a report, authored by Mark Milke, showing that our last government over the last 10 years had spent

54 per cent more on operations and programs than population growth and inflation warranted. Over the last 10 years it's \$41 billion in additional spending that, again, I'm sure, has gone to high-level bureaucracy and areas that aren't enhancing our front-line services, our education, our health care. Please look there, too.

4:30

In summary, I absolutely support the idea of taking some of our valuable resource of undeveloped oil and gas, conventional oil and oil sands, and building up a fund that will shield us against downturns, that may help with diversity and diversification if we do some of the other right things.

At this point in time, though, I absolutely believe that borrowing to invest is not the way forward. Our sister province of Ontario is a prime example. I don't know the exact numbers, but I remember reading a short time ago: \$300 billion in debt, interest annually of over \$11 billion. I was shocked when I read that that's more than they spend annually on their advanced education and their job training. Can you imagine a government that spends more than all their universities and their job training and they spend that on interest? That's not where I want to leave this province for the next generation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I'm pleased to rise. I've actually enjoyed and appreciated the comments on both sides of the House with respect to this bill. It's a very important question, and I'm glad that the hon. member has raised it because I think it's certainly worthy of debate.

The question has been raised, though, about the timing. I also am curious about the timing because the previous government had made decisions with respect to the heritage trust fund. It was their idea. It is probably the single most important legacy of the previous government and one of which they should be very proud, in my view. The question, however, is why a bill that would require that a certain fixed amount of royalty revenue, nonrenewable revenue, be put into the fund comes now. This had previously been the policy of that government back in the day of Peter Lougheed, and that was at a time when the heritage trust fund did increase steadily in value. It's true that at that time there were also investments in infrastructure that were made. I don't think that that has been the case for some time. The question, then: why reintroduce that at this point?

Decisions were made to take out the earnings of the fund and put it into general revenues so that the fund didn't grow. There were related decisions that were made as well with respect to royalties. Under the Lougheed government they set a goal for realizing the value for the owners, which are, of course, the people of Alberta, of these resources. The goal was set that 30 per cent of the total value of those resources should come to the people of Alberta, who own the resources. They actually accomplished that goal and, in fact, exceeded it in some years.

But in subsequent governments, notably after the election of Mr. Klein, a decision was made to reduce the take on royalties very substantially, to the point where the take that we now get in terms of the royalties from gas and oil is about 9 per cent of the value. Mr. Speaker, that's actually lower than under Social Credit, which accomplished a level of 10 per cent of the value of the royalty revenue coming to the people of Alberta. So that was a decision also that affected the growth of this fund because it substantially reduced the amount of revenues coming from that source that could be invested in the fund, so the fund atrophied. It failed to grow, and it actually shrunk against inflation.

So why now? I sense that there is a tinge of regret. I think there is a sense that the government has missed an opportunity, and they realize that the time when they could have done the right thing by the fund, followed the course set out by Peter Lougheed, has passed, maybe not anticipating the change in government but a change in values of resources that made it more difficult to grow the fund. I recognize it was part of their platform, but I sense a feeling of a missed opportunity in this bill.

Now, I also recognize that the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat has made an excellent point, that had we retained the earnings of the fund and allowed the compound to grow, we would be now receiving over \$30 billion a year in revenue from the fund, which could have easily offset the drop in royalty revenues which we are now experiencing. So the opportunity was lost to turn this into – I'm looking for the right word – a fiscal balance, a fiscal stabilizer, to stabilize the revenues that the province received. Talking about the royalty roller coaster came, I think, far too late on the part of the previous government.

Let me get to the point, though, about the bill and why I can't support it, and that is because the bill requires that 25 per cent of nonrenewable resource revenue be directed unless operational revenue is expected to exceed operational expense – in other words, we're in an operational surplus position – and then 50 per cent. This easily could move the province's finances into a deficit; hence, the argument that it would mandate automatic borrowing on the part of the government. So it's too specific, particularly to deal with our present circumstances. It is tying the hands of the Assembly, not just the government but also of the Assembly, with respect to the budget that we can bring forward.

We certainly accept and believe that we should grow the savings of this province. We need to make sure that we have full value or fair value for the resources that we all own together in order to accomplish that and that the tax structure enables us to spend for our programs that are delivered by the government so that royalty revenue can in fact be invested in savings, as I think all sides of the House agree. But until we accomplish those balances and reach those levels, it will be very difficult to mandate 25 per cent of royalty revenue and in a surplus year 50 per cent of royalty revenue being invested in this fund. I think that that is far too restrictive in terms of what the Assembly can do, particularly given the circumstances that we're in now, with being handed a significant deficit to deal with and low prices for our commodities at the present time.

On that basis, Mr. Speaker, I would urge all members of the House to defeat Bill 201, and perhaps a different, more flexible approach can be considered by the government to be brought forward at a future time.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the opportunity to speak on this. Personally I agree in principle with Bill 201 with a few changes that we must implement before it goes further. Before we can start saving, we have a mess to clean up and we have a budget to balance and debt to pay off. The words "Alberta heritage savings trust fund" – unfortunately, over the last three decades we've lost our savings and we've lost our trust in government, resulting in the changes that we saw on May 5.

In 1995 the government asked Albertans about the future of the heritage trust fund in a survey called Can We Interest You in an \$11 billion Decision. Of the over 50,000 responses Albertans said to keep the fund for future generations and focus on generating better returns on long-term investments. The Alberta Heritage Savings

Trust Fund Act was amended to reflect the changes Albertans asked for in the survey results. Since that point we've frittered away close to \$30 billion out of that fund. Following the results from the 1995 survey, the heritage fund was restructured. The fund can no longer be used by government for direct economic development or social investment purposes. That was in 1997.

4:40

The state of our fund compared to 25 of the top oil-producing countries in the world: we currently sit at 23 out of 25 countries. Some of the investment savings plans in other countries: number 21, whom we are behind, was started in 2000. It's now worth \$18 billion, and that's the Iraq development fund. It's been at war pretty much the whole time since 2000. The U.S. Alaska permanent fund started in 1976, and they have been paying out dividends to their residents. It's sitting at \$51.7 billion. I think you can see the pattern here, that we had an opportunity, we squandered it, and now we're asked to commit 25 per cent of all of our revenue from oil and gas without paying down debt first. Just another one that we fall behind: Libya, another country that's been at war on and off for many years. They started their fund in 2006. It's now worth \$66 billion.

Many years ago I was advised by a very successful man that the most prudent financial plan – and I agree with my colleague – was to put away any excess money that you got. He said that even if you got \$100 at Christmas from grandma, put it against your mortgage rather than putting it into savings or into some other investment that may lose money. It's simple math of reducing principal on a loan rather than carrying the interest. He said that I would have more money to save when my mortgage was paid off, and he was absolutely right. It was a very successful strategy. I would suggest that paying down our debt and reducing our deficit by controlling excessive spending is the most prudent path forward. Once we have spending under control and have a balanced budget, only then can we look at adding to our savings, which I agree is very important for Albertans now and in the future. At that point I'd suggest that we follow the plan that the Wildrose has put forward of paying 50 per cent of all surplus into the heritage savings trust fund and also 10 per cent into the MSI fund to give stability to our municipalities.

More important at this juncture is that we use this bill to protect the existing Alberta heritage trust fund from further exploitation by this or any future government. I think that's we have to do, use this bill to protect the fund from any future stealing of its revenue or interest.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Are there any other members that wish to speak to the bill? The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, second reading is really about the principle of the bill. I don't think anybody in the House would quibble with the need to save in this wealthy province, that we have inherited with tremendous resource wealth, and a need to move beyond a nonrenewable economy, that once gone is gone forever. It doesn't pass without some irony that four weeks after this Conservative government was unelected, they suddenly are talking about savings. Well, where have they been for the last 30 years, I guess, is the question. Not only the most thoughtful and well-respected economists on the planet have been saying this for years; Albertans have been saying it for years.

Finally, I think we're going to get a government that, I hope, is going to see the merit of saving where we have the opportunity. I can't agree more with the hon. member that we do need savings. At this time of tremendous instability one could argue about the principle of saving and forcing governments to save. It's obviously

on a very pragmatic and practical level very difficult at this time to commit to actually borrowing for essential services, at a time when our economy looks like it's going to be in difficult times for at least the foreseeable future, a year maybe or maybe a year and a half. We all hope, I'm sure, that it will come back.

But the previous government was living on a wing and a prayer. Each annual report and each budget said that they were planning to save once things got better, and somehow things never got better enough to save even any of the surpluses that we had. So it's a very difficult thing to deny that we must save our nonrenewable resource wealth. I mean, it's just so basic.

The unfortunate timing of this is not beyond us. We have some critical infrastructure. We have some critical public services: education, health care, supports for families at risk. We cannot compromise that. To force a government to go into debt to honour a piece of legislation that forces them to save at a time like this raises some serious questions, and I guess we'll have to debate those both at this time and in the committee.

But perhaps the hon. member is open to some amendments and some suggestions for modifying the bill in some ways that would make it more palatable, so that we actually place a high priority on saving whenever it's feasible and then start to move toward a commitment, especially when there's surplus, to a percentage saving and lock that in, I guess, in legislation so that we don't give this government, as we did the last, the option to spend it or spend even the interest on this nonrenewable resource wealth, which has been done for years, and leaving it actually depleted – significantly depleted – compared to what it was even at the time of former Premier Peter Lougheed, which is a travesty to our children, to our future, to opportunities to provide that important buffer for the future.

I'm sure others have commented on the not dissimilar decisions that have been made in Norway, where they made a legislated commitment to saving. With the high taxes, of course, there they're able to follow through on that for the most part and draw down only on the savings when they are in a deficit position and require it for public services. There's some real wisdom, real leadership in that. Incidentally, for those of you who may not know, Norway brought in a carbon tax in 1991, and they haven't suffered greatly from providing that kind of incentive for the environment and for a reduced carbon-intensive economy. So they're sending the messages that I think most people on the planet want to send: save when we can; invest in alternative energy; put on a levy on the carbon that is going to increasingly cost us hugely in extreme weather events and health problems and food production and water management. These are really important times to be thinking about the kind of example that Norway has set even if we can't follow it to the letter that they have followed it.

So in principle – I absolutely support the principle of savings. It's difficult at this time to require a government to be forced to save at a time of tremendous economic uncertainty and with critical services that are now recognized, I think, to be about 20 per cent lower than the rest of Canada on a per capita basis, human services about 20 per cent less than the average per capita spending in Canada. We are behind. We are behind, folks. That's according to Kevin Taft's book *Follow the Money*, and that was completed in 2011 or '12, so certainly there might be some changes since then, but we have some catch-up to do. I know in my community about the number of homeless, the number of people without affordable housing, the number with addictions problems that aren't getting addressed, mental health issues, children at risk. We cannot keep going like this, I don't think, and we certainly could be forcing a government to go into debt to expand services in human services where they're needed.

So while I agree in principle, I doubt that I will be able to support this in practice. Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Would the hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View like to speak? Proceed.

4:50

Mrs. Aheer: As a private member I would like to say that I support the intent of this bill. I think that the government talks about how there was an ask for change, how Albertans looked and are looking for a change. Change doesn't mean that it has to be the complete opposite. It means that you can embrace an idea that is good at its core and look at it for what it is and make it your own. That's the purpose. It doesn't mean that you have to be opposed to that bill.

For example, in its intent, the borrow-not-to-save idea is a good idea. It's good public policy. It looks like we care about what is happening with Albertans' money, that we care about saving, that we care about a legacy, that we care about our children, that we care about our grandchildren, that we care about seniors, that we care about health care, and that we care about education. These are all things that putting your money into a savings plan mean to people. It means a lot in our own families when we do that, and it means something to Albertans that when their tax dollars come to this government, they are being put somewhere where they can physically see and understand the growth of their money.

Fifty per cent of revenue from nonrenewable sectors is a good idea. It's good public policy. It is money that can only be used with the eyes of Albertans on you, and it puts all of us into a position to be accountable and transparent. Those are words that I, personally, keep hearing over and over again: transparency, accountability, integrity. Well, we need to put some real numbers and some real ideas into that.

Transparency means putting your money into something where everyday Albertans can see it growing, where they have the pride and the knowledge that going forward the government is caring about what happens to their dollars. The heritage fund is the epitome of what that means. It means that we're looking into the future of the province. It means that we're going to stabilize a sector that's unstable and make it so that that money can be there for the future. The intent of the bill is correct. It is good public policy.

I would also like to reiterate what the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat had talked about. That number, \$200 billion, is a monster number, and it's a fabulous number if you think about what the future could hold if we actually did that. Wouldn't that be amazing? If you can think about it as you go forward in deciding, this is a private member's bill. You can vote on this; we can all vote on this independently, independently of how we feel we should move forward in Alberta. That means more than anything. It means that conscientiously we're making decisions individually on behalf of our constituents, on their future, to what happens with their dollars. Imagine \$200 billion. What could we do with that money?

Now, granted, as the third party members have said, the money had been used and spent on things that we've all benefited from in this province. So if we want to continue benefiting the people in the province, which is what I hear over and over again about services and ideas and things that this government wants to bring to the people, that money has to come from somewhere. If we want Albertans to understand where their dollars are going, they need to go into a fund that has transparency, that has accountability.

It's a nonpartisan idea. It's a decision that can help us create a legacy, something that all of us can participate in. It's just an amazing idea. It's amazing to be part of something that incredible, that we can all put our stamp on.

Significant opportunities have been missed to reinvest, and the resources are limited, but they need to bear fruit in the future. They need to have a future where whatever is available to us right now produces something for later, where it's not just gone on a whim and on an idea, which has happened in the past. We can't make ideas based on whims. We need to invest in the future.

We can talk about the formula. Well, the formula within the heritage trust fund is what actually keeps us accountable. We have to be able to show Albertans what that formula means and how that comes forward. Again, what is the government talking about? Transparency, accountability. That will keep us transparent and accountable to Albertans.

Pride comes from having done a great job. It comes from knowing the legacy, how it grows, and how it will continue. Pride comes from acknowledging that we've learned from our mistakes and that we can learn to pay it forward and not spend with no conscience. Spending isn't the answer; saving is actually the answer. We do not have a revenue problem. We have a management issue. So let's show how we're going to manage. If we're going to spend, let's spend appropriately. Let's show them how we're going to spend. That is our responsibility. The idea is good, and together we can make the plan fabulous.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there any other speakers who would wish to speak on Bill 201? I recognize the member.

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak against Bill 201.

An Hon. Member: Aw.

Ms Babcock: I know.

With respect to the Member for Calgary-South East, a piece of legislation that requires this government and all governments in the future to set aside 25 per cent of resources into the heritage trust fund is not fiscally prudent. It is, with the uncertain fiscal climate we face today, premature and the opposite of forward thinking. Due to the economic policies of the previous government our province is currently in a deficit, and though it is incredibly important to save, there was little to no saving recently when there was extra to put away. The history of the heritage trust fund is important, and it is important to acknowledge the past mistakes with the trusts that have been given to us as elected members as well as some few successes.

But it becomes our duty, then, to act prudently as hindsight is 20/20. Under our current economic environment it would be financially irresponsible of the government to commit such a large sum of its revenue. Per the fiscal operating plan it would be, if it were to be instituted this year, \$2.3 billion for 2014-15, \$2.5 billion for 2015-16, and \$2.675 billion for the 2016-17 year, in which it was proposed to come into effect. Given the state of our infrastructure, hospitals, and schools that the previous government has left in such a state of disarray, a drastic commitment would severely limit the new government's ability to make prudent fiscal decisions.

These are also investments in Alberta's future, and when the government tables their own budget, it will ensure that Albertans get the best value for their tax dollar, and that will mean a balance between present challenges and future investments. This government has brought forth opportunities to invest meaningfully in the future of our province through restoring funding to important services such as education, advanced education, health care, and human services as well as physical infrastructure. These investments in the future of our province are tangible, and this government is committed to return fairness to the tax system by asking the most successful among us to pay a little bit more.

Given the uncertainty in our economy and the fact that this government has yet to table our own budget, it would be financially imprudent and careless of this government to support such a bill before the government can calculate its own financial metrics so that we can understand Alberta's liquidity, debt service obligations, revenues and expenses, and commitments free of the previous bias and rhetoric. This will help provide stability and the ability to stop depending upon the boom-and-bust cycle.

Bill 201 is not what we have been asked to do by Albertans. As a government there must be a complete royalty review so we can act responsibly with the scant public resources at our disposal currently, and when this downturn is turned around by the current government, we must be careful not to repeat the past and be more careful with our . . .

The Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. Member for Stony Plain, but the time for consideration of this item has concluded.

5:00 Motions Other than Government Motions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Surface Rights Legislation Review

501. Mr. Hinkley moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to conduct a review of existing legislation related to surface rights and work to ensure landowners' rights to fair compensation and due process are respected.

Mr. Hinkley: Mr. Speaker, thank you for this opportunity to speak to the Assembly. I am excited and delighted to be so fortunate to have the luck of the draw, 1 out of 87. This provides me the opportunity to speak and provide the first private member's motion of this session.

In pondering this issue, to commemorate this historical and personally unprecedented experience, many extremely important and very relevant topics have come to my mind. They have come from my constituents of Wetaskiwin, Camrose, Maskwacis, Millet, Gwynne, and Bittern Lake, but they concern all Albertans. Should I choose a topic and should I recommend that the government take action on Inspiring Education, postsecondary education, an Alberta inquiry into missing and murdered aboriginal women, recognize indigenous rights, initiate renewable green energy alternatives, child poverty in Alberta, electrical transmission and distribution fees, health care issues, the heritage savings trust fund, tackle seniors' issues, or rural economic diversification? So many topics. My list of important and relevant items grew and grew. No wonder the people of Alberta wanted a change of government.

During and since the election I received messages from individuals in Ponoka, Rimbey, Pigeon Lake, Battle Lake, Mulhurst, Westeros, Warburg, Devon, Ferintosh, Forestburg, New Norway, Stettler, Didsbury, Innisfail, and countless rural areas in between those cities and towns, but one recurring issue occurred over and over. Mr. Speaker, this issue forms the basis of my private member's motion.

As a rural property owner and an MLA in a government which is overwhelmingly urban, it is incumbent upon me to bring this issue to the attention of this Assembly, to right the wrongs done by previous legislation to diminish landowners' basic rights and the democratic process. I and my fellow MLAs have listened and heard the concerns of Albertans. It is now time for us to take informed, positive action to rectify past legislative errors. Legislative policy committees review all bills referred to them. I hope they will take just as seriously this motion.

Surface rights and property rights are a complex issue. Sometimes they are interchanged but definitely could be separate topics. Merely reviewing this legislation will not resolve the concerns unless action is taken. It is, however, a significant and mighty step to addressing some long-standing, serious grievances. At stake are issues of democracy. This issue is not only about social democracy but also about responsible environmental stewardship. The feelings and frustrations that property owners have as a result of government legislation allowing private companies to come onto their land, extract the resource, and leave once they have depleted the resource, with no responsibility to return their property to its previous pristine condition, with no recourse to seek compensation for their grievance, leaves rural Albertans feeling disenfranchised, unheard, and very angry about no opportunity to appeal during the process or of legal appeal later.

It is unfortunate that rural Albertans have been pitted against corporate Alberta, especially when corporate Alberta profits from extraction of nonrenewable resources, leaving landowners with the residue of polluted air, contaminated water, and toxic soils. The unconfirmed number of conflicts between landowners and oil companies around compensation, inconvenience payments, hydraulic fracturing, and abandoned and orphaned wells is growing.

Some examples from my constituency and nearby. One involves farmers near the Westrose district raising personal health and safety concerns due to blowouts. Another example pertains to the disposal of dry sorbent injection by-product, which is a toxic substance, into the ground and potentially affecting local aquifers. The company denies that the substance is toxic and will affect the watershed.

Another example from Battle Lake, beautiful Battle Lake, just west of Wetaskiwin, is the headwater to the Battle River that flows into the Saskatchewan River. An oil company is seeking to drill three deep wells around the lake then go horizontally under the lake in order to frac to extract the resource. There has been no consultation process with the local landowners and none with the First Nations of Maskwacis. Petrochemical engineers have done studies and produced papers outlining the dangers of drilling under this lake or any lake, for that matter.

A more famous conflict includes the well water on fire in Rosebud and the subsequent struggles of that landowner. There are countless other conflicts which both the Warburg and the Camrose surface rights associations could provide you, so I'll go on.

Tied into these issues are farmers' concerns about the effectiveness of the Farmers' Advocate and further concerns about the effectiveness of the Property Rights Advocate to adequately represent them. Also, there are issues with the Surface Rights Board over the right of entry; about contracts between landowners and oil companies, which were not respected; about oil companies hydraulically fracturing in a watershed against a landowner's will or the surrounding community's will. There have been debates about third-party mediation: could or should it be done by the Surface Rights Board or by another body? The legislation is unclear.

The legislation I would like reviewed but not exclusive to these three are Bill 2, which has become the energy act of 2013 and which, like all of the acts, is lengthy with multiple clauses that have extinguished a landowner's statutory right to a hearing when the government approves energy projects on private land.

Bill 24 and the surface rights acts from 2007, 2011, and 2014 determined how oil companies could come on farmland. It established the law that transfers ownership of every inch of pore space in the province from the landowners to the government – that's in section 36, dealing with compensation – it made it illegal for a landowner to sue the government in a court, and it limited a landowner's ability to appeal to the Alberta Energy Regulator,

which in itself is another major issue. I want to quote that in 2008 there were over 8,000-plus wells fracked in Alberta. In 2013 another 1,500 fracking licences were given out. In 2014 3,395 wells in Alberta were fracked. There are concerns about the nondisclosure agreements for fracked property. The need for more inspections and more enforcement of existing rules is creating further conflicts.

The third bill I would like looked at is called the Alberta Land Stewardship Act of 2010. Now, it also has information about dairy quotas, water licences, and confined feeding operations, which may be good, but more specific to my motion's concern is that that act took away a landowner's right to compensation, giving enormous powers to oil or energy companies, that they could decide if any compensation would be given to the landowners and how much compensation there would be. The Alberta Land Stewardship Act prevails over other acts, including the Expropriation Act and the carbon capture act. This is another reason why we need to review the legislation, because some legislation prevails over other legislation. Should that be the case?

To end this presentation, I just want to reiterate that during the election campaign forums, questions from individuals, letters to editors, e-mails, and property rights group meetings all highlighted the need for full legislation review. I am encouraging all members to support this motion to show that we have listened to our constituents, we are serious about their concerns, and we do indeed support democratic practices and responsible environmentalism.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The chair recognizes the Member for Calgary-Elbow.

5:10

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in support of this motion as I believe that with expropriation of land it's very important that landowners are treated with a great deal of respect. Whenever we're dealing with private property and government, there's an inherent imbalance in power. As we've seen with recently passed bills in previous Legislatures – Bill 2, Bill 36, Bill 50 – the balance has shifted the wrong way. Landowners must be not only fairly compensated, but a complete review is necessary of the impacts of bills 2, 36, 50. Certainly, I believe we need to revisit significant sections of each. New legislation needs to be brought in that genuinely protects landowners and their rights.

Now, as a significant proportion of Alberta's population lives in urban areas, this has created competition between different land uses. The trend continues, but we must never forget and never lose sight of the fact that Albertans from all around the province, rural or urban, demand fairness.

The Alberta Land Stewardship Act, formerly Bill 36, authorizes cabinet to adopt regional plans that legally bind land-use authority on private land. This may restrict a landowner's rights to use or develop land, and landowners cannot expect compensation if reasonable private use of property is left only to the owner. Bill 36 shifted that control and the emphasis from municipalities into the hands of cabinet in centralizing it. In an information bulletin about the Alberta Land Stewardship Act the provincial government explained the relationship the locally elected governments will have with these planners. The document says that ALSA managers will set out their plan for each region.

Again, the centralization of power and control is something that is of great concern to me and, as we've heard and we know, I think a great concern to many people both in this Chamber and certainly to the people of Alberta. When landowners have their land taken away for public purposes, compensation is normally given, but

when the government does not acquire the land but simply uses it, rarely is compensation given, or, if it is, it's not appropriate even where there's drastic loss of value.

There should also be clarification of subsurface ownership rights. The previous government amended several pieces of legislation, but the uncertainty continues over subsurface resource rights, natural gas storage, coal-bed methane, and pore space, as mentioned by the hon. member. The previous government did remove some people's claims to certain subsurface resources.

My concern remains, Mr. Speaker, with the imbalance in power between the government and landowners, and I sincerely hope that by passing this motion, we take the first step towards addressing that imbalance. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to debate Motion 501, a critical piece of the proceedings today. I'd like to thank the MLA for Wetaskiwin-Camrose for his efforts in bringing this important issue to the Assembly's attention. As the Official Opposition's primary individual responsible for property rights as well as a representative of a constituency with a keen interest in reinstating property rights I am pleased for this opportunity to address Motion 501 today.

I also feel that it's very critically important to point out that when we are addressing property rights, we are speaking about much more than just rural landowner rights. We're talking about more than surface rights. Rather, we are speaking about all Albertans' basic right to own and use property. That includes both urban and rural. Property rights are among our most fundamental rights, part of the foundation upon which our entire society is constructed.

Sadly, over the past number of years we have seen the previous government seemingly willing to trample on these rights by taking a ham-fisted approach to major infrastructure and planning initiatives, particularly when it came to power lines in this province. Under the previous government steps were taken to concentrate power in the hands of cabinet and limit Albertans' right to compensation, remove judicial recourse, and generally strip any semblance of fairness within our system.

These devastating changes were most immediately noticed and widely rejected by those rural Albertans who depend on the use of the land for their very livelihood. However, the previous government continued to ignore these citizens, and when they conducted consultations, it seemed that they had predetermined outcomes, and it became clear that the attack on basic property rights and the attack on rural Albertans were in full force.

Let me give you an example. Under Bill 36 the previous government – in fact, this challenge still remains today – provided cabinet the ability to rescind licences, oil leases, development rights, grazing leases, timber agreements, gravel approvals, and even livestock permits, all at the stroke of the cabinet pen.

Now, if you're a farmer and you operate a dairy, as my good friend from Drumheller-Stettler likes to point out from time to time, and the provincial cabinet chooses to revoke the water licence that's so critically important to your property, what good are your property rights if they can single-handedly revoke the licences that have been assigned to that property? By the same measure, if you're an urban entrepreneur who suddenly has a business licence rescinded, what good is the property in which you operate that business if the cabinet has the ability to do that as well?

Concerns about Bill 36 as well as bills 19, 24, 50 were repeatedly brought to the attention of the previous government, only to have many of those concerns rejected out of hand. Now, I will give credit where credit is due. The previous government, prior to its timely

demise, did take some necessary steps to repeal some of the legislation that they had put in place, but there is still much more work to be done. The public quickly recognized that the previous government's reviews of much of this legislation were orchestrated public relations events and, in fact, did not complete the full breadth of the review that needed to take place.

Today I rise to fully support the spirit of Motion 501. At the same time, I must point out a number of major concerns. The motion as it's currently worded is far too limited. It calls on this Assembly to urge the government "to conduct a review of existing legislation related to surface rights and work to ensure landowners' rights to fair compensation and due process are respected."

Let's be clear. The wording of this motion is unnecessarily limited and would potentially limit the scope of such review. At the same time, it does not specifically mention who would conduct a review. Simply handing this file off to the bureaucrats, many of whom got us into this mess, is not an option. It would be a short-sighted approach, only to further undermine the confidence of our institutions.

Rather, I would recommend that this Assembly conduct a full and public review of all legislation pertaining to Albertans' property rights. In fact, the public will not accept another property rights review whitewash, only to be done at the hands of the internal government workings. A full public and open review is exactly what is required. To this end, I would suggest that an all-party committee be established specifically to review current legislation, to seek expert testimony, and to provide specific recommendations, including legislative amendments, many of which my hon. colleague from Livingstone-Macleod will be speaking about, I would imagine.

Further, I would recommend that this committee of MLAs be empowered to seek the input of Albertans in both rural and urban communities at a series of public forums that will take place across the province, with a firm deadline to report back to this Legislature.

5:20

Finally, I would recommend that this committee be comprised of seven government MLAs and seven opposition MLAs because property rights is much more than a partisan issue. It is an issue that is at the very core of Alberta, and we ought not be scoring political points when it comes to something as important as property rights. I firmly believe that through such a process we can turn the page on the previous government's woeful record on property rights as we begin to rebuild the trust between government and all Albertans.

Well, there are many things that the previous government has done that I don't agree with. It's time that we turn the page. It's time that we move forward and look forward, stop blaming them for the past, and do what we can do to make Alberta better. That is exactly what we have the opportunity to do in the 29th Legislature, to put Albertans first, to make property rights, the very foundation which our province has been built on, a priority for all landowners, urban and rural.

There will be some significant differences between the new government and the Official Opposition, but I believe that much common ground can be found when it comes to reviewing and reinstating property rights for Albertans. We can bring back a sense of fairness to all Albertans and re-establish the trust that's so critically important when it comes to building the foundation of Alberta. Continually we must remind ourselves that it is Albertans, property owners, that make Alberta great, not this government or any government. It is Albertans.

I encourage members of the Assembly to support the motion, a motion that has the opportunity to do a meaningful review, and I thank the member for bringing it forward.

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

Mr. Stier: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't have as well prepared a presentation as the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, but I'd just basically like to touch on a few points if I could in relation to this topic. It's one that our party and a lot of our members have been working on for many years.

First of all, I'd like to thank the Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose for bringing this forward. We did have a quick little conference the other day just to talk about things in general, and I realized that the wording of the motion was perhaps a little bit misleading in that it was a little bit vague. We talked a little bit about trying to understand where he was coming from. Today he provided great clarification, I think, and suggested many of the things that I suspected were in the motion.

It basically says:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to conduct a review of existing legislation related to surface rights and work to ensure landowners' rights to fair compensation and due process are respected.

To me, I think that leaves one to imagine that the writer of that motion, which the member obviously was, was also thinking about some of the things that were mentioned in the presentation he made and also in the presentations that were made by Calgary-Elbow and also by our Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. I'd like to touch on a few of those if I could.

I'm going to be talking a little bit about the previous opinions that have been made over the past few years here in this House regarding some of these bills. I'd like to talk a little bit first of all about surface rights, which have been mentioned here initially in the motion and talked about already so well. I'd like to also talk, as others did, on Bill 36, better known as ALSA, which is the Alberta Land Stewardship Act, and also touch on Bill 2, the Responsible Energy Development Act, where there are some issues that we dealt with a couple of years ago that are still a problem today.

As well, I think someone mentioned in the House Bill 24, which has to do with the pore spaces underneath our properties and how the government launched and passed a bill that suddenly took that property away from us.

Lastly, I'd like to talk a little bit about what we think is a great initiative at the end, and that would be to pass an Alberta property rights preservation bill so that from here going forward, property owners could have some guarantee that their property rights are protected.

Let's talk a little bit about property rights in general. We've talked about how property rights are basically the foundation of landowners' financial security and prosperity, but landowners need to know that their investment in their land and their livelihood is protected and that, therefore, there is some sort of sustainable and predictable way of doing business. They cannot afford, nor would anyone want to be involved in, a situation where their land could be devalued or their operations could be put into question by others, including government.

If that is the case and if government is going to come in, there should and has to be proper compensation. Yet the former PC government passed several bills related to surface rights and property rights in general that have compromised that very thing: the property rights of people, the landowners' rights to proper notification, to fair compensation, to appeals, and, finally, to appeal to the court if necessary. These things are fundamental in today's society, yet the previous government took all of that away with the passage of these bills.

We have called for a review of property and surface rights legislation before, since our inception, both prior to us being elected

in 2012 and throughout the period from '09 to '11, when some of these bad bills were put through. We believe that this motion is a fairly good place to start, and we're so happy and recognize that the government in power today has made on numerous occasions many statements regarding these bad bills. I referred to this in question period today – and I think we used the word “draconian” in those words that I talked about today – and also that some of the members over there that were here in that time, including the Government House Leader, referred to some of these bills as bad legislation and stupid legislation. I think this is a great idea, to go back in and start looking at this now and look at how we can protect landowners' rights to all of these things and ensure that compensation and an appeal process are there for them if and when necessary.

Let's just talk a little bit about, first of all, then, property rights and surface rights. I think it's important for people to understand that surface rights have a lot to do with the right of an oil and gas exploration and development company to go in and get access to land for the purpose of developing their resources, but at the same time we also have to involve property rights for the landowners. Most of all and most importantly, we have to guarantee that the landowners' rights, when these kinds of disturbances occur, are protected, that compensation is paid to them for the lease of that land, whether it's owned or it is leased by them as part of their major operation, and we have to ensure that reclamation and all the environmental concerns are properly looked after.

The Surface Rights Act now has a problem. Section 36 of that act, which is regarding compensation, has a bit of a loophole. We need to look at that very carefully, and we need to ensure that when a company goes bankrupt, there is some way that these landowners are properly compensated and that they continue to receive their fees and their lease payments no matter what happens. Right now that is not guaranteed in that act. I would urge the government, if you're going to do this review, to look into that matter specifically.

I'd like to mention now, too, with respect to Bill 36, which is the Alberta Land Stewardship Act, which was mentioned earlier, that there are actually several sections of that act that we believe need strong attention as soon as possible. I'll mention a few of these today, and I hope some of you or one of you is taking some notes on this because this is important.

Section 11 in the Alberta Land Stewardship Act talks about the regional plans, where they can rescind existing rights, including development rights, resource extraction rights, mining rights, water licences, grazing leases and dispositions, and approvals and permits. We need to get that thing out of there. It's a bad section.

Similarly, section 19 talks about a restricted right to compensation regarding water licences, grazing leases, and so on being amended or rescinded. Again, we need to get that out of there.

Section 13: no right to the courts unless the cabinet allows it. That's just an insult to democracy.

Section 15: that it is binding on all municipalities and all Albertans without question.

Section 15(3): no right to make claims against the government.

Section 15(4): the role and authority of courts are restricted by this act.

Section 17: that this act trumps all other acts.

5:30

Truly, these sections need to be reviewed. They need to be repealed. I urge the government of today, who has spoken against this bill before, to carry on, to do what they have promised to do, and, now that they're in power, to please look at this in the most urgent manner and effect the changes that are necessary in Bill 36 like I've just outlined. That concludes Bill 36.

I'd like to move quickly, and I don't know how my time is going, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: You have about one minute.

Mr. Stier: Pardon?

The Speaker: About one minute.

Mr. Stier: Okay. Let's just get into Bill 2 very quickly, then, because I realize that I've taken longer than anticipated. Bill 2, the responsible energy act, stripped landowners of the right to independent arbitration and fair compensation. We need to put back into place what we had at the ERCB before they created the energy regulator. We need to put back the landowner rights under statute law so they can appeal the decisions to the court of appeal, to the highest court. We need to get that back, please. It's extremely important.

Bill 24 is when the government came along and said: we need a place to pump carbon, so we think that we should just take all the land underneath all of your properties and give it back to the Crown, and then we have the right to come onto your land and pump this stuff down below your home or your barn or your fields and any other properties you may have. This is a draconian act. This one, too, just like Bill 19, that was rescinded before, must be thrown out.

Lastly, the property rights initiative bill. I think that we would like to suggest to the government that it bring forward a property rights preservation bill. We'll work to assist you on that. We want to ensure that there's no private property being taken from a resident of Alberta by government without fair . . .

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

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose for bringing this forward. I will make my comments brief. Like the mover of this motion, my constituents have come to me with a great number of concerns, which they hope and in some cases expect will be addressed positively during the next four years and beyond.

For well over a year landowners' rights have been a pretty hot issue in Lethbridge as a piece of our community's action on another related issue. Before, during, and after the election I have been visited, e-mailed, or spoken to by a great number of my constituents, and they all expressed their concerns over this issue. There seemed to be an incredibly high number who spoke specifically of this concern. They have been very direct in demanding that we follow through on the government's platform commitment to strengthen landowners' rights, to fair compensation and due process in surface rights issues. There were concerns expressed, from protecting our environment and water to fair and equitable compensation when one's property is excised. All very legitimate concerns.

The establishment and completion of such a review and the implementation of all of its recommendations are essential to address the concerns of all Albertans. As a previous speaker said, we must explore all options to find the best possible outcome for surface rights within our province in the future. I have listened to my constituents and will continue to do so. Now I am speaking in favour of this motion and will continue to do so until this issue has been thoroughly addressed.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there any other members that would wish to speak to this motion?

Mr. Loewen: I'd like to speak to this motion, too. Property owners deserve fair and equitable compensation and processes to deal with the energy companies and government accessing and acquiring their property. It shouldn't matter whether you own 1,000 acres of land, an acreage, a house on a lot, or an apartment. There is a standard of duty of respect owed to a person who is in control of their property.

Wildrose has long advocated for property owners in Alberta. It's good to see the present government getting on board with this important issue. It's long overdue and shouldn't drag on. We need to move through this stage to the review and on to action as quickly as possible. We need to respect not only the landowners but the governments and energy companies that are affected by these regulations, not create instability or uncertainty in their business plans by dragging this process on.

My constituents have been concerned about this issue for years. Something needs to be done. Property rights are a basis of our democracy. It's alarming to see Bill 36, where cabinet can renege on leases and agreements. That's just not right. There are other sections that need to be removed. We need a full review of these bills, with full and open consultation with Albertans. We need to support this motion to begin this process. Property owners need to be able to appeal and appeal to the courts when they feel they have not been treated fairly. Again, we need to support this motion.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there other members that wish to speak to this motion?

Hearing none, I would call on the hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose to close debate.

Mr. Hinkley: Mr. Speaker, thank you again. Thank you to all of the hon. members for all of your comments and input. I see them as being very positive. It is an issue that goes beyond party politics. I appreciate that so many realized how important this motion is. Taking this first step, to review and understand what previous legislation has set out, is a good start to protecting property owners' surface rights. I know that we need to go further, but we always have to take the first step before we can run a marathon. This is it.

Social democracy requires that all stakeholders have a right to be consulted on topics pertaining to them. They should receive fair compensation when it is due, and they should have open, easy access to all avenues and agencies of appeal. It is our responsibility to ensure democracy for all, and it is extremely important that protection is provided to guarantee all Albertans fair, due process. By passing this motion, we take that giant step in respecting property owners' rights. This motion is very relevant because it gets to the heart of responsible stewardship of the land, which will be here long after many nonrenewable resources have been extracted. Therefore, I encourage all hon. members to vote in favour of this motion.

Thank you.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 501 carried]

The Speaker: Thank you, members.

The Assembly stands adjourned until 7:30.

I'm sorry. The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: I was going to make that motion, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:39 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday evening, June 22, 2015

Day 5

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

First Session

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Jabbour, Deborah C., Peace River (ND), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Feehan, Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (ND), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Anderson, Shaye, Leduc-Beaumont (ND)
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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Monday, June 22, 2015

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Please be seated.

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: I'll call the committee to order.

Bill 3 Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2015 (No. 2)

The Chair: Are you ready, hon. minister?

Mr. Ceci: I am. Thank you very much, Madam Chair. The Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2015 (No. 2): I'd like to ask for the support of my colleagues for this estimate. When passed, these interim supply estimates will authorize approximate spending of \$56 million for the Legislative Assembly, \$15.4 billion in expense funding, \$2 billion in capital investment funding, \$765 million for financial transactions funding for the government, and, finally, \$387 million for the transfer from the lottery fund to the general revenue fund.

The purpose of this supply bill is to ensure that the government has the spending authority to continue delivering a high level of services and programs to Albertans until the full budget is in place in the fall. That's five months' spending. In this interim supply bill we propose increased funding, to the tune of \$624 million, for core services that Albertans elected us to fix like health, education, postsecondary institutions, and protecting vulnerable populations. Reflected in this interim supply bill is funding to reverse cuts to health care and restoring stable, predictable funding for the vital public services that matter most to Albertan communities.

This interim supply bill will help to avoid cutting more than 1,500 nursing and health care positions by increasing funding to the Ministry of Health. This bill also reflects a commitment to the children and young people of Alberta. The increased funding to the Ministry of Education will fund regular operations, including school capital commitments, the teachers' agreement, and the commitment made by this government in May to reverse grant cuts and to fully fund enrolment. An investment in postsecondary education will mean an immediate tuition freeze at institutions across the province. Bill 3 would also roll back market modifier increases that were introduced in December 2014 for 25 programs across the province. Finally, increased funding to the Ministry of Human Services will strengthen services for children in care, ensuring that vulnerable families have the supports they need to lead successful lives in their communities.

Madam Chair, this interim supply bill will meet these commitments as well as allow the normal business of the province to continue until the full 2015-16 estimates are approved by this House in the fall. In the past few days some of my colleagues have expressed concern over the lack of detail in the bill. I can assure you that all of this will be addressed by our government as we will be putting forward a detailed budget this fall, which will include a line-by-line breakdown of where the funding will be allotted. Those budget documents will include comprehensive budget information in the form of the government's fiscal and business plans, the ministry

business plans, and the government estimates. These estimates will be debated when the budget documents are tabled in the fall.

Until then our government will ensure that government departments have the spending authority for five months and the funding to continue operating until the budget can be tabled. I urge all my colleagues on all sides of the House to support the bill.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Are there any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for . . .

Mr. Smith: Drayton Valley-Devon.

The Chair: Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Chair. We will get this eventually, won't we?

You know, I want to speak to the appropriation interim supply bill tonight. I'm not even sure that I can get my head around how big this bill really is. I mean, does anybody here really understand \$18.6 billion and then spending all that money for all of the government ministry areas? I'm told that it's the biggest supply bill in the history of Alberta. I guess congratulations are in order. You just outdid the PCs.

The problem with this bill is that it allows the government to spend huge amounts of money. I mean, as shadow minister of Education – in just my area, my portfolio of Education, it's allocating \$2.7 billion. Trust me; on a teacher's wage that's an incredible amount of money, okay? Two billion dollars for expenses, \$700 million for capital, and that's the total, sum detail that we've got for this. When I go to my constituents, when I go and talk to my stakeholders in education, they'd like a little more detail, and they'd like to know, have an indication of how that money is going to be spent. Where's that money going to come from? How are we going to be accountable for spending this money?

You've not addressed, even talked about the spending problem that the previous governments have had and, I'm beginning to believe, that you're going to have. You know, again, when I go back to my constituents, when I have to talk to the people that elected me, they're going to be asking me: "Well, you're in the Legislature. You're the one that's expected to hold the government accountable." When I get an interim supply appropriation bill like this, with so little detail in it, I just don't know how I can support it.

We know that the PC interim supply bill set aside \$65 million to accelerate 50 new schools and 70 modernizations for 2014-15. Were these completed, or were they part of this interim supply bill? Are you including them in it? I don't know. Forty-one point seven million dollars was budgeted under the PCs for 35 new schools and modernizations that had been delayed. Were these projects completed, or are they part of this interim supply bill? I can't tell you. I'm not even sure that you can tell me. At least, you haven't.

You're asking us in this House, on both sides, to approve a blank cheque, and I don't believe that that's in Alberta's best interests. Where will the money come from? We know that the PCs were going to have and campaigned on a \$5.7 billion deficit in their election budget. We know that Albertans didn't support that budget. We know that this government – well, at least, it's our best guess – is going to have a deficit of somewhere around \$7 billion this fiscal year. Well, we're not sure. Why do you think that Albertans will support a larger debt? When I campaigned, I didn't hear Albertans saying: let's dig ourselves a deeper hole. We haven't had any of those kinds of discussions, and before I can support this, I need to know where that money is going to come from.

I think that we have a bit of a spending problem. I thought it before the election, I thought it during the election, and I still think that we have a spending problem with this new government. We know that you can't tax your way to prosperity. It's never happened anywhere. Only when tax rates provide a real Alberta advantage will businesses be prosperous, and only when people have jobs and when the taxes are low will people spend and will governments be able to collect the taxes they need to run the government. My kids at high school understood this. I think that we understand this; at least, we should. Using deficits and debts rather than spending cuts to balance budgets is very unwise.

7:40

I don't think that too many of us here run our personal finances that way. I was a teacher. My wife stayed at home. We had three kids. We had to spend our money wisely. I've never owned a new car. I can remember having arguments with my two brothers, who make considerably more money than I do, saying: you know, it's not child abuse if my kids don't go to Hawaii. If they never see Mickey in person, they'll live. It's okay. We'll have a good time having vacations in one of the best places in the world. It's called Alberta. We'll do cross-country skiing instead of downhill skiing because we can't afford it, and they'll play basketball because they can't afford to play hockey perhaps.

We made the tough choices, and we made the tough decisions so that we balanced our budget. We don't have a big house. We've got a nice house. It needs a new roof if anybody wants to come and help me shingle it. I've had to learn how to work on my cars and my vehicles. I hate skinned knuckles, but I learned how to do it. YouTube is a wonderful thing. "Dad, figure it out. This is how you change the brakes." We made those decisions and those tough decisions so that my wife could stay home, so that my kids could play basketball, so that they would have the opportunity to go to university, so we could set the money aside. You see, in your personal finances that's what you do when you're responsible citizens.

Just because we got elected, I don't believe that we're not called to be responsible citizens any longer. We're called to be the most responsible citizens. We're charged with carrying out the finances of this province, so we have to be very careful when we decide to rack up deficits and when we decide to rack up debt. Debts and deficits are only a tax on the future and on the future generations. I always told my family: if we can't pay for it now, what makes you think we're going to be able to pay for it in the future?

In the long run debt and deficits take away your choices. I don't think there's anybody over here that's disagreeing with me. If you want freedom, you have to be fiscally responsible. If you want to take care of your children in the education system, you have to take care of the economy and your budget. If you want to have good health care services, you have to take care of the basics. Our motto. It's right there. Liber: freedom. Real freedom comes from when you can control your spending, and in the long run it makes it harder to provide the programs that all Albertans need if we don't do the job right here today.

That's why I was really hoping that when I looked at this interim supply bill, we would see more details. We'd be able to know where that money is going to be spent, where that money is going to come from. I don't think that those are unreasonable expectations being placed on us by the people of Alberta. I realize you're new; we're new. But we've got to get this right.

Thank you.

The Chair: Next on my list I have Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise in this Chamber to discuss this government's rather grandiose spending package bundled together into Bill 3, the interim supply act, or as I like to call it, the NDP's minibudget.

On May 5 I along with my colleagues in the Wildrose caucus were elected to this Legislature to ensure that the government does not receive a blank cheque on spending. I'm sure that the NDP also campaigned on this, yet with this minibudget the NDP is asking for just that. With so many questions and such little time to discuss them, this government is hiding in the shadows. To say, "Stay tuned," isn't good enough when communities need answers now. It is a shame that the NDP is attempting to limit the debate on this bill, a bill that cost a total of 18 billion of Alberta's tax dollars. When the amount of dollars is divided by the amount of time allocated to debate on this bill, only one mere minute is given for every \$83 million spent. That, Madam Chair, is beyond distasteful.

That is why I stand here today to demand on behalf of my constituents of Cardston-Taber-Warner and on behalf of all Albertans a full picture on the state of this province's finances. Albertans would like to know why this minibudget is being squeezed through the Legislature without a full debate session, why this bill is hardly being publicized, publicly discussed for all Albertans to hear. Questions of democratic and parliamentary due process surely arise.

Speaking of poor practices by members of the Alberta government, it is important to note that the will of Albertans is being denied. Many elites will tell you that this past election Albertans voted in a new government because they wanted change. Change. I ask you, Madam Chair: where is that change? This minibudget, which the government is set to pass, is the exact same budget that was passed by Premier Alison Redford and the PCs. Now, that was over three Premiers ago. Thankfully, however, Albertans have the Wildrose, the only party to stand up against these poor practices and the ideas of yesterday.

As to the question of fiscal transparency and clarity, why is this government hiding the true details of spending included in this bill? Albertans were first informed that this government intended to spend \$1.8 billion in net new spending. That number was then changed to \$775 million. Now we're being told that the new spending will only encompass \$624 million. Which is it, Madam Chair? Are Albertans not entitled to this information? More importantly, where is the money coming for this new spending?

Lastly, I would like to draw this Chamber's attention to the fact that no definitive timeline has been given yet with regard to a full budget. The implementation of a budget is the government's number one job for it sets the agenda on the government's priorities and the economic state of Alberta. Businesses look to the Legislature for guidance on the province's economic outlook. Families from Carway to Conklin and everywhere in between look to this Legislature for hope and prosperity as the budget details the economic reality that will directly affect their lives and their pocketbooks. Yet to this date the NDP have refused to inform this Chamber of when we can expect a full budget. This refusal to paint a picture as to when and where this government will take this province's economy is simply unacceptable.

I along with my colleagues on this side of the Chamber are willing and ready to help the government with implementing a timeline on the budget. We suggest that a full budget be presented to this Chamber in September. We've suggested this many times. I invite this government to accept our suggestion and provide a budget in September so that families, communities, and businesses across this province can have full confidence in the government's plan going forward. Enough with the hiding. It's time to work on behalf of Albertans for the future of this magnificent province.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: I'd like to call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms Drever: Thank you, Madam Chair. I have questions about education. I would just like to ask if the capital allotments are going to keep school construction in Calgary-Bow on schedule.

The Chair: Thank you for that.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much for the important question. Not only is Calgary-Bow an area of concern; there are growing parts of our province everywhere. In conversations with two ministers it's my understanding that these projects are going ahead. If I'm wrong on that, we'll be sure to advise the member in writing as soon as possible and all members. But as far as I'm aware, it's absolutely on schedule to continue with the construction as planned out.

7:50

Ms Drever: That's good to hear. Thank you, minister.

Now, these building projects are based on the previous government's promises. My riding is still in desperate need of preschools and elementary schools. Will this government be promising new schools, and, if so, when will that be?

Mr. Mason: Thanks, hon. member, for that question. It is government's objective to continue with the announced schools. There are three tiers of them, which could be named after the Premier's term in which they were announced, if you wanted, but there are three groups, all of which this government intends to proceed with and to keep on time and on budget.

The Chair: Next on my list is the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Chair, for another opportunity to speak to the minibudget. There has been much said regarding Bill 3, and none of it has changed the government's reluctance to give us more information. All we ask for is the general fundamentals that we need before considering a new spending bill. All we want is for Albertans to know where this money is being spent.

Last week I asked the Minister of Finance five simple questions. One, how much money will the government spend? Two, how much revenue will the government collect? Three, what will be the deficit? Four, what will be the debt? Five, what will be the province's net financial assets at the end of the fiscal year? Stay tuned, Madam Chair. I have seen the previous government dodge questions and provide no answers. I was hoping that it would be different with the new government. I was hoping that this government would help Albertans understand where the NDP is going to be spending their hard-earned tax dollars. I was hoping that this government would not take a page from the third party's handbook and hide important financial details from Alberta taxpayers.

Last week, to my great surprise, I received five answers. When the NDP held a press conference to say where the money was being spent, I was ecstatic. I was so excited that this government was going to be different and give us information. I was excited that this government would give us answers and not leave us grasping in the dark. Alas, the press release did not match the numbers announced by the minister at the press conference. In fact, over the course of the week the NDP released to the public five different answers to the same question.

Let me back up for a minute. These answers, whether they were mistakes, typos, or misplaced decimals, were only half of one of my questions. A spending projection refers to the full expenditures of the entire budget, not just four ministries. That point aside, those

five answers to that half of one question did not answer half of the question in any way, shape, or form. In fact, there were so many ways that it didn't answer any of my questions that I don't really know where to begin.

Let me outline to the House what each of these numbers was so that the House can get a glimpse as to why I think the government so desperately needs our help. First, the Government House Leader announced that new spending would total 10 per cent of interim supply.

Mr. Mason: That was a very approximate figure, as you know.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Very approximate, and we are staying tuned, Madam Chair.

Interim supply is \$18 billion. Ten per cent of \$18 billion is \$1.8 billion. That \$1.8 billion matched up quite well with their election platform. When a press release was sent out stating that spending would only be \$776 million, the idea that the NDP decided overnight to drop \$1 billion in spending was almost as welcome as it was unbelievable. But we were wrong, or they were wrong, or maybe the person who typed out the press release was wrong because at the press conference all of the numbers added up to \$682 million.

Almost \$100 million more was gone from their spending. Now, this was my lucky day, ladies and gentlemen. Maybe by the end of the day there would be a balanced budget. On my walk to one of the local food trucks for some schnitzel I was on the lookout for pigs flying over the sky palace. Hours later the Government House Leader announced that new spending was only \$624 million. By this point I was hoping that this day had more hours in it for a night sitting so that I could hear a lower number still. But to my disappointment, later in that same statement from the Government House Leader, he said: "that is the bulk of the additional \$1.1 billion." My lucky day had turned into a very confusing day, Madam Chair. Which number is correct? Which number are they actually spending? Do they know what they are actually spending? If the \$1.1 billion is the true number, then where is the other \$500 million being spent?

So I asked the Minister of Finance today: which is the correct number? Even the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board did not know. He gave us, ladies and gentlemen, a sixth number. The Minister of Finance said: somewhere in the \$600 million range. That is literally – and I don't often say literally – a range of \$100 million, give or take. Maybe he'll go Dutch with taxpayers' money and cut \$500 million from the budget. Does the Minister of Finance still not know where the \$100 million is being spent?

When this bill was put forward for discussion, it was allocated a total of six hours of debate for both readings. These six hours happened after weeks of planning by the NDP, and I hope that that planning was done with a functional calculator. This amount of time, six hours, was deemed to be enough time to give Albertans an understanding of where their tax dollars are being spent. If the Minister of Finance, the person in charge of Alberta's finances, does not know where the money is being spent, then how in the world are Albertans supposed to know?

I understand that the NDP isn't quite able to provide us with the full details of an entire budget right at this moment. That is understandable. But they could at least provide us with basic, unchanging details on this bill. Let me rephrase that. They could at least provide themselves with basic, unchanging details on this bill. The point I'm trying to make is that this bill is no better than, to borrow a quote from the Minister of Finance today, a "budget on the back of a napkin." In fact, it seems the napkin was spilt on and the NDP can't read the numbers anymore.

So, in closing, I'm not only disappointed but troubled by the answers the government has been giving us or not giving us. Fiscal competence and responsibility matter to Albertans, and the government has not been showing it. They should realize that one of the biggest reservations that Albertans have about an NDP government is whether or not they care about the books. Madam Chair, this government needs help. I've been trying to help here by giving the government the opportunity to show that it does care and that it has its ducks in a row. I know that there are many capable officials in the Department of Finance that can provide these estimates of the numbers. But for some reason or another the minister is holding back even these rudimentary details.

I don't like the fact that this bill allows unchecked spending until the end of November. I don't like that these spending increases are significant, but this government has said nothing about reductions anywhere, despite inheriting the most bloated government in the country. I don't like that the Premier has simply shrugged off the possibility that she is delaying presenting the budget until after the federal election. She knows that it will be a record deficit and record debt. The Premier perhaps does not want this to reflect badly on her comrades before October 19.

Madam Chair, I was not elected by the people of Strathmore-Brooks to give this government a blank cheque for an unidentified sum of new spending. I did not spend six years with the Canadian Taxpayers Federation fighting for taxpayers and fiscal responsibility just to give the government a blank cheque on new spending. Twenty-one Wildrose MLAs were not elected to rubber-stamp a spending bill that is irresponsibly spending in the dark without any details.

Madam Chair, the Wildrose caucus will be voting against this bill.

8:00

The Chair: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Good evening. Thank you, Madam Chair. Albertans deserve answers, and we're not getting a lot of answers. We all know that this government is new. We're being patient, but what we want to know is: where is the money coming from, and where is it going?

This budget was a budget that was built three Premiers ago. What I want to know is: do you still have the sky palace renovations in there? Quite a few campaigns ago this budget was created under a former Premier's direction. Some significant events happened since that time: the Oilers won another first-round draft pick, and the NDP formed government.

Three hours to debate a budget that was drafted by a party that both our party and the governing party campaigned against. We're here to hold the government to account, to be the check on their power. We are worried that three hours is not enough time for this and that we are not getting a lot of answers. Our sense of what this government is spending \$18 billion on is rough at best. In fact, our strongest sense is that the NDP may not know exactly what they're spending this money on. There are a lot of questions on how much the spending is going up by and what for.

Albertans deserve to know where their money is going. This legislator deserves to know where the tax dollars are being spent. I can't tell if the government isn't telling us where the money is going because they don't know yet or because they don't want us to know. I guess we'll have four years to assess how transparent this government was.

I am concerned about how our small businesses will react, how families will react. They want to know that Alberta is a stable, responsible place to invest, a place to raise a family. We want to

reassure our energy sector that this government at hand is going to be responsible, provide stable leadership, and do its part for the promotion of prosperity in this province.

As you all well know, the Wildrose would never dream of raising taxes. I suspect that those who are about to see their taxes raised may want to brace for this, perhaps pass on that vacation they kind of planned for to make other expenses. Like the rest of Alberta, Wildrose wants to know where the tax dollars are going. This isn't much time to debate it. It's an enormous amount of money, and with so many conflicting statements about how much money is being used, we just want some transparency, and we want some accountability. We want to know where our money is going, and we believe that Albertans want the same.

Thank you.

The Chair: Go ahead. You can speak, hon. member.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Chair. My questions won't be a surprise to the government because they're questions that I asked the last time we were here, and I didn't get them answered then. In fairness, the government has had a weekend to think about it since we were last here, so I think that based on the fact that they've had a few days to know what the question is, perhaps they've come up with an answer.

When we last met, it was established that the government had \$1.8 billion in additional spending in the estimates. The government – I don't know if detailed is the right word because there wasn't a lot of detail. Nonetheless, they identified around \$700 million or \$600 million in spending that they're adding. I'm sorry I did that, but I think I badgered the House leader, and he identified another \$600 million in taxes that the government is going to roll back. So that takes us to \$1.2 billion. So there's still \$500 million or \$600 million unidentified from the original \$1.8 billion. With another four or five days to think about it, I will ask the government again: can you tell me what the additional spending is with the \$500 million or \$600 million that you weren't able to identify last week when we were in here, please?

That was a question.

Mr. Ceci: Sorry. I thought it was rhetorical.

I can share with you, leader of the third party, that we will spend money on things that were planned to be reduced in your platform. Additionally, we will not collect money that was going to be taxes in your platform. Those are the two buckets that are in this interim supply that are new or different. Everything else comes out of this book that was tabled in this Legislature by the hon. Robin Campbell on March 26, 2015. As I said before, we have extended this by five months. So we just followed through with this.

The program spending is identified in the many pages of this book, and that's what we're following for the time being, until we can get our ducks in a row for a budget later this fall. I will just say that if you wanted to know what the new investments are, it's \$500 million for Health, \$100 million a month for five months; Education, \$45 million; Advanced Education, \$40 million; and Human Services, \$39 million. So those are the expenditures that we are replacing that were planned to be cut. Then there are monies that we're not going to be able to collect, that were proposed as levies and fees that we're not going to be following through with.

Thank you.

Mr. McIver: So, Madam Chair, listening carefully, the Finance minister identified \$500 million or \$600 million. While the numbers weren't exactly the same and my colleague in the Official Opposition pointed out that the numbers seem to be a little fluid, nonetheless they're in the same ballpark as the original \$500

million or \$600 million. Then you identified another \$600 million you're not taking, so that still gets us to about \$1.2 billion or \$1.3 billion depending on which set of numbers you use. The Finance minister says that there isn't any more. I guess the new spending has now gone down from \$1.8 billion to \$1.3 billion. Either there's \$500 million that I haven't been told about or the new spending has gone down from \$1.8 billion to \$1.3 billion. Can I just get that clarification, please?

Mr. Ceci: I don't think I ever indicated that the spending was \$1.8 billion. That may have been said in the early parts of the debate here, but the actual numbers are much lower, and they're in the two buckets that I mentioned.

Mr. McIver: That was good clarification, Minister. Thank you.

So, Madam Chair, we solved part of the mystery. We're down from \$1.8 billion of new spending to \$1.3 billion. I'm not sure if the taxpayers saved \$500 million or whether we just got improved information on what we had before. However, I'm grateful for the answers that we are getting.

I guess that with that in mind, since the plan currently is to bring forward a budget in October, presumably right after the federal election, my suggestion to the government is: do you think you could, especially being freshly elected, not take a four-month vacation and maybe bring the budget in sooner? No disrespect to the Official Opposition, but September 7 is a little late, too. Next month would be better. Is there any chance that you might do that?

8:10

Mr. Mason: Hon. member, is that how your government put together budgets? That might explain a great deal, Madam Chair. That might explain a great deal about the previous government's budgets.

My understanding, if I may, hon. member, based on my conversations with a number of Finance ministers that I had the honour and pleasure to know and ask questions of is that the process of building a budget takes several months and that, actually, when responsible budgets were produced in your government, there was a long process developing that. I'm beginning to work on a capital plan, which is my contribution to the budget that will be in October, and I know the amount of work that is entailed in that. I'm sure that some of your members who had previously served in the position of Minister of Infrastructure would be aware of the amount of work that goes into developing the capital budget.

This is not a small-potatoes operation, the government of Alberta, as you should well know.

An Hon. Member: It's complex.

Mr. Mason: It's complex.

We will not be taking a four-month vacation in order to postpone the development of the budget. The amount of time that we've selected has nothing to do with the federal election and has everything to do with the amount of time it will take a new government, the first in 43 years, to familiarize itself with the books of the previous government, to take a close look at the accounts, the finances of the province, and to determine exactly what expenditures are justified and what revenues can be depended upon.

I hope that answers your question, hon. member.

Mr. McIver: Madam Chair, it's a pleasure working with this government, too, thus far. Although the information that we're getting is a little thin, it's still a pleasure. I would say that the Finance minister did wave around a document that the previous

government had produced, and we hope to have that much detail when the other budget comes.

Mr. Cooper: Are you here to help, too?

Mr. McIver: No, I'm not going to offer to go to the other side and help. That's already been done.

I will say that even when we did estimates, hon. members – I noticed that what you put in front of us had three pages of numbers. Even the least we could find of when we did estimates was 24-plus pages, so hopefully we'll have more details soon.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Mason: Madam Chair, I have here the interim estimates produced by the previous government, 2015-16 interim supply estimates, and I have the one that we have provided, 2015-16 interim supply estimates no. 2. They are virtually the same number of pages, same number of figures. The format that was used by the previous government is the format that our government has used.

Mr. McIver: Madam Chair, while I agree that what the hon. member showed is a real document, it's not the only document that was available.

We could do this all night, couldn't we?

The Chair: I'll recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Just following on the notion that the Finance minister put out there last week that the interim supply is essentially the previous budget, based on that, for a period of five months. So you divide it by the number of months, and you multiply it by five. With that in mind, though, I'd like to ask a couple of questions, if I may, where I don't think the math adds up to that model.

For example, in the area of Education if operational expenditures are multiplied by five they should be \$1.763 billion, but there's actually \$225 million additional to that. I'd like to know where that's going. That's an additional \$225 million. I'd love to know where that money is actually being spent.

There are many other examples of this, but perhaps we can start with that Education example. If somebody from the other side would like to answer that question, I'd very much appreciate it.

The Chair: Go ahead, hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the member for the question. As we'll all remember, on May 5 Albertans gave this government a mandate to make sure that we fund growth, and funding growth is where the allocation is going. It's my understanding that the additional dollars other than – continuing on with the previous budget, when you fund growth, it's \$45 million for those five months. I'd be happy to follow up offline and provide some clarity around that math.

But it's around funding the growth, the 12,000 new students who are coming to Alberta, and ensuring not just that they have the allocation for teachers but also reversing the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit cuts, the English language learner cuts, ensuring that the cuts that were being proposed are reversed and funded through our interim supply bill.

Some of the questions around the math not adding up are actually because announcements had been made around what this would cost for the full year. Of course, we're not going to make a commitment to fund Education in November, change that, because the allocations actually go out in September. So the interim supply amount is \$45 million, but of course the full calendar year for the

school year is greater than that, and that'll be incorporated into our budget for full debate in the fall.

So the interim supply amount is for the five months, bringing us through until the end of November. But there will be additional educational costs because kids go to school until the end of June.

Mr. Bhullar: Madam Chair, I thank the Minister of Health for that information. However, the math still doesn't add up. I'm looking at \$225 million, not \$45 million. If this is \$225 million over the course of five months, then over the course of 12 months we're looking at an additional over half billion dollars that's going into the Department of Education, and we don't know why. The growth is not over a half billion dollars, and there were no cuts to education that would come anywhere close to a half billion dollars. So I'd love to know where that money is going.

Moving on, because I don't think we'll get further concrete examples of the answers today, well, we'll go to Health. Why not go to Health? Based on, again, that same model a five-month extension should be \$7.412 billion, but it's actually \$7.746 billion, which is an additional \$333 million in expenditures in the Department of Health for five months. I'd love to know where that is going.

I'll also put out a question to the Minister of Human Services. Last week the minister said that the department is getting an extra \$39 million in spending over the course of five months. In actuality it's \$51.3 million of extra spending over the course of five months. So the numbers don't seem to add up here, sir.

We take the example of Advanced Education. It's \$91.2 million over and above the five-month funding envelope that the ministers have told us that they're trying to fund.

Then you go into some departments, and there seem to be some pretty significant cuts. We'll start with Justice. Again, on the same model – you take the expenses over 12 months, you divide it by 12, and then you multiply it five – the Department of Justice's operational expenses for the five months should be \$528 million, but it's actually \$473 million. That is a cut of \$54 million. So I'd love to know where that money is coming from. Are there police officers or sheriffs or peace officers across this province that will not be funded?

I'd love to know the answers to these couple of departments if I may. That's Human Services, that's Health, and that's Justice, and then we'll proceed on from there.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

8:20

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you to the member for the opportunity to provide some clarity around the Health expenses. In terms of the first interim supply bill, the pre-election interim supply bill, it was \$4.7 billion approved by this House to ensure that we could operate health care until the end of June. The additional interim supply being requested is to provide funds until November 30. Schedule 2 would have been \$7.3 billion. The amounts for the June and November interim supply originally requested were based on the proposed budget tabled March 26. This has been mentioned.

The pressures being forecast for the remainder of the 2015-16 fiscal year are evolving based on actual 2014-15 expenses and more current program information, allowing more reliable forecasts than the original estimates. There are three areas where significant pressures have been identified: Alberta Health Services' base operating funding pressures of \$345 million – that includes components like compensation – and development pressures of

\$248 million and drugs and supplemental health benefits pressures of \$61 million, for a total of \$654 million.

To provide the interim supply for April to November, these additional pressures and adjustments amount to \$500 million, as mentioned, which has been added, so now rather than asking for \$7.3 billion, we're asking for \$7.8 billion.

I hope you like my numbers. They'll be on the record.

Mr. Bhullar: Even then, Minister, I don't think our numbers are matching up, but regardless, I do appreciate your providing some information. It seems as if the department and the government have chosen to fund cost pressures for this five-month period, which we believe are based on growth. For the purposes of déjà vu, I'll remind the Government House Leader – I remember him standing up in this Assembly, asking many times: how many dollars are going to go towards bonuses in that 300-plus million dollars?

Mr. Mason: How many were?

Mr. Bhullar: Well, I'm asking you, sir. I'll guess we'll find out in five months.

But I wonder if the Minister of Human Services or the Minister of Justice can provide clarification on their numbers.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you for raising this. I don't have exact numbers before me, but I remember explaining that the additional funding we're getting is going to child intervention; FCSS, family and community services; and there was an additional \$1 million that was reserved for the ministry responsible for the status of women. That's where the increase is going, and that's what I explained the other day as well.

Thank you.

Ms Ganley: Thank you to the hon. member. I'm not aware that there are any cuts in my budget. The way our budget document was prepared, the budget document for Justice and Solicitor General, was that costs that are paid equally over the course of the year, based on the previous government's budget, were sort of divided by 12, but there are some costs that occur in Justice and Solicitor General that don't go out evenly. There are municipal policing grants that go out at the end of June. Legal aid funding goes out two times a year, and I believe that one of those falls within but the other doesn't. So in terms of cutbacks there haven't been any cutbacks. The funding was sort of continued forward in exactly the same manner. It's just that some of it is unevenly disbursed. But if you had further questions, I can definitely get back to you with further details.

Mr. Bhullar: Well, thank you very much, Minister. There are many grants that go out at different times throughout the year, so that may be the beginning to the question. I mean, it's a very significant amount of money, so if you could provide us with the specifics of that, I would very much appreciate that.

Moving on to the Department of Seniors, I actually don't see any capital investments for the Department of Seniors, so I wonder where any of the seniors' housing or capital grant funding is going to be coming from, the sprinkler enhancements, the safety enhancements that were under way in many of the seniors' lodges across the province. I don't see any capital investments for the Department of Seniors in the document. In addition to that I see, based on your five-month model, a cut of almost \$15 million over the course of five months, so I'd like to know where that is going.

In addition, I'll ask the Minister of Service Alberta. Again, based on this five-month model, you're down about \$9 million in your

operating expenses and \$7 million in your capital expenditures, so I'd love to know where that difference is actually coming up from.

I think that if we start with Seniors and Service Alberta, that would be great.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you for the opportunity to address a question. What I've submitted to my hon. colleague was not anything around cuts. It was around maintaining the same ratio that had been proposed by the previous government, the three-twelfths of what the overall budget was. This is for the five-twelfths piece. So there aren't any cuts that we're proposing in terms of operating for Seniors. I'd be happy to follow up offline. I am confident that the sprinkler project is moving forward, to give you a little assurance on that one.

Mr. Bhullar: Sure. So, Minister, then just because I don't see the capital investments, does that mean that that infrastructure spending, that capital investment piece, has moved somewhere else? It's not in your interim supply, so does that mean it's now with the Minister of Infrastructure or Health or somebody else?

Ms Hoffman: I know I'm supposed to answer questions, but was it in your interim supply? That would be my question to prepare us for . . .

Mr. Bhullar: We had a capital budget for the Department of Seniors.

Ms Hoffman: I will be very happy to follow up with details afterwards around that specific – I'm not proposing any cuts to capital through the interim supply bill. Obviously, we'll have an opportunity to be able to debate the full capital proposal in the fall, when we bring that forward, but in terms of interim supply our purpose for the Ministry of Seniors was status quo throughout the summer and to bring us into November, so I'll be happy to have a little follow-up offline to get further details on that.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you. It's a very similar situation with Service Alberta, hon. member, that there weren't any cuts proposed. It was using the previous administration's interim supply numbers, obviously divided by 12, extending it for the five months, but there are no proposed cuts in this five-month interim window that we're tabling this bill for.

Mr. Mason: Can I supplement that, please, hon. member? I'm just looking at the interim supply bill that was introduced by the previous government, and the format for Seniors is precisely the same: expense and financial transactions and no capital investment line under that department. So while I don't have a definitive answer for him, I suspect, hon. member, that those items are probably contained in the Infrastructure budget, and I will endeavour to break those out and send them to him. But there's no capital line for Seniors in this interim supply bill or the interim supply bill that your government introduced.

Mr. Bhullar: I thank both ministers, but if we're starting with Service Alberta, according to my calculations and the numbers you're actually down almost \$9 million on the operations side, and you're down about \$7 million on the capital side, which is a bit surprising because Service Alberta, well, I guess has the IT capital.

Actually, this is a great time for me to ask a follow-up on that. In this year's proposed budget, as a part of our capital planning

exercise, one of the things that I proposed to do was to bring down our IT costs across government. This is an area that can have runaway costs, and we proposed to bring that down by 5 per cent this year and 10 per cent the years following, so I'd love to know, maybe, if your officials actually followed the plan that we had put forward and are actually making that cut.

With respect to the Seniors capital investment piece, to the Minister of Infrastructure, I'm looking at a document here that does have \$15.5 million in infrastructure spending. Now, perhaps my staff has put in the budgetary number as opposed to the interim supply number, so we can have a chat about that, but if you would endeavour to tell us where the ASLI money is and the money to upgrade the seniors' facilities and the seniors' lodges across the province, that would be very much appreciated. Similar to the question I asked last week as well, whether that's housed in Health now or Infrastructure, I'd love to know where that money is, how much there is. Within this five-month period my assumption is that if the money is in there for the five-month period, you will then begin to fund projects that are coming online. So some clarification around that would be very, very much appreciated.

8:30

I don't see the minister of agriculture here, but agriculture . . . [interjections] Oh, my apologies. I forgot about that. No, seriously, I did. I'm not used to being on this side, Madam Chair.

Mr. Bilous: Get used to it.

Mr. Bhullar: You know what? To the hon. minister: there's something about humility, and we always had it, my friend. We always had it. We always had it.

But the minister of agriculture – so I'd put this forward to the government. There seems to be an additional \$103 million here based on, again, that take the budget, divide it by 12, and then multiply it by five model. That should be \$232 million. It's actually \$336 million, so I'd love to know where that extra \$103 million is going.

Similarly, in the department of culture we have an extra \$54 million. Based on, again, the government's model, they should be at \$121 million approximately. They're actually at \$174 million, so where's that extra \$54 million?

I'll put that forth for the ministers of agriculture and culture. No takers, Madam Chair.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much. Those are a number of detailed questions, hon. member, all good and valid questions, which deserve a response. However, at least speaking for myself, I'm going to have to have my department provide those numbers, and I will provide those to all members of the House in written form as soon as possible.

Have you completed your questions?

The Chair: Hon. member, there's only about 30 seconds left of this 20-minute segment. You can go back on the list later.

Mr. Bhullar: Oh, 30 seconds. What I've learned from members opposite, Madam Chair, is don't give any one of your seconds up, so I will take my last 25 seconds.

I would ask the Minister of Infrastructure and of Transportation and Government House Leader if we can actually expect these answers from today and from last week to be tabled in this House before we vote on this bill in third reading?

Mr. Mason: Madam Chair, I will endeavour for my part to get these numbers for you as soon as possible and provide them as well to all

members of the House. So thank you for those questions. They're all good questions.

At this point, Madam Chair, I would move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 1

An Act to Renew Democracy in Alberta

The Chair: Are there any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thanks, Madam Chair. First, before I get started, I just want to note that earlier today my friend the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort noted – and I think he did try to correct it, but I want to clarify that Wildrose is in fact in support of Bill 1 and that this caucus does support Bill 1. The Wildrose Party supports Bill 1, and I support Bill 1.

Wildrose has long campaigned on banning corporate and union donations. We think our democracy works better when only individuals are allowed to make contributions to political parties. We think that doing it any other way either results in a key entrenched interest having too much power over political direction or, worse, it creates a pay-to-play environment such as has happened in Alberta for the last few years.

We are quite pleased to see that big labour and big business both will be curtailed in their ability to wield undue influence. This will also prevent any government from using pay-to-play to shake down industry, and that's a good thing. Wildrose has proposed amendments to ban these political donations before, but the PC majorities of the past have defeated all of them. It is a policy that we're glad the NDP has adopted from the Wildrose.

However, there are still massive loopholes, Madam Chair, that mean that with this bill we are not in fact ending corporate and union donations. Loopholes here allow unions to cover political loans, in some cases without reporting them. We will try to fix that with an amendment, but the governing party obviously has a use for union or corporations backstopping loans. There is this huge loophole about in-kind donations, particularly the in-kind donations of service. Notwithstanding what the minister said in the House last week, the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act does not define services in any relevant way. The provision of services is not discussed in the definition of contributions.

It's very clear that the provision of services by a union or corporation, either free or at a discount, remains a loophole in this legislation. This means that corporations or union bosses could donate their employees' time, either in providing services or doing union- or business-paid volunteer work. This happens already, it's legal already, and this law won't change it. We tried to close this loophole, but the government is keen to keep that loophole in law. We have to wonder why. We are hopeful that in the upcoming all-party committee we will see some clarity on what this government had in mind by leaving these loopholes available.

We also tried to fix the coming-into-force provision of this law, which will be largely unenforceable. Notwithstanding, again, what the minister said last week in the House or to the media, the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act does not require any party, constituency association, or candidate to give the date of when they received their contribution. The law only requires them to disclose which period the donation arrived in. We should have fixed that. Elections Alberta wanted us to fix that, and I don't know why the government chose not to carefully read the law. I would

point out that by not fixing that, this could result in a very embarrassing situation where this government's first bill might end up in the courts or could conceivably be overturned in part or, at very least, held up.

With that aside, let's see if I can't fix one of these other loopholes tonight. One of the key problems in this bill is that it has two strange provisions which still allow indirect influence of unions and corporations on matters that the bill takes away their direct influence on. Specifically, this bill will continue to allow the practice of unions and corporations guaranteeing loans to political parties, constituency associations, and candidates. They can do this by way of signing a guarantee, cosigning, or providing collateral security for any loan, monetary obligation, or indebtedness.

We have serious concerns about unions and corporations being able to put cash on deposit so that a political party can take out a loan to run its activities. If corporations and unions can't contribute, Madam Chair, why should they be allowed to finance a political party, constituency association, or candidate? What conceivable public policy reason is there for this? If you can't give money, why should you be able to curry favour by putting a million dollars on deposit?

I also note that the law has no limit as to the size of the guarantee, so a union or corporation could advance a political party millions or enough money to even run a complete campaign. But, Madam Chair, it gets worse. This current law would allow a union or a corporation to make payments on a loan, and as long as those payments were reimbursed before the end of the year, there would be no need to disclose the payments.

So we have a system whereby a union or corporation could put a million dollars on deposit with a bank on January 1 and guarantee a political party a \$1 million loan. This political party could use that million dollars for campaigning in, say, an election, and if the party got in a cash crunch, the company or union could pay the interest payments on that million dollar loan. So long as the company or union was reimbursed by the end of the year, nothing would have been done wrong, no one would have ever known, and there would be no need to report this. This is completely unacceptable. If unions and corporations shouldn't give, they shouldn't guarantee. They certainly shouldn't guarantee without any limits.

8:40

To fix this, we prepared an amendment to prevent guarantees by anyone other than individuals and to prevent the paying of loans by anyone other than individuals unless there has been a default. I have the appropriate number of copies of the amendment, Madam Chair, and I will wait for the pages to circulate them before I read the text of the amendment, which will basically delete corporations and unions from the loan section.

The Chair: We'll just pause for a moment while we pass out copies of the amendment. This will be known as amendment A3.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Nixon: Wildrose thinks this amendment really improves this bill. Wildrose certainly can't see a need for unions or corporations to backstop loans. We have never asked any company or union to backstop any loans or lines of credit. We've never even considered it. We hope the NDP will give Albertans some clarity on why they feel these organizations should still have this ability. Are unions financing the NDP? How much do unions have on deposit to guarantee the government party's loans and lines of credit? We should not pass this law until the government comes clean on this because putting loopholes in to protect government interests isn't what Bill 1 should be about.

Wildrose certainly doesn't see why corporations or unions would be allowed to make loan payments at all, even if they are later reimbursed, as this is still monetary assistance. If we truly want to get rid of corporate and union influence in the political process, Madam Chair, it does not make sense to have this provision continue in this bill. Allowing guarantees and loan payments still gives the impression that a political party could be seen as under the influence of special interests and not working for the direct interest of Albertans. We don't understand why the NDP has left these so-called transitional provisions in place that allow companies and unions to pay off loans for the rest of the year, but in the spirit of compromise and out of a desire to really see this amendment pass, we have left them in place, apart from insisting that payments are only made in the case of default.

We are also reassured by the Chief Electoral Officer that a party that failed to repay any of these payments would be on the hook for them as illegal donations. But we strongly believe that parties should be making their own payments, and we'd like some reassurance from the other party leaders in the House that they are not allowing any company or union to make any payments they might have. I can assure everyone here that we have no such payments. If there is a default on an existing loan, Madam Chair, that's another issue, and we have ensured that those who are on the hook for parties that might be unexpectedly broke are not breaking the law. That provision of this law is effective.

The continued existence of these types of provisions creates the impression that any party could be seen as under the influence of special interests and not working for the direct interest of Albertans. We just do not think that unions and corporations should backstop loans. Albertans will not approve of this. It specifically goes against the spirit of this bill and the arguments that the Premier and the Lieutenant Governor mentioned in the throne speech.

We hope the NDP will give Albertans some clarity on why they feel these organizations should still have this ability. Unless that argument is completely convincing, then every reasonable member of this Chamber should vote for this very reasonable amendment. Voting for this amendment is consistent with the will of Albertans and consistent with the spirit of this bill, Madam Chair, as well as consistent with every argument that the Premier and key government spokespeople have raised in defence of this bill.

If we are getting union and corporate money out of Alberta politics, let us really do it, completely, with no strange loopholes. I ask that all members vote for this very reasonable amendment and take away the ability of unions and corporations to finance political parties through loan guarantees.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other speakers to the amendment? The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to rise today and speak in support of this amendment. I support Bill 1, and Wildrose supports Bill 1. Wildrose believes in putting democracy back in the hands of Albertans. We believe in banning corporate and union donations, and this is an important step to do that.

Pay-to-play politics is the way that politics has been done in Alberta for quite a while now, and we want to put the power of democracy back in the hands of Albertans regardless of financial backing or ability to donate. We would like to suggest that there be no roundabout ways for unions and corporations to influence the political process by backstopping loans.

You've done a great job by adopting this policy of eliminating corporate and union donations, but you left loopholes. You've done only 50 per cent of the job: half. Half. Can you imagine me

as a paramedic providing half my skills and education when I'm treating a patient? What if I were to assess that patient, put on the heart monitor, give him some oxygen, start an intravenous line, you know, stabilize this patient, put him on my stretcher, get him in that ambulance and, once those doors are closed, kick back, relax because – you know what? – I've done half? I put on a good show for those folks out there. I'm not going to ply the pharmaceuticals. I'm not going to give electricity to reset that patient's heart. I'm just going to do half – 50 per cent – like this NDP government.

As a fire officer I was tasked with assessing and dictating a strategy to fight a house fire. I made sure that we positioned our pump in a strategic manner. I made sure that we had all the hose lines set up. We would ladder that building. We got all the boys there set out to attack this fire. We cordoned off the area. We set up rehab and medical stations. But we're not going to turn that hydrant on because we put a good show on for the public. It looks like we're doing something, 50 per cent, half.

Our team has identified several issues that need to be alleviated for this bill to truly protect the democratic process from the undue influence of unions and corporations. We only need to look at Ontario or even the United States to find issues. If you probe deep enough, you might even find that these loopholes are being used at the national level by our national parties. Can you imagine if there was a political party that leveraged things like property?

Mrs. Pitt: Shame.

Mr. Yao: Shame. Will this government recognize that these loopholes have been blatantly left in, or are they trying to match the previous government for suspicious decisions? If this government caucus were to approve such a bill with such blatant loopholes, they will demonstrate, every one of them, that they are not much different than previous governments.

Thank you.

The Chair: I'll recognize the hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like to propose a subamendment, which we'll now have distributed.

The Chair: We'll take a moment while that's distributed, and this will be known as subamendment SA1.

Go ahead, hon. Minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like to thank the hon. member for his amendment though it is unfortunate that he remains confused about the requirement that donation receipts state the date on which they were received. I am nonetheless glad to see that the members opposite are working hard to make this legislation and electoral financing better.

In response to his suggestions for an improvement I'm moving a subamendment to his amendment. This subamendment accepts clause (d) of part A, which limits interim loan payments by corporations and unions during the transition period to situations where the borrower is in default on their loan at the time of the payment. The transition provisions allow corporations and unions to make payments on loans that were taken out before June 15, 2015, without triggering penalties for an illegal contribution on the corporation or union. This is because otherwise the corporation or union may be punished for doing what they are legally required to do; i.e., pay back the guarantee. Limiting those loan payments made on or after June 15 to only those loans that are in default accomplishes that intent, and I thank the member for that.

8:50

The subamendment would strike out the other clauses in part A and all of part B for a couple of reasons. The legislation currently contains provisions for interim financing. We believe that corporations and unions should still be able to provide this safety net so long as the loan is paid back by the deadline. Second, there's no need to make those amendments to parts of Bill 1 that deal with guarantees. If a guarantee is needed, the political party, constituency association, candidate, or leadership contestant is already in default and needs the assistance; that is, the transitional ability to make good on a guarantee made prior to June 15, 2015, without triggering an illegal contribution does not need to be limited any further.

Madam Chair, I ask all members to support this subamendment, and again thank you to the hon. member for his hard work on this. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Madam Chair. We are trying to be helpful. Wildrose campaigned on ending corporate and union donations, and this bill is important to us as well as to the government. We strongly believe that democracy belongs in the hands of all Albertans, not corporations and unions and, more to the point, their chequebooks. Albertans should feel, when their elected members are in Edmonton, that they will represent their views. We're encouraged to see the NDP propose an end to corporate and union donations. It's a great grassroots policy that the Wildrose believes in.

But for some reason this government did not go all the way to end union and corporate influence. There are massive loopholes that mean that with this bill we are not in fact ending corporate and union donations. Loopholes here allow unions to cover loans, in some cases without reporting them, and the in-kind donations loopholes mean that corporations or union bosses could donate their employees' time either by providing services, even at a phone bank or door-knocking, Madam Chair. We're hopeful that in the upcoming all-party subcommittee we'll see some clarity on what the government had in mind by leaving these loopholes available.

I still can't find a reason why this government would want unions to be able to backstop loans or lines of credit. The government has not provided any explanation as to why they would need such a loophole. What sort of circumstances is the NDP anticipating that they would want this option available to them?

Then there is a transitional provision that allows unions to pay off loans. Why would political parties not be paying off their own loans, Madam Chair?

There is also the issue of timing, which I really feel the government got wrong in making it retroactive to the middle of the election period.

Notwithstanding the arguments that the minister has made in the House and in the media, the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act, which I encourage her to read, does not require any party, constituency association, or candidate to give the date when they received a contribution. The law only requires them to disclose in which period the donation arrived. Again, we should have fixed that. Elections Alberta wanted us to fix that, and I have no idea why the government chose to avoid the fact of the current law.

If the NDP really wanted to return democracy to the hands of Albertans, these loopholes would be eliminated. We are grateful for the attempt they made, but we are interested in more than appearances, Madam Chair. It's not just the appearances of influence that we're concerned about; it's the likelihood that unions

and corporations will continue to play an important role in our politics.

We have tried to help in Committee of the Whole by offering suggestions, pointing out problems, and offering reasonable solutions. As is becoming increasingly clear, this government isn't as interested in listening or working together as they like to claim. In fact, they seem to be a lot like the old government. Well, they have at least acknowledged that this provision allowing unions and corporations to make loan payments sticks out like a sore thumb, and I am at least encouraged that they will work with us when we point out the most obvious problems with legislation. It's an improvement over the previous.

We will support this subamendment because it's better than the status quo, but we will be watching and waiting to make the necessary changes that my amendment would have brought in, either in four months, through the all-party committee, or in four years, when the Wildrose party forms the new government.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you for the opportunity to address the House once more and the Committee of the Whole again on Bill 1. We've worked hard to make this important piece of legislation as strong as it can possibly be, but there hasn't been that much co-operation from the government as well as I could tell.

This subamendment is at least a little better or a little bit of a compromise from the government, and I'll hope that this is a sign of things to come, as we saw with last time's amendments. I hope the government doesn't pat itself on the back too hard for this subamendment, though, because it's pretty odd that they would have gone out of their way in the original version to ensure that corporations and unions can make loan payments for parties given that the bill is supposed to end their influence over parties. To be as clear as possible, Madam Chair, we're supporting the bill in principle. In the spirit of being helpful, we just wish we could have done more to ensure that the first bill we will pass this session serves the interests of Albertans in as robust a manner as possible.

Well, Madam Chair, could more be done? More co-operation would have been needed. Frankly, too many loopholes are remaining. The point here is to ban corporate and union donations during the contribution period. I hope we're all clear on that. We're not here trying to ban just certain types of contributions; we're banning all corporate and union contributions. At least, that's what the principle of this bill ought to have been aiming for. Albertans have made it abundantly clear that this is what they expect as well, and we want to help the government meet Albertans' expectations.

On the face of it the bill is trying to ban union and corporate donations, and the bill certainly takes it a lot of the way there, Madam Chair. Oh, maybe 50 per cent. We're getting close, but as it stands, it's not enough. Sure, we're banning direct donations, but we still leave the door wide open for indirect donations in the form of staffing hours and services rendered. If anything, the frequency of these kinds of donations will only increase once we've succeeded in banning direct donations. It will be the only means of influence open to corporations and union entities at this point.

Madam Chair, I fail to see the reason why the government would want to pass a bill with such gaping loopholes that would undermine the bill's entire purpose. It doesn't make any sense to me. To pass a bill with such shortcomings does not reflect well on the government that is sponsoring it. As I've said, though, we support the broad intent of the bill, and I'll be supporting it even though I wish there was more to be done to strengthen it. Wildrose will continue to press the government to correct these loopholes

allowing corporations, unions, and third parties to influence our elections.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much. I want to thank the opposition, particularly the Wildrose opposition, for their contributions to the debate on this bill and to re-emphasize what I said earlier, and that is that this bill was brought forward in a very short time frame. We need it to come forward, as hon. members know, in order to get approval to continue to write the cheques to keep the government operating because the previous government's authority to spend runs out at the end of this month. We also wanted to bring forward this bill, and of course the time frames were somewhat compressed. The Wildrose opposition is not acknowledging the fact that these are not complete, final products. There's going to be a budget in October, a full budget, and there will be a committee that will review all of these matters and may make recommendations for future changes.

So it's fine to say that the bill is not complete. That's your opinion, and that's a legitimate opinion. But to say that the government is deliberately leaving loopholes is most unfair, and I think the hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre was very unfair to all members on this side of the House when he said that if we voted for this as it is, it was proof that we were no different than the previous government. That's not a fair statement. We have an intention of looking in some depth at democratic reform issues and openness and transparency in our governance in this province, and we look forward to working in partnership with all opposition parties, including the Wildrose, on that.

9:00

So I think, hon. members, with respect, that we intend to do more than this. That does not mean that we'll adopt everything that you've proposed. [interjection] It does not mean that. It does mean, however, that we will have time in order to collaborate, which we have not to this point had.

The Chair: Any other speakers to the subamendment?

If not, I will call the question on subamendment A1, as proposed by the hon. Minister of Justice.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on subamendment SA1 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:01 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Hunter	Piquette
Bilous	Jansen	Pitt
Ceci	Kazim	Renaud
Clark	Kleinsteuber	Rosendahl
Cooper	Larivee	Sabir
Cortes-Vargas	Littlewood	Schmidt
Cyr	Loewen	Schneider
Dach	Loyola	Schreiner
Dang	Luff	Shepherd
Drever	Malkinson	Sigurdson
Ellis	Mason	Smith
Feehan	McCuaig-Boyd	Starke
Fildebrandt	McIver	Sucha

Fitzpatrick	McKitrick	Swann
Ganley	McLean	Sweet
Goehring	McPherson	Taylor
Gray	Miller	Turner
Hanson	Miranda	van Dijken
Hinkley	Nielsen	Westhead
Hoffman	Nixon	Woollard
Horne	Orr	Yao
Totals:	For – 63	Against – 0

[Motion on amendment SA1 carried unanimously]

The Chair: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Madam Chair, pursuant to Standing Order 32(3) I would ask that the division bells for the remainder of this session be shortened to one minute and ask for unanimous consent therefore.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Chair: All right. Moving back to the amendment A3. Are there any further speakers to this amendment?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Chair: The question has been called.

[Motion on amendment A3 carried]

The Chair: We are now back on the bill, Bill 1. Are there any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to present an amendment to Bill 1. I'll wait to hand that out.

The Chair: We'll pause for a moment, hon. member, while you pass out the copies. It will be known as amendment A4.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Madam Chair. I present this amendment to reduce the individual donation amount from \$15,000 to \$5,000. Bill 1 is a good start to the 29th Legislature sitting, but this amendment A4 offers us an opportunity to make what is, I think, a good bill a great bill. If we plan to ban corporation and union donations with the intent of getting money out of politics, let's do it for real. Fifteen thousand dollars is still a very significant sum of money and grants certain individuals – I will say that a very small percentage of Albertans have the wherewithal to donate \$15,000 to political parties and, in doing so, potentially can exert influence over government.

This reduces the risk as well, Madam Chair, of corporations or unions potentially granting large sums of money in the form of bonuses or payment combinations that could come from individuals while the money, in fact, comes from another source. Now, while this is, of course, against the current statute, there is still significant risk that happens when the donation threshold is at \$15,000 for individuals. It is still a significantly higher number than on the federal side and a significantly higher number than what we see in many other provinces.

As has been said before in this Chamber, democracy belongs to Albertans, real, actual Albertans, not to unions or corporations, and if we want to reduce the impact and influence that money can buy in politics, this is an opportunity to show Albertans that we are willing in this Chamber to lead.

Again, \$5,000 is still a substantial amount of money, and while I recognize and acknowledge that there will be a committee of the Legislature struck to discuss this, I believe that we are not going to unduly impact the operation of political parties currently if we reduce it to \$5,000. We have the opportunity here to take out the influence of money while still allowing political parties to function. Perhaps we'll look through the committee at lowering the limits even further. We'll have an opportunity through that to have a more comprehensive discussion about campaign finance reform, but for now this shows Albertans that we are willing to lead and willing to remove the influence of money not just from corporate donors and from unions but from wealthy individuals and reduce the impact and influence that has on our political system. This is a step to show Albertans that we do in fact care about campaign finance reform without providing too great a shock to the system for political parties.

This amendment, I submit, is a big step towards ensuring that democracy is, in fact, in the hands of Albertans, not corporations, unions, or wealthy individuals. Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

9:20

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you very much, hon. member, for the amendment. In terms of saying that this legislation doesn't go far enough, I will tell you that the government absolutely agrees. This legislation was brought forward initially as a first step, as a first bill, to ban union and corporate donations. We absolutely agree that more amendments need to be made to this act, that further study is necessary, and there is a committee that will be doing that work.

At this moment I can tell you that the numbers for donations in different jurisdictions are wildly different. So we think that the best course of action in this case is to send this to the committee and to have the committee review it and to have them think about where the donation limits should be and make a proposal, and then we will move forward. But in terms of the spirit of the amendment we absolutely support you, so thank you very much.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Thanks, Madam Chair. I rise to speak against this amendment. First, I would be surprised if my hon. colleagues on the government side of the House were to support this amendment. The reason I say that is that the Wildrose has brought forward three very reasonable amendments to strengthen Bill 1, and all of the Wildrose amendments were in keeping with the spirit of the bill as articulated by the Premier and her ministers. The Premier and every senior government official has made clear that the purpose of this bill is to remove union and corporate donations from political parties, to limit their influence on Alberta politics, and to put political power and influence back in the hands of everyday Albertans, where it belongs.

I completely support the spirit of Bill 1, and Wildrose completely supports the spirit of Bill 1. Each of the very reasonable amendments put forth has been voted down by the government despite being one hundred per cent focused on strengthening the spirit of the bill and removing obvious loopholes that went against the spirit of the bill, and we are all left to wonder why. However, in the case of the amendment now put forward for discussion by the hon. member, it appears that the amendment has very little to do with the actual intent of Bill 1, which is limiting corporation and union influence on our political process. This amendment that has been proposed by the hon. member has to do with the amounts that

an individual may donate to a political party and nothing to do with corporate or union donations.

So with due respect to my friend the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow, this amendment, while it is certainly something that is reasonable to have a discussion on and something that we support in spirit, is not to the intent of Bill 1, which, of course, is to deal with banning corporate and union donations. An amendment to deal with the limits on an individual donation does not fit with the overall content of this bill. In our view, to adopt such an amendment without broad consultation of stakeholders and in view of the larger picture would be premature and irresponsible.

I'm actually a bit surprised the hon. member is even bringing forward this amendment because even in the context of our amendments, which were directly related to corporate and union donations, the member opposed them, saying that he believes the bill is not designed to do everything. The hon. member's argument at that time, Madam Chair, was that there was an opportunity to have a broader conversation about this in the all-party committee. In this case I would submit the same argument to the Member for Calgary-Elbow, that while I appreciate the issue he is trying to raise, it would be, in our view, more appropriate at the upcoming all-party committee and not as an add-on to this bill.

An amendment such as he proposes requires broader consultation with all stakeholders to ensure that we are getting it right, so I will not be voting in support.

The Chair: Any other speakers to the amendment? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thanks very much, Madam Chair. I rise perplexed because I, too, want to see these same kind of initiatives move quickly. Obviously, the \$15,000 limit for donations in a nonelection year and the \$30,000 donation limit in an election year are way too high if we care about getting money out of democracy. I've said in many quarters that we have the best democracy money can buy, and I think that's part of why we're doing what we're doing. I would have said that we should harmonize what we're doing here in terms of contribution limits with the federal government, which is a thousand dollars a year from individuals and no corporate or union donations.

I share some of the concerns of my colleague from Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre that this may not be the correct vehicle to make those changes, but I think all of us are anxious to see movement. If it's possible, it would be nice to see some limits. We all know that we have to reduce the limits. There's no reason why we shouldn't move forward on harmonizing the provincial donation limits with the federal limits, and then everybody knows the rules all across the country. It's so much simpler, so much more in the interests of democracy.

I guess the question is: what's the appropriate venue? Given that this bill is truly about eliminating corporate and union donations, it's a difficult fit. But I do hope and I do encourage this government to move quickly on the donation limits. Otherwise we're faced with the same problem as we had with individuals like Daryl Katz in the last few years, who was able to make big donations through his family members and his board members.

I'll leave it there. I support the spirit, but I can't support the amendment.

The Chair: Any other speakers to the amendment?

[Motion on amendment A4 lost]

The Chair: All right. We're back on Bill 1. Are there any further questions, comments, or amendments to Bill 1?

Are you ready for the question?

Mr. Mason: Yes. Call the question.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 1 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Mr. Mason: Madam Chairman, I move that the committee rise and report.

[Motion carried]

The Chair: The committee shall now rise and report.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Feehan: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 1. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 3. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: Any opposed? So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 1

An Act to Renew Democracy in Alberta

Ms Ganley: Madam Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise and move third reading of Bill 1, An Act to Renew Democracy in Alberta.

This bill will amend the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act to ban corporations and unions from making political donations in our province. For too long a small segment of the population had undue influence on Alberta's political parties, but with this bill, Madam Speaker, Albertans are given back their rights as citizens in a democratic society, something very important to the Premier and to this government.

9:30

An Act to Renew Democracy in Alberta will change the election financing rules so that only residents of Alberta, not corporations and unions, will be allowed to make political contributions to political parties, constituency associations, candidates for election and senatorial election, and leadership contestants. If enacted, it will become effective as of June 15, 2015, the day the bill was first introduced in this House. It will level the playing field and inject much-needed equity and fairness into election financing in Alberta. Politicians will need to pay attention to Albertans and their issues instead of focusing on the priorities of those with the deepest pockets.

We have consulted with the Chief Electoral Officer about our proposed amendments. We've also had a lot of positive feedback on these changes, both from Albertans and from a number of the hon. members in this House. We've listened to that feedback. Madam Speaker, this government is willing and eager to work with other political parties represented in this House. We're open to

ideas for improvement, and we're willing to accept them when they make sense.

This evening we were pleased to support a portion of the amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, which will adjust an aspect of the bill regarding loans. This change to Bill 1 further limits when corporations and unions can make direct payment on loans during the transition period, made on or after June 15, 2015. Now loan payments on loans taken out prior to June 15, 2015, can only be made without triggering the illegal-contribution rules in cases where the borrower is in default on their loan at the time the payments are made, on or after June 15. This change to Bill 1 places stricter guidelines on when corporations and unions can make direct payments on loans during the transition period but still ensures that unions and corporations are not penalized for complying with pre-existing obligations.

Madam Speaker, this bill is just our first step towards fulfilling our campaign promise to improve democracy, accountability, and transparency. It does not include every possible change that could have been made, but it doesn't mean we're not going to make more improvements in the future. We've proposed a joint special legislative committee to review Alberta's elections and make recommendations that will cover all aspects of the electoral process. That review will take time, especially if we want a vigorous and thorough review, which is why we have proposed these initial changes to electoral financing.

Madam Speaker, I'm proud that this is the first piece of legislation our government has brought before you, legislation that will renew democracy and help to ensure that individuals can be confident that their concerns are being represented in this Legislative Assembly. I ask all the members for their support of me and this bill in moving to third reading.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Throughout the debate on Bill 1, An Act to Renew Democracy in Alberta, Wildrose has been abundantly clear. We are in support of eliminating corporate and union donations and getting big money and big labour out of politics. We believe that the power of democracy is best served when it's in the hands of the individual voters. Wildrose has stated for a very long time that there needs to be an end to big business and organized labour bearing undue influence on politics and having an unfair advantage when it comes to funding elections.

Finally we have a government that has taken action. Well, sort of, Madam Speaker. Getting rid of corporate and union donations is long overdue. It's a great first step, but just like the government before them, it is only a half a step forward. Just like the government before them, they take a Wildrose policy straight from our campaign platform, write it into law, and then only take it halfway. I don't know about the hon. members across the way, but I didn't come here to do half a job.

This government has decided that big unions should still be able to fund campaigns in backhanded ways. Wildrose has fought against this through every step of the debate, and we're not going to stop now. When we say that we want to get big money out of politics, we mean it. We don't say it and then use it as a half measure to make it look like we're doing something.

This government has gone halfway, and we support them for that. I'm glad to vote in favour of this, and I do so in recognition that this is a great first step. If it takes four years to finish the job, then I'm

proud to do so when Wildrose forms the next government. I just wish it wouldn't take that long.

My colleague and my friend from Bonnyville-Cold Lake brought forward some smart and logical amendments, Madam Speaker. Unfortunately, the government just smacked them down without due thought or process. As my friend from Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills pointed out ever so elegantly last week, it seems like orange really is the new blue. This isn't the kind of change that Albertans voted for. Albertans voted for a new way of doing things and an end to politics as usual. Albertans thought that both the Wildrose and the NDP were in favour of eliminating corporate and union donations. I don't think they thought that the NDP's commitment was just an empty campaign promise. When Wildrose makes a commitment, we mean it. Maybe it's just the new politician in me, but I hoped that the new government was going to stand by their commitments, too.

I think that the debate surrounding Bill 1, Madam Speaker, is going to be an indicator of things to come. I think it means that we now have a government that is more concerned with window dressing than with actually seeing results. I want that side of the House to prove me wrong. I hope they will.

With that, Madam Speaker, I will offer this in closing. Let us measure twice and cut once. Often throughout debate the minister said that this was only the start and that more was coming related directly to corporate and union donations. What I don't understand is why she doesn't want to get the entire job done at once. In the future, when we debate legislation and the government brings it forward, I hope we can get it right the first time. If not, that's all right. Wildrose will finish the job in four years.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to be able to rise to speak to Bill 1, An Act to Renew Democracy in Alberta, in third reading. This is, of course, a fundamentally important piece of legislation, and I'm so proud that our party has been able to lead the introduction of this absolutely foundational improvement to our system of democracy in this province.

You know, I just want to respond to a couple of points that have been made. I can't go as far back as, well, one member, anyway, in terms of the history lesson, but I can say that I was elected in 2008, and in 2008 one of the fundamental campaign platform promises that we made, our party, the NDP, was to ban corporate and union donations. Now, you know, I don't want to be a stickler about history, but I'm pretty sure the Wildrose didn't exist then. Unless you've entered a whole new space-time continuum, I think you really, truly have to rethink this notion that the idea was yours and we took it because, in fact, that is not the case. It's been a long-standing position of our party for, in fact, years and years and decades that we get corporate and union donations out of our electoral system.

The reason for that, Madam Speaker, is because we know that when you give the power to donate and to support whatever political party people believe in and believe represents their issues, when you give that power to individual human beings, who happen to often be individual voters, then, in fact, you make your democratic system far more accountable and far more representative. So we're very, very pleased to be leading this change here in Alberta.

Now, as for a number of the points that I've already heard made tonight about how this could be improved, be very clear, Madam Speaker, that it is absolutely our intention to move forward on a

whole range of issues that have already been raised tonight and previous nights in debate.

9:40

One of the things that we thought was really important, though, because this is a piece of legislation that impacts not just folks on this side of the House but also folks on that side of the House and even folks in that corner of the House, because it impacts all of us, was that we should refer the matter to a special all-party standing committee so that everybody could have impact. So rather than, you know, taking potshots about window dressing and all that kind of thing, we actually thought that it would be worthwhile for us to be able to, as a group on an all-party basis, take the time to consider all the issues that arise when you start opening up the Election Act and the election financing act.

You know, we've had a number of issues already raised. We've had issues about: well, what's a donation; what's an in-kind donation; how much should be donated; how much should people be allowed to spend; when should they be allowed to spend; when should the government be allowed to advertise vis-à-vis and in relation to an election; should an election be an election season, or should it be an election day in terms of whether it's fixed? There are so many great ideas that I think we can all bring to the table that will ultimately improve our democratic system not just for folks over here but for folks over there and, most importantly, for folks outside of this building.

So that's why I'm so proud of the fact that we're going to make one of our first acts be an opportunity for that very open conversation in a very open and transparent platform, and I'm sorry that that process disappoints the member from the Official Opposition, but I actually think that it's something that's good for all Albertans. I'm very proud of the process that we put in place. I'm very proud of Bill 1. I'm very proud of the foundational change that it already makes to our democratic system here in Alberta, and as I've said, I'm very proud that that change comes as a result of the work of this NDP government.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other speakers with respect to the bill?

If not, then we will call the vote on Bill 1 in third reading.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:43 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Hunter	Notley
Bhullar	Jansen	Orr
Bilous	Jean	Piquette
Ceci	Kazim	Pitt
Clark	Kleinstauber	Renaud
Cooper	Larivee	Rosendahl
Cortes-Vargas	Littlewood	Sabir
Cyr	Loewen	Schmidt
Dach	Loyola	Schreiner
Dang	Luff	Shepherd
Drever	Malkinson	Sigurdson
Ellis	Mason	Smith
Feehan	McCuaig-Boyd	Starke
Fildebrandt	McIver	Sucha
Fitzpatrick	McKitrick	Sweet

Ganley	McLean	Taylor
Goehring	McPherson	Turner
Gray	Miller	van Dijken
Hanson	Miranda	Westhead
Hinkley	Nielsen	Woollard
Hoffman	Nixon	Yao
Horne		
Totals:	For – 64	Against – 0

[Motion carried unanimously; Bill 1 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole
(continued)

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

Bill 3
Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2015 (No. 2)

The Chair: Hon. members, we have under consideration in committee Bill 3, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2015 (No. 2). Are there any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill?

Mrs. Pitt: Eighteen billion dollars is a lot of money. Most of us were sent here with the hopes that things in Edmonton would change, that the old way of doing business in politics would be over. Voters hoped for transparency, a government and opposition that would be accountable to the people. I for one will never forget that. I never thought I would long for the days where budgets were more transparent, longing for a fulsome debate over specifics of a budget, yet here we are. Even a complete document would be nice. Ministers providing three lines on how they intend to spend billions of dollars. “Just wait. Hold on. It’s coming.” I just can’t imagine that that is transparent. That is not accountable. That’s reckless. That is someone else’s money. People work really hard and send money to Edmonton, happy to provide programs and services that help our fellow Albertans out. I know that I wish I had details on the budget. I bet most Albertans do, too.

The thing with this budget is that it doesn’t have much of a mandate. In fact, the past two Premiers that attempted to pass this budget are now former Premiers, looking for a mandate, too. I’m not sure I’d want to be counted amongst those distinguished people.

I’m as keen as the next Albertan to see the financials. I want this taken seriously. It is billions of dollars. I’m all for giving this government enough time to get up to speed on their portfolios. I’m sure it’s a big job. It’s been months. It snowed when this government won, and it’s looking like it will be snowing again by the time this government gets their numbers together. And I think, more importantly to this government, the federal election will be long over by the time we see a budget.

Albertans voted out the last party that played politics with our money. We want to help. I’d be more than happy to help with whatever over there to see where the money is going. What can I do to help? It’s a serious question.

We want this budget brought forward in September. That seems like more than enough time. Does this government even know when the budget will be brought forward? December? October? January? Does it matter as long as the federal NDP are done trolling for votes around here? At the very least fully debating this budget would be helpful. Give the ministers a chance to speak to where the money is going, where the spending is going. Assure Albertans that this

government is being open and honest about where their tax dollars are going.

We’re very disappointed that we have no idea about what the true state of Alberta’s finances are a full week after this budget was introduced. Albertans deserve to know how much we are taking in to pay for nearly six months of government spending. They deserve to know how much we are borrowing, how much interest is siphoning funds away from core government services, and they deserve to know how the government plans to fund all their new spending.

10:00

In the election the Wildrose was clear about our financial plan. It was realistic, attainable, and modest. It put forward a reasonable solution to reduce the size of the most expensive government in Canada: make it more about the people served, not the dollars spent. The government’s plan, instead, is to make government grow faster than they can tax Albertans, which just isn’t fair or realistic. We will keep fighting to clear the air on this minibudget and stand up for Albertans demanding better, more transparent government.

The Chair: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Madam Chair. As many of the previous speakers on this bill have mentioned in the past, it’s a shame that we’re debating such a large amount of money, \$18 billion – I mean, wow – in such a rushed, short period of time. Last week the government announced some details about the spending in four areas. These areas include education, health, human services, and advanced education. For education there is more funding to meet student growth and to restore reductions planned by the previous government to areas such as English language learners and funding for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students. Part of the intended money was for Human Services for investments in child intervention, FCSS increases, and increased shelter beds for women. Finally, the government announced funding for postsecondary institutions. This funding will go to colleges and universities across Alberta for an immediate tuition freeze. The other commitment for postsecondary institutions is funding to reverse market modifiers that were approved by the last government in December.

In December the PC government approved 25 market modifiers to allow tuition increases in mostly specialized and professional programs across the province, programs like law and business. It’s my understanding that this bill will add an additional \$40 million this year for postsecondary institutions, but the details of the plan for Alberta’s systems are not yet clear. Wildrose policy when it comes to tuition is to limit tuition increases to the rate of inflation every year. We certainly agree that a postsecondary education should be accessible to all students, and this means making sure that tuition increases don’t rise at a rate that makes a good education out of reach.

At the same time, we also need to be sure that our whole system is sustainable. The NDP promise to reverse all the market modifier increases is a bit of a problem because it was a decision that didn’t take each different circumstance into account. Our postsecondary institutions need a plan for sustainability more than they need a quick injection of cash.

Athabasca University is facing a serious issue when it comes to sustainability. It is a university that has 40,000 online and distance education students, many in Alberta but also a large number in Canada and other countries, and is struggling for sustainability. I’d like to know the government’s plan for supporting our whole

postsecondary system. Bill 3 adds spending before there has been a chance to discuss details of the money. They are spending even faster than they can tax.

Postsecondary education in Alberta needs good planning. For years the ministry has struggled to streamline and find better ways to direct our public institutions. The Campus Alberta model has been presented as the answer, but confusion and overlap in direction has been an ongoing problem. It's frustrating to see the new government come in and request additional funding right away but be unable to provide concrete details for the spending or to answer the question: where are the additional funds coming from?

It's certainly reasonable to support the spending outlined in Bill 3 on the face of it, but we are being asked here to consider legislation quickly, with a shortage of detail about the spending and knowing that there is so much work to be done evaluating programs, services as they now stand.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'd like to take this opportunity to perhaps ask some questions of the Premier. We live in a situation where our single largest cost pressure is that of wages. We have a number of contracts that are in place that require continuous increases, yet about 20 per cent of our contracts are up for renewal every single year. This is a question I posed last week to ministers as well. In this year about 20 per cent of the government's contracts with public-sector unions and other partners are going to be up for renewal. Within this five-month period that you are seeking interim supply for, what is your plan to deal with those specific negotiations? How do you plan on curbing these expenditures? Do you foresee yourselves going to the bargaining table seeking zero per cent increases in this approximately 20 per cent of contract renewals that are coming up during this year, or do you see yourselves going to the negotiating table by presenting raises of whatever magnitude, 2, 3, 4, 5 per cent? We'll start with that.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much for the question, hon. member. I am in charge of that area within my ministry. The officials have briefed me several times, but they've not identified any ongoing bargaining that's taking place right now that I need to be aware of or address. I will be continuing to work with officials, obviously, within the ministry, but they've not identified that as a pressure point that I need to expend time on in these 30 days that I've been here. I will be, of course, here over the summer with regard to budget preparations, and issues that come up in that period of time will be addressed within the full budget, that we'll be bringing back in the fall.

Ms Hoffman: If I might supplement, Madam Chair, I just want to thank the hon. member for the question and to say that, of course, it would be irresponsible for us to talk about negotiation strategies prior to actually being part of the negotiation table. Having been on both sides of the table, we'll be happy to finalize and bring information forward once negotiations are complete, but I think it would not be wise for the employer to be talking about opening offers, potentially, in this venue.

Mr. Bhullar: I want to first of all start by saying that I really appreciate the frankness of the Finance minister last week and this week. Minister, I appreciate, you know, you breaking down the budget in very simple format. I don't think we agree that the numbers all add up, but you've provided us with a basis. Now, I would ask you, though, to go back to your officials because in any

given year approximately 20 per cent of negotiations occur with a wide range of our partners. It doesn't mean that the government of Alberta is directly negotiating with these folks. It could be our postsecondary partners that have union negotiations that are ongoing.

To the Minister of Health. Minister, I absolutely agree that you shouldn't be talking about all of your strategy in public, but you need a broad policy objective, and you should have some accounting for that within this budget – a five-month period is a very large period – in which you establish some very clear frameworks. Now, whether you disagree with us is fine, but we did provide a very clear understanding to our public-sector partners and our unions. We said: "Listen. Contracts that are signed we obviously have to live up to, but on a go-forward basis Alberta does not have the money, Alberta does not have the resources to be able to give you 2, 3, 4, or 5 per cent. It's just not in the cards. It's just not feasible."

10:10

These are really important pieces. Now, I don't remember the date, but in your department, Minister of Health, you will have a very significant negotiation ongoing with the nurses. I think this is a wonderful opportunity for you to provide us with some insight on the strategy within this next five-month period on how you plan on moving forth in negotiations and preliminary discussions with nurses. If I remember correctly, negotiations were supposed to start later this year – again, I'm going by memory – because the contract is up next year if I remember correctly.

An Hon. Member: No.

Mr. Bhullar: Somebody from the other side yelled no, so perhaps he was a member of that bargaining unit before. I would remind the member that he obviously will need to clear such issues with the Ethics Commissioner.

But there are 20 per cent of our union negotiations that take place in any given year. Madam Premier, if I remember correctly – I'm going by memory – there'll be a number of postsecondaries. If you would ask your ministers to go and take a look, your postsecondary partners will have negotiations ongoing with their unions today, right?

These are all really important pieces, and within a five-month period – you're asking us to vote on billions of dollars here – we'd like to know what the strategy is. We'd like to know how many dollars are going towards that. Or are we just walking around saying: "You know what? We'll deal with all other issues later. Let's make sure we sign some new contracts"? I think that's a very, very important, relevant discussion that we need to be having because the fact is that I don't foresee our revenue pie growing very much.

You know, RBC and the Conference Board of Canada are two of the latest people to step up and say: we think Alberta is going to be in a recession this year. In recessionary periods your resource revenues are already coming down. You have business taxes that are not going to produce the types of results they did before. We have a lot of expenditures, a lot more options, and I don't think we really have a lot of new spending restraints that are coming in.

To the Finance minister or the Premier or the Minister of Health: just as, you know, with some of the other unanswered questions that we have – we have a commitment from the Government House Leader that he'll provide us with written answers – can we get a commitment from you to take a look and see which negotiations, which contracts are coming up for renewal in this year? As I said, they can be your partners, our partners in the public sector. We just want a commitment that you'll tell us which ones are coming up

and how you plan on dealing with those within this period of five months. Is that a commitment we can get from you?

Mr. Ceci: I would like to say that compensation for the public sector accounts for about \$24 billion of the 48 or so billion dollars that the provincial budget is, so it's pretty substantial. Thank you for raising that.

In June 2014, about a year ago, the government of Alberta ratified an agreement with its unionized employees, as you will probably remember, resulting in a 2 per cent wage increase in 2014, 2.25 in 2015, and 2.5 in 2016. Now, that takes us all the way through '16. The terms of that agreement were also extended to management and opted-out employees. So we've got a big number of employees, both opted-out and unionized, covered through 2016.

The Chair: Hon. minister, I hesitate to interrupt, but under Standing Order 64(4) the chair of the Committee of the Whole shall forthwith "put a single question proposing the approval of every appropriation Bill then standing referred to the committee, which shall be decided without debate or amendment, and the committee shall [forthwith] rise and report."

Pursuant to Standing Order 64(4) I must now put the following question: does the committee approve the following bill, Bill 3, Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2015 (No. 2)?

[The voice vote indicated that Bill 3 was approved]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:15 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:

Biilus	Kazim	Notley
Ceci	Kleinsteuber	Piquette
Clark	Larivee	Renaud
Cortes-Vargas	Littlewood	Rosendahl
Dach	Loyola	Sabir
Dang	Luff	Schmidt
Drever	Malkinson	Schreiner
Feehan	Mason	Shepherd
Fitzpatrick	McCuaig-Boyd	Sigurdson
Ganley	McKitrick	Sucha
Goehring	McLean	Sweet
Gray	McPherson	Turner
Hinkley	Miller	Westhead
Hoffman	Miranda	Woollard
Horne	Nielsen	

10:20

Against the motion:

Aheer	Hunter	Pitt
Bhullar	Jansen	Smith
Cooper	Jean	Starke
Cyr	Loewen	Taylor
Ellis	McIver	van Dijken
Fildebrandt	Nixon	Yao
Hanson		

Totals: For – 44 Against – 19

[Motion carried]

The Chair: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 64(4) the committee shall now immediately rise and report.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Ms Woollard: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 3.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: Any opposed? So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 2

An Act to Restore Fairness to Public Revenue

Mr. Ceci: Madam Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today to move second reading of Bill 2, an Act to Restore Fairness to Public Revenue, 2015. On May 5 Albertans have voted for change, and this government is proud to announce that this bill delivers on key commitments we made during that election campaign. Our plan restores fairness and balance to Alberta's taxation system, it provides the government with stable and secure revenues to protect the quality of life we all enjoy, and it keeps us globally competitive as a great place to live and do business. Over the coming months our government will be putting together a full fiscal plan, a fiscal plan built upon the premise that everyone contributes fairly. Our shift to a progressive income tax system puts us back in line with the rest of the country, all provinces and territories, while still maintaining the most competitive tax system in the country and asks those who do better to help build a fairer and more equitable society for everyone.

As I mentioned at the first reading, the bill has two distinct components that accomplish these ends. The second part of the proposed bill is to introduce greater progressivity to the province's personal income tax system. This will include the creation of five new tax brackets with implementation beginning October 1, 2015.

Madam Speaker, it's important to note that 93 per cent of Alberta taxpayers will not be impacted by these PIT changes and only the top income earners pay a little bit more. It's important to note that even with these changes, Alberta's earning exemptions will still remain the highest in the country, meaning that Albertans will retain the most before they have to start paying provincial income tax. Albertans will continue to pay the lowest overall taxes when compared to other provinces.

Madam Speaker, this revenue is much-needed. It will ensure long-term, stable funding for health care, education, and other important programs and services.

Madam Speaker, I'm also proud that we are making a more affordable Alberta for everyone with the additional changes to the fee structures in the province. I announced last week that we'll be following through on our campaign commitments to eliminate the health care levy; to eliminate user fees on marriage, birth, and death certificates; and to eliminate vehicle and licensing fees. These fees and regressive levies, which would have made it harder for families to make ends meet, are not going to be followed through with. All Albertans will benefit by the rollbacks that would have gone in place and affected families on so many of these basic services.

The first part of the proposed bill is to increase the corporate income tax rate from 10 per cent to 12 per cent effective July 1, 2015. Through our plan small businesses will continue to enjoy a 3 per cent rate. But today we're asking corporations who have long

benefited from our exceptionally low tax rates to contribute a little more to support a better quality of life for all Albertans.

Madam Speaker, even with this change businesses, including small businesses, will still enjoy an overall competitive advantage in Alberta when compared with other provinces because there's no sales tax, there's no payroll tax, there are no health premiums, and we have the lowest fuel tax in Canada.

Our government is committed to working with businesses to promote jobs and diversify our economy. Over the coming months we'll be preparing a budget, and I've already begun and my colleagues have already begun productive conversations with business leaders about how best to support growth in our economy. This government is committed to ensuring that Alberta will continue to be globally competitive and an attractive option for investors thanks to its infrastructure, cities, educated population, and investment opportunities.

Madam Speaker, this is much-needed revenue that will ensure long-term, stable funding for health care, education, and other important programs and services. My colleagues who are the ministers of Health, Education, Human Services, and Advanced Education have already spoken clearly about what this means for Albertans. I'm very proud of the excellent work that they have done in reinvesting in the core services that Albertans depend on.

Bill 2 gives all Albertans more opportunities, opportunities that were going to be squandered by the previous government. Bill 2 allows us to reverse cuts to health care and invest in stable, predictable funding for the vital public services that matter most to Albertans. It allows us to invest in schools and ensure that students get the education they deserve. It allows us to immediately freeze tuition at postsecondary institutions across Alberta so that all of our

youth have an opportunity to succeed and so that we can build an educated population. Finally, Bill 2 allows us to strengthen services to the most vulnerable in our communities and help them lead more successful lives.

Madam Speaker, these changes will return Alberta to a stable tax system with a steady stream of revenue to support our vital public services while maintaining our province's overall tax advantage. Our province will continue to be a great place to do business. As the Premier has made clear, in the coming budget we will outline new initiatives to build and diversify our economy. In all, we are responsibly ensuring that all families have access to the important services they need like health, education, and social services. This is the fair thing to do, and it's what Albertans elected us to do. I'd encourage all members on both sides of the House to support this bill, and I look forward to discussing it with you further.

Madam Speaker, with this I'd like to adjourn debate for tonight. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister has moved to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Mr. Mason: Madam Speaker, we've had a very productive day. I want to thank all members for their contribution. I think we've had excellent debate on a number of very important issues for the future of the province. I would suggest that we call it a day, so I'll move that we adjourn now until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 10:29 p.m. to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, June 23, 2015

Day 6

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

First Session

Wanner, Hon. Robert E., Medicine Hat (ND), Speaker
Jabbour, Deborah C., Peace River (ND), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Feehan, Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (ND), Deputy Chair of Committees

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Rocky View (W)
Anderson, Shaye, Leduc-Beaumont (ND)
Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (W)
Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (ND)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (W)
Bhullar, Manmeet Singh, Calgary-Greenway (PC)
Bilous, Hon. Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (ND),
Deputy Government House Leader
Carlier, Hon. Oneil, Whitecourt-St. Anne (ND)
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-Meadowlark (ND)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, Calgary-Fort (ND)
Clark, Greg, Calgary-Elbow (AP)
Connolly, Michael R.D., Calgary-Hawkwood (ND)
Coolahan, Craig, Calgary-Klein (ND)
Cooper, Nathan, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (W),
Official Opposition House Leader
Cortes-Vargas, Estefania, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (ND)
Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake (W),
Official Opposition Deputy Whip
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (ND)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South West (ND)
Drever, Deborah, Calgary-Bow (Ind)
Drysdale, Wayne, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (PC),
Progressive Conservative Opposition Whip
Eggen, Hon. David, Edmonton-Calder (ND)
Ellis, Mike, Calgary-West (PC)
Fildebrandt, Derek Gerhard, Strathmore-Brooks (W)
Fitzpatrick, Maria M., Lethbridge-East (ND)
Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (PC)
Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., Calgary-Buffalo (ND)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (ND)
Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (PC)
Gray, Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (ND)
Hanson, David B., Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills (W),
Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
Hinkley, Bruce, Wetaskiwin-Camrose (ND)
Hoffman, Hon. Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (ND)
Horne, Trevor A.R., Spruce Grove-St. Albert (ND)
Hunter, Grant R., Cardston-Taber-Warner (W)
Jansen, Sandra, Calgary-North West (PC)
Jean, Brian Michael, QC, Fort McMurray-Conklin (W),
Leader of the Official Opposition
Kazim, Anam, Calgary-Glenmore (ND)
Kleinstuber, Jamie, Calgary-Northern Hills (ND)
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Littlewood, Jessica, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (ND)
Loewen, Todd, Grande Prairie-Smoky (W)
Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (ND)
Luff, Robyn, Calgary-East (ND)
MacIntyre, Donald, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (W)
Malkinson, Brian, Calgary-Currie (ND)
Mason, Hon. Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (ND),
Government House Leader
McCuaig-Boyd, Hon. Margaret,
Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley (ND)
McIver, Ric, Calgary-Hays (PC),
Leader of the Progressive Conservative Opposition
McKittrick, Annie, Sherwood Park (ND)
McLean, Stephanie V., Calgary-Varsity (ND),
Deputy Government Whip
McPherson, Karen M., Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill (ND)
Miller, Barb, Red Deer-South (ND)
Miranda, Ricardo, Calgary-Cross (ND)
Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (ND)
Nixon, Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (W),
Official Opposition Whip
Notley, Hon. Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (ND),
Premier
Orr, Ronald, Lacombe-Ponoka (W)
Payne, Brandy, Calgary-Acadia (ND)
Phillips, Hon. Shannon, Lethbridge-West (ND),
Deputy Government House Leader
Piquette, Colin, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater (ND)
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie (W)
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (ND)
Rodney, Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC)
Rosendahl, Eric, West Yellowhead (ND)
Sabir, Hon. Irfan, Calgary-McCall (ND)
Schmidt, Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (ND),
Government Whip
Schneider, David A., Little Bow (W)
Schreiner, Kim, Red Deer-North (ND)
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-Centre (ND)
Sigurdson, Hon. Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (ND)
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (W)
Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC),
Progressive Conservative Opposition House Leader
Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (W)
Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (W)
Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (ND)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (ND)
Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (W)
Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (ND)
van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND)
Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)
Vacant, Calgary-Foothills

Party standings:

New Democrat: 53 Wildrose: 21 Progressive Conservative: 9 Alberta Liberal: 1 Alberta Party: 1 Independent: 1 Vacant: 1

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Robert H. Reynolds, QC, Law Clerk/ Director of Interparliamentary Relations	Philip Massolin, Manager of Research Services	Chris Caughell, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms
Shannon Dean, Senior Parliamentary Counsel/Director of House Services	Nancy Robert, Research Officer	Gordon H. Munk, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms
		Janet Schwegel, Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>

Executive Council

Rachel Notley	Premier, President of Executive Council, Minister of International and Intergovernmental Relations
Deron Bilous	Minister of Municipal Affairs, Minister of Service Alberta
Oneil Carlier	Minister of Agriculture and Forestry
Joe Ceci	President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance
David Eggen	Minister of Education, Minister of Culture and Tourism
Kathleen T. Ganley	Minister of Justice and Solicitor General, Minister of Aboriginal Relations
Sarah Hoffman	Minister of Health, Minister of Seniors
Brian Mason	Minister of Transportation, Minister of Infrastructure
Margaret McCuaig-Boyd	Minister of Energy
Shannon Phillips	Minister of Environment and Parks, Minister Responsible for the Status of Women
Irfan Sabir	Minister of Human Services
Lori Sigurdson	Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education, Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour

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Chair: Mr. Coolahan
Deputy Chair: Mr. Schneider
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Carson Larivee
Fitzpatrick McKitrick
Gotfried Schreiner
Hanson Sucha
Horne Taylor
Hunter

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Ms Miller
Deputy Chair: Mr. Nielsen
Cyr Piquette
Ellis Renaud
Malkinson Taylor
Miranda

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Sweet
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Hinkley Rodney
Jansen Shepherd
Littlewood Swann
Luff Westhead
Orr Yao
Payne

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Ms Woollard
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Cooper Sweet
Cortes-Vargas van Dijken
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Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Wanner
Deputy Chair: Mr. Schmidt
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Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Ms McPherson
Deputy Chair: Mr. Kleinsteuber
Anderson, W. Hinkley
Babcock Littlewood
Connolly McKitrick
Dang Rosendahl
Drever Stier
Drysdale Strankman
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Ellis Starke
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Kazim Woollard
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Cyr Payne
Dach Renaud
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Loyola

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Ms Kazim
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Aheer MacIntyre
Anderson, S. Rosendahl
Babcock Schreiner
Clark Stier
Drysdale Sucha
Horne Woollard
Kleinsteuber

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, June 23, 2015

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Let us reflect. On this day, National Day of Remembrance for Victims of Terrorism, let each of us remember those who have been taken and those who have suffered as innocent victims of violent tragedy. We resolve to comfort the families, friends, and communities and people everywhere who have felt the pain and loss of loved ones through acts of violence and the disregard for the sanctity of that which is most precious, life.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased today to introduce to you and through you Calgary Mayor Naheed Nenshi and his chief of staff Chima Nkemdirim. Mr. Nenshi is no stranger to this building or to the members of this Chamber. He was first elected in 2010 and has spent the intervening years serving his constituents and representing the city on the provincial and the national stages. Municipal governments, including in Calgary, play an important role in providing services and supports that families rely on every day. Over the last month I've had excellent conversations with municipal officials about our shared priorities, from stable funding to infrastructure to flood protection and public transit. I look forward to continuing those discussions with Mayor Nenshi and Mr. Nkemdirim this afternoon and in the weeks and the months ahead. So I'd ask that all members join me in giving these guests our warm welcome.

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, I see that they haven't arrived yet, but I am going to take the opportunity as I hope they will arrive momentarily. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly some very special guests today in the House. I will ask them to stand when they arrive and allow us the privilege of introducing them. First and foremost is my incredibly supportive and accomplished wife, Cathy: my CVO, or chief volunteer officer, during the recent election; mother of my three beautiful children; long-time tourism professional and creator of Babes in Bali, women's-only tours to Bali, Indonesia. As a legacy of her passion for this incredible destination and its people, she has been volunteering and supporting less fortunate children through adoption of an orphanage on this island for over a decade. Cathy has also been a dedicated volunteer for the CBE, serving in chair and vice-chair roles and other key volunteer positions on parent councils at all of our children's schools over the past decade.

I am also honoured to have three young constituents and future leaders joining us today, all of whom became interested in and learned a bit about politics over the past few months and all of whom demonstrated their volunteer spirit in the process although I have to say that mention of another literature drop might just send them into convulsions. Firstly, my loving daughter Georgia Jayne, looking forward to being a grade 11 student at Bishop O'Byrne high school next year and to hopefully getting her driver's licence next week. Secondly, Ms Grace Hilton, our second daughter, area

constituent, grade 11 student at STS, and an accomplished athlete. And last but not least, Mr. Liam Franke, also an area constituent, grade 11 student at Dr. E.P. Scarlett high school and long-time family friend. Maybe they can hear us outside the Chamber, but please join me in the traditional welcome accorded to all honoured guests.

Ms McKittrick: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the House four persons who have been active in the fourth national day of action drawing attention to refugee health care. Health care professionals from Victoria to St. John's rallied across the country to call on the federal government to reinstate refugee health services as part of the interim federal health program. The Edmonton rally took place at noon on June 15 at the University of Alberta. Please stand as I call your name.

Sarah Hanafi was one of the organizers for the national day of action for refugee health here in Edmonton. Sarah is a second-year medical student at the University of Alberta, with a long-standing interest in minority issues in health care.

Ruth Wolfe is on the academic staff of the University of Alberta School of Public Health where she serves as practice program director. She has worked on and studied issues associated with the inequities facing minorities for over 40 years and immigrant and refugee health for over 20 years. She's a strong advocate for community health workers as a vital bridge between minority communities and health and social service programs.

Dr. Jessie Breton is an emergency physician working at the Royal Alex hospital in Edmonton. She's a member of the Canadian Doctors for Refugee Care, a group of front-line health care workers from across Canada advocating for refugee health care. She's also the cofounder of the Alberta Refugee Care Coalition, which has strived to fill the gaps left by the cuts here in Alberta.

Bashir Mohamed is a refugee and was involved in organizing the rally on June 15. He's a student in political science at the University of Alberta. I would ask that the House offer the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly several members of the Edmonton cycling community and supporters of the Edmonton cycling community. I'd just ask that they each stand as they are introduced. Tyler Golly is the general supervisor for the city of Edmonton's transportation master plan. In his six years with the city he's worked tirelessly to develop and implement the bicycle transportation plan. My own constituency of Edmonton-Centre will benefit from this work with the construction of a protected bike lane on 102nd Avenue, scheduled to be completed next year, and I thank him for his efforts.

As a nephrologist and critical care physician at Royal Alexandra hospital, Dr. Darren Markland knows well the damage that a lack of regular physical exercise can do. Today I'd like to recognize him for his daily efforts to model a solution by travelling our city almost exclusively by bike.

In his work with the Edmonton Bicycle and Touring Club and Alberta Bicycle Association, Mr. Alan Schietzsch helped found the Tour of Alberta gran fondo, an event that has grown to host over 1,500 riders each year on roads across Alberta, and this is an event that he continues to support today as a volunteer.

As the president and executive director of the Edmonton Bicycle Commuters Society, Chris Chan has been one of our city's most vocal advocates to ensure that cyclists and pedestrians are protected and respected on our streets. I salute both Chris and the EBC for their long-standing and ongoing work.

Through her graduate studies in human ecology, weekly bike report on CJSR 88.5 FM, and work with the online cycling hub Bikeology, Karly Coleman helps inform and support those who already bike and encourages many others to give it a try. She's also a strong supporter and organizer of events during Bike Month.

Eric Jenkins commutes by bike every day year-round to his work as a public servant providing care and support for veterans through Capital Care and making deliveries for Calico bakery. Calico bakery is operated by his partner Laurel Ferster, an entrepreneur and fellow bike commuter who creates delicious baked goods that are available for sale every weekend at Edmonton-Centre's Mother's Market.

Lastly, I'd like to introduce Jay Smith, whose column, Your Ride, in *Metro* Edmonton offers stories and insights related to getting around Edmonton by transit, foot, and bike.

I'd ask all of you to join me in providing them with the warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Seniors.

1:40

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you some of the staff who've helped me in this office and helped me get where I am today. I'd like to begin by introducing the members of the transition team. Sharron Bursey has worked with government for seven years – please rise, Sharron – in communications offices with various ministries. Currently she is the office manager for the communications staff in the Ministry of Seniors. She helped me through the first two weeks as well as Cindy Dunphy, who has been with government for 34 years in a variety of roles, and currently she is in the Ministry of Seniors, working in the deputy minister's office. Thank you very much.

In terms of permanent staff we have Tonya Malo. Tonya started in my constituency as my constituency assistant yesterday. She has worked for AHS for the past 16 years in a variety of roles and was the chairperson of AUPE local 54 as well.

Claire Puyaoan has worked in government for nine years. I'm honoured to have her as part of my support team. Claire is my go-to for your correspondence, fellow MLAs, and she is one of the big contacts in our office, ensuring that I understand process and co-ordinating correspondence.

We also have Eileen Hofmann – spelled differently; no relation – who has spent more than six years working in a constituency office for a former MLA. Through her casework she's been inspired to become a registered social worker, a journey that she's been completing through night courses, which she will complete this summer. She is also one of our front-office experts, supporting Albertans and finding supports that they require through Health and Seniors.

Camille Hauck is my scheduling co-ordinator, and she is in charge of keeping me on time. She has worked in government since 1985 and continues to enjoy the challenges and excitement of her work. I keep it exciting.

Tim Wilson comes to us from Alberta Health, with seven years of experience in municipal and provincial government and two and a half years as the father of his daughter, Addie Eudora Halton Wilson. He's very proud of her. Also, he is my press secretary. We should mention that.

Bill Moore-Kilgannon is my chief of staff, and he comes to us after many years as an executive director of Public Interest Alberta and was also the first executive director for the Parkland Institute here at the University of Alberta. He is a proud dad to Neil and Ian.

Please join me in the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, thank you so much to you and through you to all members of this fine Assembly today. We all know that politics is about the support of our friends and family, and today I'm so pleased to be joined by just that, some very dear friends of ours who have shared a very similar family journey. It's great to have them here to support me today and to be able to take part in the proceedings. I would like to introduce to you Ashlea, Jaeden, and Ethan along with their mom, Steph Christensen. They are the future leaders of our province, and I'm so proud to have them here with us today. If you'll join me in welcoming them to the Assembly.

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, with the indulgence of the House I'd like my guests to rise and actually personally receive the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: To all our guests and visitors today, welcome.

The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly Dana Geall. For the last 10 years Dana has been a nurse at the University hospital, and Dana was one of my dedicated campaign volunteers. I thank her so much for her hard work, both as a nurse and certainly on our campaign. It is certainly an honour to have her here with us today, so I'd ask the Assembly to please give her the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: Are there any other members who have introductions today?

I'd like to use this opportunity for just a minute. Welcome to all our guests here. To the hon. members, let's remember that time is a very valuable commodity to this House, and as we make introductions in the future, I hope you'll remember that.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Bike Month

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise in the House today and recognize that across Canada June is celebrated as Bike Month. My own love of cycling goes back to my childhood, when the family bike ride was one of our most frequent and loved activities. That love has continued throughout my life.

Biking, however, is not merely an activity for children or to be pursued solely for recreation. Across Canada governments are recognizing that providing safe, accessible routes to commute by bike is an essential part of building a modern and progressive city. This has already been demonstrated in many other parts of the world.

With the growth of major urban centres comes increasing pressure from traffic congestion. The density of our urban cores does not allow for expanded roads, but we can move more people along existing corridors by investing in alternative means of transportation, including expanded transit and protected bike routes. It is my intention to work closely with our government to fulfill our campaign promise to provide secure, stable funding for municipalities that will allow them to continue this essential work.

Commuting by bike improves physical and mental health, decreasing pressure on our medical system. I've been commuting by bike within my own constituency of Edmonton-Centre for over five years. It allows me to slow down, focus, and connect to my

community while providing essential daily physical exercise. It is also my small part to mitigate the effects of climate change and reduce my dependence on fossil fuels.

Bike commuting isn't always possible or convenient for all people in all circumstances, but I encourage all my fellow members here in this House to try biking during the time that you spend here in Edmonton-Centre, whether on our beautiful river valley trails or to visit festivals, markets, and the unique local businesses here in our downtown core or even just coming here to work in this House. It's fast, it's efficient, and most of all it's fun. No matter what time of the year, it's always a good time to bike.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

My apologies, hon. member. I lived there at one time. I should have known this. Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Rural Health Care

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a privilege to speak in this House for the fine people of Grande Prairie-Smoky. Grande Prairie-Smoky has many vibrant communities. These communities make up a vital part of the Alberta economy. It is indeed sad to see how the government has treated such an important part of the province.

We have a severe lack of doctors, a problem not exclusive to Grande Prairie-Smoky. Some residents cannot even get a family doctor. If you're lucky enough to have one, it can still take up to six weeks to get an appointment. This forces people to go to emergency for simple things like getting a prescription renewed, which compounds the problems faced in emergency rooms. I recently heard first-hand of a patient that went to emergency, waited five hours, and was then moved to a second waiting room, where the people were sleeping on the floor, the same people that he waited with in the first waiting room.

Stories like this are common. We cannot continue to treat our seniors and other vulnerable citizens in this fashion. It is reprehensible. This is a topic I've heard over and over from the public and from seniors I have talked to. I have visited many seniors' facilities in the last couple of months. A common concern was the lack of seniors' facilities and other options for extended care.

Mr. Speaker, we spend an enormous amount of money on health care in Alberta, one of the highest in Canada, an enormous amount considering the dismal results we get, especially in rural and northern Alberta. Our front-line staff are doing the best they can with the broken system they are forced to work in. It's time to cut the waste in Alberta and put that funding toward front-line staff and hiring doctors for rural Alberta.

I have heard the current government state that there will be a \$500 million influx into the health care system. How much will be put into rural health, and how much is earmarked for hiring new doctors? Something needs to be done. I ask the government to seriously consider not only those in the Peace Country but all proud, hard-working Albertans.

1:50

Oral Question Period

Government Policies

Mr. Jean: Yesterday I asked the Premier if she really believed that Alberta will have an advantage from having higher business taxes than Ontario, British Columbia, and Quebec. She didn't answer. This Premier's government is taking our business taxes to levels higher than those of the provinces we compete with for our corporate head offices. Our personal taxes are going up for Alberta

families, but the real Alberta advantage saw dozens of corporations move their head offices to Alberta originally. So why is the Premier pursuing policies that will drive head offices out of Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, as I said yesterday when I answered this question, what this government is doing is pursuing policies that will get us off the royalty roller coaster. We are also pursuing policies that will ensure stable, predictable funding of those important public services that Albertans rely on, whether it be education, whether it be health care, whether it be postsecondary and many others. In order to do that, we need stable, predictable funding. So it is about time that we develop a tax system that is grown-up, one that reflects people that are committed to ensuring a good, solid economy.

Mr. Jean: The Premier is pursuing policies which will hurt our economy.

Wildrose wants to help the government clarify its fiscal situation. We're helpful. Yesterday the Member for Strathmore-Brooks tried to get the Finance minister to tell us how large the deficit will be this year. Well, he wouldn't answer, but just a few days ago the Premier told a columnist that the deficit would be \$5.4 billion. Why can the Premier talk about deficit numbers with the media but the Finance minister won't answer the same questions here in the Legislature?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, first of all, just in terms of the whole issue of driving investment out of Alberta, I did want to just mention an opportunity that I had on Friday to participate in an event where Telus announced that it would be investing a billion dollars in the city of Edmonton in infrastructure to support both our education and our health care systems. That was good news.

What I said in terms of the issue of deficit was that, generally speaking, as we work on a budget – that is not before the House today. [interjections]

The Speaker: I would remind the House that the leader, again, has some difficulty speaking when there's a lot of noise in the House, and time is a valuable commodity.

Second supplemental.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. More questions about pursuing policies which will hurt our economy. There are actually media reports that the Premier is going to dismantle the Alberta Energy Regulator. The AER was set up to reduce the regulatory burden on industry while ensuring that our environment was properly protected for Albertans' future. While Wildrose has heard complaints about the AER's inefficiency, there is no doubt that industry and Albertans have benefited from having a single regulator. Why is the Premier planning to dismantle . . .

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, first of all, "dismantle" is a little bit of a torquing of a quote in the article that the hon. member referred to. That is not the word that I used. What I did say was that our government will be conducting a full review of agencies, boards, and commissions, something that folks over there talked about doing as well. We'll be looking at salaries and salary disclosure as well as the function of each board. When I was asked about whether AER would be part of that review, I replied that it would. This is something the people from both sides of the House have asked for.

The Speaker: Second supplemental, the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Jean: So far this session this government has made statements in the Legislature and in the media that need some clarification, and we're here to help. The Education minister says that Alberta is expecting 12,000 extra students this fall. The Finance minister has used this number. Yesterday the Premier used this number. That number is false. Alberta school boards say that there will be 7,500 new students, not 12,000, a big difference. The actual data you can actually find on the Education ministry's website if you want to look. Can the Premier clarify why her government is using a number that they know is false?

The Speaker: Let me just clarify. That was the Official Opposition's second major question.
The Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. We are basing our numbers and basing our projection to make sure that we review the shortfall in funding based on all of the students coming into the education system across the province, in all places. That number is within a range, but it's quite an accurate range.

The Speaker: Now the first supplemental.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will remind the minister: it's on your website.

There are more statements, indeed, that need clarification from this government, and we're trying to be helpful. During debate on Bill 1 we asked the government to ban unions from donating the paid time of their employees. The Justice minister said that the law includes services in the definition of the contributions. That is simply not true. It was never an issue when union donations were allowed. Now it is a big problem. Unions can donate their employees' paid time to a political party for political purposes. Can the Premier please clarify?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Notwithstanding that I'm being asked to reflect on a unanimous decision of the House, actually, just to be clear, rather history-making, what I said when that issue was raised was that it's one of several different issues . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: . . . that we are putting to an all-party committee because, quite frankly, it's something that every member of this House should have a chance to weigh in on and that also Albertans should have a chance to weigh in on. That's why we're doing it.

Mr. Jean: So bringing in a law that doesn't actually change the law and allows donations from unions. I understand.

A final but very important statement from this government that needs clarification. The labour minister and the Premier have both said that increasing the minimum wage by 50 per cent will result in more jobs. Every employer of minimum wage employees say exactly the opposite. They point out that they will either have to shut down or they will have to reduce staff or they will have to find labour-saving ways to absorb a 50 per cent increase in labour costs. Can the Premier please clarify: does she know one single employer who will hire more . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me just begin by pointing out that my friend across the way has an interesting idea of what a supplemental question is. We started with education and students, then we went to the Election Act, and then we went to minimum wage. So, you know . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. Premier, would you finish?

Ms Notley: Nonetheless, in answer to your question, yes, I do know many employers who are going to create more jobs.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Pipeline Development

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've heard the Premier say that she understands that we need pipelines. That's brilliant. We want to help, but the government has a lot of trouble supporting pipelines heading west or south and has sent mixed signals about pipelines heading east. Let me be clear. A new report shows that without new pipelines western Canada will lose a hundred billion dollars over the next 15 years. Can the Energy minister explain why her government is dismissing this hundred billion dollar priority for Albertans?

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, I think the Premier made it fairly clear in the last few days that we are pursuing market access. Absolutely, that's important to our government. It's important to the industry. We've heard over and over again in our royalty discussions that that's one of the biggest concerns they have, and we are absolutely pursuing those talks.

Mrs. Aheer: We can do more to invite investment for refineries. However, that does not get our product to market. A hundred billion dollars lost in investment means less money to health care, education, to pay down the growing debt, or to save for our future, the future of Alberta. Projects like Keystone XL, the pipelines east and west are ready to be built today to start creating jobs for all Albertans. Can the Energy minister explain this government's growing disinterest in building pipelines?

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, first of all, the member opposite is truly mischaracterizing what we're saying, and I have to say that I'm not entirely sure how many times we have to say it for them to hear it. What I will say, however, is that, you know, I had a great conversation with the Premier of New Brunswick earlier this week, where we talked about our common interest with respect to Energy East. I'm also very excited to be talking about the Canadian energy strategy at the Council of the Federation in a couple of weeks. We will continue to do exactly what the minister over there has been saying.

Mrs. Aheer: *An Action a Day Keeps Global Capitalism Away*: that is the name of the book that the environment minister helped to write that calls for shutting down the oil sands and encouraging blockades to moving product to market. We need advocates, and we need people who understand the impacts of losing a hundred billion dollars from Alberta's economy over the next 15 years. We do not need economic experiments. The NDP in Saskatchewan gets it. Why can't the Energy minister here fully support building all environmentally responsible pipelines?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think we've made it fairly clear in the last week or two that we're working with all industry to talk about market access and working in an environmentally responsible way to get product to market.

Government Policies
(continued)

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Premier gave a heartfelt apology in the House to aboriginal peoples. Our caucus stood in recognition of that apology; the second party did not. Actions are more important than words. To the Premier: what action is your government taking to help aboriginal peoples benefit from Alberta's high quality of life to the full extent that they choose?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That was a very good question. Of course, there are a broad range of actions that we need to take. As you know, we supported the call of many indigenous leaders in our province for a proper, full inquiry into missing and murdered aboriginal women, but we know that that's one of many, many issues.

One of the things that we'll be doing is asking our government to look at the TRC recommendations and look at how we can make those real through a crossministry evaluation of what we can do to improve what we're doing, but we will also do that in consultation with First Nations.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, Alberta has had low unemployment traditionally, at least until the NDP government was elected. To the Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour: what programs will you put in place to assist youth, all Alberta youth, including aboriginal youth, to be included in the economy to the full extent of their abilities and ambitions so that they can become the bright future of Alberta that I believe we all want them to be?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you . . . Oh, sorry.

The Speaker: I have recognized the minister. Would you like it to be the Premier?

Ms Notley: Well, I think it was directed at me.

Mr. McIver: No. It was to the minister.

Ms Notley: It was to the minister? Well, then, I wasn't listening. We have every intention of promoting youth employment issues. Of course, we've got our job creators' tax credit, but also we ran on and will ultimately be introducing for next summer the return of the summer temporary employment program.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, in the throne speech it states, "Investing in skills and education is the single best investment our province can make to ensure our future prosperity." We agree. Today we hear reports of hundreds if not thousands more layoffs in Alberta. To the Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour: what are you doing to help Albertans get back to work after they've lost their jobs due to uncertainty created by your government's policies?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. The unemployment numbers we are

seeing are a reflection of the previous government's lack of diversifying the economy. We are committed to making lives better for all Alberta families, and this means raising the minimum wage to . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, as I was saying, the unemployment numbers that we're experiencing today are because of the previous government's lack of diversification of the economy, and we are investing in other things than the oil and gas sector . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.
The Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Minimum Wage

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Now, we've already heard a lot about minimum wage in this House, so I thought I would try a more nuanced approach. My friends on my right here: they're locked in. They believe a minimum wage should never increase, nor should any taxes in any case ever. My friends on my left: they're locked in, and they think a 50 per cent increase in Alberta's minimum wage is a cure-all. Now, I expect the truth is somewhere in between. To the Premier: what specific evidence can you provide that shows a \$15 minimum wage will not have unintended consequences . . .

The Speaker: Hon. Premier, is there a question that you'd like to respond to?

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. This really is a critical, critical issue. As I've said previously, there is a tremendous amount of evidence to show that when low-wage people have more money, it actually generates more economic activity. We also have seen the evidence in the States, where we've . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Any time left? Hon. Premier, 10 seconds, please.

Ms Notley: All right. Okay. Then, of course, we've seen numerous antipoverty reports that identify that a living wage in this province, for instance in Calgary . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Clark: So we haven't heard a study, and I wouldn't count that as evidence, but what I would agree on with the Premier is that I also care about poverty reduction. I care about that very much and helping people who really need it. Minimum wage, however, is a blunt instrument, and having a minimum wage 40 per cent higher than the rest of Canada is a risky social experiment that could backfire on this government and actually make the situation worse. To the Premier: will you commit to a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy that includes minimum wage, and if the evidence shows that a \$15 minimum wage hurts more than it helps, will you back down?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We, of course, are very focused on poverty reduction, and I've asked my Minister of Human Services to follow up on where that poverty reduction strategy is and to bring it forward with some real, significant changes, minimum wage being one of them, minimum wage being one of the key recommendations of groups who have

been working on the poverty reduction strategy for the last two and three years. So we know that that is part of it. The other thing to remember is that three years from now \$15 an hour will not be 40 per cent above the rest of the country.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, we know multinational corporations can spread the impact of minimum wage increases across hundreds of stores, but Alberta's small businesses will face increased costs, causing them to lay off staff or, worse, go out of business entirely. Now, I want to point out to the Premier that Calgary-Elbow and Edmonton-Strathcona are home to an especially high number of excellent Alberta small businesses. To the Premier: if you are locked in on a \$15 minimum wage, will you commit here and now to reduce small-business tax to offset the problems you will create for your constituents and mine?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, we will be putting together a job creation package that you will hear more about, Mr. Speaker, in the fall because we know that that is a very important issue. We'll be working together with business on that, and I look forward to that. But, again, we do not want a province where the only businesses that survive are those that require people to be paid at two-thirds of a living wage. We cannot grow our economy on the backs of the poor.

The Speaker: Before we begin the next set of questions, I would remind the House about preamble comments. I know there will be some creative ways found to not turn statements into preambles, so I would ask that you be conscious of that.

The Member for Calgary-East.

2:10

Education Concerns

Ms Luff: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a teacher in the CBE for the last six years I've regularly had classes that are up to 70 per cent English language learners. This is especially true in classes across my riding of Calgary-East. For years school boards have had to cut valuable supports for these students due to lack of funding. Since the future of our province relies on the success of all of our students, I ask the Minister of Education: what is this government doing to ensure that English language learners are getting the supports that they need?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. We recognize that we've seen a 50 per cent increase in second language learners in our public school system since 2005, and that number is increasing by 5 per cent a year. So the first thing that we did, very importantly as a new government, is that we reinstated the funding around all grants pertaining to second language learners as well as for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students as part of the ...

Mr. Jean: Time.

Mr. Eggen: ... \$103 million injection of funding for 12,000 new students in our schools.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I would remind that the time is being taken care of by the table officers, and that is who I'm listening to.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Luff: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In addition to English language learners, teachers are working with larger, more complex classes, less prep time, and fewer resources overall. Can the minister tell us what is being done to help these teachers and their students?

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, it's very important to understand the first principles in ensuring that schools are functioning and that kids are learning, and that's to make sure that you have proper funding in place. That's why, once again, we put that money in straight away, to ensure that we at least hold the line. Then I've also been working with parent groups and with trustee associations and with the Alberta Teachers' Association to make sure that we build a sustainable plan for the future.

The Speaker: I would remind the hon. member that the last time I heard your first supplemental, I thought I saw a preamble in there. I know it'll be different this time. Go ahead.

Ms Luff: I really like preambles.

To the Minister of Education again: given that school boards have told us they felt ignored and neglected by the previous government and given that I have spoken with some principals and superintendents and they are very hopeful that this new government will hear their concerns, what are we doing to ensure that school boards are being heard?

The Speaker: Very creative use of the word "given." I'm sure I'm going to hear that a few times today.

The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you. Well, given that I've met with school boards across the province – and, you know, we opened up the door straight away. I've had meetings not just with each of those groups separately but with all of those groups together, which is the first time, they've said, in many, many years that that's happened. We're looking for a spirit of collaboration to ensure that we get the long-term funding we need, where we need it, when we need it so that all students in our province are able to succeed and learn to the best of their abilities.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Education Funding

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has presented an interim supply bill without information about how the funds will be used. The budget will not be presented until the school year has started. School authorities are holding back their funding for hiring and supports until they have some clarity about the budget. This crisis in educational planning has been brought on by this government. To the Minister of Education: what is the Minister of Education going to do to ensure that educational funds are ... [Mr. Smith's speaking time expired]

Mr. Eggen: I guess, Mr. Speaker, hyperbole is part of the action plan for this opposition over here.

We made it very clear that we would restore the funding that the previous government failed to do to meet the needs of 12,000 new students coming into our schools to learn. That's what we endeavored to do, and that's where the money is going to be so that kids learn on time and learn what they need to learn as well.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that I've heard from constituents that resources for teacher aides and other supports for vulnerable students have been rolled back and given that the Wildrose campaigned on a solid plan to ensure that our vulnerable youth would have what they need, again to the Minister of Education: will this government commit to providing clarity for the educational authorities so that they can have their programs and staffing in place by the beginning of this new school year?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actually, I thank you for that question, too, because everyone needs to know that the money that we put into place – and it's in the range of 12,000 based on the 1.9 per cent population growth from the Treasury Board – is to be in the classroom for teachers, for support staff, and to make sure that kids are learning in our classrooms. After the fall budget is tabled, then the monies for the rest of the school year will be forthcoming as well.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Smith: Well, thank you, again, Mr. Speaker. It's all very well and good to add money to the Education budget, even if you do not have an approved budget to add to. Given that Mr. Ramsankar, president of the Alberta Teachers' Association, believes that the new funding will be of limited value if it does not go to the classroom supports by September, how is this minister going to reassure parents that teachers and educational assistants will be rehired to meet the needs of students in the classroom this September?

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, you can be certain that I will be looking very carefully to make sure that that money, the \$103 million or thereabouts, however many students are there, will be spent in the classroom to make sure that the supports are there for kids to help them learn. In fact, the Calgary board of education said, and I quote: for the first time since 2012 the CBE will see their basic funding per student increased. End of quote. So, certainly, they're very pleased about it. I'll make sure that the money gets spent in the classroom, where it belongs.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Job Creation and Protection

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Another day, yet another report of job losses in the oil and gas sector. In fact, 185 hard-working Albertans at TransCanada are now without jobs. Given that we're hearing that other major oil and gas companies are in the process of cutting their ranks as a result of nearly a billion dollars of lost revenue thanks to pending corporate tax hikes and the uncertainty created by the government's promised royalty review, to the Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour: what are you doing to create more jobs and to address these job losses?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. As I've said already in this House this afternoon, unemployment numbers that we're experiencing now are a reflection of the previous government's lack of diversification of the . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: How much time left?

The Clerk: Twenty seconds.

The Speaker: Twenty seconds, Minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The situation that we are in now is because of the lack of diversification in our economy, and certainly we are wanting to invest in diversification and to support business. We're working with our partners in industry and business to do that. As the Premier said, Telus has invested a billion dollars just last week . . .

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, to the Minister of Energy: given that the pending royalty review, a new climate change strategy, and reviewing the mandate of the Alberta Energy Regulator are causing so much uncertainty in the energy sector, what do you intend to do, specifically, to work with the energy industry to ease the uncertainty and anxiety caused by your government's policies, to ensure that there are no more job losses for hard-working Albertans?

2:20

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, since day one we've been meeting with energy leaders, mostly in Calgary, but in Edmonton here some have reached out to us. The federal energy minister has reached out to us, and we're in constant talks. They're encouraging us to look at the industry as a whole, look at all the pieces. They feel that when we do all those parts, that will create stability. In fact, it is creating stability just in these talks that we've been doing.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Finance minister: given that so many Alberta businesses are holding off on making new investments or are cancelling existing commitments thanks to the policies of this government and given your own caution on tabling a budget, why can't you wait until next spring to implement higher business taxes, working with the business community to adapt and save jobs? What's the big rush?

Mr. Ceci: Thank you to the hon. member. Mr. Speaker, it's always regrettable when there are job losses in any sector, including the ones that we're experiencing in the oil and gas sector. But we're working closely, as the Energy minister said, with that sector, and we'll be looking at that more as we go forward. The budget, as this hon. member knows, is coming forward in the fall, after looking at all ministries, the efficiencies that we can create through looking at those ministries. We will be working hard to develop that so we're globally competitive as we move forward, as we have . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Rural Transportation Infrastructure

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Between 2013 and 2014 the former government downloaded the funding of bridges to rural municipalities. One of Little Bow's counties has about 200 bridges, of which 11 are within one year of their useful life. In fact, rural Alberta is responsible for 75 per cent of roads and 60 per cent of bridges. Wildrose's 10-10 plan would make sure that municipalities have resources for these projects. To the minister: is this government aware of this quickly growing problem facing our rural communities?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. member for that question. Yes, we are aware of this problem. As leader of the NDP opposition in years past I met regularly with the executive of AAMD and C, and they brought these matters to my attention, particularly the question of bridges. I might add, however, that much of the infrastructure in the province's purview is in similar condition. So we have many priorities that are very important, and we have . . .

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Given that detail is limited in the supply bill as to where dollars for infrastructure are to be spent and given that the resource road program was funded at \$31 million and the local road bridge program was funded at \$26 million, rural communities need to know what the government's plans are. To the minister: will you confirm or deny that there is money within the supply bill that will see funding returned to the local road bridge program?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again to the hon. member for that question. This is something that I've been discussing with my officials as I am getting up to speed on the many complex details of the ministry, and I can assure you that it's going to be given the most careful consideration when we bring our budget forward in the fall.

Mr. Schneider: Given that in the riding of Little Bow a roundabout has been proposed for the convergence of highway 23 and highway 519, where seven accidents have taken place since January 1 and one fatality, and given that access in and out of Coalhurst is another dangerous situation, complicated by a CP Rail crossing, and given that those important road projects were in the loop for construction – given, given, given – can the minister please confirm that monies in the supply bill will see that these projects are funded?

Mr. Mason: To the hon. member: I am aware of these problems, and I'm becoming increasingly aware of the wide number of similar issues in other constituencies. I want to assure you that we'll take these seriously and that I will be looking for some assistance from individual private members regardless of their party affiliation in addressing the issues facing their constituents.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Urgent Health Care in Airdrie

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm from Airdrie, and given that it is one of the fastest growing cities in Alberta – we're literally bursting at the seams – and given that Health ministers have played politics in Airdrie and now we have a bigger, more centralized Alberta health system that has a long history of neglecting the local needs of local decision-makers, we're desperate for a 24-hour urgent health facility. I'm hoping this government can get it right. Will the minister commit to put politics aside and build this centre in our community?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. We know that there has been some lack of confidence in some of the processes among Albertans moving forward from the past government, and we're committed to making sure that we have an infrastructure plan that is publicly

released, with lots of opportunity to ensure that the sun shines on that list and we can have a full public conversation. So when this government makes a commitment, you can count on it.

Mrs. Pitt: Minister, lives are in danger, over 60,000 people. Given that there is only a total of 14 beds to treat a population of over 60,000, a 24-hour urgent care network is needed. It's overdue, and study after study has demanded it. We all know that putting off this urgent care centre is dangerous. What sort of timeline will the minister commit to?

Ms Hoffman: I want to thank the hon. member for the question and the opportunity to express the fact that we want to ensure that Albertans no matter where they live, including every corner of this province, have opportunities to ensure that their confidence is instilled in the public health care system. We do have a responsibility to the 60,000 people living in Airdrie as well as the more than 4 million people living in Alberta to make sure that we're planning infrastructure responsibly, and when we do make a commitment, to following through on those commitments. I appreciate the information being provided today.

Thank you.

Mrs. Pitt: Given that Airdrie needs a . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I wonder if you'd wait until the Speaker recognizes you. Proceed.

Mrs. Pitt: Given that Airdrie needs a 24-hour health care facility and given that in March the facility was promised but now we're sort of in limbo – when you have a sick child, Calgary is simply too far away, the wait times are just too long, and we're closed after 10 p.m. The plans are in place. Will you just give it the go-ahead? Will the minister commit to helping all Albertans and build this centre?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you to the member for the question and for drawing attention to the fact that there were a number of press releases made by the third party when they were in government in the months leading up to the election. Press releases do not necessarily instill confidence in Albertans moving forward. We as well as members of the Official Opposition were highly critical of the number of promises that were made and the lack of government actually funding those in the past. You don't have that in this government. When we make a commitment, we'll follow through on it, Mr. Speaker.

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

Job Creation and Protection

(continued)

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Job losses across the province are among the most pressing of social and economic issues. For example, in your own home city of Medicine Hat, operations at Sanjel were recently suspended, meaning that these jobs will go to another location, potentially outside of Alberta. To the Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour. Oil service companies in rural Alberta are feeling the pinch of a weak product market as well as a government whose policies seem bent on crippling their industry. How will you ensure that those who live in rural Alberta will receive the same focus on . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Certainly, the lack of diversification in

our economy due to the previous government's decisions is continuing. The numbers we're experiencing now have a lot to do with that. We are interested in investing in diversity. As I said earlier, Telus just invested \$1 billion, and we want to have more investment and that kind of thing to diversify so that we're not so dependent on the oil and gas industry.

Thank you.

2:30

Dr. Starke: My next question actually is to the environment minister. Given that other major companies such as Baker Hughes and Schlumberger are also scaling back or shutting down certain locations, how does this government intend to strengthen their greenhouse gas emission techniques when the very companies that look to create this technology are being forced out of Alberta?

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: I have to assure folks that both the environment minister and myself have been meeting with industry because we do see the connection between both. Industry is quite heartened by that, and we are assured to look at the industry as a whole, and . . . [interjection] Excuse me?

An Hon. Member: Stay tuned?

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: No.

The industry has assured us that they like the fact that we're looking at it together, and they don't feel that's going to impact jobs.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Back to the Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour minister this time. Given that most mid-sized cities in Alberta experienced explosive economic growth since 2005 along with unprecedented job creation and given that the most recent figures from my home city of Lloydminster suggest that up to 3,000 jobs have been lost because of economic and policy uncertainty, how can this government's only strategy in creating new jobs be to simply put money in the hands of those who spend it fastest?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In addition to being the Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour, I'm also the Minister of Innovation and Advanced Ed. Innovation is doing a tremendous amount of work. I just recently went to NAIT and saw all of the alternative energy and other initiatives they're doing. We've invested \$40 million more in postsecondary and apprenticeships to support people to get good jobs and stay here in Alberta.

Thanks.

Health Coverage for Refugees and Refugee Claimants

Ms McKittrick: Mr. Speaker, nearly three years ago the federal government drastically cut its health coverage for refugees and refugee claimants. Many provinces, including Alberta, then stepped up to provide care to refugees and their families. To the Minister of Health and of Seniors: will this government join the calls of doctors, nurses, and other Canadians in other provinces for the federal government to reinstate health care coverage for all refugees?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for this important question. The highest court in Canada

has ruled that the federal government must reinstate coverage for refugees. The federal government is appealing that decision, but it has been forced to put an interim program in place to ensure coverage for refugees and refugee claimants. This government's position is that the federal government should end this appeal. We are committed to ensuring that people who are living in Alberta legally have the right to public health care, just like all of us do, including refugee claimants.

Ms McKittrick: What assurances can the hon. minister give us that this government is there for the refugees and all of their families?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. I've had an opportunity to ask some questions in my ministry around this issue. As has been directed through the Court of Appeal, the federal government has a responsibility to ensure that refugee claimants are currently getting the services that they require under public health care. As well, I've had an opportunity to clarify that children who are born in Alberta who are the children of refugees will have access to whatever services they need within public health care. This means that we'll continue to provide public health care for refugees seeking legal status in Canada.

Ms McKittrick: To the Minister of Health: will this government stand up for those seeking refuge in our great country by calling on the federal government to abandon its costly appeal of a Supreme Court ruling, which has called these cuts cruel and unusual?

Ms Hoffman: Thanks again to the hon. member and those who are in attendance today to hear this answer. We absolutely agree with the Supreme Court that these cuts were cruel and unusual and that they targeted populations who have already been targeted for far too long in their own countries, and that's why they come to Canada. They come to Canada to ensure that they have opportunities for themselves and for their future, and that includes publicly funded health care. We encourage the federal government, whoever is in government after the fall election, to ensure that this appeal stops and that we continue to fund refugees and refugee claimants.

The Speaker: Hon. members, there's a suggestion that there may be laptops being used. I would remind the House of the procedural letter that was sent earlier about that practice.

The Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Registry Services in Blackfalds

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first question is about the town of Blackfalds, a town of 8,000 people that have no Alberta registry office. It's not because the town doesn't want one. Council has asked for it. And it's not because there are no entrepreneurs willing to invest – there are – but because of the bureaucratic rules that are convoluted and deny an entire town the benefit of a registry. Is the Minister of Service Alberta aware of this problem, and could you please tell us why the bureaucracy is preventing this community from having a registry office?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. member for his question. I can tell you that I will be looking into this matter. I don't have an answer for you right now, but I think it is a very valid question, and I look forward to getting back

to you and to all members of the House with a response. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Orr: I do thank you for that answer because people do have to drive all the way to Lacombe or Red Deer every time they are required by law to renew their driver's licence or a registration or get a death certificate or anything. People with disabilities and transportation problems, busy working people find that extremely difficult. Will the same minister be able to tell the people of Blackfalds how long they will have to wait for such an essential service?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member for the question. As I'm looking into getting more details on this, I think it would be irresponsible to give an answer as far as how long. I can assure the member that I will be talking to the ministry and getting some answers as quickly as possible and getting back to the hon. member.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Orr: Thank you. In that review, if necessary, would the minister be prepared to initiate a review of the registry rules with the intent of permitting separate municipalities to service their communities with this essential service of a registry office?

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, thanks to the member for the question. I definitely want to look into this. I think, first of all, it's important that Albertans do have access to registries to ensure that they, obviously, can get their licences and not have to travel too far throughout the province to get this done. Again, I think that until I get some answers, it wouldn't be prudent to be making any kinds of promises and commitments other than that I will look into this example in Blackfalds and get back to the member.

Thank you.

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

Capital Projects in Calgary-Lougheed

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents in Calgary-Lougheed are truly grateful for the building of three schools in the past three terms as well as the internationally awarded Calgary South Health Campus, the reconstruction of south Fish Creek park, a historic agreement for the southwest Calgary ring road with our Tsuut'ina neighbours, and more. However, due to recent changes, my constituents have become greatly concerned about whether formerly planned projects will actually be going ahead. My first question is to the Minister of Education. Considering the incredible growth in our riding, can the minister assure the students and parents in Calgary-Lougheed that the construction of Evergreen middle school will begin in the next two months and be completed the following fall, as scheduled?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the Member for Calgary-Lougheed for the question. We've been working very closely with Infrastructure, with school boards to make sure that we provide stability and predictability for all schools here in the province of Alberta. In regard to his school specifically I'm aware of the growth that's taking place there, and if the hon. member can give me a list – I've done it already for a couple of people – I can find out exactly where that school is at.

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. I look forward to a little back and forth on that.

Now, given that our caucus leader was instrumental in reaching a landmark agreement with the Tsuut'ina First Nation – and my constituents truly appreciate that – can the current Minister of Transportation quell any uncertainty and assure our constituents that the tendering of the southwest Calgary ring road will be completed this calendar year with construction to begin in 2016?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the hon. member for his question. I had the opportunity two weeks ago in Calgary to meet with the chief of the Tsuut'ina Nation, and we had a discussion. I fully understand the components of the agreement that was negotiated by the previous government with the Tsuut'ina Nation, and I understand as well the very significant contributions that the province has made in terms of land and cash and that there's a seven-year guillotine, if you will, on the agreement, after which everything would revert to the Tsuut'ina Nation. So there's a very serious time urgency with . . .

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. I'm sure that *Hansard* will get the spelling of guillotine correct.

My last question is to the same minister. Given the deadlines, as you've mentioned, in the complex agreement can you assure the constituents in Calgary-Lougheed and all Calgarians and Albertans, who will be extremely well served by this road: will the southwest Calgary ring road indeed be completed by 2019 according to your time schedules?

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much to the hon. member for the question. Given what's at stake, Mr. Speaker, it's very important that we proceed as expeditiously as possible with the completion of the southwest ring road.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-South East.

Energy Policies

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, my heart goes out to all the Albertans that have lost jobs, including the 185 from TransCanada that we heard of today. The Premier said today that her intent is to get Albertans off the oil and gas roller coaster, but is it her intent to move them off the roller coaster and right into the unemployment line? With higher business taxes, a royalty review, a new climate change strategy, increasing the minimum wage in a downturn, reviewing the mandate of the Alberta Energy Regulator, it's no wonder businesses are holding off on making new investments or even following through with the existing commitments they have today.

Just yesterday the *Financial Post* reported that the uncertainty surrounding Alberta's policy on oil and gas royalties has already caused several companies to shift capital to other provinces, and this should come as no surprise. A securities analyst was quoted as saying that land sale activity, which is a key indicator for future

drilling and investment intentions, is expected to increase in British Columbia and Saskatchewan in 2016-17 at Alberta's expense.

I find it ironic that we keep hearing the government say that they need four, five, six months or maybe longer to conduct multiple reviews before they can bring down their budget, yet this same government expects Alberta businesses, who create many of the jobs in this province, to only have six days to change their budgets to accommodate the new policies.

Mr. Speaker, we're not just talking about numbers. We're not talking statistics. We're talking about Alberta families. These families want to take care of their children and their aging parents. In order to do that, they need a job. When Albertans lose jobs, that goes far beyond politics. These are life-changing events caused by policies being rushed by this government without enough thought or consultation.

To the government: slow it down; protect Albertan jobs.

The Speaker: The Member for Stony Plain.

Wabamun Dragonfly Festival

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This year, as every year, the stunning village of Wabamun held their Dragonfly Festival last weekend. It's a weekend filled with pancakes, parades, playing ball, and the perfect weather in this, the capital region's four-season playground. Young and old alike watched the parade go by, and I heard that there was a rule that if you waved, you got candy.

Upon entering the beautiful village of Wabamun, the first thing your eye is drawn to is the world's largest dragonfly. To celebrate the dragonfly and life on the lake, Wabamun holds its annual Dragonfly Festival.

The village of Wabamun did not always sit on the site it occupies today. The village was moved across the ice of Wabamun Lake during the winter of 1911-1912, one building at a time, to accommodate the arrival of the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway. The coming of the railway led to many opportunities within the village of Wabamun. Tourists arrived from Edmonton, and coal in the area was developed for shipping.

Today the coal and the tourism are still there along with a marina capable of launching and mooring all manner of boats, including large sailboats, and the village's waterfront park. There are many young families that call this village home and many retirees as well, making for a well-balanced, tightly knit community. Many people volunteer and are willing to give a hand when needed, exemplifying the sense of community and friendliness we find throughout rural Alberta.

The Dragonfly Festival is a time to see people come together not just in a time of need but in a time of joy: firefighters making smoke on the barbecue instead of putting out fires, new ventures in the market, dance classes coming to town for the little ones, and candy in the streets. The symbol of the dragonfly carries the wisdom of transformation and adaptability, of change and light, and when a dragonfly shows up, it reminds you to bring a little more lightness and joy into your life. So when you celebrate the world's largest dragonfly, it can bring nothing but positives.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I would remind the House again that as members leave the House, they acknowledge the Speaker's chair.

The Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Sheldon Kennedy

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to acknowledge the work of a local leader and hero who is recognized both here in

Alberta and further afield. Whether you know Sheldon Kennedy for his eight years in the NHL or for his cross-Canada in-line skate to raise awareness for child abuse, Sheldon is best known for his courageous decision to report the sexual abuse he suffered while playing junior hockey.

Since then Sheldon has become an inspiration to abuse survivors around the world and has become a committed, outspoken children's advocate. For his tireless work he has received several awards, and in May this year he was awarded our country's highest honour, the Order of Canada. Sheldon also serves on the board of the Sheldon Kennedy Child Advocacy Centre in the constituency of Calgary-Varsity. In this amazing place compassionate and committed experts from all fields, like social workers, health care professionals, police, and Crown prosecutors, work together to support victims of child abuse. The centre's collaborative approach gives children, youth, and families affected by violence hope and helps them heal.

The Alberta government is a proud partner with the Sheldon Kennedy Child Advocacy Centre and its work in support of children as well as prevention and research. Together with other child advocacy centres in the province we are developing Alberta's integrated model of best practice. The integrated model will expand the collaborative services approach beyond the locations of the child advocacy centres themselves.

In addition to his work as a board member, Sheldon continues to bring attention to the work of the centre and the issue of child abuse. Please join me in congratulating Sheldon Kennedy for his appointment to the Order of Canada, for his leadership, and for his compassion and courage.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Strathmore-Brooks Constituency

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to represent my constituency of Strathmore-Brooks. The counties of Newell and Wheatland have a rich history that is significant to both the development of Alberta and Canada, dating back over 100 years. Now, imagine me in a hat for a moment. I'd like to take this Chamber back to 1885, when James Wishart first followed the Gleichen trail towards Montana. During his exploration he came across a river valley covered in wild roses. He shouted to his crew: "Here's the promised land. We go no further." James Wishart knew what we now know, that Strathmore-Brooks is as Albertan as Alberta gets and that this is Wildrose country.

2:50

My riding of Strathmore-Brooks has a long and proud history abundant in western heritage, with century-old farms and ranches that are still in operation today. Good old rodeo still plays a large role in tourism in my constituency. Speaking of rodeo, rodeo season has kicked off, beginning in June with the Brooks Kinsmen pro rodeo, and the upcoming annual Bassano Amateur Rodeo is set to take place soon. And how can we forget Tilley Heritage Day, which features a delicious old-fashioned barbecue and barn dance, the Duchess Days festival, and the Siksika summer rodeo? Both the Strathmore Stampede and the Strathmore gay rodeo feature a running with the bulls.

These are just a few of the many events that my community has to offer. This summer all across Strathmore-Brooks you can see bull riding, barrel racing, tie-down roping, steer wrestling, chuck-wagons, stagecoaches, and many other western activities for all to enjoy. I would like to invite everyone to visit Strathmore-Brooks

and experience some of these incredible events that run deep with Alberta's history and heritage.

Yee-haw, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I would remind the members that we should be cautious and get clarity from the Speaker's office with respect to items which are props that are brought into the House. I will overlook this instance, but again I would remind the members that we ought to be cautious and respectful of the House's traditions with respect to such matters being brought into the House.

Thank you.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm tabling the appropriate number of copies of a Canadian Press article highlighting the comments from the New Democratic government last week on "Punt patronage: Alberta NDP wants end to 'pork-barrel politics.'" I'm looking forward to seeing an end to unfettered appointments without independent merit.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also have an article here with respect to the 185 layoffs at TransCanada corporation announced today. I'd like to table that for the House as well.

The Speaker: I think that pursuant to Standing Order 7(7) the daily Routine is now concluded.

Orders of the Day

Consideration of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

Mr. Connolly moved, seconded by Ms Kazim, that an humble address be presented to Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows.

To Her Honour the Honourable Lois Mitchell, CM, AOE, the Lieutenant Governor of the Province of Alberta:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank Your Honour for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

[Adjourned debate June 18: Mr. Clark]

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

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. I had concluded my remarks previously. I thank all members for their rapt attention to my words and, with that, will cede my remaining time.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Hon. members, questions and comments?

The hon. member.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to deliver today my response to the Speech from the Throne and for the privilege of delivering my maiden speech to this House. It is indeed an honour, which I take very seriously.

First, let me congratulate you and the other officers of this House on your election to lead us in our humble duties. To all members of

this House: I salute their commitment to represent the people of Alberta to the best of their ability and my caucus colleagues for their indulgence, patience, and guidance as I become conversant with the legislative practices and procedures.

As a 23-year resident of Calgary-Fish Creek I am more than humbled to represent a constituency which I believe reflects much of what is great about our province. Being the 19th member of the Legislature to serve this geographic area, I am in good company, with Premiers, Speakers, and Leaders of the Official Opposition preceding me. Established in 1979, Calgary-Fish Creek, named after the neighbouring Fish Creek provincial park, has previously had only two other MLAs representing the great communities of Canyon Meadows, Lake Bonavista, Bonavista Downs, Parkland, Deer Run, Deer Ridge, Queensland, and Diamond Cove.

Calgary-Fish Creek is home to just over 38,000 Albertans living in an area with a deep history and key significance to this region, an area of early habitation and gathering by our First Nations people. First settled in 1873 by John and Adelaide Glenn, Fish Creek quickly became an area known for ranching, agriculture, trading, and social activity, and some of those habits still remain today.

After a short period as a Dominion of Canada instructional farm for Treaty 7 the land was purchased by the Hull brothers, when it became a place of innovation in irrigation and agricultural production while also cultivating a much-heralded reputation for regional social life, with the emergence of the Bow Valley Rancho as a required stop for all visiting dignitaries.

The natural brick home built by William Roper Hull still stands proudly, restored today as a showpiece of the Rancho at Fish Creek Restoration Society, a testament to the tenacity, hard work, and dedication of Mitzie and Larry Wasyliw, who along with the Friends of Fish Creek Provincial Park Society and regional park staff continue to act as able stewards of this valuable park, established in 1975 by Premier Lougheed's PC government as a legacy for all Albertans to enjoy for generations to come.

It has indeed lived up to that government's vision. Today Fish Creek is our busiest provincial park, welcoming an estimated 4 million visitors per year to enjoy this gem of nature as Canada's largest urban park. I am proud to represent communities which share this incredible natural resource.

The constituency of Calgary-Fish Creek, which has been home to me and my growing family since 1992, is an amazing example of community spirit at its best. Along with my wife, Cathy, and our three children we have been committed to and deeply involved with the community since making it our home. From years of involvement in the scouting movement to managing soccer, lacrosse, and volleyball teams and an ongoing commitment to area schools, it has been a pleasure to connect with our neighbours and other like-minded Albertans seeking a safe, friendly, welcoming, and nurturing community.

In Calgary-Fish Creek 70 per cent of area homes were built between 1961 and 1980, including, of course, Calgary's first man-made lake, Lake Bonavista, a brainchild of Mr. E. Vee Keith, now a community-run facility that boasts its own mini-ecosystem, including year-round recreation and fishing. Forty-eight per cent of residents were born in Alberta while 18 per cent are immigrants. Over 85 per cent are homeowners, and fully 62 per cent boast postsecondary education, working in every vocation and profession imaginable. While over 15 per cent of residents are between the ages of five and 17, an almost equal number are aged 65 or over. Languages spoken in the area include French, Chinese, German, Punjabi, Vietnamese, Spanish, and Tagalog, to name a few,

reflecting the increasing diversity within the constituency over the past several decades.

As a proud born-and-raised Calgarian and Albertan myself I am perhaps a hybrid of what makes our community, Alberta, and Canada great. While my mother was a third-generation Irish-Canadian of humble roots born in Parry Sound, Ontario, her sense of adventure and selflessness led her as an RN to Thailand to establish their first-ever public health program, representing the United Nations World Health Organization. There she met my father, a Polish-born Jew raised in Shanghai and a refugee from the communist regimes of Stalin and Mao, also in a faraway land, representing MGM movies in the most exotic of locales during the era of *The King and I*. And where did they choose to raise a family? Alberta. I am blessed that their choice back in 1957 has become part of my life story. Yes, my parents were two of those people from all around the world who shared a dream of a better life mentioned in the throne speech, and I and my family indeed believe that all of us here are part of that living legacy.

3:00

I have lived in war-torn Nigeria as an impressionable child, travelled extensively around the world during a two-decade-long career in the international airline business, and fed a lifelong appetite for wanderlust, but Alberta remains my haven, my safe place, and the best place in the world to make a living, to build a life, and to call home.

During my humble life I've been honoured with the privilege of serving the community in many ways. With deep involvement in Alberta's Asian communities since the early 1980s I've been blessed to have made many lifelong friends, and I'm humbled to be considered honorary Chinese by my peers in that community. Being part of bringing dragon boat racing to Alberta in 1992 was one of my proudest moments.

While I've been deeply involved in embracing cultural diversity through such organizations and events as the Chinatown Street Festival in Calgary, the Hong Kong-Canada Business Association, which is a national and provincial organization, Hong Kong days, and more recently GlobalFest, I've also had the privilege of deep engagement with community groups and the nonprofit sector, including the Kids Cancer Care Foundation, Trico Centre for Family Wellness, Trico Charitable Foundation, Habitat for Humanity, and many more, too numerous to mention. These opportunities have deeply influenced who I am and the values I uphold and defend every day.

I've also been blessed to have spent a decade in Alberta's housing sector. This has provided me with an opportunity to embrace the importance of affordable and appropriate housing for all Albertans. This key issue will be a personal priority for me in working with this Legislature, collaborating with the public, private, and nonprofit sectors to bring creativity and innovation to reduce barriers faced by many Albertans, both long-time residents and newcomers of all ages, in addressing housing affordability.

But why public service at this stage of my career in life? Not only is it time for me to give back but also for me to follow my passion for people, for our province, and to do all that I can do to ensure that Alberta and Canada can seize our rightful position on the national and global stage. From the distant memories of model parliament at Western Canada high school to studying political science and economics at the University of Calgary, some dreams never fade.

For me the core values and principles of the party and people I now serve and represent remain little changed from the vision I took away as a 13-year-old pounding in lawn signs for Peter Lougheed in 1971. To me Alberta is, rather simplistically, all about three

things: entrepreneurial spirit, for which Alberta is renowned as a national leader and where those with a predisposition for risk can bring forth great societal wealth; a prairie work ethic, a true tribute to our pioneers and province builders from all walks of life; and building an inclusive society but, truly, more than that: embracing and celebrating diversity in all its forms.

I'm a passionate proponent for and will remain a fierce defender of the Alberta advantage, recognizing that the legacy of what this means to Albertans varies from city to city, town to town, and hamlet to hamlet but that it does have a powerful and distinct meaning to every Albertan. Whether they were born and raised on the land or whether they came from across our country or from around the world, they have chosen our great province as a place to build a life and to live their dreams, with the benefits of the Alberta advantage as their beacon.

But let us be mindful that we are stewards of this legacy and that ego, dogmatic ideology, and blind ambition have no place in the formula for our future and for our future success as individuals, as a people, or as a province. One of the most admirable traits for any individual or community is indeed a simple characteristic: humility. We must work together collectively as passionate Albertans, but we must listen to and respect the views of others while defending their right to hold differing opinions. That is what our forefathers fought for and what we must respect and honour their sacrifice for. We must ensure our legacy is not one of irresponsible, unsustainable behaviour, sacrificing generations of wealth and resources for our own enrichment, while also ensuring that we do not leave a trail of debt and burden for future Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, ladies and gentlemen, hon. members, guests, and fellow Albertans, we have been entrusted with the power and ability to do great things, but with that power comes great responsibility. Let us honour that as we live, learn, prosper, and grow together as the 29th Legislative Assembly of this great province.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any questions and comments?

The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my absolute pleasure to stand today as the elected representative for the people of St. Albert. I'm equally proud to rise today and share some information about this wonderful community. The beautiful city of St. Albert is also known as the Botanical Arts City. It is the second-largest city in the Edmonton capital region and shares its wonderful home with more than 63,000 proud citizens.

Many of you will know that St. Albert was originally settled as a Métis community and was founded in 1861 by Father Albert Lacombe. St. Albert boasts a large, thriving francophone community, which adds to the unique community feel. In fact, it may surprise you to know that roughly 10 per cent of St. Albertans can actually speak French today.

The people of St. Albert are proud of their community, and so they should be. In 2014 St. Albert was named the best place to live in Canada by *MoneySense* magazine, and just a few weeks ago St. Albert was named the best place in Canada to raise a family by that same magazine. Few in St. Albert were surprised by this recognition because they realize how fortunate they are to call St. Albert home.

St. Albert is home to the world-renowned International Children's Festival, that runs for five days each spring and entertains over 55,000 children of all ages. Albertans come from all over the region to enjoy this event and share in the welcoming community and arts. As well, the St. Albert outdoor farmer's market is the largest of its

kind in western Canada, with over 250 local vendors offering homegrown, homemade, and home-baked goods for thousands who shop there.

I can't talk about St. Albert without paying respect to the honourable and extraordinary Lois Hole. I know the entire community of St. Albert was bursting with pride when Lois Hole was named Alberta's 15th Lieutenant Governor in 1999. This successful businesswoman, writer, gifted gardener, and mother of two was a tireless advocate for public education, and she was a tireless community activist. She was the driving force behind the Lois Hole hospital for women, for which thousands of Alberta's women are grateful. Lois Hole once joked that schoolteachers should earn as much as NHL players. Not a bad idea.

She was an inclusive woman, kind, and always ready to lend a hand to anyone who asked and even some who didn't. This kind, practical, and loving woman, affectionately called "everyone's grandmother," was an amazing ambassador for the city of St. Albert. One of my favourite pieces of public art in St. Albert is a statue honouring her. It's a depiction of her kneeling down in front of a small child and both looking at each other lovingly. Knowing what I do of her, I think this statue and this piece of art is very appropriate. The Lois Hole hospital for women houses a banner that bears this now famous quote from its namesake: my hope is that when people come to this new hospital and see my name, they're going to have a little extra hope, that real, uplifting hope that things will turn out okay. She was a breathtaking woman.

As in all communities, the growth and joy that is experienced now is always preceded by opportunities to learn and grow. Five decades ago two residential schools for indigenous children operated in St. Albert. The two physical structures burned down long ago, but the scars remain. St. Albert can be proud of its commitment to forge and nurture relationships with the aboriginal community members by moving beyond just speaking about truth and reconciliation to living reconciliation.

As is the case throughout Alberta, unfortunately, St. Albert is also home to many women, men, and children who struggle daily due to poverty and its results. Poverty was once thought to be contained in the inner core of big cities but is now receiving wider recognition throughout the province.

3:10

Two weeks ago I was able to spend some time at the St. Albert food bank. I was astonished to hear from the staff and volunteers at the food bank that over 600 individuals and families regularly use the food bank to feed themselves and their families. Over the last 12 months food bank usage has steadily increased and shows no sign of slowing down. As you might expect, economic uncertainties and related job losses have contributed to increased food bank reliance. But that is not the biggest contributor to the increased reliance on the St. Albert food bank. Domestic violence is the single largest cause of reliance on the food bank, and I want to thank the Premier for her initiative in the creation of the women's issues ministry to help those already taxed agencies addressing these needs.

I, like so many, was thankful to hear our new government's commitment to addressing violence against women in the Speech from the Throne. The people of St. Albert clearly recognize the need for education, action, and prevention related to domestic violence. The SAIF Society, which stands for Stop Abuse in Families Society, is a community-based organization that has, since it began in 1989, offered support to individuals and families that experience domestic violence.

St. Albert is truly a beautiful city, both in appearance and in spirit. It's a fine example of what an inclusive city and government can

achieve. Inclusivity is not simply a word sprinkled in local policy but is a way of life there.

For the last 14 years I have worked as the executive director for the Lo-Se-Ca Foundation of St. Albert. This nonprofit organization supports people with disabilities so that they're able to live and work in their communities. During my 14 years there I was able to see first-hand how the community of St. Albert worked with local leaders and activists to promote inclusion. Local government and community leaders sought out assistance from residents with disabilities and advocacy groups in order to create inclusive employment policies and practices and accessible and affordable transportation and housing. What this community got right is that it is imperative to include people in decision-making when those decisions impact their lives.

In 2013 I was fortunate enough to participate in something that forever changed my life. I was part of a group of 19 that travelled to Tanzania. The group was made up of Lo-Se-Ca Foundation staff members, people with disabilities, and some of their family members. For over a year we fund raised and trained together so that we could climb Kilimanjaro in order to raise money for a small charitable group in rural Tanzania that worked with children with disabilities. Only two people who set out to climb the mighty Kilimanjaro had to turn back before reaching the summit. During this gruelling five-day trek I learned that it is the journey that matters most. I learned that anything is possible if you believe it is, and I learned that every person is capable of great things if they are supported, valued, and included.

We left our final camp for the summit just after midnight on the last day. At almost 20,000 feet the air is thin and quite cold. The exhaustion and smell after days of endless trekking is physically and mentally draining. Approximately eight hours after leaving camp, we arrived at the rim of the crater and knew that we only had about an hour of trekking left. At this point I had literally run out of energy and couldn't fathom taking one more step, let alone trek for another hour. At that precise moment a young man, who happens to have a developmental disability, took me by the arm and told me that we would walk the rest of way together. We did walk the rest of the way together, and we did reach the summit together, and I was the one that was most vulnerable that day.

Together all of us have much to do to restore power in decision-making and inclusion for the people of Alberta. I believe that over the last few years we've lost our way and focus by choosing not to really hear and consult with the people of Alberta, not just those who have big voices and powerful voices but all people. Community consultation is not simply a stand-alone exercise but the building of nurturing relationships. We can't create policy without listening, listening to the people whose lives are impacted by the policy.

Through my work and in my personal life I've witnessed the dangers of well-meaning policy created without real community consultation and impact assessment. Recently slight adjustments in budget line items to support people with developmental disabilities literally put thousands of men and women at risk. Current changes to housing safety standards for people with developmental disabilities have inadvertently put people with disabilities who want to live independently in their communities at risk of losing that very housing. The intent was good, and the result is not.

Similarly, the labels we assign to people can innocently chip away at their dignity. The language we use to describe people in our community is important. I am grateful that this new government, on both sides, has chosen not to refer to people with disabilities as our most vulnerable but as people first, people who need and deserve our support.

My brother, like so many others, struggled his entire life with an illness, a disability, schizophrenia. My brother had a great deal to offer his community when he had access to help and the support he needed. However, when necessary mental health care supports were not available, he fell through the cracks, like many people. Even the most loving and supportive families cannot rescue people from cracks that can become deep canyons. My brother was one of the many who believed that ending his life was his only solution. Every time I hear about another family losing a child or a loved one to suicide, I'm physically reminded of the acute pain of loss and the necessity to ensure that mental health supports are available to people whose very lives depend on them.

I'm honoured to sit in this Assembly, with the vast collection of life experiences and individual goals, which are as diverse as the very people we were elected to represent. Now more than ever it is vital that we find a way to work together to meet the collective needs of all Albertans. Hope is a powerful thing. Albertans are hopeful when they look at us assembled here. People are hopeful we will make decisions that will guide them into an inclusive future. People are hopeful that we will set aside party-first mentality and replace it with Alberta first.

Thank you for allowing me to share a little bit about St. Albert and myself.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Any questions or comments?

The chair recognizes the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed an honour to have the opportunity to address this Assembly in response to the Speech from the Throne as MLA for the people of Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills. Congratulations on your election as Speaker of the House. I understand it is a very challenging role, and I look forward to working together with you and the rest of this Assembly to make this, the 29th Alberta Legislative Assembly, an effective and fair government for all Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself and the many communities I represent and some of the main issues that I will be addressing over the next few years. I was born and raised in the Two Hills area, more specifically, Duvernay, Alberta. My parents are Billie and Joyce Hanson. My wife, Donna, and I now live on a farm that we purchased from my grandparents' estate in and around the hamlet of Owlseye. Both my wife and I have spent most of our lives living within my constituency. Donna, the daughter of Florence and Joseph Labant, was raised in the Cork Hall area west of St. Paul, and we will be celebrating 34 years of marriage this August.

We are a very multicultural family, with English, Swedish, Ukrainian, and Irish heritage. With the marriage of our son Dean to Sara Dargis in 2011 and the marriage of our daughter Nikita to Adrian Pomerleau this September, we will be adding French to our family of united nations. True Canadians, I think you would agree. Our son Dean is entering his last year of medicine at the U of A, and his wife, Sara, is a practising veterinarian. Our daughter Nikita is an RN at the U of A hospital and is marrying Adrian, a carpenter. I should be well taken care of in my old age.

My grandfather Lesley Tennant was the blacksmith in Owlseye for many years and was married to Elsa Bergman. My children are the fourth generation to live on the property at Owlseye, the fifth if you include that my great-grandfather Lancelot Tennant also resided there for a time.

3:20

Owlseye was once a thriving community with three grain elevators, two stores, and two gas stations and was a hub for local farmers to get together at the community hall for celebrations. Now, like many small communities in Alberta, after the loss of the railroad branch lines we were reduced to just a few families.

My great-grandfather Swan Hanson was a successful farmer in both the Glendon and Fort Saskatchewan areas and was a true pioneer. Records show him settling here prior to 1905, while Alberta was still considered Rupert's Land. I have very strong ties to this area and am very proud to be here representing the people and communities of the Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills constituency.

I represent a number of very interesting and unique communities. This is one of the larger constituencies in the province and has a very diverse economy, including agriculture, oil and gas, tourism, and innovative technologies. We are also home to four First Nations: Beaver Lake, Heart Lake, Saddle Lake, and Whitefish Lake. We cover two treaty areas, treaties 6 and 8. There are also two Métis settlements, Kikino and Buffalo Lake, within my constituency. These communities add an incredible historic richness to our cultural diversity. I was very proud to have received my very first eagle feather at a recent graduation at Portage College in a ceremony conducted by Elder McGillivray. It was a very moving experience.

Our communities share a very long history in the province of Alberta, a few of them from before we even became a province in 1905. The Lac La Biche Mission was established in 1853, making it one of the oldest established communities in Alberta. Lac La Biche is a very vibrant community with a proud history and a strong base in tourism and agriculture as well as being a major hub for the oil and gas industry of northeastern Alberta.

There are a few small neighbouring communities in that area as well: Plamondon, Venice, and Hylo. I recently visited Venice for their annual Venice days and discovered they were celebrating 101 years of Italians settling in that area. This event is held the first Sunday in June, and I would recommend the fresh pasta dinner to anyone.

The people of Lac La Biche are, obviously, also very patient. Here it goes: they have waited for 10 years to get a proper dialysis unit in the hospital and have been putting up with a broken-down bus in the parking lot as a stopgap for the past four years. That's news to everyone, I bet. In that same hospital they have been patiently waiting for AHS to replace the therapeutic bathtub, that quit four years ago. A new one has not been installed despite the community raising funds for it and purchasing it three years ago. It's been sitting in a crate ever since. You will be hearing a lot about these issues in the upcoming months and years if need be. I will not let up until they're fixed.

Down in the southwest quadrant of my extensive constituency we have many smaller communities, mostly settled by Ukrainian immigrants in the early 1900s. There are a string of them running along highway 45 and the railroad: Willingdon, Hairy Hill, Two Hills, Beauvallon, Musidora, Myrnam, and Derwent. These mostly farming communities still maintain strong ties to their proud Ukrainian heritage.

In recent years the town of Two Hills and the surrounding area have seen an influx of Mennonite families, who have served to revitalize this community. The increase in population also comes with increased infrastructure demands. The Mennonite community has been promised a new school for some years now, and indeed construction was started two years ago. However, the project is fraught with difficulties that have made me conclude that the project should be scrapped and renewed in a safe location. Construction is

currently halted due to structural failures, before the walls have even gone up.

The issues with this project include that the site is built on an artesian well, there are methane buildup issues underneath the new school, and there will be no room for a playground or staff parking because the school is being built on the existing schoolyard, with zero room to grow. Finally, the school is designed to house 500 students while current enrolment sits at 650. This community deserves a safe school that will support community growth. The existing plan does not serve the needs of the community. It is unsafe and needs to be halted immediately. You'll be hearing a lot more about this from me as well.

Following east along the North Saskatchewan, we have Heinsburg, Lindbergh, and Elk Point. Lindbergh is home to the Windsor salt plant, that was established in approximately 1948. The Elk Point area was settled around 1908, and in 1955 10,000 people showed up at Elk Point to witness the opening of the bridge over the North Saskatchewan River, huge numbers for 1955. The Elk Point area has experienced significant growth over the past decade due to rich oil and gas resources. Two trading posts, Fort George and Buckingham House, were established along the North Saskatchewan River in that area in 1792.

The town of St. Paul originally was settled as a Métis colony in 1896 and incorporated into the village of Saint-Paul des Métis in 1912. It is home to a very strong francophone community as well as an ever-increasing diversity of cultures as we welcome new immigrants from all countries.

The St. Paul area is well known for its abundance of lakes and wetlands, all of which deserve our stewardship and protection. Water is our future. The St. Paul area also has many smaller hamlets such as Ashmont, Mallaig, Lafond, Vilna, Lottie Lake, St. Vincent, St. Lina, Spedden, Bellis, St. Edouard, and, of course, Owlseye, my hometown. The village of Vilna claims the world's largest mushrooms, beautifully constructed by a welder-craftsman friend of mine, Richard Hawiuk, and it's definitely worth stopping in if you're ever going down highway 28.

The people in my constituency are very hard working, whether in the extensive oil and gas industry, agriculture, or the many other support services that make up a true community. They are very generous people, which can be shown by our many volunteer groups and charities. For instance, the hamlet of Mallaig hosts an event every August long weekend called Haying in the 30's to raise money for a cancer support group of the same name, started by a great man in our area, Edgar Corbiere.

Haying in the 30's is celebrating 16 years this August. The weekend is very entertaining and showcases farming as it was done by early Albertans, by hand and by horse. It's very interesting, and the trip is worth while. What I love about this organization is that it is one hundred per cent volunteer, meaning that 100 cents out of every donated dollar go to support people diagnosed with cancer to help with unexpected costs and to show that the community cares. There are a lot of organizations out there that could take a lesson from Mr. Corbiere's vision.

My constituency is also a valuable resource to all Albertans, with many lakes and recreational areas. Our fishing and hunting opportunities are second to none. The people of this constituency deserve good representation and support from their provincial government. As an area that accesses and holds large natural resources, we deserve reliable, reasonable access to health care and emergency services. The loss of medevac access to the municipal airport in Edmonton was an insult to all northern Alberta people and the industry involved out there. We have had to fight to keep hospitals open in communities that have grown significantly and that support thousands of uncounted workers that support the oil and gas

industry and live here temporarily but are not considered when our needs are analyzed from bureaucrats' offices in Edmonton.

We deserve support for our local schools and infrastructure that recognizes the significant contribution this area provides to the provincial economy. Our infrastructure was not designed for the growth we have experienced, and we can no longer be ignored. Schools need to be built. Highways need to be maintained and upgraded. We deserve support for seniors, to whom we owe so much, and I will work toward local seniors' facilities that respect the needs and traditions of our elders in their own communities.

I am very proud to have been chosen to represent the people of Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, and I hope that during my time at the Legislature my work will improve the future for this constituency and all Albertans.

Thank you for this opportunity.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any questions or comments? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My comment, actually, is to congratulate the member on an excellent presentation. I do want to echo his appreciation for the Haying in the 30's organization. As an oncologist at the Cross Cancer Institute I'm very aware of the excellent work that they do. They are the most selfless and highly motivated individuals in this province, I believe. I really do appreciate it in my work.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

If the House might allow me, we need more of that kind of comment across the hall.

Dr. Turner: If you want me to, I could say some more.

The Speaker: But only when I ask you to stand up. Hon. member, I have you on a list that indicates you would like to speak in addition to the question's answer. Is that correct?

3:30

Dr. Turner: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I'm prepared.

The Speaker: Please proceed.

Dr. Turner: Sorry; I misunderstood you. I have trouble understanding English, I guess.

I really appreciate this opportunity to speak in response to the Lieutenant Governor's Speech from the Throne. That speech was one of the highlights of my life, being able to participate in hearing it. I am celebrating my 67th birthday today, and I can say that for about 60 years I have been interested in political life. One of my earliest recollections of my father, who was a strong supporter of another party, was his disappointment in hearing the results of the election that saw Mr. Diefenbaker assume a minority government in, I believe, 1957 or '56. I have remained eager to see the defeat of Conservatives ever since.

I do want to speak in response to the Speech from the Throne because it really invigorated me. It motivated me. It is a pathway for the future of this province. We are going to see change in this province. We're going to see the public services of this province elevated to a level that we Albertans deserve. That's the promise that the Speech from the Throne gave us. I think our job as legislators in this Assembly is to make sure that that vision is fulfilled. To fulfill it, we need to look carefully at the way our tax monies are spent. I'm in complete accord with the members of the opposition in wanting to review boards and commissions and make sure that all of the management of our important public services are

administered in the best way. In my opinion the best way is a publicly administered system that is publicly accountable and which gives the best possible service to all of us Albertans.

It is evident that I'm interested in health care. I have spent the last 38 years – and it's almost my anniversary of arriving in Edmonton. I chose to come to Edmonton because Edmonton and Alberta had a cancer program, that was actually started through the foresight of a Social Credit government. Mr. W.W. Cross, after whom the Cross Cancer Institute is named, was the Health minister in the Aberhart government, I believe, and he established the Alberta Cancer Board. The Alberta Cancer Board, until the previous government destroyed it, was a model in the world for a comprehensive cancer service.

In the Alberta Cancer Board I joined with nurses and technicians and hospital cleaners and secretaries as well as advanced nurse practitioners and clinical researchers. I could go on and on. We are a team, and our team is focused on providing the best possible care for all of our patients. Any patient that shows up at the Cross Cancer Institute can count on me advocating for them if they're my patient or that whole team advocating for them.

When I was running in the by-election and in the general election, I would say at the door that I really wanted to see health care in general be modelled on what the cancer program does. I still am of that opinion, and I've been in discussion with the Minister of Health and Seniors as to how we can promote that model: teamwork, accountability, making sure that we provide world-class service. No patient in Alberta needs to go to the Mayo Clinic to get better care. We can provide superb cancer services in this province by Albertans for Albertans.

One of my great privileges has been to do a lot of clinical research over the years. In fact, I was the site leader at the Cross Cancer Institute for clinical research for several years. I enjoyed that work because it allowed me to be able to give my patients access to medicines and other treatments that they might not otherwise have access to, but it also was a way for us oncologists to tell the government, or at least the health service, what the evidence was that would support getting this particular treatment in place in this province.

Now, to do clinical research, you need a big team as well. You need statisticians. You need people that can keep data, basically IT specialists. You need people that are experts in ethics. We have to be able to consent our patients, and those patients have to be able to understand what's going on. Sometimes we have to do it in another language so that they truly understand. We have to be very careful with that. We have to be very conscious of things like confidentiality and privacy, and I think that's something that all of us as legislators need to be paying attention to as well.

You may have heard over the years that I actually went outside the system at times to advocate for my patients. I advocated within the last year and a half for the addition of a medicine called brentuximab, which is a monoclonal antibody treatment that is very, very effective for a form of Hodgkin's lymphoma, and I had a patient who desperately needed this medication. So what I had to do was to marshal all of the evidence that I could get from the medical literature, and then I went through our tumour group in the cancer program and was able to get their support for this. Despite that, the powers that be that were in place at the time decided that we Albertans couldn't afford it. So to get further action on that, I did go to the media and made a public appeal, and that public appeal was successful. I can tell you that that patient as well as several other patients have benefited from the addition of brentuximab to the list. I'm very proud of that sort of achievement, and it's the sort of thing that all health care workers in this province will be doing and can do if they're given the appropriate environment.

As I said, I'm a very proud Albertan. I'm here by choice. I came from the United States and made a conscious choice to come into Alberta. I'm still proud of the fact that I came to Alberta. I'm particularly proud of the fact that we had such a fantastic throne speech, that is going to help all achieve the sort of satisfaction that I have.

I want to turn just for a few moments to what the other members have done, and I really want to compliment the people that have given their responses, their maiden speeches. I've enjoyed every one of them. I'm humbled to stand here and speak because my experience is only one of the 87 that exist in this Legislature, and I'm really looking forward to working with all the legislators in this Assembly.

I was born 67 years ago, actually in the hospital in Brandon. I'm a prototypical baby boom baby. In fact, the boom was on – and I have sympathy with the previous speaker's situation. The Brandon hospital was so busy that my bassinet was a peach basket, so I spent the first few days of my life in a peach basket, apparently. I don't recall that. I think that some of the pressures that we're seeing on the health care system now really reflect what was going on in 1948 or 1950, in that era.

I spent the first nine years of my life on a farm in southwest Manitoba. I still have an ownership interest in that farm, and when agricultural issues come up, I don't want to be excluded from their discussion just because I'm a big-city representative. One of the things I learned from growing up on the farm is that farmers are very capable and they can achieve lots of things, but they do need the government's help from time to time. They do need things like, for instance, something that we had in 1948 that we don't have now, a wheat board to help us sell our wheat, which was very important on that grain farm in southwest Manitoba. We also need water regulations, and we need regulations that control pests in our animals. You cannot farm without some regulations, and I would say that we cannot live as citizens of this province without some degree of help from the government in making sure that health and safety and financial services and pensions and hospitals and schools are run in a collective way to make sure that everything is done well.

3:40

I mentioned that I grew up in southwestern Manitoba. I had the great opportunity to go to McGill University. I lived for eight years in Montreal, and then I went to the United States to complete my training in hematology and medical oncology. I still practise, although I would hasten to mention to all members that unless you have a cancer problem, I'm not much use to you. The Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo is probably a much more capable person for dealing with medical emergencies than I am, and we have several nurses, at least in our caucus, that, again, would be much more capable of dealing with the colds and flus. I did help one of my colleagues with a nosebleed the other day, which I'm pleased with. I didn't submit a bill either.

I want to turn just because we were talking about collegiality in this Assembly. There was another instance of collegiality today that I participated in that I want to bring to the attention of the whole. The Member for Strathmore-Brooks was expounding on all the rodeos and exhibitions in his area, and he mentioned that there was going to be a running of the bulls. Immediately – I tell you, immediately – I sent him a note saying: what would I have to pay to see him running with the bulls? In fact, I would pay for the Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills member to run with the bulls and maybe the Drumheller member to run with the bulls.

An Hon. Member: We'll all pitch in.

Dr. Turner: That's right. I think some of the repetitive questioning might be diminished.

I am a proud husband, a proud father. I'm actually a grandfather now, since I'm 67. My wife, Joan, is a professor of oncology at the University of Alberta. She is a radiobiologist. She claims that she is the real doctor of the family since she earned her PhD, whereas I'm a glorified tradesman. You can imagine the discussions over the dinner table. One of the things that Joan has accomplished is that she was an active member of the 35-and-over soccer teams that we have a plethora of here in Edmonton. In fact, she played on the Riverbenders team. For those of you that don't know, we have more vintage – i.e., 35-plus – women playing soccer in this city than other place in the world, apparently. You can see the kind of support that this has led to in terms of getting the world-class tournaments that we're enjoying right now.

My children are both doctors. One is a surgeon, like me a glorified tradesman. The other is a genome scientist. They are the products of what I consider to be the best education system in the world, Edmonton public school board, and I say that without any reservation. Edmonton public and, I daresay, the Calgary board of education, the Catholic equivalents, and the school boards in rural Alberta produce some of the best students. When my daughter went to McGill University to follow in her father's footsteps, she was shocked to see that she was about two years ahead of Ontario and Quebec students at the same level.

Like the Member for Strathmore-Brooks, who unfortunately is not here, I have a Scottish grandmother, and I actually listened to my Scottish . . .

Mr. Strankman: Point of order.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Point of Order

Referring to the Absence of Members

Mr. Strankman: Point of order, Mr. Speaker. It's not proper to refer to a member that's not in the House.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I believe the hon. member is correct.

Dr. Turner: I certainly withdraw the statement and apologize.

Debate Continued

The Speaker: Hon. member, I must tell you that many of the points you were making were, I think, well received by all of the House, but your time is up.

Are there any questions or comments to the hon. member? The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to ask the hon. member if he could finish his comments with respect to his Scottish grandmother.

The Speaker: Before the member rises to do that, I think we need a unanimous vote to allow that to happen. Is that agreed? [interjections] That was a . . .

Mr. Mason: Oh, a joke.

The Speaker: My apologies.
Any questions or comments?

Dr. Turner: Sorry; am I allowed to complete this? Thank you. Thank you to the legislators for allowing me to do that.

My grandmother and grandfather emigrated from Glasgow about a hundred years ago. They came to Manitoba and worked hard, and their values were the values that I have, of valuing education as well as hard work and commitment to the community. I am very appreciative of their influence on me, and I thank the members for the indulgence of allowing me to express that.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members.

Any questions or comments now? The hon. member.

Mr. Nixon: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. First, I'd like to congratulate the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud on his maiden speech. While I respectfully disagree with many of the things you said, particularly in regard to the wheat board, I would like to just briefly recognize my good friend the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler, who fought very hard to see that ridiculousness stop, up to and in fact even being in prison to stop that.

With that said, though, I would like to just acknowledge the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud. While we may disagree on many things, I credit him with keeping a very dear friend of mine alive, who I had the privilege of speaking with this morning. The work that he does for patients across Alberta with cancer is amazing, and I thank him for that service.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I hesitate to interrupt because the tone sounds so optimistic.

The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I must confess, though, that I'm a little bit unsure. I was going to thank Ms Notley, et cetera, but she isn't in the House, so is it appropriate? [interjections] I'm sorry. That was wrong altogether.

The Speaker: You withdraw the comment? Thank you.

Mr. Orr: I'll just skip over it. I was going to get through congratulations, but we'll let it go.

Sometimes I'm accused of being a dreamer. I've been often drawn toward a dream for a better world, and I couldn't help but notice that the Speech from the Throne was somewhat like that as well. The difficulty, though, for all of us is that getting from dreamer to doer is a distance. Bridging the difference between the way things are and the way they could or should be is challenging. The great people in this world are the ones who see a better tomorrow and actually help to create it. So I do believe in the good land, the good life, and the good society, except, of course, if somebody is trying to sell it to me. Then I have to admit I'm a bit skeptical. But that's why I've always sought to be both a community and a capacity builder in our world.

3:50

During the campaign we heard quite clearly that math is hard, but the painfully obvious thing was that politics, in fact, is much harder. It's never going to be easy, it will always be a challenge, and it wasn't easy for those who came before us. I think of my four grandparents. One each was Irish, Danish, Norwegian, and German. They came here to a new land with incredible challenges. My grandfather arrived by himself, a 15-year-old, in about 1911. My mother's family came to a homestead and built a sod shelter for the winter of 1906 close to Drumheller. So life is a challenge for all of us. I'm not the first in my family to actually serve in a Legislative Assembly. I follow in the footsteps of my great uncle, who spent 20 years as a state senator in the North Dakota Legislature, and after him his daughter Ruth became the first woman Lieutenant Governor of North Dakota.

I've been fairly self-reflective in life, and finally, by 60, I think I've begun to figure myself out just a little bit. One day in a foggy blaze of brilliance six Ws that define my self-understanding began to emerge, and the alliteration, by the way, has helped me not forget who I am, at least not so far, anyway.

Wilderness. My refuge is the wilderness. I prefer to holiday in remote and wild places.

Wood. I love wood: its sturdiness, its diversity, its smell, its feel, its colour. For strength and beauty it's a wonderful artisan material.

Work. I get a great deal of reward from work, actually. It gives me purpose and identity and camaraderie. It draws out of me creativity and learning and growth. I actually get up excited in the morning to go to work.

Words. Words are the bodies of ideas that awaken and speak to me. Words are visions crafted with care. We travel by words into one another's minds and souls.

A woman. A certain woman, Donna Marie, is in many ways the very centre of my life. We've been married 39 years as of Friday. Together we have three wonderful children and now seven grandchildren.

Lastly, worship. I can't pretend to know much about God because He is, after all, the great mystery, but I do know that all worship begins with a sense of incredible wonder and awe. I share some of that because I actually truly believe that many of the people in my riding would embrace similar values and self-understandings, although each would be unique to themselves.

I'm truly delighted to live amongst and represent the 40,000 stable, hardy people of Lacombe-Ponoka, which actually should soon, I hope, become Lacombe-Blackfalds-Ponoka, since Blackfalds has grown larger than Ponoka now. Lacombe-Ponoka is in the central parkland region of Alberta. It is lush, verdant, and fecund, one of the most fertile and amenable zones of the province. West it's too cold, and rocky east is too dry for good farming; the central corridor is just right, but that's made it a place of conflicting visions.

The people of Maskwacis, Bear Hills, where there are now four treaty reserves, found berries and abundant game and wholesome life there. Ponoka is a word from the word for elk. These Cree and Blackfoot peoples have their vision of life. I've met some of their elders. I know some of their people, good people, finding a new vision for life.

Next there came a wave of farm settlers with their vision. They settled in this area early because it was the best, but that has also put it at risk. Prosperity came, and roads and industrial and residential development are paving over the very best agricultural land in the province. Should we not preserve land and protect farming? Food does not originate in grocery stores. Farmers are getting harassed by those who don't like the smell or the noise or the big equipment on the roads. Increased regulation and legislation is not often supportive of farming, yet agriculture is absolutely one of our most sustainable industries. It contributes to our economy independent of the oil and gas treadmill.

Food production and processing in Lacombe county includes cereal grains and oil grains, seeds, and many huge produce greenhouses that have been erected in recent years. The Alix malt plant ships malt to brewers across the globe. Beef, cattle, hogs, chicken, eggs, and milk production are all intensive in my area. Alberta produces 44 per cent of all of the beef in Canada, and the most concentrated production is in central Alberta.

Rural communities contribute something else, generations of strapping young men and resourceful women. The labour shortage for oil and gas and construction workers would be a lot worse without the steady stream of family farm progeny, but rural communities, schools, and health care are often not priorities for or even understood by massive, centralized political bureaucracies.

Just give rural people the power and the resources to manage their own lives, and they will thank you for it. These are some of the concerns of rural Alberta people.

Then there are the needs and the visions of industry and business. Understand that Lacombe-Ponoka is bustling with job- and wealth-generating industriousness. Joffe petrochemicals plant is an example of an \$8 billion value-added oil and gas industry in Alberta. It is the largest single enterprise in the riding, and it's currently in the middle of another \$1 billion expansion. I have a personal interest in that plant because my father was a site manager for one of the early expansions in the 1980s, but there are other numerous gas and oil plants at Prentiss, Content Bridge, and Haynes. There are a whole number of secondary oil and gas service and manufacturing small businesses, "small" meaning up to 50 employees, and there's yet another group of agricultural manufacturing and service businesses with world-wide sales.

Then there are the urban centres and an ever-increasing demand for acreages. Urban centres of Lacombe, Blackfalds, and Ponoka have been facing tremendous growth. They have worked together to develop regional infrastructure. The north Red Deer River regional water commission now supplies water to all these major communities. There is still the need to complete a regional wastewater treatment facility, which we hope the provincial government will be able to proceed with soon. It's urgent because the amount of untreated water now overflowing into the Red Deer River is unacceptable. There's an especially great need for a reliable and adequate funding model for municipal governments. Blackfalds, as I mentioned earlier in the day, doesn't have a registry office. The whole town struggles with this.

But the areas where the challenges of competing visions will most arise are the areas of land and water use, rights, and management. The previous government enacted what many of my people consider to be terrible land legislation. It's unacceptable, and it needs to be repealed or amended. I've been to surface rights and Synergy land-use meetings. I've sat and listened to the competing visions for water at the Red Deer River watershed annual meeting. These are areas of concern. Our aboriginal peoples of Maskwacis, rural agricultural communities, urbanites, and business communities all have their own visions, and it's only as we listen with respect and learn to work together that we will build that better future.

Of course, there are extremely important concerns regarding health and education that we're all aware of. The culture in these institutions just does not seem to be healthy. Both have become – the word I've heard is "dysfunctional." Both are so frustrating to work in that teachers and nurses whom I know personally are pulling their hair out. These are just simply not best-place-to-work environments. Home care and seniors' care facilities are insufficient and would open up hospital beds.

We are proud of the Centennial centre in Ponoka, Alberta's world-class centre for brain injury and mental health. We're also thankful for private education, specifically the benefits socially and financially from the Canadian University College in Lacombe.

4:00

The people in Lacombe and Ponoka are industrious, productive, and innovative. Good leaders have arisen from among them in the past. Part of our heritage there would be Edward Michener, elected in Lacombe as the Leader of the Official Opposition from 1910 to '17. His son the Rt. Hon. Roland Michener, 20th Governor General of Canada, was born in Lacombe. Provincial Premier John Brownlee served in this riding from '21 to '35. Irene Parlby, the first woman in Alberta to be appointed a cabinet minister and one of the Famous Five, was from Alix, again part of this riding. Good

leaders will arise from this riding again. We need to give them the resources and the authority to manage their own lives, and they will thrive.

I would be remiss, too, if I did not point out the thriving art and culture of our area. There are bands and fiddle contests and choral groups and comedians. Gord Bamford, a country star, hails from Lacombe, as does Anna Maria Kaufmann, a world-renowned soprano. Oh, and there are the dance studios and the visual artists and arts in every village, from the murals of Lacombe to the encaustic wax painters, pottery studios, a woodworkers' guild, soap makers, you name it. And there's cowboy culture. The Ponoka Stampede is second only to the Calgary Stampede, or if you want something a little different, you could go to Long Ears Days in August in the village of Tees, where mule and donkey owners meet from across the province and hold their own unique rodeo.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for a few moments to brag about the central corridor riding of Lacombe-Ponoka and to outline some of the needs that I hope to address in the coming days in this House. These are the dreams for a better life of my people. Thank you to the people who have honoured me with their trust and trusteeship. Thank you especially to those who helped to get me elected, and thank you to my wife, who has walked with me, knocked on doors, and encouraged me in every way.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. I noted the comment that you made about where you vacation in wild and remote places. The Speaker noted that, and we hope that you're not on a vacation now. Questions or comments?

Hearing none, the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to move that we adjourn debate on the Speech from the Throne for today.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

Bill 3

Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2015 (No. 2)

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

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to rise today to move third reading of Bill 3, the Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2015 (No. 2).

The Speaker: Are there any other members to speak? The hon. member.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in this Chamber to discuss this government's spend, spend, spend package. Bundled together in Bill 3, the interim supply act – the NDP is referring to it as a minibudget, which must refer to the details provided. . .

Mr. Mason: Point of order.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I wish to correct the hon. member. It has been the Wildrose opposition that has repeatedly referred to this as a minibudget. It is not. It is an appropriation bill and not a budget in any form.

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, thank you so much. I didn't quite catch the citation that the Government House Leader was rising on. However, I'm guessing that it was a slight misstatement by the hon. member, and I'd be happy to withdraw it on his behalf.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. I didn't hear "given" before it. Thank you.

The hon. member may now proceed.

Mr. Nixon: Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

An Hon. Member: Given.

Mr. Nixon: I don't have to do that. I know the people in my riding want to know what is in this budget. Heck, I'd like to know. This feels like the NDP is writing a blank cheque with no details. I can't help but feel surprised, Mr. Speaker: three hours to debate \$18 billion of spending, and the details are so thin. We have three numbers from each ministry to ask questions on. The minister's answers are vague. Frankly, the Finance minister himself doesn't seem to be clear about how much money is being voted on. With so many questions and such little time to discuss them, this government is hiding in the shadows. Why won't this government open up the books and let us know what is in this budget?

Albertans would like to know why this minibudget is being rushed through the Legislature without a full debate session, why this bill is hardly being publicly discussed for all Albertans to hear. My wife and I spent more time debating what truck we were going to buy this past fall than this government is spending talking about this budget. The thing is that this isn't even their budget; it's former Premier Alison Redford's. That's three Premiers ago, Mr. Speaker. Maybe there's another sky palace in there. We don't know. They won't show us the numbers. Frankly, I can't for the life of me understand why anyone, never mind a government that got elected on change and transparency, would want to align themselves with not only a budget of a widely unpopular Premier but of a different party altogether. Is it possible they don't know what is in the budget? I'm starting to think that may be the case. The communications from the Finance minister and his team certainly would allude to that. How much money is being added? Which of the many numbers is it? Shouldn't we know how much taxpayers are on the hook for?

Are the NDP playing politics with taxpayer dollars? How come they can't commit to a day when the budget will be posted? September seems reasonable, Mr. Speaker, tons of time since the NDP became government on the 5th of May, a whole summer with the Legislature not sitting, time to consult with stakeholders. Why do we keep hearing dates like November, October, December? I'm hesitant to suggest this has something to do with maybe a federal election. Do the NDP have to wait until the federal NDP come out with their platform before they can write their own budget? Are we tied to what the NDP activists in Ottawa think? I sure hope not, but a budget after the election sure would lead me to believe it.

I'm here to help. I want the best for Albertans. We all want open, transparent government that is accountable to all Albertans. I'm keen to help to get a budget to take to my riding and explain to the citizens of Alberta, but right now all we have are three numbers and no answers.

Thank you very much, Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity to speak to Bill 3. Personally, I'm truly amazed at how quickly this new

government has lost all perspective when it comes to the value of a tax dollar. I can appreciate that some of the members across the way have never had to monitor a payroll, overlook expenses, or manage a budget, but it requires transparency, openness, and a dose of reality for what we can and cannot afford. When we're talking about \$18 billion, it's easy to lose perspective.

When looking at the interim supply act, even a million dollars suddenly seems to be not a lot of money, but it roughly equates to almost 400,000 person hours for a worker in the \$25 per hour range who pays 10 per cent of their wage to income tax. Four hundred thousand hours. So every time we mention a million tax dollars in this Chamber, think about an Albertan making \$25 an hour for approximately 200 years to provide that money to the government. Now it appears that a billion dollars is just another number. Maybe if we say it as 18 thousand million dollars, it will put it back into perspective. Eighteen thousand million dollars. You can do the math to figure out how many years it would take a person to do that. You are going to vote on spending 18 thousand million dollars of your constituents' money, when some of you may not even know how to balance your chequebook, on a budget that has provided this House zero details on where the money is coming from or where it is going. Good luck explaining your position to your constituents over the coming months.

Thank you.

4:10

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there any others who would like to speak to the bill?

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just want to reiterate what this is and what this is not because some hon. members opposite are misrepresenting the situation. First of all, this is not a budget. It is not a minibudget. It is a bill of appropriation that allows the government to continue to operate past the end of this month, when the spending authority which was obtained by the previous government runs out. In order to continue to operate the government and to pay the bills and to pay our employees and to maintain the programs that Albertans depend upon, we need to bring forward – clearly, we couldn't prepare a budget in a matter of a few weeks as a brand new government.

So we had two choices. We could have brought forward the appropriation bill, which we did, and have it debated in the House and give the opposition an opportunity to debate the spending of the government over the next five months, or we could have used special warrants, which would have essentially just borrowed the money to keep going without reference to the Assembly. Those were the only two choices we had, Mr. Speaker. We chose, I think, the riskier option, which is to bring forward an appropriation bill to the House and face the opposition in order to get authority to continue operating the government of Alberta while we prepared a budget in the fall.

That's the first thing, Mr. Speaker.

Secondly, the hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre has characterized this as a continuation of Alison Redford's budget. Mr. Speaker, that was three Premiers ago, and it is absolutely a false statement that this is somehow based on any budget that was brought forward by that particular Premier. This is, as we have said, based on the appropriation bill that was brought forward by the previous government. That was not Alison Redford.

Mr. Speaker, I want to make a point. I think that though there is sharp disagreement and, you know, a high level of criticism on the opposition side with respect to this particular piece of legislation, we have maintained a very good tone overall in the Assembly, much

different, markedly different, than the previous Assemblies of which I've been a part. But when members start making false statements in order to create propaganda for their side in the House, then that breaks down. I just want to caution hon. members on the other side that if they want to characterize this budget in clearly incorrect terms, if they wish to rewrite history, then the tone of this place will not last the way it has been. I just want to provide that as a caution.

Mr. Speaker, this appropriation bill does a number of things, and we've talked about that. It provides additional money so that we can ensure that there are teachers for expansion in the schools, that we can replace the cuts that were in the previous government's budget for health care and postsecondary education and human services.

It also provides funding in order to cancel certain taxes and charges that the previous government's budget contained. For example, the health care levy is cancelled by this bill, and that's a significant amount of money that would have been brought in. It was a tax on the middle class, a significant tax increase on the middle class which this government is cancelling.

There were also many different charges for different things – birth certificates, death certificates, all of those things – where there were increases in the previous government's budget that are cancelled. That also requires money to compensate for the loss of revenue that would have otherwise been obtained.

So that's what this bill actually does, and it provides the funding for the government to continue with those changes for the next five months. We will prepare a budget, which will be fully discussed and debated in much greater detail than this particular appropriation bill.

I just wanted to leave the members with those thoughts, to put this in context. I know that the opposition needs to create a certain narrative, but I would urge members opposite to make sure that the narrative is based on an honest difference of opinion and not on falsification of the record of the government or of the history that precedes it, Mr. Speaker.

With those comments, Mr. Speaker, I will move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 2

An Act to Restore Fairness to Public Revenue

[Adjourned debate June 22: Mr. Ceci]

The Speaker: Hon. member, please proceed.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to rise and address Bill 2. We've heard a great deal about the possible impact of this bill, from deterring foreign investment to being the nail in the coffin of the Alberta advantage, from driving companies away from the province to fears that the wealthy who earn more than \$125,000 per year will file their taxes elsewhere or just move.

4:20

Mr. Speaker, one thing that we have not heard too much about is the impact on everyday Albertans. I would like to raise some concerns of my constituents as an example of how this bill is going to impact the economy, stability, and the direct effects that this bill will have on hard-working Albertans. I'm from the Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Bonnyville riding – sorry, not the Bonnyville riding; the Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills riding, but I have worked up in the Bonnyville area. We are south of what most people think of as

the oil sands area in Fort McMurray. In our part of the province crude oil is extracted by pumping steam downhole by using either cyclic steam stimulation or SAGD to recover the oil product. Projects in my riding are smaller than the mines surrounding Fort McMurray although there are some very large companies active in the area, including Canadian Natural Resources, MEG Energy, Cenovus Energy, and Imperial Oil.

With the low oil prices we have seen this year, several big projects are on hold and much of the drilling has been cancelled and pushed back to the third quarter of 2016. For instance, CNRL deferred the \$1.45 billion Kirby north project near Lac La Biche, and MEG Energy has reduced their 2015 budget by three-quarters. Meanwhile, Cenovus is holding off on developing long-term projects elsewhere in northern Alberta.

The area has a sizable population of temporary residents who've come to work in the region and live in hotels and camps. The 2013 Lac La Biche municipal census found that this group made up 26 per cent of the county's population of 12,000 people. There have been fears that the lower price for crude oil may force companies to slow down or even outright halt operations. This action would result in fewer customers for local businesses and lower profits. It would also discourage people from moving into the area. So all related industries in the local economy such as housing, car sales, and even groceries will feel the effect. The economy will stagnate at best or crash at worst.

For example, the operations manager at Lac La Biche Transport was reported as saying in January that with the lower prices and reduced workload he may have to start laying off workers. This is now a reality. Their oil field operation is at a standstill, and the freight division is slowing considerably due to that. Oil sands operators hire his company to haul equipment in northeastern Alberta, and he said in an interview with Global News that the business was down by about a quarter compared with the same time the previous year. That was in January, and it's slowed down considerably since then.

There are so many other examples of how the economic base in northeastern Alberta is suffering. MRC Global supplies pipe and fittings and other materials for the oil industry. They have had to lay off staff, and there are many more layoffs to come as the few projects that are still under way start to wind down. Welding companies in the Bonnyville area that I have talked to are reporting that as the big oil companies are cutting back projects and slashing contractor charge-out rates by 10 to 25 per cent – I've seen those; the requests come from the oil companies: slash your charge-out rates by 10 per cent, 15 per cent, 20 per cent, up to 25 per cent, or we won't be hiring you – they face increasing difficulties maintaining their bottom line. This flows down to the workers. Companies have no choice but to cut back hours, slash salaries, or lay off workers. This, of course, will destroy the local economy. Many of the businesses in our part of the province, as across the entire province, rely in one way or another on the oil and gas industry salaries paid to the workers in that industry. Cars, homes, groceries are based on a strong resource industry. The service and supply companies live by the drill bit and unfortunately also die by the drill bit.

Mr. Speaker, that is just the impact of lower oil prices. Most Albertans are used to that boom-and-bust cycle, but many are about to experience it for the very first time. Though there is a lot of concern over the effects of the price of oil, I believe that there is a general sense that this bust will be followed by a boom, as it usually is, and we'll be on track again in time, hopefully soon.

However, I don't think anyone ever expected that at a time of such economic uncertainty, when the lowest oil prices in years are threatening all aspects of our economy, the government would do

exactly the thing guaranteed to hurt us even further. Local businesses have already experienced reduced revenue due to the pullback by the oil companies related to oil price reductions. Their rates have been cut, anywhere from 10 to 25 per cent as I mentioned earlier, but now businesses are expected to pay another 2 per cent on their already lowered revenue. The NDP's focus on tax grabs and job-killing royalty hikes is the wrong way to address economic instability. [interjection] That's funny is it? It may be funny to you.

The Speaker: Hon. member.

Please proceed, member.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sorry about that.

The government needs to curb the unbelievable cost that our public service incurs. We do not have a revenue problem. We have a spending problem. Wildrose put out a very reasonable budget during the campaign that would have cut spending without hurting the front-line service delivery. Our plan was to make reductions in budgets over time, and many of those reductions would be from government travel, consultants, advertising, and conference costs. Most reductions have come from ending corporate welfare and cutting middle management in Alberta Health Services and not from eliminating front-line staff. The Wildrose plan pointed out possible savings of over \$2 billion, which is more than the NDP government hopes to realize by raising taxes. What's more, the NDP have not been very sure of the expected revenue to be gained from these new taxes and have gone about making all sorts of irresponsible funding promises based on their faulty math.

Mr. Speaker, businesses and Albertans across the province should not be expected to bear the weight of government mismanagement and overspending. You cannot tax your way out of debt, and in trying to do so, this government and this bill are threatening Alberta's competitive edge both here at home and abroad. The government expects Albertans to shoulder the costs, and that is simply unfair. Small and medium-sized businesses continue to be hit from all sides, from reduction in charge-out rates, reduced activity in the oil and gas sectors, and now from increased taxes. The cost of your ill-advised business tax increase will be job losses, reduced salaries, and reduced hourly rates, business and personal bankruptcies, and stagnant economic growth.

The province has experienced record revenue over the last couple of years, not because of royalties alone, but because of the massive amounts of man-hours that have been put in in our construction in the oil and gas industries and the resulting windfall of personal tax paid in the province. In 2015 and 2016 this will not be the case due to the pullback in oil and gas exploration and exploitation. Many projects have been cancelled or put off indefinitely. Contractors have had to reduce rate sheets in order to maintain what contracts are left, resulting in lower wages and layoffs. An increase of business tax by 20 per cent is only going to make a bad situation worse. If this new government is really interested in increasing revenue at the expense of working Albertans, it will do whatever it can to get our construction, oil, and gas people back to work. That is where the real money is, real prosperity now and in the long run. You can have higher taxes if you like, but it will mean nothing if the bulk of your workforce is sitting at home on pokey.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there any questions or observations?

I would recognize the Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I recognize that our work here in this House involves a certain level of theatre and performance. We are here in part to act out the parts that are

assigned to us as representatives of the people in line with the great traditions that proceed us. At times, that involves some drama, whether genuine or feigned, and at times it leads to hyperbole on both sides of the House. That said, I think it's important to note that this bill we are considering today, Bill 2, is not a radical proposition. The proposals put forward in this bill are not unusual, they are not unreasonable, and they are not unprecedented. These amendments to our tax structure do not represent a radical restructuring of our tax system. They will not cause the sky to fall or Alberta's economy to grind to a halt. These changes simply represent a reasonable correction of our fiscal course.

4:30

In regard to income tax this bill will return Alberta to the same form of progressive tax structure found in every other province in Canada. In fact, the small percentage of Albertans who will be affected by this bill, those who, like ourselves, earn more than \$125,000 a year, will still pay less income tax than in any other province in Canada with the exceptions of Ontario and Newfoundland.

The introduction of the flat tax in 2003 put us on a road of increasing dependence on resource revenues to fund the services that Albertans depend on by replacing a stable source of revenue with one that we could not predict or control. This flat tax played no small part in creating the fiscal difficulties we're dealing with here today. We simply can't continue to depend on the price of oil to determine whether or not we can provide the services and build the hospitals and schools that Albertans need and deserve. The flat tax was simply poor policy, rooted more in ideology and political strategy than in fiscal prudence or considered choice.

As I said, this bill simply corrects that error by restoring the fair, progressive tax structure that we have in every other province in Canada. This is not unreasonable. This is not an unfair overreach on the part of government. This is the change that hundreds of thousands of Albertans voted for; in fact, far more Albertans voted for parties who supported a return to a progressive tax system, 1 million Albertans, to be exact, 70 per cent of everyone who cast a vote. That's a resounding and decided majority. Albertans support a progressive tax system, and that's what this bill delivers.

In regard to the increase in our corporate tax rate a survey conducted by the previous government showed that 69 per cent of respondents favoured increasing the corporate tax rate in Alberta. For years we've maintained some of the lowest taxes in Canada by far, and it's simply not sustainable. We need higher revenues to ensure that there's adequate funding for our social programs, our services, and the infrastructure that we so badly need and that I've heard so many members on both sides of the House advocating for us to build.

Our corporate tax system continues and will continue to be competitive with other provinces. Alberta will continue to be an attractive option for investors thanks to our infrastructure, our cities, our diverse industries, our growing and skilled population, and the many investment opportunities that remain. The Alberta advantage does not lie solely in having the lowest bargain basement rate across the country. It is not unreasonable, it is not unprecedented to ask those corporations, the large, profitable corporations who have benefited from what we as a province have to offer, to pay a little bit more.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there any questions or observations? The hon. member.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In your words it may not be unreasonable, unusual, radical, or unprecedented, but it is unwise. It may not be unreasonable, unusual, radical, or unprecedented, but it will hurt the economy.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the advice and the concern from across the aisle. As we're well aware, you are here to help. I appreciate your opinion, but I think we'll see. These are the actions that Albertans voted for. We were clear in our platform. We didn't hide this under a bushel. This was out there. Albertans looked at it. As I said, nearly 70 per cent of Albertans who voted voted for a progressive tax structure.

I look forward to seeing this bill implemented, I look forward to seeing this new tax structure put in place, and I look forward to the increased prosperity that we are going to see in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner. We're in the five minutes for questions and clarification.

Mr. Hunter: I just have a question. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the comments of the hon. member. However, my question to you is: can you show me a precedent where \$18 billion has been introduced in an interim supply bill?

Mr. Shepherd: Mr. Speaker, I would note that that question has nothing to do with my comments or with the bill that is currently under consideration.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you. I think it had everything to do with what you said there. You were asking for a precedent. You said you had precedents, so I wanted to find out what precedent that was.

My other question to you. In business we have a competitive and comparative advantage. This is what the Alberta advantage was. When we are the same, where is our comparative or competitive advantage? This is my question to you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question from the hon. member. Alberta still has many advantages. We do not have a sales tax. We do not have a health levy, which is often required to be paid by the employers. We offer a skilled populace. We offer a fantastic place to do business. We offer great resources here available for use and for extraction. These are advantages that still remain, and I don't believe that this small rise in the corporate tax rate is going to cause those to fail.

Mr. Hunter: I guess the only comment that I want to make on this is: you said that we will wait and see. This is a terrible risk – this is a terrible risk – to wait and see. You need to do your studies. You need to make sure that it is grounded on fundamentals that have worked in the past. This is what's going to be able to help Albertans and make them feel comfortable with what you're doing. This is the concern that we have. Now, when you make an argument and say, "We got the mandate when we were in the election," I will remind you that not a majority of people voted for the NDP government. Not a majority. You do have a majority in the House – you do have a majority in the House – and that does allow you the legal right, but it does not give you the moral right to do what you're doing.

Mr. Shepherd: I thank the hon. member for his comments. In terms of looking at what effects this might have, we can always look to B.C., which raised their corporate tax rate and, in the years following, increased the number of jobs. At this point there is speculation on both sides of this issue. Certainly, we've heard plenty from certain economists in Calgary and other individuals who choose to predict doom and gloom. We will see.

In regard to your comment about moral authority we . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, your five minutes have been allocated.

I recognize the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

4:40

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It would seem that the change that some Albertans were so eagerly anticipating when the New Democratic Party was elected is not the change that perhaps they had expected, but it may be the change that, I would argue, a majority of Albertans are fearing. Hoping to be released from the overspending that marked the 44 years of Progressive Conservative government, we thought that we might see a more responsible, long-term approach to fiscal management from the new government. Instead, many are saying that their worst fears are being confirmed.

I talked to a constituent yesterday who phoned me up. He said that what he was seeing and what he was hearing was, in his words, scary. "Two times as much work," he said; "I've had more work than I can handle." Then the price for oil drops. We see that he's having a hard time finding work for his company. He's afraid of the increase in the minimum wage and what that's going to do to his business. These are his words; they're not mine.

Albertans are worried, and I don't think that's a partisan statement. Instead of tackling the real challenge to economic stability in Alberta, instead of attacking a bloated, expensive, and unmanageable public service, we are seeing that the NDP is going to combine the worst of the previous government with its own brand of personal and business tax hikes. Does this NDP government really want to live up to the stereotypes that are out there of the other NDP governments' fiscal mismanagement?

Albertans hoped, we believed that this NDP government would be a unique Alberta variety, and I say that honestly. You have many of Alberta's peoples – they're giving you a chance. What I hear out there is that people are willing to give the hon. Premier – they have a lot of respect for her, and I've heard over and over at times that they're willing to give you the chance, but they don't want a rehash of Ontario or some of the other failed experiments. So we're hoping, the people of Alberta are hoping that in this New Democratic government ideology will not trump proven practices and policies of fiscal conservatism and restraint.

Those of us who've lived in Alberta for any length of time have become accustomed to a boom-and-bust cycle. It plagues a resource-based economy. We understand that, but we fear that we're going to move from a boom-and-bust to a bust-and-bust cycle, with oil prices as low as they have been. We've seen the effects of that across the entire economy. Last November the Alberta NDP leader said that it will be families who will pay the price for the PC government's failure to responsibly manage the resource revenues, and according to our Premier the governing PC Party claimed that there was a crisis every time oil prices dropped. Our Premier is quoted in a newspaper article, stating, "It's time we finally moved to a more fair, stable, predictable revenue system." I think we've just heard you try to defend that comment. Fair enough.

Albertans were forewarned that an NDP government would focus on the wrong end of the equation when attempting to address the

economic instability based on a falling oil price. Instead of addressing overspending, they focused on raising revenues by raising taxes on businesses and families. We're going into an economic slide and we raise taxes, yet the reality of the extent of the new government's misunderstandings of economic principles and potential mismanagement is only just now becoming clear.

We see a perfect storm coming: low oil prices; lower than expected revenues; the most expensive government in all of Canada; the \$500 million miscalculation in revenues required to meet spending requirements; business tax hikes, which make Alberta a much less attractive place to invest for both international and national companies; and eventually an increase in debt. While there is very little anyone can do about the price of crude oil, government can and it must develop sound fiscal policies to ensure that the economy stays competitive and strong in the long run.

At the very time that the government needs to be attracting investors, you intend instead to scare them away by hiking business taxes. Alberta currently has the lowest business tax rate in the country; however, under this bill our tax rate will tie with Manitoba, New Brunswick, Saskatchewan and will be 1 per cent higher than Quebec. At the very time that the government needs to be encouraging business start-up, they are putting obstacles in the way by increasing business taxes. At a time when the government needs to be increasing our competitive edge in the international economy, they are putting the final nail in the Alberta advantage. At the very time that the government needs to stimulate investor confidence, they instead are doing the very thing guaranteed to steer investors out of Alberta. At the very time that the government should be addressing a spending problem, instead they throw taxpayer dollars on the fire.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta runs the most expensive government in all of Canada, and Wildrose believes that we need to make government more efficient before we jump to any other serious suggestions for how to deal with the economy. Wildrose put out a very moderate budget during the campaign that would not have impacted front-line services. For instance, with a reduction of 50 per cent of the AHS managers, consultants, travel, advertising, and conference budgets, we projected a savings of approximately \$300 million. This is roughly the same size as the damaging business tax being implemented. That is only one approach to addressing a volatile economic climate while preserving a standard of life and the level of service.

It is not too late to back away from this disastrous idea to raise business and personal income tax. Wildrose would be happy to help the government to find a more workable, long-term solution. To paraphrase a famous songwriter, at least in my circles: the NDP are mortgaging Alberta's future to pay for the PC bankrupt past.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, questions and observations? The hon. Government House Leader.

4:50

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the hon. members opposite and their view. They have a very different view, of course, in our view a very ideological view. Of course, to them it just looks like common sense, I suppose, but from over here it looks like dogma.

Now, the hon. members opposite have repeated over and over again that they're here to help. Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to tell them that I'm here to help, too. The hon. members have been raising the issue. They don't want to have any increase in revenues, whether it be taxes or royalties. They don't want to borrow any money, yet there is a huge gap between expenditures and revenues.

They claim that this can all be corrected by eliminating waste and mismanagement, cutting down on the bureaucracy, and so on. I severely doubt that.

At the same time as they're asking us to curtail spending in a major way, billions of dollars actually, they're asking for our help, and I'm happy to try to provide that if I can. They're asking for help with their crumbling hospitals; for example, in Wainwright. They want road improvements in Little Bow, Chestermere. They want a new school in Two Hills, and they want a new registry office in Blackfalds. That's just a very, very short list of the requests that have been made in this House since we began sitting just a bit more than a week ago.

Mr. Speaker, you can't have it both ways. If the hon. members want these things – and they are important things. I'm not diminishing that in any way. Those are things that their constituents need and want and which the government, if it can, will help to provide. But if they insist on heading down the path of a huge, huge cut in government expenditures, which is what they're saying that they want to see, these things will not be possible. I think they have an obligation to be straight with their constituents. If they want the policies that they say that they want fiscally, then many of these things will never be fulfilled. I think they have an obligation to be straight with their voters.

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, thank you so much, and thank you to the hon. member for your comments. They are much appreciated.

I'll just take a brief moment here. The Wildrose has been very clear that we would take the steps to release a priority spending list. Never once have we said that we would not spend, just that we would undertake the appropriate steps to ensure that the spending which is done by the oversized bureaucracy here in the province of Alberta is done in a much more responsible manner.

For the hon. member to rise and say, you know, that we've seen them talk about a registry in Blackfalds and an intersection where there have been lives lost in Chestermere-Rocky View as well as lives lost in the last 12 months in Little Bow – clearly, these intersections create a significant safety concern where lives are being lost, and Wildrose has never once advocated to stop government spending wholesale. The things that we're wanting to ensure happen are that we are reducing waste within the government, that we are prioritizing every tax dollar, and this is the path forward that creates an environment where spending isn't so loosely looked at.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first opportunity to speak to Bill 2, An Act to Restore Fairness to Public Revenue. The bill proposes to amend the Corporate Tax Act to increase the general corporate income tax from 10 per cent to 12 per cent effective July 1. However, the bill is not proposing to change Alberta's lower small-business corporate tax rate, which is currently at 3 per cent, something that the Alberta Liberals were suggesting. The bill also proposes to amend the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act to end the province's single-rate personal income tax of 10 per cent and reintroduce a progressive income tax system effective October 1, 2015, which the Alberta Liberals have supported.

In conjunction with Bill 2 the NDP government also announced that it will not proceed with a number of fees imposed on Albertans by the previous government. The government will eliminate the health levy and scrap proposed fee increases on vehicle licences and registration, land title searches, mortgages, marriage licences, birth certificates, and death certificates.

These changes in general were supported by the Alberta Liberal caucus as a recognition that we are slipping further and further behind not only in infrastructure, not only in maintenance but in critical social programs. We spend 20 per cent per capita less on social supports for people than the national average in Canada. It is resulting in serious backlogs in mental health issues, early childhood risk, poverty issues, mental health and addiction resolution. So we are creating a debt, a social debt, for not only this generation but the next.

We have an infrastructure debt not only for ourselves but future generations, and we have an environmental debt. Massive cleanup costs will be facing all of us in the next couple of decades, whether it's the oil sands or whether it's upstream oil and gas wells. We have to be conscious that we are already spending beyond our means. At the same time, we have to start generating from our pockets. Our current generation, we who are the baby boomers, has to start paying more, or we're going to leave huge debts of all three types to our children.

There's no question that last year the government gave back \$11.6 billion more – \$11.6 billion more – than any other province in the country to corporations and the wealthiest in the province. That is the Alberta advantage, right? And who benefits from the advantage? Well, about 7 per cent of Albertans, in fact, and with the new tax rate moving on a progressive level to individual incomes, the top 7 per cent of tax filers will see an increase in their taxes. The top 7 per cent of income earners. The proposed rates, I think you know, start at \$125,000 a year.

I for one want to pay more taxes on my income. I want to see our social programs solved. I want to see our infrastructure solved. I want to see a serious investment in environmental monitoring. I want to see groundwater actually monitored before people frack. I want to see some assessment of what has happened to our groundwater in a hundred years of drilling and fracking. We still don't know in 2015 what is happening to our groundwater.

Of course, corporations only pay taxes on profits. If they don't make profits, they will not be paying extra taxes. The first \$500,000 of profit in a smaller corporation: they will not see that 10 per cent or even an increase.

An Hon. Member: Three per cent.

Dr. Swann: It will be 3 per cent, yes.

In our view, we should be reducing small-business tax because that will stimulate new economy, that will stimulate more jobs, but this government has not chosen to do that. I would hope they would consider that in the future as a stimulus for some of the new jobs and new economy that we need desperately in this province, whether it's renewable energy, conservation measures, better building codes, and new businesses that can spring up around alternative technology for reduced carbon emissions. There are some tremendous opportunities for us to not follow the world but lead the world on carbon-reducing technologies.

5:00

Small businesses make up 95 per cent of all businesses in Alberta and 35 per cent of private-sector jobs. In 2013 there were 158,000 small businesses, businesses with fewer than 50 employees that bring in less than \$500,000 in profit in a year. I think we could stimulate that part of the economy in a very substantial way and rebuild some tax advantage, ensure that we have that tax advantage in Alberta, with a win-win for jobs and our economy.

Revenue generated by the 10 per cent general corporate tax for 2015-16 is estimated to be \$4 billion. Revenue generated by the 3

per cent small-business tax for 2015-16 is estimated to be \$500 million.

In 2001 Alberta introduced Canada's first and only single-rate personal income tax of 10 per cent. We are the only province in the country to have bought into, under the Klein government, a flat tax. It has not served us. We have gone further and further behind in social programs, in environmental monitoring and environmental reputation, and now we're having trouble getting our oil to market because of severe challenges.

But I want to make another recommendation to this government. Not only does Alberta currently tax corporations the least; it also has been doing an increasingly poor job in collecting corporate taxes according to our Auditor General in 2014. All provinces except Alberta and Quebec use the Canada Revenue Agency to collect corporate taxes. Alberta does not. Alberta has set up its own administration to collect corporate taxes.

The CRA pays other provinces the amount of provincial taxes assessed, whether or not it collects them. It bears the credit risk. Why should we bear the credit risk of uncollected taxes, penalties, deferrals, and interest when the CRA will pay us the outstanding amount and try to collect it on our behalf? It would save a bureaucracy, and it might even improve our return on corporate tax owing.

In the October 2014 report the Auditor General was critical of our system for collecting corporate taxes given the dramatic increase in overdue taxes, penalties, and interest. Of the \$885 million in outstanding corporate taxes at the end of the 2013-14 fiscal year, the Auditor General suggested that the government might not be able to collect \$378 million, 43 per cent, in doubtful accounts. The CRA would have paid us that money and tried to collect it for itself. That's an opportunity to not only add to the treasury but to save the administration costs of corporate collections.

This report also showed that the government has written off \$108 million in uncollected taxes in the last three years. As of the end of 2013-14, 364 corporations were appealing \$557 million in taxes, penalties, and interest. Options for collecting that disputed amount are, quote, limited, according to the Auditor General, while the CRA would be paying us that money and taking the hit themselves.

Corporate profits are significantly higher in Alberta, both per capita and as a share of GDP, according to our former leader Dr. Kevin Taft's book *Follow the Money*. He and economist McMillan from the U of A analyzed our corporate returns compared to other provinces in the country. According to their research corporations in Alberta have brought in profits three times the rate per capita of any other province in the last decade. That has not always been the case, but in the last decade there has been a big jump in corporate take compared to the public purse. It accelerated through the 2000s and has now reached three times the average of \$5,000 per person in nine other provinces.

There is a recent precedent for reversing corporate tax cuts. The B.C. government went too far. They have now returned from a 10 per cent tax for corporations in 2011 back up to 11 per cent in 2014. There's a recognition that there is a fair share, and we don't have it in Alberta. Giving back \$11.6 billion more than any other province in the country left us in the position we're in today: over \$5 billion in deficit and looking at, according to the previous government, up to a \$30 billion deficit if we build all the infrastructure, the maintenance, and the social supports that are needed in the coming three years. That was what was presented by the existing government leading up to this last election, a \$30 billion deficit and debt by 2019.

Surely, we have to do something. We have to do something differently. Yes, there is no doubt that there will be waste. We're talking billions here. There's no question that we can't find billions of dollars in human services, in environmental monitoring, in

research and development. Just where are we going to find the \$5 billion and realistically think we're going to provide Albertans with the infrastructure, the social supports, and the environmental standards that we say we want to be champions of?

I'm in the position of not agreeing with everything this government has done. I believe they're moving in the right direction with this bill. The Liberal caucus will be supporting this bill. [interjections] We'll be pushing them to take . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, would you please be seated? Thank you.

Dr. Swann: Sorry, Mr. Speaker. I didn't see you.

The Speaker: You have two minutes left. Do you have some additional comments?

Dr. Swann: I do not.

The Speaker: Are there questions and observations for the hon. member?

Mr. Fildebrandt: Mr. Speaker, the Member for Calgary-Mountain View says that he doesn't agree with everything the new government has done. I'm wondering if he can cite anything.

Dr. Swann: I think I've already said that I think small-business tax should be reduced. Along with that, there's significant red tape, I'm hearing from small businesses, that we could be reducing without loss of accountability and integrity in business. In fact, most of the tax measures that have been introduced in the House were very consistent with what we were planning to bring in, bringing in roughly \$1.4 billion more than the past government would have, which would have meant a slow and incremental base on which to bring harmony to the disparity, the growing inequality in our society.

We have the largest gap between rich and poor in this country, and that has to be examined from the point of view of its social impact but also recognizing that we have to find a way to get off the dependence on an oil market that is inherently volatile. We've had 44 years of not having a stable budget that we could count on for the essential services to children, families, the disabled: infrastructure, schools, health care, and, again, an environmental department that has been gutted, absolutely gutted. It responds only to complaints now. It does not initiate monitoring on any basic level. It still has not produced a cumulative impact assessment to understand how a whole river system is being impacted by all the developments instead of piecemeal environmental assessments. There are tremendous gaps in our knowledge as legislators to make better long-term decisions for this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, thank you so much. I just have one quick question, through you, to the hon. member. If the Liberal caucus does such a great job of recognizing that lowering taxes on small business would stimulate the economy, I'm just a little bit unclear as to why raising the taxes on other businesses wouldn't have the same effect.

5:10

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you for the question. There are two dimensions to this, from my point of view. One is that we are looking at fairness. What does fairness look like? Who benefits most from the public services: the public roads, the public hospitals,

the public education system? Surely, it's the largest corporations, who have hired the brightest and the most contributing members of our society, who have benefited most from our public education, health care, and infrastructure. There's no question in my mind that the large corporations, who also earn the largest profits, much of which leaves the province because most of our industry is not housed in Alberta – most of the corporate profits in Alberta leave Alberta. There is no question in my mind that they should be contributing a greater share to the public good because they're benefiting more than, certainly, the smaller corporations or Albertans in general.

I guess the other dimension to that is that small businesses are inherently less stable. They are more vulnerable to short-term changes in revenue and expenses. If we can in some way, especially in the start-ups, especially in the early days, contribute to some stability and to growth and to opportunity to the point where, I would say, that we should be considering eliminating small-business tax till they get to the point where they are making \$500,000 and then can begin to propagate the larger opportunities for Albertan jobs and for benefit to society.

Thank you for the question.

The Speaker: Any other questions or observations?

Hearing none, I would recognize the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to start off with a small story. My son is 18 years old, and he bought my van from me, my old, dilapidated van, and we charged him market value for that. A lot of his friends got new vehicles from their parents, and that was great. I'm sure it wasn't fair for him to have to drive my old, dilapidated van, but he paid for it. He earned it, and he acknowledges how important that is to him because he invested himself and his time and his energy into buying that old, dilapidated van, which, I must say, he's very proud to drive because he paid for it, because he was incentivized to do that. That's how we teach our children to function.

On that note, I'd also like to add, just on what everybody else has been saying, that we do not have a revenue problem. Are we not already being taxed? Is something not already coming in? We don't have a revenue problem; we have a management issue. We're already paying taxes, so I don't understand. There is no transparency here. The prudence is gone. We're on the last leg of the Alberta advantage, that we've boasted of in this province. Bring in families, bring in head offices, and have low taxes: this is something that we are proud of. It is an advantage.

The NDP is raising taxes for ideological reasons, increasing taxes for the sake of increasing taxes, without disclosing why. Why are we not speaking to balancing the budget, true fiscal responsibility? There's a lack of a coherent picture from the NDP about Alberta's economic future or budget. Where is the NDP's plan to balance the budget? Did that even make the platform relevant? We have not fully investigated the repercussions of these tax increases in Alberta, and we're not ready to implement policy. What will the net effects of this proposal be? I really think that perhaps it should be referred to a committee for further study.

I need to speak on behalf of my portfolio, too, to understand the effect that Bill 2 will have on the energy industry. The NDP has proposed a plethora of policies that will have a significant and negative impact on the energy sector, one of Alberta's most important job creators. The NDP has proposed an increase to the carbon levy, a royalty review, increases to minimum wage, a recent proposal to split up the Energy Regulator, and now increases on business taxes as well as income taxes. This is a triple-edged sword

when you add in that a royalty review will leave the energy sector speculating. The uncertainties discourage new capital investment. The energy sector, which relies on certainty and a regulatory framework to counteract price volatility, is already battling for market clarity because of the royalty review.

At least when Ed Stelmach conducted his royalty review of 2007, we had no way of predicting the financial downturn of 2008. The difference this time is that we know we're in an economic downturn, yet this government is plunging recklessly ahead with all of these things and is embracing instability.

A \$15 minimum wage increase will raise labour costs across the board, inflating all prices. The energy sector as a whole will be facing increased labour costs, and it negatively affects their ability to be competitive with other markets. This increase in the price of labour inputs is compounded by the NDP's unwillingness to commit to any of the proposed pipelines, and our lack of access to energy markets already reduces the competitiveness of our product. It already prevents Alberta's energy exports from obtaining their full market value.

The recent proposal to split up Alberta's energy regulator: again, the business in our energy sector has been left to speculate, adding to the instability of the NDP's royalty review. The cost-benefit analysis by the industry for staying in Alberta is changing and not in the favour of Alberta.

The negative impacts of this bill are so broad ranging, even beyond the energy sector. We do not need these tax increases. This year's revenue is projected to be the third highest in Alberta's history. This is in spite of the fact that Albertans are generating less income in this current economic downturn while the government collects more and more taxes. Alberta has a spending problem, not a revenue problem. Are you saying that you can spend dollars that you're collecting in taxes better than a taxpayer? You are taking dollars out of the pockets of individuals and businesses. Government stimulus does not work. We are concerned that this may diminish the incentives for entrepreneurs, which is un-Albertan.

A 50 per cent increase in personal taxes in a year for any Alberta family is radical, to say the least. The NDP gave up rent controls, which is a terrible economic policy. Will it give up this terrible policy as well?

Thank you.

The Speaker: Questions or observations? I would recognize the Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 2. It says An Act to Restore Fairness to Public Revenue. I would suggest that possibly it could also read An Attempt to Raise Public Revenue. May I suggest that what we're striving for as trustees of Alberta is taxation balance, a policy that will take into consideration the needs of the most vulnerable in our society and the needs of Alberta families but at the same time provide the necessary balance that will incent investment and reward risk with competitive rates of return. This bill proposes to adjust the rate at which taxes are collected for businesses and individuals. But it does more than just adjust; it attempts to collect more revenue through taxes.

My colleagues opposite are known not to have faith in supply-and-demand economics, but let me discuss with you the trickle-down effect of decisions to raise taxes on businesses. Business tax is simply a cost of doing business to any business. The money has to come from somewhere to pay for the tax increase. At the end of the day, all business tax will be paid by individuals. Individuals will pay this tax increase. Businesses are accountable to shareholders. Shareholders put money at risk with an expectation of a reasonable return. Without a reasonable and competitive return investors move

their money. Businesses therefore are forced to address the extra cost of doing business, the extra tax, by either trying to increase revenue or lowering their expenses.

5:20

Businesses have products to sell, services to render. They try and increase revenue. They're in a supply-and-demand economy. There's a limit to where they can increase their revenue. It's a competitive economy that we're working in. If they cannot find enough extra revenue to cover off the extra cost of doing business from the extra taxes, they need to take a look at their input costs. They need to take a look at their other expenses. Are they able to adjust their expenses in a way that will still give them a reasonable rate of return? Why would they do it if they were not guaranteed or at least have a sense that they're going to get a reasonable rate of return?

One of the first line items that businesses will look at, because it's usually a fairly large item in their cost of doing business, would be labour costs, and might I suggest that with the business environment that has been established in Alberta, the Alberta advantage, all Albertans have benefited from the ability of businesses to be able to pay very competitive labour rates? When we increase expense on business by raising tax, businesses will be forced to take a look at their input costs for providing services and commodities to the general public. They will be forced to take a look at that line item, labour expense, and possibly need to adjust.

As I was campaigning through the Swan Hills territory in my riding, I learned that if they were not laid off or put out of work, most of that town experienced a 15 per cent wage rollback at Christmastime. That's a reality of working in the oil field. I do not want them to experience more reductions, more wage rollbacks based on the fact that we're trying to get more tax revenue from companies. The companies are going to pass the taxes on. Tax in a business situation is a cost of doing business. If there is no reward to the risk of doing business, there is no need to do business. So they'll look at rolling wages back. They'll look at adjusting salaries, adjusting hours worked, look at restructuring the number of employees they have. If the business is not able to adjust accordingly, shareholders move their investment because they have a lack of a competitive rate of return, or possibly, in the worst-case scenario, the business closes its doors.

Now, we also take a look at taxation balance. This bill is looking at restoring fairness to public revenue. The bill proposes to adjust the methodology used to collect taxes from individuals. Fair enough. Again, we need to focus our attention on taxation balance. Currently in Alberta personal tax exemption is marked at \$18,214, adjusted annually according to CPI. Might I suggest that if we're looking for taxation balance, we also take a look at personal tax exemption? Or is this bill really about more tax revenue? Adjusting the exemption of personal tax will protect our most vulnerable, will help protect Alberta families. Is the NDP considering taking a look at adjusting that end of the spectrum?

I truly believe we need to look at all angles. But first and foremost, before any taxes are raised, before the raising of any taxes, in any business it is critical when we're in a downturn, in a recession, in a time of shortage of revenue to examine our spending. In my business as a farmer when times are tough, the first thing we look at is: are we doing it as efficiently as we can?

An Hon. Member: Farmers know.

Mr. van Dijken: Farmers know. Farmers have felt it.

Mr. Speaker, I would leave it at that. I would ask this government to carefully consider all spending before we get into the habit of just raising taxes to try and fix our problems.

The Speaker: Hon. members, any questions or observations? I would recognize the Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every dollar earned by Albertans is earned through their sweat and drive to better themselves, their families, and their communities. That money is earned by Albertans because they decided to work hard for their own business or for another company that determined that their skills were worth paying for. Now the government is going to ask for an even larger share of hard-earned money from working Albertans and businesses because this government and the one before it were addicted to spending. This government is spending even faster than they can tax.

No society has ever borrowed or spent its way to prosperity. Most jurisdictions that have abandoned marginal tax structures for a flat-tax structure have increased their total revenues. Alberta actually collects more per capita from personal income tax than any other province in the country barring Saskatchewan, with whom we're tied.

Now for a slightly different and unconventional example. I wouldn't recommend very many things about Russia, but let's look at their experience with a flat tax. One of the most impressive single cases was Russia's 2001 move away from marginal rates towards a single-rate flat tax. Russia's revenues rose by 26 per cent in the first year of its implementation. Even lowering personal income taxes can increase revenues. When the United States dropped the top personal income rate from 70 per cent to 28 per cent in the 1980s, the share of all income taxes paid by the richest 1 per cent of Americans rose from 19.3 per cent in 1980 to 24.7 per cent in 1990 as wealthy Americans stopped hiding money in offshore accounts and became more productive. Nations prosper when taxes are lowered, not raised. Lower taxes encourage people to make more money. Higher taxes discourage people from making more money.

In this bill the proposed marginal tax system discourages people from jumping to the next tax bracket. Every dollar an earner makes in a higher bracket is worth less than the dollar he earned before it. At some point many earners will opt not to take that extra shift, not to upgrade their skills, and would enjoy the time off instead rather than make less per hour than they invested before. In 2010 one country raised its personal income tax rate by the same 5 per cent for their highest income earners. Five years later that country is much worse off than it was before. In fact, that country, Greece, is a millstone around the neck of the entire eurozone.

Now, I'm as tired as you are, Mr. Speaker, of hearing about Greece, and I'm tired of hearing my relatives outside Munich, who have worked their entire lives, continue to complain about bailing out Greek taxpayers. I'm not saying that Alberta is Greece, nor am I saying that Alberta is Russia or Norway or the United States, but it stands as a stark example of a society that traded away its future for the soup kitchen of the welfare state.

5:30

The taxes proposed will not even cover the spending that is planned in the Redford- and Prentice-inspired minibudget that was just passed. Who knows how much extra spending will be allocated in the actual budget? In fact, these taxes will only bring in at most \$800 million this fiscal year. This is compared to the new spending announced in the minibudget, which totalled a blank – I have no idea – which means that there will be a blank of more debt that our future generations will have to pay off.

Now, I actually didn't fill in the numbers in my speech, Mr. Speaker. I was going to fill them in last night, but I honestly have no idea what numbers to put in these slots. I can't even craft a

speech after almost six hours of debate on the government's mini-budget because we still don't know how much spending is being allocated. Let's take the last number announced by the Government House Leader, \$1.1 billion, that area. Subtract that from the highest possible revenue from these tax measures this year, \$800 million. That is \$300 million worth of extra debt passed in the Redford-Prentice minibudget. Alberta had a big spending problem under the previous government, and now Alberta's spending problem just got a lot bigger.

Businesses don't come to Alberta for the weather; they come to Alberta because of low business taxes. They come to Alberta because of what was once called the Alberta advantage. At 10 per cent we are for the next few days still the lowest in the country. This meant that Alberta had an advantage over every other province in the country. The previous government killed the Alberta advantage; now the NDP are burying it. The Alberta advantage meant that businesses flocked to Alberta, which meant more revenue for the government. If those businesses had not come to Alberta, then there would have been less revenue generated. I'm not sure if the hon. members opposite truly believe that as many businesses would have come to Alberta had their plan been in place over the last 10 years.

With the 20 per cent increase to business taxes Alberta no longer is the first choice for business in Canada. Businesses can choose from B.C., Ontario, or Quebec if they want a lower tax rate than Alberta. Good God, Quebec has a lower tax rate than Alberta. Just let that sink in for a moment now. Then if they want to pay even more taxes, they can go to Manitoba, New Brunswick, and Saskatchewan, which are at 12 percentage points. What incentive do new businesses receive from coming to Alberta? What incentive do businesses who are wanting to expand receive from Alberta? The advantage that Alberta has will be gone with this tax increase. Mr. Speaker, if you want to start a small business in Alberta, buy a big business, and elect the NDP.

Saskatchewan, our neighbour to the east, currently has a 12 per cent business tax. That was not always the case. In 2005 the Saskatchewan NDP authorized and paid for a study on their business tax rates. Do you know what they found, Mr. Speaker? The NDP that governed Saskatchewan discovered that they should lower their business and personal taxes. The NDP government there decided to take their own advice from their own research and lowered Saskatchewan's business tax rate by 5 per cent. But wait; there's more. In that same study they determined that the business tax rate should be lowered to 10 per cent. The Saskatchewan NDP decided that it was in the best interests of their province to lower business tax rates to the exact same rate that Alberta has for the next few days.

Saskatchewan implemented this tax cut in 2005. Since 2005 Saskatchewan has seen extraordinary economic growth. Coincidence? I think not. Lower business taxes encourage new business to enter into the market. Lower business taxes encourage businesses to stay in the province. Lower business taxes generate even more revenue over an extended period.

Mr. Speaker, there is a corporate giveaway taking place in this province, and it's not taxes; it's welfare. If we want to get our fair share from corporations, we should focus on cutting corporate welfare subsidies in this province. The previous government would accept large cash donations, which, thankfully, we have worked with the government to now ban. They would accept large cash donations, political favours from consultants and award them sole-source contracts. Navigator, the North West upgrader, Kananaskis: the list goes on and on and on.

Now, the Alberta advantage was premised upon removing corporate-welfare subsidies that had been in place from the 1980s and early 1990s: Novatel and other examples that live in infamy. Corporate welfare was eliminated in Alberta and sharply curtailed

in future use. The business financial assistance limitation act is now toothless and without any point on the paper. Corporate welfare was slowly allowed to set in, which had a corrupting effect not just upon the economy but upon the very government itself. Instead of raising taxes on honest businesses that work hard, that pay their taxes, that contribute to our communities, that donate to charities and give their time, we should focus on rooting out corporate cronyism and ending corporate welfare in this province.

The Saskatchewan NDP authorized their research to be done in their province to determine the effects of altering business tax rates. They did their homework. The Alberta NDP has not done its homework. In 2014 I had this to say about the Alberta advantage in my alternative budget, when I was at the Canadian Taxpayers Federation. I do love to quote myself, Mr. Speaker.

The Alberta Advantage had four pillars ... for its success: responsible spending, transparent budgeting, no debt and competitive tax levels. The first three of these four pillars have fallen on one another like dominos, with the last – competitive tax levels – now threatened.

I said that over a year ago, and I normally love to say that I told you so, but I don't now.

The NDP is pushing for these tax hikes for simplistic, ideological reasons. This bill is being pushed through the Legislature without due diligence, without proper study of the side effects of their bill. The effects of altering Alberta's business tax rate need to be studied before we foist it upon the economy. The fact that this government is pushing legislation through this House that affects the entire province, without a shred of research, is extraordinarily irresponsible.

If the government refuses to do its homework on business taxes, then it should at least consider amendments to the bill. Let's begin. Good God, I'm agreeing with the Member for Calgary-Mountain View. Note it for history. Let's begin by increasing the \$500,000 threshold for small businesses. Let's index it to the price of inflation. It has not been increased in years.

Let's even consider phasing in both personal and business tax hikes if they must be raised, just as the government is doing with the minimum wage. Although I don't agree with the increase to the minimum wage, a phase-in approach is better than the shock and awe of a 50 per cent increase overnight, a 50 per cent increase, as they are proposing to do, at the highest marginal tax rate.

5:40

Let's also amend the bill in the same manner that the Premier herself suggested in 2012 and that the Municipal Affairs minister suggested in 2014. The Premier suggested while in opposition decreasing the tax limit for small businesses from 3 to 2 per cent. The Premier campaigned on – and I quote – reducing taxes for small businesses by one-third to help them grow. Mr. Speaker, I agree with the Premier.

The Minister of Municipal Affairs said on April 22, 2014 – don't you just love *Hansard*? – "I'd like to remind the House that the Alberta NDP was the only party during the 2012 election that had in our platform a reduction in the small-business tax. We would have reduced it by a third." Well, jeez, in hindsight I may have even voted NDP in 2012 after all events.

I understand that this would mean the very first cut that the NDP would legislate. This cut would help small businesses cope with the increase to taxes and the minimum wage.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there any questions or observations?

Mr. Cooper: I have been so riveted by the hon. member's comments. I wondered if he might just like a couple of moments to continue.

Mr. Fildebrandt: An excellent question from the Opposition House Leader. What is the term we use when we don't have a preamble? Given that, to borrow a quote from the Minister of Municipal Affairs, "small businesses really are what drive the Alberta economy," small business are to be protected. With the increase to the minimum wage small businesses are going to need some help, and we're here to help.

I do not agree with raising taxes, period. But since this government is intent on raising taxes, they could at least consider these reasonable amendments that the Premier and members of her cabinet themselves have already campaigned on. Let's not repeat the mistakes of history. Let's not be blinded by a knee-jerk ideological need to spend other people's money better than they can. Let's rebuild the Alberta advantage, not bury it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes. I'd like to ask the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks – he gave some allusions to a small bit of a history lesson there in regard to Russia, and I was wondering if he could expand on that, when he talked about the timing and the increase of the tax revenue relating to the tax rate fall.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you to the Member for Drumheller-Stettler for the question. They're supposed to be puffballs from my own side, not asking for statistics. Well, I'm clearly an expert on Russian history and the Russian economy. As I said earlier, I'm not keen on following most things Russian in our government. It's generally ill advised, but there's a little bit of good in everyone.

Well, compared to their tax rates of the 1980s, it was extraordinarily radical. But I don't believe we're going to be going to that extreme in Alberta. Similar to what the government is proposing today, the Russian Federation had high marginal, what they would call progressive, tax rates and went to a single flat-rate tax. In the first full year of implementation they saw a 26 per cent increase in revenue. Now, the people of Russia, more than perhaps any other population on earth, had long endured a stifling economy that did not allow people's impulses and the free market to thrive. This was an excellent test-tube case of what happens when a people is allowed to succeed, when a people is allowed to make their own choices, not government making them for them. Unfortunately, they have since retreated from some of those excellent pieces of progress.

The Speaker: Any other questions or observations? The hon. member.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks alluded briefly to the fact that Alberta pays more income taxes per capita than any other area in the country. I wonder if you could elaborate a little bit on that.

Mr. Fildebrandt: I'd like to thank the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre for his question. There are many different reasons, and everyone can find their own set of facts to support their reasons, for why Alberta collects more in income tax than any other province except for Saskatchewan, with whom we are tied. Now, Alberta has the highest per capita spending in the country, which is why those of us on this side of the House, at least this side of this side of the House, believe that taxes should not be going up. We understand that we have a spending problem because we have the highest per capita spending in the country. The members opposite talk about us having a lower than national average spending as a

percentage of GDP, and that is why they believe there is a revenue problem and that we don't spend enough.

There is a fundamental reason for this difference in what numbers we use to talk about spending problems versus revenue problems. The reason that we collect more in income tax is because we have allowed a greater proportion of our economy to thrive without being inhibited, controlled, and consumed by the government. The members opposite believe that because we spend less as a percentage of GDP, we should therefore just be spending more. Because we're wealthy, we should be spending more. Mr. Speaker, I'd say that the reason we are wealthy is because, at least in decades past, we controlled our spending.

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

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for the opportunity to speak on Bill 2. At this time I'm very pleased to be able to offer some perspective as a member of the past government and as being the first speaker from our caucus to address Bill 2 in second reading and also as a former member of Treasury Board that was involved in some of the decisions that were made leading up to the most recent budget, in fact, the budget that the interim supply estimates are based on, as correctly pointed out by the Government House Leader.

You know, it's been interesting over these past six or seven days that we've been sitting to hear the 44-year record of the Progressive Conservative government over that period of time be repeatedly vilified by members on both sides of the House. Quite frankly, I'm still very proud of that record regardless of what has been said here, and I would hasten to remind members within the House that you only stay in power for that length of time if you win elections throughout that period. Indeed, the Progressive Conservative Party did maintain the confidence of Albertans in 1975, in 1979, in 1982, in 1986, in 1989, in 1993, in 1997, in 2001, 2004, 2008, and 2012.

Mr. Speaker, it's worth while to point out that when members in the House criticize 44 years of Progressive Conservative government, they're indeed criticizing 44 years of electoral decisions made by Albertans. You are so praising the decisions that were made on May 5. I find it very interesting, quite frankly, the various interpretations of what that decision meant. I find it very interesting that the party opposite now in government feels that it is a *carte blanche* endorsement of all of their policies. I would encourage you not to fall into that trap. Indeed, people vote in an election for a wide variety of reasons, and you should be cautious that the endorsement that you received from the people of Alberta is a *carte blanche* endorsement of all your policies because it is not.

5:50

You know, I found it very interesting as well – I'm going to make a couple of references to the bill at hand because I do have some very specific concerns that nobody has addressed, and we will certainly address these in Committee of the Whole. Most specifically, on the very back page of the bill the coming into force date of the bill is listed as January 1, 2015, retroactively to the beginning of this year. This government wants to have the coming into force of this bill extend to a period five months before they were even elected. Mr. Speaker, I find that to be an incredible statement.

The other thing I find interesting on page 7, in section 6.1(2), is the calculation of the increase in the personal income tax, which is to go up on October 1, that because it extends for an entire year, it will indeed extend over the full year of income for Albertans. In no other way can you achieve the rates that you're asking for, or

demanding, I should say. Indeed, what this does is that it means that on income that has been earned by Albertans in the affected tax brackets between January 1 and the date of passage of this bill, they will be assessed additional income tax on that income.

Mr. Speaker, if you happen to be in a position where you retired or lost an election or for some other reason had your flow of income significantly drop from January 1 to the present period and then the subsequent period, you're now going to have the additional surprise from this government of paying additional tax on that amount if you're in the applicable tax brackets. I find these changes to be very, very troubling.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I represent the constituency of Vermilion-Lloydminster. I've made my home in Lloydminster for the past 30-plus years, and I live two miles from the Saskatchewan border. I live there by choice, and unlike a certain former governor of Alaska, I can see Saskatchewan from my front door. In fact, the joke is that I can see all the way into Manitoba. Saskatchewan, our neighbouring province, has indeed had an interesting history, and I will tell you that the border city of Lloydminster is a very interesting case study of differing government policies. In fact, it's a bit of a petri dish.

Let me sort of outline it for you. My hon. colleague next to me from Strathmore-Brooks has already pointed out that in 2005 the NDP government recognized that there needed to be some taxation changes. A couple of years later the good people of Saskatchewan recognized that there needed to be a government change, to turf out the NDP that had been dragging their province down like an anchor for so many years.

What do I mean by that? Well, Saskatchewan at one time was the third largest province in Canada. Behind Quebec and Ontario, Saskatchewan was third going back to the '30s. But thanks to a succession of CCF governments and then a number of NDP governments, Saskatchewan never grew. In fact, the province of Saskatchewan's population has fluctuated around the 1 million mark since the 1930s, and in the last few years of the NDP administration Saskatchewan's population was declining at a regular rate. People were leaving Saskatchewan in droves, especially young people, and there was virtually no growth in Saskatchewan. Businesses would locate preferentially in Lloydminster, at least on the Alberta side, not on the Saskatchewan side. And you're saying: oh, that's because of the sales tax. Well, there is no sales tax anywhere in the city of Lloydminster.

Let me give you some comparative growth rates that illustrate this. From 2001 to 2006 the Alberta side of Lloydminster grew populationwise by 21 per cent. During that same period of time, when the NDP government was in power in Saskatchewan, the growth on the Saskatchewan side of Lloydminster was a meagre 3.5 per cent. From 2006 to 2013 the Alberta side of Lloydminster grew by a further 26 per cent, and from 2006 to 2013, during which time the Saskatchewan province had the benefit of the Saskatchewan Party, a conservative party, the growth on the Saskatchewan side of Lloydminster was a whopping 41 per cent. People chose to locate to the Saskatchewan side of Lloydminster because there was an advantage to doing so.

Let me say a few other things that changed in Saskatchewan. Prior to 2008 Saskatchewan was a province that received equalization payments through the federal equalization program. It was a great source of pride to the residents of Saskatchewan when they no longer were a have-not province in 2008, and that was largely because of government policies that had been brought in to

make Saskatchewan a more competitive, more tax-friendly jurisdiction.

Mr. Speaker, you know, one other thing that I will tell you that is also a source of pride to the residents of Saskatchewan that may or may not have as much direct reference to political parties: the Saskatchewan Roughriders have won the Grey Cup three times. They have never once won the Grey Cup while the NDP was in power. If you want to ask people from Saskatchewan what is important to them, they will tell you that the success of the Riders is perhaps one of the most important factors.

Mr. Speaker, you know, one thing I will say with regard to this, and it's referenced back to my involvement with the past government. We did not bring in corporate tax increases in our budget because we recognized the damage it would create to the Alberta economy, to bring them in at this time and to this degree. To suggest that corporate taxes should never be touched or never be looked at, that's not what I personally felt, and it's not really what we were looking at at that time. At the time that we were talking about this budget, recognizing the fragility our economy, raising corporate taxes was a mistake. It is a mistake to raise corporate taxes now. That's not to say that there may not be a point in time where corporate taxes could be raised without damaging the economy. But I will tell you that right now, under the current economic circumstances, raising corporate taxes would be a terrible, terrible mistake.

Now, my friends to the far right of me will point out that we were going to raise personal income taxes as well, and that is true. We had a proposal to raise personal income taxes marginally and gradually. Our proposal would have increased personal income taxes to a maximum rate of 12 per cent and to a marginal rate of 11.5 per cent for those earning above \$100,000 in taxable income. But it was going to be phased in over the 2016 and 2017 taxation years, nothing like the sudden and dramatic increases that are contained within Bill 2.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to debating Bill 2 in committee and also to discussing amendments to Bill 2, which I believe are necessary and would assist with Bill 2 being a better piece of legislation. I do not fundamentally agree with a number of the precepts of Bill 2. I do not want to see Alberta become the Saskatchewan of the '90s. You know, quite frankly, that's not what Albertans want, and if the party opposite suggests that that's what Albertans voted for, I would suggest that you are seriously misreading the mood of the electorate.

I will further say that Bill 2 is certainly mistitled as far as restoring fairness to public revenue. I would say also, Mr. Speaker, that in conducting business within this House it is helpful to look at the experience of other jurisdictions. I'm concerned that this government has elected to not look at the experience of our neighbouring province to the east of us, to see, indeed, a province that is just as old as our province is, that shares many of the historical features of our province, and I think from whom we could learn many valuable lessons.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are at 6 o'clock, and pursuant to Standing Order 4 and Government Motion 6 the Assembly stands adjourned until 7:30 this evening.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday evening, June 23, 2015

Day 6

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

First Session

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Party standings:

New Democrat: 53 Wildrose: 21 Progressive Conservative: 9 Alberta Liberal: 1 Alberta Party: 1 Independent: 1 Vacant: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, June 23, 2015

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Consideration of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

Mr. Connolly moved, seconded by Ms Kazim, that an humble address be presented to Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows.

To Her Honour the Honourable Lois Mitchell, CM, AOE, the Lieutenant Governor of the Province of Alberta:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank Your Honour for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

[Adjourned debate June 23: Ms Gray]

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, with all due respect, the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods was still in the middle of her response and has a few minutes left.

The Speaker: Sorry. Thank you.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today in reply to our first Speech from the Throne for the 29th Legislative Assembly of this great province of Alberta. I'd like to begin by congratulating Her Honour the Honourable Lois Mitchell, who is in the first few weeks of her service as Alberta's 18th Lieutenant Governor. I was delighted to be able to attend Her Honour's installation ceremony on June 12, where she spoke eloquently on a variety of important topics. I know that she will make an excellent representative of the Crown throughout her tenure.

I would also like to take this chance to extend my congratulations to all the hon. members of this Assembly on their recent electoral success. I think Albertans have built a strong Legislative Assembly, and we are now all tasked with doing our utmost to help make life better for every Albertan. As we heard in the Speech from the Throne: "We are optimistic, hopeful, entrepreneurial, remarkably diverse, and community-minded people. We are a people who dream no little dreams and live them."

I was born on the north side of Edmonton in 1978. I'm the elder daughter of Craig and Linda McLennan. My father, Craig, is an accountant and a small-business owner, and my mother, Linda, is a now retired schoolteacher who focused largely on special-needs education throughout her long career with Edmonton public schools.

On July 16 of this year my husband, Neal Gray, and I will be celebrating our 11th wedding anniversary. Last year for our 10th wedding anniversary he surprised me with a trip to Paris. He arranged the time off with my work, and I didn't know. He has his work cut out for him this year.

I owe some of my interest in politics to my husband's family, where political discourse is the appetizer of choice at every meal. In my own family's home we didn't talk as much about politics

because my father is a staunch fiscal conservative and my mother is firmly progressive. Discussion was avoided at my house a little bit lest it give way to overly heated debate. So in spite of the many polls that foretold the election results this year, in spite of our Premier's excellent performance, in spite of all of those various signs, I knew for sure that change was finally coming to Alberta when I saw Dr. Bob Turner's sign on my parents' lawn. The planets had to have reached a very special alignment for my father to ever agree to such a thing.

Mr. Speaker, hon. ministers, hon. members, it is with great pride and humility that I stand before you today as the elected representative from my home constituency of Edmonton-Mill Woods. I'm excited to take this opportunity to talk a little bit about Edmonton-Mill Woods and the great people who live there, who have sent me here in this incredible new role.

Of the many words we might use to describe Canada and why we love being Canadian, multiculturalism is one of the first to jump to mind. Canada is a nation where people of all backgrounds and faiths have come together under a commitment to mutual peace and prosperity to build a collectively better future. It is my tremendous privilege to represent Edmonton-Mill Woods, one of the most diverse and vibrant examples of Canada's commitment to multiculturalism. In the very short time since my election I've already had the chance to attend numerous wonderful events put on by members of very different organizations in my riding, representing a variety of cultural and community groups.

Almost 15 years ago, when I was looking to buy my first home, I chose Edmonton-Mill Woods because of its amazingly strong network of communities, its beautiful cultural mosaic, and because I saw my own commitments to honesty, hard work, and open friendliness reflected in its citizenry.

Amidst all of its wonderful diversity there are a few things that hold true for everyone in Edmonton-Mill Woods. It's a community of hard-working people looking to build a better future. Ours is a community founded on the bedrock of volunteerism. Our extremely active community leagues, which contribute so much to enriching our lives, are comprised entirely of volunteers. Our schools, our seniors' centres, our local hospital also depend on a network of volunteers to assist in the delivery of their very important services.

Residents in my constituency work towards that better future in other ways as well. Ours is a community rich with entrepreneurial spirit. Edmonton-Mill Woods is home to countless small businesses, many of which are family owned, and these small businesses work to provide a whole host of services to our community and to the city as a whole.

I invite every MLA to take advantage of the opportunities that being in this Legislature provides and come down to Edmonton-Mill Woods on one of your brief breaks from session. If you come to Edmonton-Mill Woods, you will find some of the best ethnic and cultural restaurants that this city and possibly this province have to offer. That is just one of the kinds of treasures that Edmonton-Mill Woods houses. They are an example, these restaurants, of the way in which the entrepreneurs in Edmonton-Mill Woods enrich their fellow citizens' lives while they also provide for their own families in the process.

In Her Honour's speech it was clear that this new government is also working towards that same better future as the people of Edmonton-Mill Woods and all the people of Alberta. The Speech from the Throne revealed that this government intends to do exactly the same things that we told Albertans we would do during the election. It was those commitments that Albertans overwhelmingly endorsed with their votes, and it is because we will keep our promises that Albertans will continue to endorse us going forward.

I'm a believer in the philosophy of servant leadership, and it is my intention to work hard, very hard, every day on behalf of my constituents. I'm here as their humble servant and to give voice to their opinions and concerns as we go forward. The election results in every constituency tell a separate and unique story about a particular part of Alberta, and I go forward knowing that a strong majority of voters in Edmonton-Mill Woods endorsed me, this government, and the choices that we laid before them. So I see my role in this Legislature as one of advocacy, of being a voice that ensures that those commitments continue to be kept. I will push our new hon. ministers and our new hon. Premier to stay on track and to deliver on the wisest and most progressive options available to them at every turn.

Our system of government is at times like a pendulum, and in Alberta that pendulum can swing slower than it does almost anywhere else, so we were long overdue for it to begin swinging back the other way, as it has now begun to do. The time has come to focus on things that matter to all Albertans. The time has come to reinvest in education, in health care, in social services. The time has come to once again build vital infrastructure. The time has come to make Alberta a leader in human rights and to ensure that every minority community in Alberta is afforded the full protection of law and the dignity of their provincial government. I sincerely look forward to being part of this Assembly as we move forward towards those goals.

Thank you to all the members for their time today, and thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition. [some applause]

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the extra applause tonight. I do appreciate the opportunity. As time goes, I'll be better at standing up and sitting down, and I'm sure that we'll all get better at our respective jobs.

I have to tell you that it's an absolute pleasure and honour to be here today to respond to the Speech from the Throne, and I appreciate the attendance here. I know sometimes it can be riveting no matter who's speaking. I hope this is a little more riveting than some. It is, actually, my most significant speech in the Legislature so far, and I think it's an important opportunity to talk about some things as well as my plan, the plan of what the Wildrose has and what the government has and how we will have some opportunities to have some commonalities, and of course we will have some differences as time goes on. You know that, Mr. Speaker, as you've seen this go on for some period of time.

But I will tell you one thing that I'm proud of and that I think all members in this House are proud of and that we should remember, that we have some similarities. One is that we've all been elected by the people of Alberta, notwithstanding different ridings and different jurisdictions and, actually, different peoples, in essence. We have all been elected to this place, and we all have the respect and the ability to speak for the people that we represent. All of us should be respected for that belief because if we aren't, we will find ourselves sometimes as a third party if we don't actually represent the people that we were elected by. As I said before, we are not here for ourselves, nor did we get here by ourselves, and we need to make sure that we remember that no matter how important we start to believe we are.

7:40

The other thing that we have in common is that we're all very proud to be from Alberta, very proud to be here. We all have families, we all have loved ones, and we all love and are loved. I love Alberta, and I would like to say that when I first came into my

political sphere, nobody loved Alberta more than I did. But I know that's not true because we all love Alberta as much as we possibly can, I would suggest. I would recommend, Mr. Speaker, through you, of course, that all of us remember that as we give our speeches and as we comment on other people's performance on those speeches and beliefs.

But the Wildrose and the NDP government have some different political philosophies, and I'm going to try to talk about the different philosophies. Those philosophies, of course, are based on different experiences in the world and different experiences that we have all had, whether it be in Alberta or elsewhere.

I would commend the NDP at this stage, though, for something, and that is that the NDP do believe in something. Now, they believe in something more than just staying in power, which I find refreshing. No disrespect to our third party here, but I found that for many years that party would do anything to stay in power. I don't think that's a good source of options for the people of Alberta, and I think that's something that I'm hoping will change. I hope that the NDP will stick to their policies, primarily because I think Alberta is more associated with our policies.

But whether or not that is true – we will find out in the next election – the truth at this stage is that we must respect those policies and have good policy debates and make sure that we don't fall into the trap of previous parties; that is, to lack principles. Principles and ideas are all that we actually can give to Albertans that they want, truly. I think the NDP will govern from their principles, and I hope that they do. I hope that they will also be honest. No disrespect to the NDP as a party, but that has been a difficulty of some NDP governments in the past in other jurisdictions. I hope that doesn't happen here, and I believe, based on the leadership that I've seen, that it won't.

Many of the things the NDP believes in come from academic theories and works of intellectuals. Almost all of the things that the Wildrose believes in come from, in my opinion, real-world experience, and I say that with respect. From working, from sweating, from succeeding and failing, from trying and achieving, or from trying and failing we all learn something. I'm sure that I will learn in this place from failing and succeeding, as you will.

Wildrose MLAs have real-world experience in productive things. Someone once said that the facts of life are conservative. I truly believe that. I know that free markets lead to prosperity. I've seen examples of that throughout the world. I know that freedom, the freedom that we enjoy, leads to good government. I know that small government leads to innovation, and I know that nothing stifles innovation more than big government. I know and firmly believe that I can spend my money better than the government ever will be able to, and I know that the overwhelming majority of Albertans believe the same thing. They believe in smaller governments. I know that a good government protects the vulnerable, and I think there's no greater measure of a people than seeing how they treat the vulnerable people of that society.

I am conservative in principle. I believe in conservative principles – not those Conservatives, the conservative principles of fiscal responsibility. But I promise you that there is nothing more important than a strong social safety net for the people that can't protect themselves. We as a society cannot let people fall through the cracks, but we must also reject the nanny state, that wants to control every aspect of other people's lives, and I hope that this government will do exactly that.

I know that people working together in charities and not-for-profits can achieve so much more than an overzealous and bureaucratic government. I know this because I live this. I have worked at many charities and nonprofits, as you will soon find out. I know that innovation, creativity, and the human spirit are much

better than a bureaucratic government that's large, wasteful, and doesn't get the job done. [some applause]

Good thing I have 90 minutes; we're going to have 30 minutes of applause. I hope you guys start soon, through you, Mr. Speaker, of course.

How did I come to believe these things and know these things? Well, it has a lot to do with who I am, how I've lived my life, and where I come from, so I'm going to tell you a little bit about that today. I'm the youngest in a family of 11 children, and our family made the very smart decision to move to Fort McMurray in 1967. I was only four years old. Fort McMurray was an amazing place to grow up. I had a dog team. I would go down the main street of Franklin Avenue with my rifle slung over my shoulder at the ripe old age of 12 years. I know it sounds a little bit astonishing today, but it was an incredible, incredible upbringing and life, a small-town atmosphere that gave me the opportunity to try so many different things and to see boom and bust, boom and bust but meet an amazing number of people.

The average age in Fort McMurray is much younger than most places in Alberta, but we have the opportunity to meet so many different people. We don't have cliques. We don't have these little groups that form in older communities because we have such a young community. So everyone gets along pretty well, and that's what I like about Fort McMurray. I like the fact that people walk down the street and say hi to everyone, that they go out to a restaurant and stop at a table to talk to everyone. I like the fact that it's a small town. I like the fact that there are five rivers that flow into the city centre. That is probably one of the most beautiful places on the planet. Heard that before? Unlikely. I've lived there for 50 years. I've lived in other countries, including Australia, including the United States, and I find no greater place than Fort McMurray as far as working, playing, and raising a family. It's a beautiful place.

I invite you, like the previous member did, to come to my hometown and see exactly what it's like and why I find it so beautiful. If you get lucky enough, you might even get invited, like your House leader was, on a fishing trip on the Clearwater River with me. It's a beautiful place, and you can actually eat the fish.

I attended the Prairie Bible Institute, which is in Three Hills, Alberta, for high school – I don't know whose riding that's in – and I would say that it was an incredible upbringing because I learned how to milk cows, how to work on a farm, how to talk the talk, how to shoot gophers, and how to be a different kind of Albertan, and I enjoyed it very much. I did get into some trouble there. It was a Bible school, and I went there for high school, but I did get into some trouble. I understand that all good people get into trouble from time to time. I was also the captain of the hockey team. I liked to play a lot of sports, and I still do.

After that I went and got a bachelor of science degree in Portland, Oregon. I then attended and received a master's in business administration and finance and a law degree. During school I had a variety of jobs, some interesting ones. I've worked as a log hand, a printer, a lawyer, a registered trapper, a heavy-equipment operator, and many other jobs, including a politician. I don't tell a lot of people that because they get worried. I had an incredible upbringing out of Fort McMurray, travelling to Australia for my law degree and my MBA, travelling the world and understanding that there is more than just Fort McMurray even though I kind of would have liked it to stay that way because I had such a great upbringing. Before I returned to Fort McMurray in 1991 after my law degree, I was president of the student council at university. I was also the editor of the newspaper. I've been very active in all communities that I've been involved with.

I actually attended the University of Calgary to finish off an equivalency in Canadian law and began practising in Fort McMurray for 10 years. I was a very busy litigator. I had some businesses that I started during that period of time in Fort McMurray, bought some land and did some wonderful things.

You know, the thing about Fort McMurray that is so incredible, besides what I've told you already, is that Fort McMurray is a land of opportunity, just like Alberta is a land of opportunity for so many people in the world and in Canada. You can go to Fort McMurray with nothing, and in 10 years you can leave with as much money as you can possibly carry and more. You can make a lot of money through hard work and determination, which many people go to Fort McMurray for but don't stay. Most people go there for opportunity, and that opportunity usually leads to a good family, an incredible lifestyle, and a great quality of life for years to come.

Now, I did want to tell you and have the opportunity to tell the public a little bit about what I have done for nonprofits. I was the chair of the children's health foundation of northern Alberta. I did that for six years, raising money for hospitals for sick children. I was the director of the Alberta Summer Games, director of the chamber of commerce, president of the downtown business association and other business organizations. I taught, volunteered my time at Keyano College – quantitative methods and statistics and business law – so I had an opportunity to give back to my community, and I continue to do that. That's what I feel I'm here today to do, I think much the same as everyone else feels.

7:50

Now, I did talk a little bit about Fort McMurray and opportunity and prosperity, but I will tell you this. When you move to northern Alberta, whether it be in Slave Lake or High Prairie or Athabasca or Lac La Biche or these small rural communities, Fort McMurray, you will find a vibrant community of people that actually love to be there.

Now, you've heard some bad things about Fort McMurray. I have. Those people are usually the people who work at work camps that are from different areas and are unhappy because they fly in and fly out. Anyone would be unhappy flying in to a camp with 3,000 other people, working at the same place 12 hours a day, and then flying out to go home because you miss your family. Everyone wants to be near their family. So when you knock Fort McMurray or have opportunity to hear other people do it, remember that they are not people who actually call it home. I am a person who calls it home, and I am very proud of it.

Now, Fort McMurray is also about energy, and I'll get to that in a little bit.

But I will tell you that further on in my career, after practising for 10 years in Fort McMurray, I ran for the federal Conservative Party of Canada in a nomination. There's sympathy from the other side, I know, but I'm very proud of that. I was very proud to run for Stephen Harper, and I was honoured to be elected with 60 per cent of the vote the first time, 65 per cent the second time, 68 per cent the third time, and 72 per cent the last time. I didn't do quite as well the last election, but the people of northern Alberta liked what I offered and liked what Stephen Harper had to offer and re-elected me with a clear majority each and every time.

I believe that I made a significant difference in Stephen Harper's government, and I believe that Stephen Harper's government made significant positive differences. It was a government that reduced Canadians' tax burden: clearly, 12 days of tax freedom that wasn't there when we got there in 2006. It reprioritized government. It respected provincial jurisdiction, something that hadn't happened before in quite a while. It improved our standing in the world. It kept us safe – and to commemorate that statement, this is the 30th

anniversary of the Air India bombing, the largest ever terrorist attack against Canada, and my heart still goes out to those people who were affected by that tremendous tragedy – a government that made me proud to be Canadian; that invested in our infrastructure, \$47 billion over eight years, the largest infrastructure investment in the history of Canada; a government that protected the vulnerable.

Yesterday we talked about the residential school apology. I was there when the Prime Minister correctly and courageously made that apology. It was right to come from the federal government, and he made that apology. Stephen Harper made that apology, not a Liberal Prime Minister, not any previous Prime Minister but Stephen Harper, and I was very proud of that.

I'm very proud of my time in Ottawa for a number of reasons, and I won't get into them because we will be asleep for a long time before that. I fought for some big ideas. I fought for decentralization, for limited taxation. I fought for a lot of things, passed about 25 bills in committees that I was part of. I was parliamentary secretary for transport and infrastructure for six years, and I enjoyed that portfolio very much.

As all of you will know if you ever have the opportunity to go to Ottawa, it's a long trip. From Fort McMurray it would be anywhere from seven to 10 hours of flying twice a week. That's travel time, and it becomes exhausting. I was missing my family. I had a young family. So I decided to come home and stay. I didn't want to stay in Ottawa. I'd never actually been in the House of Commons before I was elected. I was actually never in this House before I was elected. I'm not in politics to be a politician. I'm in politics to make Albertans', Canadians' lives better.

You know, I decided to go to Ottawa because things were bad there. People were stealing our money, and it's our money, all of us here and all citizens of Canada. They were taking that money and using it for political purposes, to put in their own pockets and to change the course of history and the elections without the democracy that we all have so much respect for. That's why I went to Ottawa.

Under the Liberals the things that were happening there were exactly the same, in my opinion, as the things that drove me to run against the PCs in the last election. I saw the identical issues with the provincial government that I saw in Ottawa with the Liberal government 10 years before. They weren't listening to the people, whether it be Willow Square in Fort McMurray or just about any decision that the people actually spoke up for. They would do the opposite or thought they knew better. It was the same attitude that I saw back in the '90s with another government that thought they knew better, and that started the reform movement. I say to this government and I say to all people in this House: don't forget who put you here because they can just as easily get rid of you. Entitlement, overspending, cronyism: a government that believes in nothing except staying in power will have no priorities, and people will not keep them in power.

Then, of course, there is health care. Health care drove me to this. It's almost 50 per cent of our budget. We do have wonderful, dedicated front-line workers, but we have a system that just simply does not work. It is not good enough for Albertans. We spend more per capita on health care than anybody else in Canada, and we get bottom-of-the-pack results. I put it to you as the government: please fix health care. Concentrate on health care. It is not just a disaster; it is part of taking away our loved ones if it's done wrong.

So I did get back into politics for the same reasons that I was driven to politics federally. I ran for the leadership of the Wildrose because Wildrose believes Albertans need a better government. Wildrose believes that Albertans need true democratic reform. My compliments on Bill 1. Wildrose believes that Albertans need transparency, not secret deals, secret laws, secret regulations that contradict what politicians actually say out loud. It's time to do

what you say and say what you do. Wildrose believes that Albertans need efficient ministries, not cronyism and sole-source contracts. Wildrose believes that Albertans need this government to get down to the business of actually fixing the health care system and seniors' care. I challenge you all on that. Most of all, Wildrose believes that Albertans need a government truly committed to fiscal responsibility. I mentioned that health care is the most expensive in Canada per capita and gets bottom-of-the-pack results, but we have the most expensive government in Canada and get bottom-of-the-pack results.

I say this to you, Mr. Speaker, not because you can fix it all by yourself but because you might be able to carry the message on to others.

It's not our money. We need to be truly committed to fiscal responsibility and prudence in our management styles to make sure that what we do is right for future generations, and when I say future generations, I mean our children, our grandchildren. We do not want them to carry the debt of our stupidity. We want them to have a better quality of life than we have, and that's why we need to focus on fiscal prudence in the future, right now, starting today, and moving on for the next four years and the next four years after that. The government can do better and needs to do better.

Albertans do deserve to have the best quality of life in the world, but when your third-largest line item is debt financing, it means that you cannot have that money to do other things because you borrowed it. And I say to you all: please, do not borrow any more money. Albertans are smart, and they can spend their money much better than we can. They will get the dollars where they're supposed to go for them and their priorities instead of us and our priorities. Every time we decide to make a spending decision for them as a government, that decision costs money to implement, to announce, to roll out. The money is better left with them.

During the election Wildrose campaigned on five priorities, and I'd like to compare those priorities to the throne speech. The first priority, of course, was standing up for low taxes, balanced budgets, and a long-term savings strategy. Our plan would have balanced the budget by 2017 without raising taxes. We would have done this with actual reductions in spending, not draconian reductions but actual small reductions in spending across government, cutting PC waste, and the whole time protecting one hundred per cent of our front-line services. Our plan actually included a long-term savings strategy and investing back into the heritage fund.

8:00

Now, the first thing that bothered me about the throne speech was that it was very thin. The second thing was that it didn't have any, not one, mention of fiscal responsibility. This government at this stage has no plan for getting our spending in line with our revenue levels. Now, we've heard that oil is low. That's because we heard it from the previous government. Well, oil prices are not low, folks. We are in the third-highest revenue year that this government has ever seen, the third-best sales of this corporation's, this government's, business ever. Any business would be proud to have the third-highest sales in its history to deal with as far as expenses. So it's not a revenue problem; it's a spending problem.

And this government has no plan for savings. All indications are that this government will spend every dollar of the future legacy that is our resource wealth. When it is gone, what do we do then for jobs? We hear of diversifying our economy, but we see very little action and, bluntly, no action from the previous government. We must go away from the path of PC debt, PC entitlement, and PC cronyism and move to a new era of what's best for Albertans.

Every indication so far is that this government is committed to growing the bureaucracy and to growing government. I say to you:

think differently. Compare yourself to the rest of the country and what they do with the same amount of or less resources. Not once in the throne speech is there any mention at all of economizing. Already we have seen this NDP government resume a hiring boom and cancel the wage freeze to the senior managers in the civil service.

I went to a chiropractor just the other day a couple blocks from here, and he told me that he couldn't believe – couldn't believe – how many jobs were being advertised at AHS with six-figure incomes, and he was thinking of leaving private practice to go to Alberta Health Services. What scares me the most is how much money we don't have to spend, how big the bureaucracy is, and how much we're spending on the bureaucracy now in inefficiencies, middle managers, upper managers. It is not serving Albertans. It is pushing paper from one end of the desk to other, and that doesn't actually cure patients.

When it comes to fiscal issues, I promise Albertans, Wildrose promises Albertans, that we will fight the NDP government's fiscal folly. We are hoping they will see the light.

Our second priority was standing up for patient-centred health and seniors' care, both of which are very important to Canadians. We have about a million new Canadians that become seniors every year. We have 65,000 to 70,000 people in Alberta that become seniors every year. We cannot ignore this issue any longer. While we do want to reform the health system and guarantee Albertans that their wait times would be medically reasonable, unfortunately we were not elected with a majority to do that. A wait time guarantee would have put an end to excruciating and dangerous wait times Albertans face across the province. I would suggest that would be a very good start on health care.

We also wanted to have a mental health and addictions strategy. We believe that health care is about patients cured, not about dollars spent and managers hired. Health care is not about the system or the procedure. It is about the patient. It is about curing.

This throne speech has no mention, none at all, of how this government will fix health care. This is the number one priority for many Albertans, but the government's only plan seems to be to employ as many pencil-pushers as possible. That is not reasonable, and that is not what Albertans need.

Our third priority was standing up for a world-class education system. Fifteen years ago we were number one in the world, number one in Alberta. Today we're number five in Canada. That is not reasonable. We need to concentrate on an education system that builds schools both on time and on budget. How many did the PCs build? One school. How many did they promise? One hundred and twenty-three. How many times did they promise them? Two hundred and forty. Let's try business differently this time.

Our plan focused squarely on parents. We wanted to eliminate mandatory school fees for parents. We wanted to protect their right to choose what's best for their children's education. Parents across Alberta have told us that it was time to get back to basics. Wildrose MLAs will fight to develop consistent provincial grading standards with traditional letter or percentage grades for students from grades 5 to 12. We've heard clearly that this would be an important first step for education in this province and to restore education to where it was and where we all want it to be.

This throne speech has no mention at all of how this government will give Albertans the top-quality education system that we did have. Not one mention in the throne speech. All we know is that the government is prepared to throw money at the system. They claim that they're investing \$103 million in the system, but if you have a calculator and add it, it actually comes out to \$213 million. They claim that it is to fund 12,000 new students except that if you look on the website, the school boards have indicated that they only

anticipate 7,500 new students. The throne speech does not mention curricula. The throne speech is very weak on education.

Our fourth priority focused on democracy and accountability. We had a series of reforms to cabinet and to how MLAs should work. We would limit severance packages across all government, not just among political staff. We wanted to keep politicians accountable, and we wanted MLA recall legislation, true fixed election dates, and – you might guess this – a ban on floor crossing without a by-election. Now, you might say: why? Well, I will tell you why. I believe, clearly, Mr. Speaker, that the floor crossing was an attack on our reputation as politicians. It wasn't an attack on the Wildrose or the PCs or the NDP. It was an attack on all of us, and democracy should not be attacked like that again.

This throne speech has some elements of progress on this particular front, and I would like to compliment the House leader and the Premier. Yesterday we passed Bill 1, which almost – almost – gets rid of union and corporate donations. Pretty exciting. We campaigned on it. The NDP campaigned on it. Good opportunity. But I do say almost because the bill leaves in two huge loopholes. Unions can still guarantee loans to the NDP, like they have done in the past, and unions can donate paid time of their employees to the NDP, like they have in the past, two loopholes that, clearly, the NDP knew existed yet they did nothing to close. We thought we'd seen the end of governments that were opportunist and changed the playing field to their advantage. We're hoping that that loophole can be changed.

The law in Alberta defines contributions as cash, goods, or real property. I'm pretty sure the Premier doesn't think that union and corporate employees are goods or property, so I think this gives us a tremendous opportunity to slam the door shut on those two loopholes. It's not a fair playing ground, and we need to be fair so Albertans know that we believe in democracy for all parties, not just for the NDP.

But there is hope that we can fix it. The Premier has invited all parties to sit on a special committee to deal with these sorts of issues. We're hoping that the members from the government on that committee will be open to amendments and open to closing these loopholes. Of course, I look to the House leader, in particular, to give directions on that front. It's a good thing. I do commend the Premier for that effort, and I'm hoping that we will see better legislation in the fall.

8:10

Our fifth priority was standing up for Alberta communities, for healthy communities, for vibrant communities, to make sure that people want to live in Alberta communities, both rural and urban. Our rural and urban communities are tied together. It is not a mutually exclusive situation. They are dependent and codependent on each other. And why do I say that? Because the urban areas do not hold the natural resources or the people that work on most of these natural resources. The rural areas hold that. But the same is reversed. When people in Fort McMurray want to have a nice weekend out, they go to Edmonton, and that's where they spend a lot of their money, or to Calgary to watch a Flames game. There is a connection, and we're very proud of Edmonton and Calgary, living in the rural area, the same as, I believe, urbanites should be proud of the rural areas in Alberta.

Our urban communities need funding certainty. We heard that clearly from the mayors. For too long politics has been the key determinant of funding. That has to stop. We proposed the 10-10 municipal funding plan to solve this problem, to take politics out of infrastructure funding. We would give this funding to municipalities with no political strings attached.

The throne speech is very weak on community issues as well. It really fails to understand resource issues entirely. It fails to mention agriculture, one of the most important things that actually built this province and that keeps food in our mouths. What about tourism, other key economic drivers in so many communities that have been left out entirely from the throne speech? Not one mention. The government's policy on energy issues is also particularly concerning, and to suggest otherwise – nobody's listening. People in Alberta are worried. Communities are worried. Corporations and businesses are worried.

As the MLA for Fort McMurray-Conklin I know how important our energy sector is. When I moved to Fort McMurray in 1967 there were 1,500 people there. Today there are over 100,000 that live in that area, and there are another 70,000 that work in the work camps, which means that probably about 110,000 people work in the work camps because they hot-swap the beds. I know how important the energy issue is to us because I saw these people every week, flying back and forth to Toronto, to Newfoundland, to B.C., when I would fly to Ottawa. The planes were full, and there are three direct flights a day to Toronto and points beyond. The economy of Canada rests with our energy industry here in Alberta.

People wonder why Alberta has such a big influence on the world stage. There are a number of reasons. One of the reasons is the oil and gas industry and the success we have with patents, with ingenuity, with the people, the men and women that work in this industry that go around the world and bring their resource specialties into the world and bring Canadian jobs and investment into the world. What does that do? Well, when you come from Alberta, which is the most generous place in Canada per capita, and Fort McMurray, which is the most generous place in Alberta and Canada per capita for all nonprofits, including the United Way and other groups, we have the ability to influence not just Canada but the world with our decisions. That's why every decision that is made by your government is so critical to not just us in this place, not just Edmontonians and Calgarians and not just the people in rural Alberta but to all Canadians. To the entire world we are an example of what can be done with a proper democracy. We have struggled in the opposition to get the government to acknowledge the importance of our energy sector and our need to get more pipelines to get our product to market. As all of you know in this place, the Wildrose is here to help.

The throne speech is also weak on communities. Our cities and other municipalities will still have to go cap in hand to the government for their funding, and they will have to play political games to get their projects built. The most popular infrastructure program in Ottawa was the gas tax fund. The Federation of Canadian Municipalities gave rave reviews of it. Why? Because it was certain. It was based on population. It was indexed, so it would grow with the rate of inflation, and it was fair. It didn't take myself or someone else to make decisions on where the money would go. It would go to the communities based on their need and their population. It's a fair system, and that's a system that our 10-10 program suggests, very similar, and I would recommend that particular infrastructure investment project to be adopted by the NDP. It's a great platform, and we'd be happy to help to go over more particulars.

Overall, as you can tell, I'm not thrilled with the throne speech. I thought it was very thin. Really, it is a speech about how the government will return in the fall to give a Speech from the Throne. So it was a speech about a speech. That is very concerning. Albertans have gone months without a budget and a government, and we have a time in our lives right now that is very unpredictable. The economy of the world is faltering, and we need to make sure that the corporate community, the business community, Alberta families have certainty in their decisions. In my mind, that means that when we have an election, we come to the people with a clear,

laid-out plan for where the priorities of the government are so that they can feel confident and focused in the future.

As I mentioned, the throne speech fails to mention agriculture or forestry or tourism, which are all very big industries, and all of those industries need assurances that this government hasn't forgotten them. The throne speech has no plan for health care. It has no plan for restoring Alberta to world-class education. It has no plan on dealing with our communities.

It does have some elements that deal with improving democracy in Alberta, but much remains to be done about accountability, and now some on this side of the House would question this particular act based upon the two loopholes that allow the NDP to have employees working for them from unions or to allow loans. Those are troubling issues.

The throne speech really has no plan about fiscal issues except to raise taxes. You might have heard: the Wildrose is not in favour of raising taxes. Not just raising taxes but spending the money faster than they can tax it: that's something new for the NDP. Albertans are worried about their jobs, and they want the government to be predictable. They want the government to promote long-term stability, and this throne speech does not do that. It does none of that.

I think that it would have been helpful for Alberta businesses and Alberta families to get a clearer picture of this government's priorities, especially given the economic situation that's just come about in the last few months. That economic situation is not not enough revenue. That economic situation was brought about as a result of those folks over there, that spent faster than it came in, and they had no plan to do so. They threw it around like it was their money. It is not their money.

Getting that clarity from the government as far as a focus on the future would have been very helpful, and it would be helpful now because we see in our marketplace, we see in the economy that the uncertainty is causing difficulties with businesses. People are deferring funding and investment decisions in Alberta, and you can say that that's not happening, but it is. People are worried. A clear road map is the best thing to do before you get in a car and take any trip, and we have no map.

All we can do now is hope that the government goes away for the summer and, as the House leader said, as the Minister of Infrastructure said, works hard over the summer to come up with a plan, to come up with a strategy that identifies what Albertans want as their priorities. We can hope that it will take the time, that it will listen to Alberta families, listen to communities, listen to Alberta businesses. We can hope that such consultation will result in a stable and mainstream throne speech in the fall or the winter, as the case may be, or next year, as the case possibly might be even further – I hope we get to vote on it before the end of the year, but we'll see – a new budget and throne speech that actually deal with priorities that matter to Albertans and not just the ideological hobby horses which matter to this government's partisans.

8:20

I think there's nothing clearer than to make sure that we all represent Albertans with hard work, with honesty and perseverance, recognizing that we are here but for a very short time. To move this mountain called government, one way or the other, is difficult even with the largest majority, but to make things better only takes one step in the right direction.

Please, Mr. Speaker, through you, when you and everyone else takes the step, might they please take the step towards fiscal responsibility, prudence, and understanding that the money does not belong to the government. It belongs to the people of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, with respect, I would move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 2

An Act to Restore Fairness to Public Revenue

[Debate adjourned June 23: Dr. Starke speaking]

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the time I have remaining, I did want to talk a little bit about something that's been talked about quite a bit here in the Chamber, and that is: does this province have a spending problem, or does this province have a revenue problem? Well, I will put it to the members that we do have a spending problem. We spend \$1,300 per person more than the national average.

One of our problems is that we pat ourselves on the back – or, at least, I can tell you that in the past the government has patted itself on the back – by saying that we spend more per capita on education, we spend more per capita on advanced education, we spend more per capita on health. That's not a measurement of success. That's not the metric you should use. You should be looking for results.

But, Mr. Speaker, we have a revenue problem as well. The Alberta advantage is that we collect 11.5 billion fewer dollars than the next lowest taxed jurisdiction, which is British Columbia, and if you brought in the tax regime of Nova Scotia, there would be an additional \$24 billion per year. We've made up the difference between high-cost services and low taxes with royalty revenue, with nonrenewable resource revenue, and when resource revenue goes down, as it has in the past year, that gap becomes extremely problematic.

Notwithstanding some of the things that happened in the last election and a strategy which I won't choose to go into today, we decided to try to do some of both, in decreasing spending, which we did, and increasing revenue, which we also tried to do. Clearly, the voters felt that that was not the direction to go, and we accept that verdict.

Mr. Speaker, I would say, though, that it is important that we do not view issues on the economy in terms of black and white. Most issues are nuanced, and most issues are in multiple shades of grey. I won't give a specific number. It's important that we do look at things in that way. I do believe that a cautious but prudent approach is the correct one to do, and the members of my caucus will do that in this Chamber.

The Speaker: Are there any questions or observations?

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would just like to see if we could get some help for the House, to get some clarity on an issue that the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster raised before the break – I'm not entirely sure that he can provide the help, but perhaps we can get help – suggesting there was something untoward in the retroactivity of the date of Bill 2 coming into effect, the 1st of January. I assume that this merely reflects the need to make the changes that encompass the entire year and that the changes would be retroactive as well as pro-rated based upon the year. I'm just curious to know if anybody in the House knows the answer to this, particularly the member if he does. I'm inclined to believe that he knows more than me, particularly because of his experience at Treasury Board, but I just wanted to see if there was some chance for a little clarification on that or if we knew that at this point.

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

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Parenthetically, I'll just say as an aside that I'll just correct a common mistake in the pronunciation of my home community. It's Lloyd-min-ster, three syllables, not Lloyd-minister. It's all about the church, not the preacher, which is, indeed, how a lot of things should be.

With regard to the retroactivity or, at least, the coming into force or effect, I will tell you that I'm not aware of any situation that I've encountered in my admittedly limited parliamentary career where any act that has been brought in has a retroactive date for the coming into force or effect. My problem with it, quite frankly, is that in this situation it bridges over a period of time in which the existing government was not, in fact, in power. I have a fundamental issue with that.

You know, it also raises the question: what limitation is there on that retroactivity? If the government in power, for example, as they have asserted before, decides, let's just say as an example, that royalty revenues that have been collected by government have been insufficient for the past five or 10 or 15 or 30 years, will they pass after the royalty review a decision to raise royalties that is retroactive for the last 30 years? Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that that would be a measure that would cause considerable turmoil and one that we members of the Assembly here would certainly reject.

I have a fundamental problem with this act including a reference to a coming into force or effect that occurred before the date that this party won the election or was sworn into office. We already had a considerable debate as to the effect of Bill 1, and that debate was resolved, or, shall we say, it was defeated. But in this situation we're going right back to January 1 of this year, and I do have difficulty with that.

Mr. Ceci: Mr. Speaker, with regard to the pro-rated numbers, as you can see, for the 12 per cent they would be 10.5 per cent. So everything over \$125,000 to \$150,000 would be taxed for the 2015 year at 10.5 per cent. That's a pro-rated 12 per cent amount for three months of the year. There is a requirement when you're dealing with personal income tax to deal on a yearly basis, and that's why it goes back to January 1. But we're only pro-rating that fee, that 12 per cent fee, at 10.5 per cent, and we implement it on October 1.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, I certainly understand the math involved here. That's not the issue. The issue is that, in point of fact, in order to affect the change that you're wanting and to bring in the tax rates that you're wanting, you have to start taxing people before you were ever elected. That is fundamentally wrong. You may say: "Well, it doesn't matter. They earn a lot of money." It's a question of fairness. Whether you earn \$50,000 or \$500,000 or \$5 million a year, fairness shouldn't change based on income level. So with regard to that, I reject this notion.

Yes, I understand the math. I get the math because, you know, that's what you have to do if you're implementing a tax for a three-month period. You have to stretch it out, and you do a multiplication, and that's not complicated. My difficulty and my problem with it is that we are being asked to pass a bill that retroactively has its coming-into-force date well before the election of the government. That's problematic for me.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will always rise in this House to defend Alberta's hard-working families, and I will always fight against an increase in the size and the scope of government. It should be no surprise, then, that I vehemently oppose Bill 2. This is a regressive and harmful experiment with Alberta's jobs and the future prosperity of our province. It is nothing more than a direct

attack on the Alberta advantage. The government should have realized by now that 60 per cent of Albertans didn't vote for them, that 60 per cent of Albertans didn't vote for an attack on Alberta's hard-working families, and that 60 per cent of Albertans didn't support this government's plan for higher taxes, higher spending, and even more debt and borrowing against my children.

Mr. Speaker, the Wildrose was sent here on a platform of no new taxes. I'm humbled and I'm honoured to be here on behalf of my constituents in Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. Where I come from, we don't believe in higher taxes before we deal with spending problems, and we don't believe in taking money away from our hard-working families' pockets before we deal with spending problems. And you know what? We're proud of it. We don't believe in taxing our way out of spending problems. It's reckless and regressive.

8:30

We think that this government, just like the old government, needs to get spending under control. They need to take a look at the books, find efficiencies where efficiencies can be found, cut the waste where there's waste to be cut. Instead, Mr. Speaker, this government thinks that there's not a single cent to be saved. They think that after 43 years of waste and mismanagement and cronyism there's not a single place to find savings. Really? Forty-three years of PC government, and the NDP thinks that they're going great. That's a little surprising, to be honest. That's why Wildrose has long advocated for finding efficiencies and cutting waste. We believe Albertans are taxed enough. Hard-working Alberta families are the lifeblood of our communities and our province, and we shouldn't be taking more from them to fund the pet projects of the new NDP government.

Mr. Speaker, these tax hikes will mean the end of the Alberta advantage. It will mean the end of our competitive advantage, and why on earth is this something that we should be in favour of? Why should we be in favour of making Alberta a more difficult place to start a business? Why would we be in favour of making Alberta a more expensive place to raise a family? Why do we think that Albertans should be penalized for choosing to make our beautiful province home? I just can't figure it out. We have a government that wants to chase people away from our province, to encourage families to move away and work in more competitive jurisdictions like B.C., Ontario, and even Quebec. I never thought I would live to see the sad day that Quebec could end up being a better place to live and work and raise a family than Alberta.

I'm going to fight against higher taxes until the day I die. I'm going to do it every day that I'm in this House. I'm going to fight this government every step of the way because hard-working Alberta families need a champion in this House. Wildrose is here to be that champion. We do not believe in higher taxes now or in the future, Mr. Speaker. We are here to fight for hard-working families. We are here to fight for our constituents, that rely on the Alberta advantage. We are here to fight for keeping Alberta a great place to live and work and raise our families, and we're going to keep doing just that. I will wholeheartedly and without reservation vote against this bill every step of the way. I will never give up on the fight against the regressive tax hikes of this NDP government.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Any questions or observations? The Member for Calgary-Greenway.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That was rather quick. I'm very, very, very pleased to rise, I guess to be recognized by you to be able to speak. I rather wish that the subject of this

discussion was something other than what it is. What I think it is is short-sighted political, ideological moves that are coming at a time when the economy is incredibly fragile. I know that the members opposite feel that we need to make changes to our income tax system. I for one believe we need to make changes to the income tax system. I think that significant and substantial changes at a time when the economy is in such peril are incredibly unwise. It is self-serving to put one's political ideologies and pursuits ahead of everyday, hard-working Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, I want to share with you a story of today. Earlier today I was in Calgary attending a school function. At that function I happened to check my phone, and I saw a headline about a particular company in Calgary that was going to lay people off today. So I immediately thought of a friend that works there, somebody I went to high school with, somebody that I've known since childhood. He was born and brought up in northeast Calgary. He's worked incredibly hard. He is the son of two immigrants that have worked labour jobs their entire lives so that their kids could have better opportunities. I thought of him immediately. I thought: "Oh, man, he works there. He works there, and he works in the major capital projects area."

Now, he's a guy that has worked his tail off. In a period of 13 years he has been able to get himself in a position where he's the sole breadwinner in the family, because one of their children has a medical condition, and his wife decided to stay home with the child. I thought: damn. I hope I can say that. No? My apologies. I'll take that back from the record. I thought: if he is the victim of this layoff, this is really going to suck. There's no other way to put it.

Now, I started calling him and sending him text messages, and for a period of about four hours I did not reach him. It wasn't until I was starting to come back to Edmonton that he finally called back, and he said: "I just missed it. I just missed it." He could have been one of those unfortunate people that lost their job today, and his life would have been turned upside down. So why in the world would we be debating a bill in the Legislative Assembly today that has the potential to have more of these stories, Mr. Speaker? I just don't follow that.

I'm not saying: don't bring in changes. I'm saying: bring them in in a thoughtful way that doesn't have a negative effect on the economy. Bring them in in a thoughtful way. I stand with you. You know, unlike other members of the Assembly, I do believe that there need to be some changes and adjustments to our income tax system. I get that. But you can't do it overnight, and you really can't do it at a time when thousands upon thousands of Albertans have either lost their jobs or are in fear of losing their jobs. That's just not cool. That's not right, Mr. Speaker. That's damn – sorry; again I retract that. That is unjust.

If we want to talk about justice and fairness, then we should be pragmatic in our approach. I see the members opposite and the government opposite, Mr. Speaker, stand up in the House on many decisions, on many things they talked about during the campaign, and they said: "You know what? We said that in the campaign, but now we might have to reconsider it." So you're willing to give on things like the Calgary cancer project, but when it comes to thousands of hard-working Albertans, you're not willing to reconsider their livelihoods. How do you explain the difference? How do you explain that difference? I invite any single member opposite to stand up and give me the rationale. How can you justify? How can you say, "This is a complicated decision, so we have to wait and look at our options"? Well, what about the income tax system and the corporate taxes? You don't have to do that for that? That's not complicated? That's not going to affect tens of thousands of hard-working Albertans?

I get it. You want to make changes. It's all good. Just do it thoughtfully, and don't jam it down the throats of Albertans in the midst of what may be one of the most significant economic crises that we face in many, many years. We have estimates right now that production levels in many countries are going up. What does that mean, Mr. Speaker? That means that we're going to be in this low-price environment for years. If that is the case, sir, you're going to have a significant reduction of capital expenditure. You're going to have a very significant reduction in capital expenditure across this province.

Now, what does that mean? That means that our hard-working friends and neighbours are going to be out of luck. That means that some of them are not going to be called back to work. That means that some of those gravel truck drivers are not going to have a season. Some of the rig workers: nope. That hotel or that motel in rural Alberta: empty. What about the diner? There'll be a couple of guys like us that go around, that want to shake some hands. We'll be in the diners. That's about it.

8:40

This is real. So if you can have the pragmatic instinct to delay the Calgary cancer project or now rethink your position on that, I'd invite you to do the same here for a bill that's going to have an effect on tens of thousands, millions of Albertans. That's all we're saying. We understand your ideological perspective. You want to make changes. Rock on. Just do it in a way that doesn't already kick people when they're down. That's just not right. That's not cool, you know.

I brought some other substantive issues up, Mr. Speaker, in the past, and I'd love it if the government opposite could provide us with answers. Alberta has double the high-income tax filers of other provinces, double the high-income bracket tax filers of other provinces as a percentage. Now, why do I bring that up? They're about 12 per cent of tax filers whereas in other provinces they are about 4, 5, 6 per cent of tax filers. Why am I bringing that up? I'm bringing that up because that means that there are a heck of a lot of people that pay their taxes in Alberta. On December 31 of any given year they say: I am an Albertan because Alberta has that advantage. So they pay their taxes here.

They pay their taxes here, and some 33 or so per cent of our income tax revenue comes from those very high-income earners. Some 33 per cent. So my question is: if you chase those people away because now they have to pay 15 per cent in Alberta – let's say that they live in B.C. They've got to pay – what is it? – 12 per cent. Why would they not file their taxes in B.C.? How much are they going to lose in their income? How much are we going to lose in revenue?

My question to the members opposite is: how will you make up for that revenue in two, three, or four years from now? You're going to go back to everyday, hard-working Albertans and say: "You know what? I know we said that we're going to keep you at 10, but we've got to bump you up." There's no other way, or you're going to have to bring in a sales tax. You tell me. If you lose that 33 or so per cent of our personal income tax revenue, you've got to make up for it somewhere. I don't see them, Mr. Speaker, making cuts.

I know my friends to the right proposed \$5 billion in cuts. I don't think that's reasonable. I don't think that's fair. I don't think that's sustainable. But what the government is proposing to do, Mr. Speaker, just will absolutely hinder our economy at a time when we can't have it. At the end of the day, if you look at the two-, three-, four-year horizon, when a good chunk of the personal income tax revenue is gone, there are going to be everyday, hard-working Albertans that are going to have to pay more.

You know, ideological pursuits aside, sometimes you've got to think this stuff through, just like you're thinking through the

Calgary cancer centre project. I'd invite you to do the same thing here. Go out; talk to a few people, maybe more than a few. Talk to some experts. More importantly, talk to some of those tax filers. Talk to the guys making \$100,000, people making \$50,000, the gals making \$80,000. Talk to some of them, and then talk to some of the guys making \$200,000 or \$300,000 or \$400,000 and say: if our rates go up, will you continue to file taxes here? Then tell me if your plan is sustainable in three or four years.

Now, I understand that this stuff is really emotional. You can get people all jacked up to say: "You know what? Those who do better should pay more." I get that. I get that you can get people worked up any second. But you've got to think right now – unless you're planning on just, you know, four years of this. Otherwise, you've got to think that in four years from now you're going to be going back to those same people and saying: "We chased away a whole bunch of tax filers. Now we've got to go up with the rest." You've got some folks around the table here that are in those categories. I suggest you talk to them.

On the corporate income tax side, for the Premier to stand up and say, "For those that have benefited from the good times in Alberta, we expect them to pay more now," you know what? I don't know about anybody on that side of the House, but businesses don't create themselves, Mr. Speaker. They don't create themselves. You don't wake up and have somebody go and switch on the lights and open the doors to your dry cleaning shop. It doesn't happen. You've got to work. You've got to put in that work yourself.

So for all those hard-working business owners, small-business owners – because a small business can easily do \$500,000 in gross sales a year, 1,400 bucks a day. Fourteen hundred bucks a day. I invite anybody here to go to their neighbourhood pub, go to their neighbourhood restaurant and ask them what their daily sales are. Then you'll see how many businesses are actually being affected by your plan. It's not bigwig corporate Calgary.

An Hon. Member: It's profit, not gross.

Mr. Bhullar: It doesn't matter. [interjections] Seriously?

The Speaker: Hon. member, could you . . .

Mr. Bhullar: Do I have the floor, sir?

The Speaker: No. I'd like you to sit down, and then you can have the floor. That's why I'm standing.

Could we let the hon. member finish?

Proceed.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, it's quite simple. Those who understand business, who understand the hard work required to succeed in business, would never jam a 20 per cent tax hike down the throats of hard-working Alberta entrepreneurs overnight. It's ridiculous. Ridiculous. The members opposite say that they need months and months and months to prepare a budget. What about the budgets all these businesses have prepared? You're going to throw all those out the window? You're going to throw all of those budgets out the window? What about the planning they've all done? That's all done.

The Speaker: Any questions or comments? The Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to start off by thanking the member for his very impassioned speech. Clearly, we see your ideology shining through here.

A couple of points that I'd like to address. First of all, I find it interesting that the hon. member is talking about kicking people when they're down. Last time I checked, income earners earning \$125,000 or more aren't considered being down.

I'd like to juxtapose that comment with the many men and women working multiple jobs earning minimum wage. That side of the House has vehemently opposed raising the minimum wage so that those people can afford to live and pay the bills. You know, I find that it's quite disingenuous talking about those earning significant salaries, as the hon. member's colleague had said the other day, talking about how people earning \$125,000 or more can possibly afford to make ends meet. I was quite surprised at that.

8:50

You know, I want to just address a couple of things here. First of all, 70 per cent of Albertans polled in a poll from this hon. member's party voted in favour of a 2 per cent corporate tax increase. So when the members opposite talk about all of these Albertans that are opposed to it, there are a significant number of Albertans that had said that the profitable corporations can afford to pay a little bit more. A 2 per cent increase still puts us in the middle of the pack, even lower than the average of the middle of the pack, as far as a corporate income tax rate goes.

As well, Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that "tax" is not a four-letter word. We pay taxes in order to build roads and schools and hospitals and pay for the critical infrastructure. The members opposite often like to talk about and ask the front bench during question period when they're going to get a new amenity or an upgrade to a facility, yet they don't propose how it's actually going to be paid for. How we pay for it is through everyone paying their fair share. Again, you know, raising personal income tax in a graduated system starting at \$125,000 a year is very reasonable, is very prudent. We're talking about saving dollars for those Albertans earning an income under \$100,000. We're actually making life more affordable for the majority of Albertans while, again, asking those who can afford to pay a little bit more to pay a little bit more.

I believe, Mr. Speaker, that the member talked a little bit about businesses or individuals being chased out of the province. I remind the hon. member that there are many different things that make Alberta an incredible place to live and to invest in, and our tax regime is only one factor in a myriad of reasons why people choose to live in our province. We have an incredible infrastructure. We have no PST in this province. We have incredible amenities and services. Again, one of the reasons that we have such a robust economy is our natural resources. So although members opposite may think that many different businesses or individuals may decide to pick up and leave, the reality is that the natural resources that many people's jobs are dependent on are here in Alberta. Therefore, people will be staying in this province to continue to lead very prosperous lives.

We're not trying to say that Albertans shouldn't deserve to make good money and that their hard-earned money shouldn't go toward valuable projects. But at the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, it's not just about the taxes that people pay; it's what they get for their dollar. Again, in this province this government is committed to building schools, to ensuring that we're staffing them with teachers and support staff, to have hospitals, health care that's there when a person needs it.

Mr. Speaker, quite frankly, the proposal that this government has made is quite reasonable. This bill talks about doing a very modest increase to ensure that Alberta can continue to remain prosperous and that the province has the amenities and services here for our citizens. I appreciate the hon. member's impassioned speech on this

topic, but I felt moved to speak and offer some reasons as to why this is still an incredible province to invest in and to live in.

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

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to talk about Bill 2 not as a legislator but as a father and a grandfather. I'd like to talk about the people who will be affected by this, those who can't vote for or against this bill but who will be expected to pay for it. I want to speak for our children and grandchildren.

Politics was once described to me as an act of determining who gets what from the cookie jar. A farmer wants the government to put in a culvert for him whereas a baker in the city wants a crosswalk in front of his shop to make it easier for his customers to come and buy bread. Each of these individuals competes for a limited fund called taxes unless, however, the government of the day happens to be the NDP. Then another option is available. In this option the farmer and the baker both get what they want because the NDP government is more than willing to mortgage our children's future in order to satiate their present spending.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The previous government would not address the problem of overspending and were convinced Albertans wouldn't mind if they stuck their long arm down taxpayers' short pockets. As can be evidenced by the scarceness of the numbers of those on my left, that didn't seem to work out so well. I would caution this new government to learn from our past. That history will be prone to repeat itself.

I've heard the Premier and many of her cabinet say that Albertans were consulted during the election, that therefore they have the right to bring forward the policies Albertans want. I would remind the governing party that even though they have a legal right because of their majority status, they did not receive a mandate from the majority of Albertans. The majority of Albertans voted for something other than the NDP platform. So to state that Albertans asked for what's coming down the pipe is simply spinning the reality of what actually did happen during the election.

The NDP government have often used the word "fair" to describe the implementation of their platform. I would ask them: what is fair about saddling our children and grandchildren with a debt burden that they have no say in? Over the next few days we will decide whether we should address the root of the problem, which is government overspending, or whether we will saddle our children and our grandchildren with mounting debt.

I read a telling caption the other day. A couple of fathers were observing their newborn babies in the hospital nursery. One father asked the other why all of the babies were crying, to which the other father proclaimed: because they just found out they were \$23,000 in debt.

With complete solemnity I would like to ask this governing body to do something for me. When you go home tonight and tuck your children in bed, I want you to lean over and ever so softly whisper in their ear that you have successfully sold their future to some banking interest. I want you to whisper in their ear that you have just made them someone else's future investment. Whisper in their ear that you appreciate their willingness to pay for your spending problems. Then in good conscience pat them on their head and tell them that you will ever remain their champion.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows five minutes for questions, comments. Anyone? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak in response to the hon. member's statement. After listening to yet another member of the second and third parties making disparaging comments about my motives and accusations that my support of this bill is purely ideological, I can sit no longer. Time after time I listened to the accusation that I do not care about the citizens of this province and seek to cause harm to the wealthy citizens and corporations – I listened to the defence of the status quo in taxation as if there have been no victims – that I am not thoughtful and have not talked to the people affected.

Well, I stand to speak as a social worker with 33 years of experience, having worked in private practice, small business, nonprofits, government services, and at the university. I have committed my life to talking to the people of this province every day about their lived experience. While I could speak to many aspects of the accusations levelled against me and the members of the government, I wish to address just one to demonstrate a point.

A report from the Edmonton Social Planning Council, an agency for which I worked, states that 1 in 10 children living in the province of Alberta lives in poverty, with over 77,000 children living in poverty today under the regime built by the right wing in this province. From the report: Alberta children who live in low-income families experience a greater depth of poverty than the national average. Alberta children also tend to live in poverty longer than children in other parts of Canada. Among Alberta children living in poverty, 32 per cent lived in families where one or both parents worked full-time year-round, and only 22 per cent lived in households where no one worked. Yet these people are against a minimum wage of \$15 an hour, still a poverty level.

9:00

Children living in poverty is a debt that we have already exacted on our children and our generations to come. Research indicates that children living in poverty costs our province between \$5 billion and \$10 billion per year in extra social costs and lost economic potential. Poverty is a primary indicator of the social determinants of health. It is time we had a government that did not focus singularly on one indicator of well-being, that being wealth. It is time we focused on indicators of well-being that are complex, sophisticated, and future-thinking like the social determinants of health.

I intend to speak to these issues in a larger way in my first full speech to the House, but I ask the members of this side of the House to remember that the concern and care that brought me and many of the people on the government side of the House here today are concerns about the people and their well-being and where we are going and the need to develop a complex understanding of the ways in which we construct a social society in which everybody benefits and not the 7 per cent that had benefited under the previous regime.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: We're back to the main debate now. Does another hon. member wish to speak on Bill 2?

Mr. Fraser: Are we still in questions?

The Deputy Speaker: No. Standing Order 29(2)(a) is done. You can speak to the main bill if you like.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Madam Speaker. You know, it's interesting to me to hear the comments of the member that just spoke, talking about the good intentions of the people that come to this House, the people that put their families in front of the public to view, to be criticized. There is a saying that the first one to lead is the first one to be criticized, that it is the first one to make

mistakes. I would agree, from the third party, that we have made mistakes.

I'll keep this short. You know, I was on the phone earlier tonight with friends that I grew up with from northeast Calgary that fought tooth and nail to become accountants, to become traders in the market for oil companies today. I'm calling them: "How are things going? What do you think about this corporate tax, this Bill 2?" They're like: "Rick, we don't care. I'd be happy to pay the corporate tax. That's if I have a job." Albertans are losing jobs because of this.

[The Speaker in the chair]

You know, it's funny to me. We talked about this. We've been talking about it in question period, yet you're laughing. You're laughing across the aisle, which you said you would never do if you were in that position. You said that you'd have debates, that you would change the way things were done. Well, you have an opportunity right now to admit that rushing this and putting through Bill 2, corporate taxes, in a downturn is costing Albertans jobs. You can reverse that. You can do something maybe that you criticized that we never could do. You could say that this is a mistake and that we're going to press the stop button, the pause button.

Further to that, I've got to tell you that if I was on that side of the House, which we were, and we were making decisions on finances – flood recovery or anything else, particularly on this one – and then retroactively put it back six months, how does a family budget for that? How does a corporation budget for that, that retroactively they're going to have to pay taxes going back to January 1? How is that fair? Let me remind you that you did have corporations that did vote NDP. You did. So it's fair to retroactively charge them?

I go back to the intent. Definitely, as a Progressive Conservative, which I am, I fought tooth and nail for everything that I have. Thank God for my wife, thank God for my parents, and thank God for my friends because they had faith in me that I would come here and I would do the right thing.

You're seeing right now that it's pretty hard to manage all the moving parts of being in government, and I wish you the best. I do. You know why? It's my kids. It's my dad, who owned a small business, who didn't have a pension, a defined benefit pension. He didn't work in the public sector. He fought for everything as a single parent in Georgian Village. You know, distinctly I remember sitting in the area of the hockey boards, where drug dealers were making deals right next to us. I was the age of my youngest son now, and I couldn't even imagine him having to deal with that. But thank the Lord and thank God for parents and thank God for friends, that that community put me on a track that put me in this House to make a difference for Albertans.

If you think that it's disingenuous why I'm here – I was a paramedic. I went to school specifically to serve my community, and like I said before, I've seen the best and the worst of this province. I am urging this government to press the pause button, to consider how many jobs are being lost. I would agree with the hon. member that at the end of the day . . . [interjection] See? Once again you just can't let me finish the debate without a comment, which you said that you wouldn't do.

An Hon. Member: You guys do that to us.

Mr. Fraser: Well, no. We're talking about Albertans' jobs here, good sir. Jobs. If you lost your job tomorrow . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. member, please proceed.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you. The intent here: I know that you want to do right by Albertans. Everybody in this House does. You have an

opportunity to slow it down, consider the jobs being lost, make a readjustment. Like the member said, we're not saying that you can't raise corporate taxes at some point or look at a royalty review at some point. Those are important things. We believe in that. I believe that government should always be evolving. This is an opportunity right now where government is evolving, so you can do something different. I'm urging you, I'm urging you with my constituents who are losing jobs . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member – and again I say this to all of the members in the House – I respectfully request that you try and direct your comments through the Speaker. I think that's part of the emotion that's being dealt with, if you would. Thank you.

Please proceed.

Mr. Fraser: Yes, sir. Mr. Speaker, thank you for that. My intent in looking at these members is not to spar. It is certainly to have a debate and give the side of the people that I'm talking to that are concerned about losing their jobs, and I think we all care about that. This government has a great opportunity right now. Like I said, press the pause button; save jobs. Let's figure out where we need to be. I do believe that the Wildrose, the Progressive Conservatives, and people in the independent parties absolutely want to help this government. I think right now that the economy, jobs, and making sure that Albertans are whole is job number one for this government.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The Minister of Finance.

9:10

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much. Thank you to the hon. Member for Calgary-South East for those words. The point I'd just like to talk about is that I think he just misspoke a little bit when he talked about the corporate income tax being retroactive. It's not going to be retroactive. It'll be coming in on July 1. It'll only be two percentage points greater than the 10 per cent it is now. It's not retroactive. It'll be going forward.

The hon. member talked about retroactivity in terms of the personal income tax also. That will be implemented on October 1, but it will be pro-rated for the 2015 year only at a lower level, so it implies that it's only three months of taxes that it'll take in. It's going forward October 1, and the corporate income tax is July 1. The calendar year needs to be used by the CRA for personal income taxes. That's why we had to call the 2015 year only a pro-rated level; for instance, 10.5. For a 12 per cent effective tax rate for 2016, it would be 10.5 for 2015.

Thank you, hon. member.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just real briefly, the hon. member earlier spoke with very apparent passion for the kids that he's working with, and that's very commendable. He's not the only member of this House that's dedicated his life to the poor and the vulnerable in our communities. I've spent 30 years with one of our largest nonprofits in the province that's dedicated to the homeless, seven years as the executive director of it. I can tell you that raising the minimum wage will not help one of those over a thousand homeless people that that agency works with a day. It won't. You know why? Because it's taking away jobs, that we need. For the kids that the hon. member discussed, taking away jobs from their parents does not help make the kids' lives better. It's that simple. Nobody on this side of the House is trying to hurt anybody. You're

going to cost Albertans jobs, which is going to hurt the most vulnerable of our population in this province.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there any questions or comments?

The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I couldn't help but notice that there was a discussion earlier in relation to vulnerable Albertans. You know, there are 450,000 seniors in Alberta. There are going to be a million seniors by just over 2030. Seniors, of course, are one of our most vulnerable sets of citizens. In this particular case, I saw a joke recently, just today actually, that had two people come up to the counter of a coffee shop, and one person said to the other, "What could be wrong with a minimum wage of \$15?" Meanwhile the clerk said: "Here's your coffee. That'll be \$12. Thank you, sir." There's no question that with people's salaries going up, costs are going to go up. I owned a Quiznos franchise, and I can tell you that when I have to pay \$15 to \$25 for somebody to put sandwiches together, I have to charge more for subs, so the prices are going to go up.

My question to the member is: how will that affect seniors in Alberta? That's who I'm worried about, the most vulnerable. I think seniors on a fixed income are going to be the hardest hit because they don't work anymore. They've set aside money to take care of their future, and their future is now changing. Costs are going to go up, and the costs of things that they buy are going to go up. Could the member please answer that question?

Mr. Fraser: Well, Mr. Speaker, thank you to the Leader of the Official Opposition. You know, being a paramedic means you spend a lot of your time with the vulnerable, particularly seniors. Again, like I've said before, I've seen the best and the worst in this province regarding that. When you raise the minimum wage, you think about the store owner. He's going to raise the price of milk. He's going to raise the price of bread. He's going to raise the price of the essentials to cover those costs. But what we haven't done and what we haven't heard, because there isn't a detailed budget, is how we're going to give seniors and those folks on a fixed income today, based on how they've been saving – how are they going to be able to afford these things?

When that happens, what I can tell you is that at the end of the day, for all these other things that they say will be offset by raising the minimum wage, it is actually the opposite. When seniors feel they can't afford things, they do get depressed. When they get depressed, they call the ambulance. When the ambulance has to take them, we have to deal with them, whether it's a mental health issue or whether it's an actual emergency. Oftentimes they wind up in the emergency department. It's not an actual emergency, but somebody needs care. At the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, it just costs more money.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak against Bill 2, An Act to Restore Fairness to Public Revenue. There is nothing fair in raising taxes. The individuals and businesses in this province that are getting this rather large increase in tax are about to be hit by a high inside pitch: unexpected, hard to see, and painful.

Mr. Speaker, it was the poor management of the public purse by the former government and the inability of this government to address the inherent spending problems throughout the public sector that will result in job creators being punished. Higher business taxes can have harmful effects on the economy.

University of Calgary School of Public Policy economist Jack Mintz stated that Alberta would lose 8,900 jobs for each one-point increase in the business tax rate. The findings of Dr. Mintz's study have been reviewed by Toronto economist Mike Moffatt and University of British Columbia economist Kevin Milligan. This study is not disputed. Another study of European companies, piloted by the University of Oxford, found that a dollar rise in corporate tax reduced the wage bill by 75 cents.

Businesses are not going to break into their profits to pay for an increase in taxes. What we can expect to see is an increase in prices of goods, a lowering of wages, and the laying off of workers. These are the front-line protections that businesses will have to explore before giving up profits. Punishing the job creators will only further delay Alberta's economic recovery from lower-than-forecast oil prices due to geopolitical events; Saudi Arabia has turned on the taps. Raising business taxes will increase government revenue but only in the short term. Long term it will deter investors when Alberta loses its advantage over other provinces. Combine that with an increase in minimum wage, and business profits will decline sharply.

These business tax increases have the potential to drive investment and jobs to other provinces. For example, Saskatchewan, right next door, is already making noises, asking business to come and invest in their province and inviting people to move over there for the Saskatchewan advantage.

But here's the one that really gets to the bone, Mr. Speaker. Alberta will now have a higher business tax rate than the province of Quebec. Yes, Quebec, Canada's bastion of all things left-wing, the fiscal basket case of debt and deficit, and the largest recipient of transfer payments, will now have a lower business tax than Alberta, at 11.9 per cent. I can already hear Premier Philippe Couillard crowing about Quebec's competitive advantage over Alberta. It's embarrassing. Alberta has lost its place of fiscal leadership in Confederation.

This is a 20 per cent tax increase all at once. No discussion about phasing in this tax. The government is more than willing to phase in a minimum wage over three years but not a tax increase that will be detrimental to jobs in Alberta. Alberta businesses like Earth's General Store, an organic food store right here in Edmonton; Poppy Barley, a shoe store; Calder Bateman; and Yardstick Software, all here in Edmonton, are facing the issue of having to find 20 per cent somewhere. If their profits cannot handle the increases, lower cost and poorer quality inputs may have to be what's used, which could potentially ruin the businesses' reputations in the long run. Potentially, staff salaries would have to be cut or positions eliminated or hours of workers cut back or, at the worst, businesses will just have to close. Your favourite corner pub will be affected in exactly the same way. How much will you have to pay for your favourite pint of beer?

The fastest way to close these fine Alberta businesses down is to raise taxes. Higher taxes will mean fewer staff in the service sector. Fewer staff means poorer customer service. If people are travelling from all over the world to come to a town in my constituency of Little Bow to engage in all things *Star Trek*, they are not going to come back if they get poor customer service. Events in my constituency like Vul-Con and Spock Days will be negatively affected by higher taxes and personal taxes.

Mr. Speaker, I implore the members opposite to please vote down this unfair tax increase at this time of economic readjustment in Alberta. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there any questions or comments? The Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

9:20

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank my next door neighbour, the Member for Little Bow, for his comments today. There are a number of very interesting points that he hit on. He's speaking about the very direct impact that this is going to have upon his constituents. The Member for Calgary-South East spoke about the good intentions of every member in this House regardless of their ideological intentions or bent. We all want to help Albertans, but we come at some things from pretty different perspectives at times. But it's important that we stick to our principles when we're here and we stick to the facts.

The Member for Calgary-Greenway said a lot of things that I very much would agree with other than some pretty strange factual errors such as us cutting \$5 billion from the budget. Now, as a fire-breathing fiscal conservative I might fantasize about doing so in my wildest dreams, but that was nowhere close to the Wildrose's balanced budget program. In fact, we were proposing to cut as much from the budget, \$2.5 billion, as his own party had been proposing to cut from the budget until one week before it tabled that budget in this House, fatefully.

I find it strange, as much as I agree with many of the arguments coming from the third party, I find it mind-bending that a party that introduced 59 taxes on Albertans, targeted primarily at the middle class, to raise a tax burden on the average household in this province by two and a half thousand dollars a year can now position itself as a champion of taxpayers.

Mr. Speaker, Margaret Thatcher called it popular capitalism. A defence of capitalism requires a broad buy-in by all people. A defence of capitalism cannot be focused only on high-income earners or large businesses. It must benefit all Albertans, all people. That is why the Wildrose has more than twice as many seats in this Legislature as the previous government.

I was wondering if the member would like to comment about the remaining taxes that have not been withdrawn by the current government, taxes imposed by the previous government like the one that affects many members of this Legislature very personally and dearly, the beer tax.

Mr. Schneider: What do you want to know about the beer tax?

Mr. Fildebrandt: The government's repeal.

Mr. Schneider: Well, all I can say, hon. member, is to just reiterate what I said in my speech. This is a clear 20 per cent increase in a tax for corporations, small businesses that hire the people that go out and shop and spend money and keep the economy rolling around. If things move up by 20 per cent, Mr. Speaker, your beer downtown isn't going to be near as tasty, is it?

The Speaker: Any other questions or comments? The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What an interesting conversation tonight. It's great that we all love Alberta so very, very much, and I think it's time to recognize that there is middle ground here. For the longest time this province was proud to hold a competitive economic advantage in relation to the rest of Canada. The late Premier Peter Lougheed famously dubbed it the Alberta advantage. Sadly, the days of the Alberta advantage are numbered thanks to the last decade of PC mismanagement and the NDP economic reforms like Bill 2.

For decades businesses big and small would look to Alberta as the land of opportunity, the land of low taxes and economic freedom. This government, however, is set to implement the largest

business tax increase in recent Alberta history. For years families from across Canada would move to Alberta for lower taxes and plentiful jobs. Now those, too, will become a thing of the past. It's already started, with the 50 per cent income tax hike for high earners and a 50 per cent hike in the minimum wage. Think twice, please. Lastly, the oil industry, Alberta's economic powerhouse, is set to face turbulent times with a royalty review and a carbon price review levied over their heads. In short, these provisions included in Bill 2 are set to strip Alberta of the advantage it has enjoyed for decades.

I'd like to take the next few minutes to briefly explain why. To begin, a staggering tax hike of 20 per cent on businesses across this province will guarantee two things: one, lower wages; two, higher prices on everything, from apples to zucchinis. An apple a day keeps the doctor away. We can't afford one every day. This will only hurt Alberta families. This will hurt your children. A tax hike on businesses, the job creators in this province, will only further weaken the already fragile Alberta job market. The proposed business tax hike will make Alberta a less competitive place for business to invest in. It's fact. Alberta will now become less competitive than our neighbours in British Columbia as well as other large provinces, Ontario and even Quebec. What will this do to our province? It will drive out jobs, growth, and prosperity.

Next, let's take a look at the personal income tax hike. The NDP platform promised that their proposed income tax increases would rake in \$1.1 billion in revenue. Now we are being told that only \$800 million will be raised. That's far, far less. Where will the NDP find their funds for their spending commitments, commitments that have already been proposed? The math simply does not add up. We wonder how many more tax hikes we will see before voters can get to the ballot box again.

Finally, I'd like to draw the attention of this Chamber to the government's overall spending forecast as proposed in the bill. This government is set to include almost \$700 million, unless it's \$600 million, in net new spending, and that's just for the minibudget, to keep the government running until a full budget can be announced. We still don't know when.

All of this is to say that one thing is clear. You cannot tax and spend your way to prosperity. This has never worked; it never will. Contrary to the belief of this government you cannot just raise taxes without addressing the core of this problem, shrinking the size of government.

I will speak against Bill 2.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there any questions or comments? The chair recognizes the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise before the House today because the Alberta advantage is under threat, and probably for the first time since the Alberta advantage was created, it is under threat from within our province, not from outside of our province, and that is a shame. Bill 2 compromises a very delicate balance between revenue and expenditure that Alberta has to maintain in order to ensure that our advantage is sustained. Let's be really clear about something. We're in a global marketplace, and we are also in a national marketplace. There are other provinces that are looking at Alberta right now for the first time since the Alberta advantage was created. They are looking at this province, and they are seeing our companies as some kind of golden prize that they can take from us. Never before have we had a government put that at risk.

This revenue stream, that is the backbone of all of our social programs, depends on and is maintained by industries, by small and large businesses and their desire to build the Alberta economy. Now, business people are attracted to a climate that fosters

entrepreneurship. The Alberta advantage, of all the things that it was, was a climate. It was a regulatory climate, a taxation climate, and an economic climate that fostered entrepreneurship, so people like me, like others in this room that have started businesses looked at the climate and said: this is the place where I can start a business and prosper. Some of us succeed, and some fail, and we keep trying, but up until now Alberta was a place worth risking that investment.

9:30

If this bill passes, we are going down a slippery slope where the investors, small and large, are going to look at this economic climate, this regulatory climate, this taxation climate, and they are going to say: Saskatoon is looking pretty good right now. Now, I don't want to be too disparaging against Saskatoon because I'm an immigrant. I emigrated from Saskatchewan in 1961, so I'm a foreigner but an Albertan today.

Just on that note, my family moved us from Saskatchewan to British Columbia. Then an NDP government got elected in British Columbia. I have a confession to make, Mr. Speaker, before this House. You'll have to forgive me. I did vote NDP that year. Of course, it begs the question: well, how did that work out for you? Two years later I was without a job, could not find a job, and I moved to Alberta. Thank God I stayed, except for a few short years overseas where the taxation rate was – get this – 45 per cent. It was 45 per cent overseas. I came home again only then to – well, we'll see how this goes.

Entrepreneurs brought their ideas to this province historically because of the Alberta advantage. They built their businesses here because of the taxation regime that we had. They kept their businesses here because in return for their capital and their ingenuity Alberta has provided them with a very fair taxation framework, one that was the best in our country, as we all know.

These revenue streams that came into the Alberta government permitted this province to build roads, hospitals, and schools for our children. Our per capita funding of services like health care and education was higher than anywhere else in Canada. Why? Because entrepreneurs had an environment here where they could prosper in their businesses. Revenue, as you have heard probably more than once, is not Alberta's problem, but spending is. Let's not misconstrue the poor fiscal management of the third party in the past decade as a flaw in the Alberta advantage. That wasn't the problem at all.

Now, this advantage permits good public services alongside of low taxes. The members opposite seem to think that as long as you have good public services, you can tax at any old rate you might want to, that people will live here for the public services. This is really a dangerous, slippery slope to be going down. There has to be a full-meal deal to keep businesses in this province. We have to have good public services, which are funded by taxes which are paid by profitable companies, but we need those companies here. We need those businesses here, and they will stay as long as we have a favourable tax regime for them.

The combination that we have had has provided a great life, with rising incomes and reasonable public services. However, this economic policy right here is sending us down the road to finish off what is left of the Alberta advantage, and that is tragic. We're going to push away businesses that contribute to our revenue stream by creating an unfavorable economic climate. Worse yet, we are going to push away highly skilled workers that are instrumental to this province's intellectual capital, individuals who are a critical part of this province's knowledge economy.

Now, Canada offers political stability, natural resources, and a highly skilled labour force. We attract investment into this province specifically by maintaining a comparable tax advantage. As we

have heard, Albertans are wary of the weakened position, competitively, that Bill 2 puts us in compared to our neighbours to the east and to the west. It is this combination of things that I believe worries me most of all. We have a cumulative effect in just the first few days of this Legislature. We have an NDP government that is actually gambling that the cumulative effect of a 20 per cent rise in the corporate tax, a 50 per cent rise in the minimum wage, a 50 per cent rise in the top marginal personal income tax, and a royalty review will somehow magically not bother anybody, that it's not going to affect jobs, that it's not going to affect prosperity.

For goodness' sake, Mr. Speaker, this is a cumulative package that is just hitting our province in a way that our province cannot stand to be hit at this point in time. This is not a risk that we should be taking. Moreover, in my opinion, this is not a risk that that government has a mandate to impose upon Albertans. This is not what they were elected to do.

As we've already heard, there are economists, three of them, that have calculated that we will lose 8,900 jobs for every one-point increase in the business tax rate. In my town of Sylvan Lake we already are seeing the for-sale signs going up all over town. We have a population in Sylvan Lake the average age of which is 35. This particular demographic are the young moms and dads with little children. They are oil field workers. They are young families, and they are being hit hard. We have a number of drilling companies who have land in the industrial park in Sylvan Lake, and those yards are chock full of drilling rigs. There is nothing moving. Those young people are out of work because these companies are holding back. They're holding back, Mr. Speaker, because they are very worried about a government that is taking away the Alberta advantage, and they are not willing to put billions of dollars of their shareholders' money at risk at this time in this province with this government's actions. In my opinion, this is irresponsible governance. This is not what Albertans asked for.

The reason why the third party is no longer in government is because Albertans determined that that was irresponsible governance, and we're not seeing any much better government now. Orange is, you know, the old blue.

Wildrose is concerned for everyday Albertans, responsible government, responsible fiscal policies, creating a climate that fosters entrepreneurship, that keeps businesses here, that provides Albertans with a quality of life that we all enjoy. This is what Wildrose was elected for, this is what we will stand for, and – I know I speak for my colleagues – this is what we will fight for.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
Are there any questions or comments?

Mr. Strankman: Well, yes, Mr. Speaker. If I might, I'd like to ask my hon. colleague from Innisfail-Sylvan Lake why it took him so long to get to Alberta.

An Hon. Member: Is that our fault, too?

An Hon. Member: Absolutely.

The Speaker: Are there any other questions or comments?

The chair recognizes the Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

9:40

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for giving me this opportunity to speak in opposition to Bill 2. You know, I find it really quite interesting that the government of Saskatchewan had a 17 per cent business tax, the highest in the country. They reduced it to 12 per cent, and business picked up. This NDP government is

looking to raise taxes, and expects – what? – business to pick up? I don't know. Now, the NDP government has floated the idea that their business tax be reduced from 12 per cent to 10 per cent in Saskatchewan in order to stimulate more development, more jobs, and higher earning jobs. Consequently, a by-product of that reduction would be more income generated from personal taxes.

In 2001 the PCs under Ralph Klein slashed the income tax from 15.5 per cent to 13.5 per cent and then further reduced it to 10 per cent in 2006. That, I believe, was an Alberta advantage. It seems that the NDP here in Alberta want to destroy that advantage we have, while their comrades in Saskatchewan are waking up to that reality. Business stakeholders have been calling me, e-mailing, phoning me, just telling me, basically, that these new taxes are going to hurt the bottom line.

You know, I find it really ironic that Bill 2 is supposed to be an act to restore fairness to public revenue. It's not really about fairness if jobs are lost, is it? What did the tax increases that B.C. just recently put in do for their economy? Well, private businesses took a dive in the province, dropping 3 per cent since 2012 while the rest of Canada saw an increase of 1.5 per cent. Sources project that without investment B.C. won't grow as much. Its per capita GDP for 2014 is below the national average in contrast to two and a half decades ago.

What we understand of Mintz's study and the two other people that are backing it up is that we really need to focus on what's good for the Alberta economy. Albertans now in high-paying jobs are going to leave this province in search of locations that are more favourable to work and grow a business in.

Here in Alberta we used to attract others looking for the Alberta advantage. Unfortunately, that's not what's happening now. Over and over again I'm hearing from small-business owners that we do not need a minimum-wage hike. They know that this will affect their bottom line. They know that they will have to either increase prices, lay off workers, or ultimately come to the conclusion of shutting their doors altogether. The combination of a minimum-wage hike, new business and personal taxes, and a royalty review – let's not call it a royalty review because I don't believe that's what it is. I believe it's a royalty hike that will stifle the oil sector. It will have a trickle-down effect, and in the end it will affect all businesses to one extent or another.

Sorry, folks, but this government's plan to get more money out of Alberta taxpayers' pockets is not going to do the rest of Alberta any favours, and when you pile on top of one another the wrong-headed economic policies of this government, we're even in more trouble.

For the sake of Albertans I urge you to reconsider tax hikes. Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there any questions or comments?

Hearing none, I would call upon the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Truly these are important and difficult conversations, and somehow I wish we could get outside of the box and find creative and real solutions to them because I struggle with the fact that one policy always seems to injure the other, and there always seems to be a loser. Somehow I think that that doesn't necessarily need to be our reality.

Government clearly does need revenue. How much may be debatable. More importantly, government does need to fulfill its social contract. I think we all do care about those who struggle in our society, those who have less than others. Let me make it clear that from my point of view none of this is about not providing for the needs of people. My concern is that increased tax may, in fact,

even make it impossible to do that. I know that my constituents would struggle deeply with this bill. Raising taxes would go against principles for most of them, and part of that would relate, I guess, to the realities of economic theory, which I plan to move toward here as I speak.

Throughout my life I've both seen and personally had the benefits of lower taxes, as I think we all have. We've all lived in a regime in which there's been prosperity around us. Alberta has boomed because of low taxes. Lower taxes benefit the citizens who live at all levels of taxation, actually. Lower personal taxes encourage entrepreneurial growth, which does provide jobs for all levels of society, and lower business tax rates encourage more businesses to actually start up and stay in Alberta, and then they have the need to hire you, whatever job you might fit into.

I'd like to suggest that it's not just my word. I'd like to also read a little bit more in detail from a recommendation proposed in 2005 by the NDP government of Saskatchewan with regard to business taxes and how they viewed it. I will say that this comes in two stages. They went partway first of all and then more the second time.

Reading from their report.

We recommend that the general Corporation Income Tax . . . rate be reduced from 17 per cent to 12 per cent.

And I would quote three things from them that they said lowering the tax rate would result in. The first is:

A more neutral tax regime, removing an impediment to business expansion and investment caused by the significant difference between the small business tax rate and the general rate.

A second point would be:

A general [corporation income tax] rate that is competitive with western provinces and would significantly reduce the costs associated with capital investment in Saskatchewan.

Their third point:

A higher allocation of corporate profits to Saskatchewan for income tax purposes – an allocation that is more consistent with economic activity, resulting in higher provincial revenues.

Here's my point. Raising taxes does not necessarily equate to raising the needed revenue for government and, conversely, lowering taxes doesn't necessarily go the other way either. Sometimes it's counterintuitive. There is an inverse relationship.

I want to continue to quote from the Saskatchewan report.

When the recommended [corporation income tax] rate reduction is combined with the recommended phase-out of the general [corporation capital tax] rate, a significant reduction would occur in the tax on new investment. The Committee believes that these reforms would increase the economic opportunities in Saskatchewan for its residents – and investment means jobs.

There is an inverse relationship. It's counterintuitive. Just because taxes are raised does not mean that revenue to the government will be raised.

Now here's my favourite part of the Saskatchewan report.

The Committee further recommends that, as fiscal circumstances permit, the general [corporation income tax] rate be reduced to ten per cent – to match the [corporation income tax] rate applied to manufacturing and processing . . . activities.

Let me recap a little bit. The Saskatchewan committee resolved that, first of all, lower tax rates would actually encourage business expansion and investment. That expansion and investment means more tax revenue. If these businesses did not expand, there would be less revenue to generate. The more a business expands, the more jobs it creates. The lower tax rate creates jobs.

9:50

The second thing that they said, as I summarize, is that a more profitable a province is, the more business profits a province earns,

which leads to more revenue. A lower tax rate encourages business creation, which means more taxable revenue, so – get this – lower taxes create more revenue. That's what this Saskatchewan NDP government committee resolved.

Thirdly, they are saying that lower taxes mean less tax on new investment, and new investment, of course, means more economic opportunity, more jobs. There's a pattern emerging here.

I'd like to suggest also a little bit of economic theory. Arthur Laffer is an economist who wrote in the 1979 era, fairly famous for what's called the Laffer curve. In it he equates taxes or the rate of taxation with the resultant rate of revenue that governments can collect. He says that there are two results that can happen. The first one is arithmetic. In the arithmetic case a tax increase in the simple short-term does actually seem to raise taxes a little bit, but then he says that in the long-term the revenue will in fact stagnate and decrease rather than increase.

The second effect that he says you will observe is what he calls the economic effect. The economic effect is actually a long-term result. Lower taxes, whether business or personal, actually increase the overall tax base over time because money in the hands of the people, in the hands of the taxpayers, causes them to spend it. They spend it on businesses, businesses are encouraged to grow and invest. What he says is that pretty soon the increased revenue outruns the lost dollars of the tax cut. The larger the tax base, the larger the revenue.

It's certainly not clear in economic theory today, the more you read, that raising taxes will increase government net revenues. I'd like to use an example, actually, from Canada of that same fact this evening. A study done by the School of Public Policy had this to say.

[Federal] corporate tax rate reductions of more than 30 per cent (since 2000) . . .

Now, that's just a combination of all the different kinds of taxes: excise taxes, income taxes, business taxes.

. . . have, contrary to the critics' cries, failed to make an appreciable dent in tax revenues thanks to [other sources of revenue growth].

The comparison is obvious, but I want to point it out just to make it clear that not only do lower tax rates at a provincial level create more revenue, but lower tax rates on the federal level created more revenue. That's because, as I've said, businesses, whether large, small, or medium, look for a country and a province where they can make the most profit.

We are in a competitive environment. Businesses will pick up and move to another province. I am almost embarrassed to have to admit that my oldest son is one of those. For generations we have cried in Canada about the brain drain to the U.S. My oldest son is an academic. He has a PhD from Stanford University, and he says: dad, I'd love to come home and work in Canada, but the tax rate here in the U.S. is so much better; I'm going to stay down here. The reality is that the brain drain of Canada into the U.S. in part is a function of taxation. By providing a lower business tax rate, we can attract more business to come to Alberta, which means more general revenues for the province, more jobs. I realize there are ways that we do need to care for the people who are struggling and don't have their income, but I don't think that killing business or creating impediments to business by creating environments that cause people to actually lose their jobs is going to do that.

You know what? I think I've made my point. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll leave it at that.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there any questions or comments?

The chair would recognize the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think many members in this House may agree that timing is everything, and certainly our caucus has felt the pain of ignoring that particular instance. But timing is everything in Bill 2, and I think that we need to look at the unintended consequences that seem to not be being adhered to here.

In the last week or so I've talked to three different individuals in the oil and gas sector, one a mid-sized oil and gas company. Their comment was: this government is killing our industry. The second instance from a local gas producing company that had two opportunities for investment of approximately \$400 million, one in Alberta and one in California: they've chosen the one in California. A third company, a large foreign-owned company with \$200 million to \$300 million in investment capital looking to invest in their sector: they've chosen to invest in Saskatchewan, B.C., and the United States. Mr. Speaker, these are undermining the Alberta advantage, and Bill 2 is going to further undermine that.

I tend to try and look at things in a fairly simplistic way. It helps me to form my thoughts around it. I look at the Alberta advantage, that many of us have grown to know and love over the years, as a combination of three things, some of which have been challenged recently. Certainly, one of those is robust job creation. We can cross that off the list with the policies of this government. Relatively low taxes is number two. We can cross that off the list with this bill. Number three, which has been challenged more recently over the last decade or so, is relatively attractive housing affordability.

As I've mentioned, with my background in the housing industry I've seen this seriously undermined in this province over the last 10 years. It used to be that if you moved – you could move here from almost anywhere in the country. If you came from Toronto or Vancouver, it was like winning a lottery in terms of the ability to purchase an affordable house. I used to say that we acted more like a large Saskatoon than a small Toronto or Vancouver. That has been undermined more recently by new urban land supply ideologues who are intent on further undermining housing affordability. I further am concerned that this government may also pander to that ideology.

It seems to me that this government in their policies is undermining number one and number two very seriously, and they may actually have the unintended consequence of achieving number three. Mr. Speaker, the decimation of our economy may result in a further bloodbath in the residential housing sector in undermining the real estate market. These unintended consequences of killing the Alberta advantage through the decimation of the robust job creation that we've become used to, the in-migration that results from that, the relatively low taxes that we've enjoyed as a hallmark of the Alberta advantage: I'm concerned that the unintended consequences that we will see from these policies are now the hallmark of this government, which appears to be intent on unintended consequences.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, any questions or comments?

The chair recognizes the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are at this time discussing the merits or lack thereof of Bill 2. We talked yesterday about Bill 201 regarding savings. There seemed to be unanimous support for savings, just a difference of opinion on when and under what conditions. There was also agreement on the benefit of compounding interest when saving money. This idea of compounding was not lost on myself and others. The problem is that we are seeing the government creating a compounding detriment to the economy of our great province.

Presently our economy is slowing. The largest part of our economy is taking a hit with low oil prices. Jobs are being lost, businesses are suffering, and families are suffering, too. The world price of oil is not under the control of the Alberta government, but the price we get for our oil is influenced by our access to markets and our access to multiple markets.

10:00

I know the current government may not buy into this idea, but competition for a product you sell allows for a stronger return. I think Albertans deserve a higher return for their resource. While this government feels that increasing royalties is the way to go, we believe Albertans could benefit from higher world prices. This could increase interest in business investing in Alberta rather than relying on a detrimental royalty scheme that has failed before.

The royalty review creates instability. Businesses in our energy industry have no idea when or how much royalty changes will affect them. That creates instability. It wasn't that long ago that we saw the effects of the previous government's royalty review. In the end, it cost Albertans. This government talks about stability but only when it suits them for political rhetoric. We need true and honest economic stability.

This government has brought forward a minibudget. It's maxi in dollar amounts and mini in details. They have used the PC's election-killing budget and added more ambiguous spending. They then tell us that Albertans support this. Huh? I don't get it, and I don't think Albertans get it either.

That brings us to where we are now. Our current government is considering pushing through measures to bring in higher taxes on Alberta families and businesses. So let's get this straight. We have a slumping economy. We have a royalty review creating instability. We have a minibudget with little information. We have rough estimates in that budget in the hundreds of millions. We have no idea of projected revenue. We have no idea of deficit numbers. We have lots of uncertainties except higher taxes.

Let's be clear. Albertans did not give the government a blank cheque. The NDP feels that Alberta residents and businesses need to experience a raise in taxes. Am I alone in thinking that something is wrong here? Is there anyone else that is concerned about this situation? I think Albertans are concerned. I think they're very concerned. As much as the ideology that drives this government makes them feel warm and fuzzy, it makes Albertans queasy and uncomfortable.

Now, it's a given that this government wants to raise taxes on Alberta families and businesses. It doesn't matter that they don't know how much these taxes will bring in in revenue. Their own platform promised that the business tax would bring in \$800 million. Now they say that it's only \$300 million. Who is going to make up for that extra \$500 million shortfall?

They talk about the \$5 billion deficit. How will they balance it? How? How much more in taxes will you have to raise? You can't tax your way to prosperity, but they're going to give it a try. This government has no idea how much they need. They don't even know where it's going to be spent. But they just can't wait to raise those taxes, with no care for the consequences. For example, a tax hike of 20 per cent on business doesn't just affect business; it gets passed on in higher prices and lower wages.

The government has stated over and over that they are new and need to get up to speed on topics. They want consultation. They want fulsome discussion. If I had a dollar for every time they used those key words, we wouldn't have a deficit. But when it comes right down to it, they're no different than the previous government. They just forge blindly ahead with their own ideological agenda.

This bill needs to be sent to committee to make sure that we get it right the first time. Competitive tax rates attract investment. Investment creates jobs. Believe it or not, jobs create tax revenue. This government wants to kill the goose that lays the golden eggs. That will only increase poverty.

Alberta used to be the leader in fiscal responsibility. We bragged about the Alberta advantage. Over the past eight years or so we have become the laughingstock of Canada and probably the world. All the revenue we take in, record revenues year after year, and massive deficit after massive deficit: the Alberta advantage is now a dimming memory of better times. Alberta already runs the most expensive government in all of Canada. Alberta already collects the most income and business taxes per capita in Canada. Let's work on the foundation here. We need government to be more efficient, not default to ill-conceived tax hikes.

There are solutions to our troubles. The government just needs to be willing to look beyond tax and tax again. It cannot be overstated enough. We don't have a revenue problem in Alberta; we have a spending problem. With a government that is a hundred per cent about new spending and zero per cent about reducing waste, it looks like it will be a long four years for those of us who care about balanced budgets.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there any questions or comments?

I would recognize the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for giving me this opportunity to rise and give my thoughts on this bill. The government across has put forward a bill that will affect every Albertan who makes more than \$125,000 a year. They want to get rid of the flat tax by adding tax brackets from 12 to 15 per cent on income over \$125,000. They are telling us that due to Alberta having a massive revenue problem, we need to increase taxes for 7 per cent of the population and more than that if you live in a resource town with high costs of living like Bonnyville and Cold Lake. Why are they not willing to focus on the real problem? That problem is spending.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to give you an approximate number of how many Albertans, that 7 per cent, will be affected. As of October 2014 our population was 4.146 million people. Seven per cent of 4.146 million is about 290,000 people, 290,000 Albertans whose taxes will be affected. One of the things that I love about Alberta is that people don't look at your name, they don't look at your family, they don't look at your colour, they don't look at your sex, they don't look at your gender, they don't look at your sexual orientation, and they don't look at your religion. They ask if you have a good idea, if you will work, and if you're a good neighbour. Hiking taxes and creating divisions within Alberta go directly against our spirit.

We hear a lot about how hard it is to keep enough doctors in this province, especially in our rural communities. I wonder how hiking taxes by 50 per cent on most of our doctors will help them. These are key people that everyone in society deals with on a day-to-day basis and who we seek out for important services, key Albertans that we respect and depend on who are also in that 7 per cent. If they don't see Alberta as attractive, they won't stay. I have seen many doctors in Alberta work long, hard hours on services that you and I benefit from and sacrifice time from their families, friends, and interests to help their patients.

Most of the professionals in this tax bracket have invested a great deal in their education. We don't want to create a tax system that drives these talented people out of our province. What I can eventually see happening here is that they may be attracted to other job markets that will offer them the advantage and remuneration

they deserve. We need to do more than just attract them. We need to give them reasons to stay in Alberta. What attracted these professionals and businesspeople here before was the Alberta advantage. That's what was going to keep them here. That's what's going to keep them in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, the government across is now going to implement a tax increase to businesses, from 10 per cent to 12 per cent, which is in reality a whopping 20 per cent increase to what businesses are handing over to the government. They are raising taxes on 7 per cent of Alberta's population, their personal taxes, to a resounding 50 per cent on the highest marginal tax bracket. They are raising our minimum wage by 50 per cent.

Now, of course, the Wildrose caucus and I are of the opinion that no taxes should be increased, and the government should instead work to be more frivolous . . .

10:10

An Hon. Member: Less frivolous.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you.

. . . less frivolous and less wasteful. [interjections] They are listening. Yeah. However, even the PCs' budget earlier this spring, which I obviously didn't agree with, was a better budget than this one that is being presented. The government across is now going to inflict upon us a massive impact all at once. At least the PC budget was going to be in phases and not unleashed for our economy to bear the brunt at a time when people are losing their jobs and being cautious with their spending.

These are radical reforms to our economy, and the government should take some time to ensure that they are not bringing down a calamity in this time of slowdown. If we don't keep the Alberta advantage here, we're going to see key Albertans moving to other jurisdictions, key people who sustain our health care system, who sustain our business sector and many other services that we receive on a daily basis. We are going to see a lot of people bearing a burden they should never have had to bear, especially in a province like Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there any questions or comments?

The chair recognizes the Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise and would like to speak against Bill 2. My notes say: Bill 2, the Alberta disadvantage. I don't know where that came from.

It has long been a source of pride amongst Albertans, Mr. Speaker, that the phrase "the Alberta advantage" was synonymous with growth, prosperity, and economic potential. People from all over Canada and, indeed, the world flocked to Alberta in hopes of realizing this advantage. They found jobs in not only the oil fields but restaurants, hotels, and the retail sector, anything associated with our growth. If you were willing to work hard, the possibilities seemed endless. We were the envy of Canada. The Alberta advantage was partly economic, part swagger. Sadly, that swagger has disappeared, and due to poor governmental policies of the past and economically shaky ones of the present we are at a disadvantage.

Mr. Speaker, one of the main advantages of the government in the neighbouring province of Saskatchewan when it was governed by the NDP was the export of its citizens. They came to Alberta. They were the pride of Alberta, and they are still the pride of Alberta's workforce to this day.

We were the benchmark for austerity in Canada. But, sadly, we have dropped to the bottom of the pack, now spending \$8 billion more than our neighbours in B.C. That was generated in the Klein

years, Mr. Speaker. The government got lax, they got complacent, and they spent without thought. We had that prosperity so that when Alberta collected the most business taxes per capita across Canada, it wasn't harmful to the economy because it reflected more investment and productivity in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business had an interesting comment. They said that small business is big business.

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 3 Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2015 (No. 2)

The Speaker: Members of the Legislature, I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, but in accordance with Standing Order 64(5) the chair is required to put the question to the House on the appropriation bill on the Order Paper for third reading.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:15 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, S.	Goehring	Payne
Babcock	Gray	Piquette
Bilous	Hinkley	Renaud
Carlier	Jabbour	Rosendahl
Carson	Kleinsteuber	Sabir
Ceci	Littlewood	Schmidt
Connolly	Loyola	Schreiner
Coolahan	Luff	Shepherd
Cortes-Vargas	Malkinson	Sigurdson
Dach	Mason	Sucha
Dang	McCuaig-Boyd	Swann
Drever	McKitrick	Sweet
Eggen	McLean	Turner
Feehan	Miller	Westhead
Fitzpatrick	Miranda	Woollard
Ganley	Nielsen	

Against the motion:

Aheer	Godfried	Pitt
Anderson, W.	Hanson	Schneider
Bhullar	Hunter	Smith
Cooper	Jean	Starke
Cyr	Loewen	Strankman
Drysdale	MacIntyre	Taylor
Ellis	Nixon	van Dijken
Fildebrandt	Orr	Yao
Fraser		

Totals: For – 47 Against – 25

[Motion carried; Bill 3 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 2 An Act to Restore Fairness to Public Revenue (continued)

[Debate adjourned June 23: Mr. Strankman speaking]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, again, Mr. Speaker. I'll take up where I left off if it's less painful for you.

The government got lax, they got complacent, and they spent without thought. We had that prosperity so that when Alberta collected the most business taxes per capita across Canada, it wasn't harmful to the economy because it reflected more investment and productivity in Alberta.

10:30

Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business stated that small business is big business. Unfortunately, the success of dubious policies by our previous government combined with the change from the socialist government in Saskatchewan to the current one under Premier Wall has stolen some of our thunder, so much so that Premier Wall now jokes about the Saskatchewan advantage. He was using that phrase even before the NDP government here took over and brought us back to the middle of the pack or worse in so many ways.

I am nervous that he could be onto something, Mr. Speaker. In a recent editorial in the *Calgary Herald* it was quoted by Mark Milke:

Over time, to recap: The new NDP government will raise business income tax by 20 per cent (to 12 per cent from 10 per cent), hike the minimum wage by almost 50 per cent [from \$10 to \$15], add multiple new provincial personal income tax brackets while increasing the top bracket by 50 per cent, and may hike resource royalties after its promised review.

All that means is that there is a great opportunity to create jobs and prosperity in Saskatchewan. I also lived within six miles of the fourth meridian, sometimes known as the Alberta-Saskatchewan border, and growing up I specifically saw and recognized the disparity in visiting with my cousins from Saskatoon and various areas.

For those who would think economic success and employment are accidental and inevitable creations, the mere result of natural resources in or above ground, the next several years in Alberta will be a useful case study. Maybe change is good – and I adopt change, Mr. Speaker – but given the direction Alberta's new government has chosen to take, it's dubious at best. Facing low world oil prices, this government is doubling down on bad news in Alberta.

Raising business taxes: a hike of 20 per cent for businesses will not just affect them, it will mean higher prices and therefore lower wages. This business tax increase will now make Alberta a less attractive place to invest than Quebec, Ontario, British Columbia, and only tied with other provinces.

Raising personal income tax: a 50 per cent hike in income tax for higher earners. The top 10 per cent of earners in Alberta already pay 50 per cent of the taxes. Alberta already collected the most business taxes per capita across Canada because it invited more investment and productivity in Alberta.

Minimum wage increase: a 50 per cent hike in the minimum wage with no facts to back up this radical election promise despite assurances that there is study after study that it will somehow create jobs. It's a mystery to me, Mr. Speaker.

Royalty increases: recall the disastrous effect this had when combined with the 2009 downturn.

In my younger years I had a chance, with my farming career and my licence as an aviation pilot, to travel many times into Calgary in the heyday of Calgary prior to the invocation of the national energy review. It was very difficult, if not impossible, to obtain clearance on the control tower frequency in Calgary with the activity that was going on with the aircraft at that time. Mr. Speaker, after the national energy policy was invoked, there was absolutely

no problem. When you switched to tower frequency, it was dead air. There was no problem getting on the frequency.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta already collects the most business taxes per capita across Canada, even with the lowest rate, because it invited more investment and productivity in Alberta. This isn't about the big faceless corporations that the left loves to portray as a bad guy. It's about all kinds of everyday businesses. The Alberta advantage applies to everyone. It applies even to the agriculture sector, upon which Alberta was primarily founded and which helps diversify the economy. It certainly applies to those in construction and the trades, people who chose to build a better Alberta for all Albertans, which is why this government set upon taking more from those that work hard to build a better life for themselves. Where is the Alberta advantage in that policy? Why would a government decide to single out people who happen to be, through their own volition, more successful than others?

When the government takes more money from the pockets of Albertans, that doesn't mean that they are redistributing the pie. It probably means that they are shrinking it. I profoundly believe that wealth is not limited. Wealth is a creation around the world. The northern and southern hemispheres, that I have travelled into, have experience with different government models, and therefore the missteps that these governments have endorsed generally relate to their global success or not success, positive or negative. The MLAs across the aisle need to realize they are in the business of government, not the business of Robin Hood.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I yield.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Fildebrandt: What's the time remaining, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: You've got five minutes.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Excuse me. I want to make sure that you're rising on a question or an observation for this speaker?

Mr. Fildebrandt: A question for the Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank my friend for his comments. As my neighbour to the north, our ridings have a lot in common. Around my constituency there are hundreds of flags of Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, and Saskatchewan, economic refugees from other parts of this country, people who have come here for opportunity. People did not leave the beautiful shores of Newfoundland or Nova Scotia to come here for the weather, as I've said. They've come here for opportunity. People have come over the border from Saskatchewan not for similar scenery but have come here for reasons of economics.

Lloydminster stands, I believe, as a moderated example of the great economic experiments of the 20th century. We could take the exact same peoples, the exact same languages, same cultures, people who eat the same food, but put them in two systems of government, two systems of economics. Now, it is a much more moderate example than East and West Berlin or North and South Korea – they're not anywhere on par – but it is an example of people who are the same, families living on different sides of the border, so we can see the way they react to different economic incentives.

Would the Member for Drumheller-Stettler care to talk about his experience with people from Saskatchewan, Nova Scotia, and

Newfoundland in his constituency and the likelihood of them staying in the event of us following the policies of those provinces?

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, I would. It's a great honour to do that. Through the election cycle I had a chance to meet a young couple who, through negotiation with one of my constituency workers, happened to put an election sign on their property. I went in to thank them for that support. They didn't know who I was, but this young couple with two kids, two and four, were from the greater Toronto area, the Golden Triangle, I understand it's called. They were pleased and proud to be in Alberta. The reason for that? They came here for a job. They came here for jobs, and they are happy to raise a family in a lower taxed environment.

To the differential of the environments created, I'd like to relate to some articles by an organization called the prairie centre wherein they talked about the formation of two provinces in 1905, I believe was the timing of it. One was called Saskatchewan, and one was called Alberta. Both formed at the same time. In the 1930s, '35, I understand that there were some 943,000 people in Saskatchewan. In Regina there was a General Motors truck plant, there were the headquarters of Esso Petroleum. In fact, my wife's uncle worked for Esso Petroleum, and they were exploring a lot of oil, Mr. Speaker, out in around, I believe, your home area of Weyburn and Estevan, now known, ladies and gentlemen, as the Bakken reservoir.

10:40

This Bakken reservoir was difficult to relate to with the technology that they had at that time because, from what I understand it to be, it was what they called a tight formation, barely accessible by vertical drilling. But in a whole other era, Mr. Speaker, on that subject, horizontal drilling and the production thereof caused great wealth creation in what's now known as the Bakken reservoir, both in southeastern Saskatchewan, your home area, and also in Minot, North Dakota.

Mr. Speaker, in the 1940s, though, there was an illustrious gentleman that came to power in Saskatchewan, and his name happened to be Tommy Douglas. If anybody happened to see the movie from the National Film Board – it's called keeper of the flame – it shows wagon cavalcades leaving the province of Saskatchewan, sometimes in the dead of night, because they believed that the nationalization of the industry in Saskatchewan was going to take away their royalties. Now, that didn't happen specifically, but at that time . . .

The Speaker: The chair recognizes the hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request unanimous consent of the House to shorten the bells to one minute, please.

[Unanimous consent denied]

The Speaker: The next speaker is the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to rise to speak to Bill 2, An Act to Restore Fairness to Public Revenue, in second reading. This is the title of this piece of legislation, but I have to be honest. Fairness to public revenue is not how I'd describe what this government is doing today. With this legislation the government is moving quickly to raise taxes on Alberta businesses from 10 to 12

per cent, a 20 per cent increase. Alberta will no longer be able to claim that we are the lowest taxed province in this country.

This low-tax business climate has attracted businesses. Families have moved to our beautiful Alberta to raise a family, take a risk and build a business. The sort of people this reckless tax rate targets are the people that built this province. The local dry cleaner that employs your kids during the summer, the local diner where you go for lunch on Sundays, the gas station where you worked to pay your way through school: these are the people that you are targeting. There is nothing fair about that.

The Premier and members of the NDP caucus have been fond of claiming that an increase to the taxes that businesses pay is fair, that it is just. Their argument depends on a skewed image of the ultra-rich corporations abusing the hard-working residents of Alberta and profiting dishonestly from their labour. We cannot pretend that there is no relationship between the health of Alberta's businesses and the health of Alberta's residents. Alberta has a proud history as a leader in attracting business investment. Between 2004 and 2013 \$1.6 trillion was invested in Canada.

Mrs. Pitt: How much?

Mr. Yao: One point six trillion dollars.

My goodness. You know what Alberta's share of that was? It was 33 per cent. We can do math. During the same period Alberta led the country in job creation, adding over 400,000 jobs. These are incredible figures. A population with roughly 10 per cent of Canada's population attracted over 30 per cent of its investment. This has not been accidental good fortune. The Alberta advantage is something that the people of Alberta have demanded and fought to maintain.

We didn't want a PST. We did want a flat-tax system. We wanted the lowest business tax rate in the country. Because we had these things, we also had the highest level of investment in our province. We had the lowest unemployment rates. But it doesn't look like the Alberta advantage is going to be sticking around.

The other thing that this bill proposes is raising the income tax on higher income earners. [interjections] You like that. I do not. I do not support increasing taxes for either individuals or businesses. I just can't support this. We've been talking for years about the gross misuse of tax dollars. Why is this government not looking at savings before you raise taxes? Are you expecting wild cost overruns long before taxes are raised? It would seem prudent to foresee where money can be saved. This isn't good fiscal management, Mr. Speaker.

According to Stats Canada Fort McMurray has 40 per cent of income earners over \$100,000 versus 10 per cent across Alberta. With four times as many higher income earners this will affect four times as many people in my community. So when the Premier talks about this affecting 7 per cent, it's closer to 30 per cent in my community. And that's not even the whole story because the cost of living really is that much higher in Fort McMurray.

A hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars: that's a lot of money. What are new MLAs doing with that kind of money? Buying a new car? A down payment on a nice pad on 17th Street or Jasper? Because of this bill the people of Fort McMurray will be hit harder than everyone else. Fort McMurray is the land of opportunity, the land of milk and honey, yet in Fort McMurray people can barely make ends meet with that kind of money. If we were to do a show based on the lifestyles of the MLAs of Alberta, the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo would show off his manufactured home, a home that's worth \$500,000. In layman's terms that's a trailer. I live in a trailer park, and that trailer is worth half a million dollars. What can half a million get you in Edmonton?

What can that get you in Calgary? I'll bet all of the city mice in the House that I can afford two trailers with that in your cities or one ridiculously nice house.

The people of Fort McMurray work very hard. We work long hours. We do tough work in a harsh climate. These people are your pioneers. They are very similar to all of your ancestors – your parents, your grandparents, and your great-grandparents – the ones who came over to Canada, who were willing to leave their homes, the comfort of their homes, of their communities to make a better life. They were willing to go up to the Great White North to get ahead. And these aren't just oil sands workers. These are people who work in the service and support industries, people who come from across Canada hoping to get ahead. They hope that if they can get up to Fort McMurray and if they work two, three jobs, they will get ahead. These are people in the service industry: your waiters, your dishwashers, your cooks. You'll hurt everyone with this taxation plan.

Under the PC plan everyone in Alberta would've been paying 2,500 bucks more. Everyone in Fort McMurray would have been paying \$2,000 on top of that. You've ensured that McMurrayites are still going to pay thousands more. You'll hurt everyone with this taxation plan. If the NDP plan is to simply decimate this beautiful city of Fort McMurray just because of those cursed oil sands, you're on track.

Albertans are hard-working. They take risks, protect their families, and lend a hand whenever possible. This bill undermines the Alberta spirit. This bill says: go elsewhere to start a business; it's not worth it to take the risk. Now the answer to every question is bigger government.

The Wildrose will bring back the Alberta advantage. We're here to stand up for our families, for the people that employ us, for the people that have an idea and take a risk. We want that place to be Alberta.

The Speaker: Are there any questions or comments, hon. members? I recognize the Official Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise this evening and address Bill 2. We've heard for weeks that the new government is not yet ready to release their budget. They're not ready to tell Albertans how they're going to spend the billions of dollars that are now in their control. They've released no details about how they're going to save money, but here we are today. They're ready to ask Albertans for more money.

10:50

There are no reasons that the NDP have given for why exactly they need all these additional resources. In reality, it would appear that they're just playing politics. They don't even know exactly how much money this is going to bring in, or if they do, they're certainly not saying. They certainly don't know how many jobs are going to be lost because of these tax hikes, but here we are, charging ahead anyway. They don't even know what the long-term impacts of this tax hike will be, but it's full steam ahead. Let's pray that we're not headed over a cliff.

Now, we should be spending this summer meeting with our constituents and having conversations with them about the future of Alberta, but wouldn't it be great – wouldn't it be great – if we could be spending this summer not just chatting about the future of Alberta but consulting about these tax hikes?

That's why it's my pleasure to propose an amendment this evening.

The Speaker: I'd ask that the hon. member pause for a moment while the pages distribute the proposed amendment. While the

amendment is being distributed, the chair would like to alert members to the procedures governing amendments. Is this the appropriate time for me to read the amendment?

The proposed amendment by Mr. Cooper to move that Bill 2, An Act to Restore Fairness to Public Revenue be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

The amendment is subject to debate. Once all members who wish to speak to the amendment have spoken, the chair will call the question on the amendment. If the vote is carried, the bill stands referred to the committee. If the vote is defeated, the Assembly returns to the debate at second reading. Is the bill distributed?

I will now recognize the member to move the amendment.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As mentioned, the amendment for Bill 2 would read:

An Act to Restore Fairness to Public Revenue be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

I think we have a great opportunity to send this bill to committee. It's exactly why I've proposed the amendment today. I hope it's something that all sides of the House can agree on. We should consult with Albertans. We should get the facts straight. We should meet with stakeholders. And when that's done, and only when that's done, then we should proceed. When Albertans elected a new government, they expressed a desire for change, not just a change in the colour of the government website from blue to orange, but substantial change.

Now, there's an inspiring politician that I know many Albertans have hope for. In fact, I have hope for them as well. I'd just like to quote them at some length, but just for a little while.

I know that a select group there in cabinet have convinced themselves that this is all okely-dokely, but I would suspect that a vast number of the Conservative caucus itself are not fully briefed on what this means. Either way, the fact of the matter is that most of the people who are impacted by this piece of legislation have not had an opportunity to really fully consider the implications of these changes, nor have they been given the opportunity to really fully communicate to this government, which is accountable to them by way of that trite, old, little institution we call democracy, to listen to what they have to say about this.

The Speaker: Hon. member, we have a point of order that was called.

Mrs. Pitt: The hon. Finance minister is not in the right chair.

The Speaker: I'm glad you pointed that out because I noticed that on this side of the House there were a couple of people that moved before as well. Thank you for pointing that out.

Mrs. Pitt: You're very welcome.

The Speaker: Please proceed.

Mr. Cooper:

Because this has such an incredibly far-reaching set of consequences to the lives of so many Albertans, I would suggest that this not be a bill that we ram through at, you know, 4 o'clock in the morning as this government is scrambling to get out of the Legislature so they can run off and slap a whole bunch of ineffective bandages over this broken political vehicle.

The fact of the matter is that what we should be doing is actually putting on our good-governance hat and putting out a

very clear, open, transparent process for everyone to participate in discussing what the consequences of this bill are, what the objectives of this bill are, the competing expert assumptions, the competing characterizations of what different components of this bill mean.

I continue, Mr. Speaker.

All that information should be fully canvassed and fully discussed by having this matter referred to the standing committee. Then, hopefully, that committee would move to have public hearings on it and secure independent expert [advice]. By doing that, we could ensure that we actually acted in the interest of those people who voted for us and got the best deal for those people, all people, not just those people but also the taxpayers that the Finance minister claims to be standing up for – frankly, I think that's a bit disingenuous – and let everybody in on the conversation. That is what we could do by accepting this amendment.

Of course, the reason for it is because there are just so many things that are wrong with this bill, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, thank you for your indulgence. By the way, those wise, astute, forward-looking, consultative words were the words of our current Premier. Yep, this Premier. The Premier, the one leading the new government, believes in consultation. She also believes in getting the facts lined up before proceeding. That's exactly why this bill should be referred to committee. It's what the Premier would want, I'm sure. Surely, her caucus would agree.

The question is: don't you want to talk to your constituents? Don't you want to make sure that we're making the right decision, not just based on a campaign promise but what's actually the best for Alberta moving forward? Surely you don't want to play politics with the jobs of hard-working Albertans. Surely you're not just raising taxes without getting all of the facts lined up. That would never happen. Under a new government with a new way of doing things, we wouldn't be rushing such critical legislation that is important to Alberta's future. That's why the committee should spend the summer holding hearings and conducting consultations with the public.

11:00

We have heard this government speak at length about the importance of getting the budget right. In fact, they're going to delay the budget from May to June to July to August to September to October, six months, to get it right. Here today we see the government giving businesses and Albertan families six days to get it right. Surely, we could spend a brief summer consulting with Albertans. The committee should spend the summer holding hearings before going ahead. That's exactly how this decision should be made. We should be, you should be one hundred per cent certain that we're doing the right thing, and Albertans should have the ability to provide feedback that that is, in fact, the path forward. We should have the facts to back it up. We shouldn't be conducting economic experiments that threaten the jobs of hard-working Albertan families. That's the old way of doing things.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin my closing remarks by quoting another esteemed colleague in this House of mine. I might even say a friend of mine. Well, he was until just moments ago. We agree on a few things every now and again. He recently said:

Once again we're in a position where – should this bill get referred to committee in Committee of the Whole, I do see that as a positive step. But I do need to voice my frustration with the fact that once again it's another example of the government putting forward poor legislation then being stopped in its tracks by the public, by opposition parties and forced to go back to the table. If it was done with adequate consultation in the first place, then we wouldn't have to be here and constantly going in circles.

Very smart. The new Minister of Municipal Affairs: he understood, when he was fulfilling the important role of opposition, the critical step of consultation with Albertans, and somehow, since the 5th of May, it seems that he has forgotten all about that critical step of consulting with Albertans. Now, he's a good guy, and I like him. Like I said, we agree on things from time to time, and I hope that this can be one of those times.

We need to have public consultation. We need to get the facts straight. It's not that hard. We can do it. In fact, very rarely has this place taken into full consideration an amendment like this to refer to committee. We have the opportunity to do things differently in the 29th Legislature. We have the opportunity to have Albertans actively engaged in the process of providing input into legislation.

As you know, the Wildrose is here to help. Here's an opportunity where we can be better together. We have proposed a number of recommendations that would make this Assembly work better. One of them is using standing committees for exactly what they were designed to do, and that is reviewing important pieces of legislation that affect Alberta's future. That's exactly why this bill should go to committee for public consultation so that we can get it right.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to just briefly speak to the referral motion that's been moved by my esteemed colleague, the House leader of the Wildrose, not that I would want to generate any discord over there by talking about your potential ambitions, hon. member. He's made a very persuasive case. I listened with interest to the words of my Premier, whom he quoted at length about the importance of consultation. I have to say that I'm persuaded that consultation is, in fact, important in something like this.

I will point out, however, that we have just been through one of the most extensive, far-reaching consultation processes on just this point that is possible within the realm of politics in our province. That was the late election that we just had. In this election the question of taxes was a major issue.

Each of the three main parties took quite different positions. It began with a Progressive Conservative Party, then the government, that brought forward a budget which included tax increases for, essentially, middle-class people, and this was the so-called tax to pay for the health care levy, which was something that they put forward as their view. The Wildrose, on the other hand, put forward the position that there should be no tax increases whatsoever and – more power to them, Mr. Speaker – that the very large deficit that was projected by the government should be eliminated and all of this should be made up by reductions in spending by the government on a massive scale. That was the position that the Wildrose Party took in the election, and they campaigned vigorously on it. They talked to hundreds of thousands of Albertans about their position. We talked about the importance of making everyone pay their fair share.

We talked about a small corporate income tax. We were very clear in our platform about what it was that we were going to do. We also talked about eliminating the flat tax and reintroducing, like every other province in Canada, a progressive income tax. The results were very clear, Mr. Speaker, in terms of that consultation. That was a far more extensive consultation than any committee could possibly do operating over the summer.

The results are clear. The Wildrose Party received 360,511 votes, or 24.2 per cent of the vote. The Progressive Conservative Party received a rather larger popular vote of 413,610, which gave them 27.8 per cent of the vote. The NDP received 604,518 votes, or 40.6 per cent of the vote. So with respect to the hon. member's motion I

would suggest that the consultation has just occurred. It was far more extensive than any committee of this Legislature, and it does not need to be repeated in order for us to know the will of the public on this matter. As I've said, the question of taxes was one of the fundamental issues . . . [interjection] I think the hon. member opposite, Mr. Speaker, needs to control her temper because she is interfering with my right to speak in this House.

Mr. Speaker, the consultation has happened. The results are in. This motion is unnecessary, and I would urge all hon. members to vote against it. Thank you.

11:10

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

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the greatest of respect to my esteemed colleague across the way, whom I enjoyed listening to for the last three years, when he sat over in this quadrant of the House – I continue to enjoy him now. Nonetheless, despite the fact that our positions are reversed, I still totally disagree with him.

Mr. Speaker, I said this earlier when I spoke to Bill 2. I think that it would be a grievous error on the part of any member of this Legislature but certainly on the part of members of the government to make the analysis, based on the election result, that you have carte blanche to do whatever you like. I'm actually, quite frankly, a little bit surprised that an astute political observer, a veteran of the political wars such as the hon. Government House Leader would leap to the conclusion that he has made.

In point of fact, the consultation that has just occurred, the general election, occurred on a wide variety of subjects. To suggest that there was an endorsement of the taxation policies of the NDP, to go ahead with what they proposed as part of a very large platform – and it was only one part of that – that that somehow now gives them the authority to go ahead, I think, is certainly stretching matters. I'm, quite frankly, surprised that he would make that conclusion, because, certainly, when the hon. member was sitting over in this quadrant he regularly called for additional consultation and he regularly called for the referral of motions to committee.

I've said before that sometimes things can change, and I will tell you that my perspective has changed a little bit as well. I will speak from the point of view of someone who has been involved in a sitting government for somewhat longer than my hon. friend across the way, and whether he chooses to accept this or not, I'm going to offer a little bit of advice. Rushing through legislation is a mistake, and we can trot out a few examples of some mistakes that our government made rushing through legislation. Quite frankly, we had suggestions from this side of the House, some from your party, some from the party next to me, and that is that motions and/or certain bills should be referred to committee and use of the committee structure is a good idea in certain instances. This is one of those instances.

At this point I'm going to more address the members of the government caucus who are private members, who are not members of Executive Council, because they will vote in lockstep, and that is just part of being in Executive Council. But for those of you who are not in Executive Council, this is something you can vote freely on, and you should think about your vote because, indeed, you can make a statement that legislation should not be rushed through without due process and due consideration. This is an opportunity to take that due consideration. The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler will recall that, in fact, a certain member of the government last time voted with the opposition on one of these types of motions because he felt that this was a good idea.

So I'd encourage members of the government caucus to have the courage and have the foresight to listen to your conscience on this

issue. If you're not comfortable with this decision, if you're not comfortable that the consultation that the hon. Government House Leader describes has indeed been fully the consultation that gives you the right to go ahead with these measures, I would encourage you to refer this matter to a committee for further study. This is a prudent measure because the measures that you're considering under Bill 2, the tax increases that you're considering, are significant and they will have consequences. My other colleagues have pointed that out very eloquently. The Member for Calgary-Greenway, the Member for Calgary-South East, the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek have all cautioned this Assembly against taking this move this quickly.

I think that the committee structure is one that can and should be used in this instance, and it's why the committees are there. I would encourage all members of the Legislature to give this very careful consideration, and I would certainly encourage all members to support this motion for referral.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Please proceed, Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A lot of members have said and quoted from members past some pretty wise advice. I know that the Government House Leader has served this institution, served Alberta for a very long time in a very lonesome quadrant of the House, and he is justly rewarded for sticking to his guns and being where he is today. He lost many elections, however, before he won, yet none of those elections . . .

Mr. Mason: That's not true.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Well, not lost. He went through many elections and was elected to this House as a representative for his constituency without his party winning first, second, third place, and at no time – he was elected as an MLA to represent his constituency despite the vast majority of the province not voting for his party. His party overall lost election after election after election, yet at no time did he ever state that the government had carte blanche to do anything it wanted. At no time did he ever state that Albertans did not need to be consulted on individual pieces of legislation.

The government has a broad mandate to implement its platform, and we'll do our best to interrupt that from time to time, but they do not have a mandate to push through pieces of legislation without consultation, without expert advice. By referring it to an expert committee, they can still ignore the advice of that committee, they can ignore the voices of Albertans who come and speak against the legislation, or they can accept the voices of Albertans who will surely speak for the legislation.

I don't believe that this government has a mandate for its policies. Its mandate came from a desire of Albertans to throw out the previous government. It had remarkably little to do with policy. Mr. Speaker, I know of many Albertans who heard the opposite of what the former Premier said. When the former Premier told Albertans that only the Progressive Conservatives could beat the NDP, a lot of people heard the opposite side of that equation. People who did not in any way, shape, or form accept the NDP agenda or platform voted for the NDP to throw the old government out, a sentiment that I can sympathize with. They did not vote for the NDP's policies. Those are many Albertans, and I think that those Albertans would be poorly served if the government took that vote as carte blanche to implement their platform without any consultation whatsoever.

The government has informed this House that they need about six months to craft a budget, but they feel that they can implement these tax hikes, a key element of the budget, in a mere six days.

They have told us time and time again that they cannot even give us rudimentary information on how much they will be spending, how much they will be collecting, what kind of deficit they'll be running, what the debt will be, what the net financial assets will be, information that I could even get vaguely from Doug Horner. They cannot give us any of this information, and they say that they need six months to craft a budget because they need to consult, because the budget is a huge process requiring consultation. By going ahead on the revenue side of things right now, they are telling Albertans that half of the budget can be decided in six days, but the other half requires six months.

Can you implement a 20 per cent increase to business taxes without any consultation from businesses? Can you implement a 20 per cent increase on businesses without any warning? They talk about the need for preparing a budget not on the back of a napkin. By changing the financial plans of every single business in this province, in a matter of six days they are forcing every single business in this province to rewrite their own budgets on the back of a napkin.

11:20

What about the people whose taxes you are raising? We should not forget that those who earn more than \$125,000 are people. They are Albertans, and they worked hard for that money. The Wildrose and Albertans do not believe in the politics of envy and the politics of jealousy. Because this government cannot rein in their spending, those Albertans are made to pay for the previous government's mistakes and the new government's mistakes to be made. It's almost like telling them to look in the mirror.

Albertans, including high-income Albertans, are generous people. In fact, Albertans are the most generous people in Canada by a country mile. The average Canadian tax filer donates \$1,411 a year to charity, Mr. Speaker. The average Albertan donates \$2,289. That is a huge difference between what the average Canadian income tax filer gives to charity and what the average Albertan gives to charity. Albertans give back to their communities. Efforts to portray successful people as greedy banksters is disgraceful. People in this province have worked hard for their money, and they give back to their communities. Albertans should not have to pay for the mistakes of the previous government with their hard-earned money.

This bill needs to go to a committee so that we can hear from Albertans. We need to hear from experts on the issue. The government can choose to ignore that advice, or it can choose to heed that advice, but it should at least hear that advice. Albertans are willing, just as we are willing, to help the government make a wise decision. Experts could be brought to the committee to advise the government so that you can make an informed decision.

This bill is rushed. I know that the members across support the principle of the bill, as is absolutely your right, just as we on this side of the House oppose the principle of the bill. But if you want to do justice to the people who elected you, you should not rush a bill even if you believe it to be a good bill in its intent. This bill needs research. It needs homework. We have not provided one shred of evidence that it is actually beneficial to Albertans. All the government has told us is that they voted for you. That fact is obvious since you sit across from me.

Whether or not Albertans voted for you, it's still your duty to do your due diligence as private members. It is your duty to show Albertans that you know what the effects of your actions will be. You need to look before you jump. It is still your duty to do research on this topic and not just throw tax hikes at the deficit and hope that it goes away.

Every piece of research I have read since this government suggested this tax hike has said that higher taxes will discourage

growth that creates prosperity, jobs, and the benefits of a prosperous society. Even the research done by your own NDP fellows in Saskatchewan says that lower taxes will benefit the economy and government revenues, and to not one single conservative's surprise, when the Saskatchewan government lowered their taxes, their economy boomed.

This bill will only improve if we have a chance to consider it more thoroughly in committee. These taxes will not fix excessive spending seen in the government's minibudget. These personal taxes on hard-working Albertans will not solve the government's spending problems. This minibudget presented on the back of a napkin to the House contained not one single detail, not one single cut to spending.

The tax increases presented in Bill 2 do not cover the deficit projected by previous governments. With spending projected to be higher under this government than the last, the taxes do not cover even the spending, and we have to ask: will we see even more tax hikes beyond this in the future? I know that this bill was rushed through and not fully researched because it is forgetting a campaign promise made by the NDP in 2012. The Premier herself campaigned on lowering the small-business tax rate. This motion opens up a way for the Premier to help small businesses the way she said she wanted to. There is no shame in admitting that a platform was forgotten.

We're here to help the Premier remember her promises to cut spending and taxes. We are here to help this government help Albertans, and we are here to help the government help small business. The government can help small businesses by cutting the small-business tax rate by the Premier's proposed one-third. This would help small businesses deal with other rushed policies implemented by the NDP, a 50 per cent increase to the minimum wage that they will have to shell out from their profit margins. This tax cut will help save jobs that the minimum wage hike would take away from Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, we must do our due diligence. We need to be responsible with taxpayers' money in how we spend it and in how we collect it. We should not frivolously pass laws.

I will close by citing a statesman from the 19th century who, I believe, probably had a moment just like this when he said it. Chancellor Bismarck said that making laws is like making sausages: you don't want to see how it gets done. Let's not make sausages.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said before, I will always rise in this House to defend Alberta's hard-working families, and I will fight against increasing the size and scope of government. However, I am in favour of the motion that has been brought forward by my good friend and neighbour from Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. We should not be experimenting with economic and taxation changes. There should be proper consultation, and this government should not be rushing through changes.

For the last two weeks we've heard from the Premier and her ministers that now is not the time to bring forward a budget. They say that they need time to consult. They need time to figure things out, and they need time to work out the details. That's what they say. So how is it exactly that they can bring forward a massive hike in taxes on hard-working Alberta families but they can't tell us where they are actually going to spend the money? Is there even a need for a massive tax hike? We don't think so. The NDP haven't made a case for why the money is needed. The NDP hasn't even told us what's going to happen. So far all we've seen is an NDP

government that is playing politics with the future of hard-working Alberta families. It's disgusting that this government is playing politics with the future of Alberta families, and I say, Mr. Speaker, that they should be ashamed.

We should spend the summer consulting with Albertans, speaking with small-business owners and taxpayers, and spending the time needed to study the actual implications of hiking taxes on hard-working Alberta families.

That's why I'm in support of the motion from my hon. colleague from Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. I think that there are many other members of this House that should also be in favour of spending the summer studying the impact of these high taxes.

One particular member is my good friend, well, my friend, the Minister of Municipal Affairs. He has said:

For a government that loves to talk about the word "consultation" and how they speak with folks, their actions don't seem to live up to their words. Although I could stand here and give numerous examples where consultation never took place even though it was asserted, I won't do that.

Once again, that's the Minister of Municipal Affairs. He said it so well that I couldn't have said it better myself. Naturally, I look forward to him voting in favour of this motion. This is a regressive and harmful experiment with Alberta's jobs and the future prosperity of our province and is nothing more than a direct attack on the Alberta advantage.

11:30

We think that this government, just like the old government, needs to get spending under control. They need, Mr. Speaker, to take a look at the books, find efficiencies where efficiencies can be found, cut the waste when there's waste to be cut. That's why Wildrose has long advocated for finding efficiencies and cutting waste. We believe Albertans are taxed enough. The people in my riding of Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre believe Albertans are taxed enough. Hard-working Alberta families are the lifeblood of our communities and our province. We should not be taking more from them to fund the pet projects of the new NDP government, particularly ideological projects.

We now have a government that wants to chase people away from our province, Mr. Speaker, to encourage families to move away and work in more competitive jurisdictions. We do not believe in higher taxes now or in the future. We are here to fight for hard-working Alberta families. We are here fighting for our constituents, that rely on the Alberta advantage. We are fighting for keeping Alberta a great place to live and work and raise a family. We're going to keep doing just that. I will wholeheartedly and without reservation vote against this bill every step of the way, but I will vote in favour of this motion put forward by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. But I will never give up the fight against the regressive tax hikes of this NDP government, and I will never stop saying: shame on you.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, just a word of observation. I've received a few notes about comments across the House. In a preventive mindset as we go forward into the late hours of the night on this wonderful adventure, can I ask that you please be doubly conscious of remarks or feelings or opinions that you might have of the others – these are notes; they're not verbal comments – in a preventive way? Thank you for that.

The Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise and support the motion brought forward by the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. The name of the bill says it all: An Act to

Restore Fairness to Public Revenue. Fair to whom? Will it be fair to the mom-and-pop businesses who hire high school students after school and on weekends, who now won't be able to afford to hire them? Will it be fair to companies in the oil and gas supply industry, who are dependent on the large producers for their work, the welders, pipefitters, mechanics who have started their own companies and now face reductions in charge-out rates and who still have to pay higher taxes? They will be losing out twice, once from reduced income and secondly from increased taxes on all of that income. Will it be fair to the people who would like to expand their business but decide not to due to increased taxes and uncertain revenues?

Is it fair to the people who used to work for the Lufkin service in Drayton Valley, Alberta? I say used to because they were all laid off in the last few weeks – all of them – 15 families from one community. Why? Because their parent company no longer saw the Alberta advantage. Their operation was no longer a profitable branch due in part to the reduction in charge-out rates demanded by the major oil companies. I found this out from a friend tonight as I was walking out of the Legislature for the supper break. He called me looking for advice, and I couldn't give him any. This is just one example. Every call I make to people I work with in the oil patch of northeastern Alberta carries the same message: cutbacks, pay cuts, and layoffs. That's what our future is.

Mr. Speaker, who is this bill fair to? The NDP government intends to make life much more expensive here in Alberta and to make our province a much less attractive place in which to do business. This government will raise business tax by 20 per cent and add new provincial personal income tax brackets while increasing the top bracket by 50 per cent. Now they are talking about a royalty review, which may well end in an increase in resource royalties. Where is it going to stop?

Looking at business alone, when Alberta raises its general provincial corporate tax rate to 12 per cent, that puts Alberta's business tax higher than B.C., higher than Quebec, and on par with Saskatchewan on the general rate of 12 per cent but higher than Saskatchewan's manufacturing and processing corporate tax rate of 10 per cent. This approach to fiscal management is from the NDP playbook. It has failed in other provinces, and it will fail here.

Mr. Speaker, this bill is poorly thought out, poorly planned, and based on faulty economic ideas of debt servicing and fiscal management. Increasing taxes is going to destroy our economy; indeed, even the threat of increased taxes is enough to start stories of business closures. We just talked about one in Drayton Valley.

We need to take our time with this bill. We need to ensure that we have input from the community and the best economic advisers before we do anything so ill advised as pushing through this legislation. The government will not even have a budget out, yet they want to increase taxes as a sort of pre-emptive strike in their planning. Referring this bill to committee is the only responsible and reasonable course of action.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to rise in support of my colleague from the constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills and the referral amendment. This government has repeated over and over again that they need time: time to get up to speed, time to get proper consultation, and time to get it right. On this I am in full agreement. We need more time. This bill needs to go back for further consultation. Albertans need to know what the government is doing in a clear and open manner.

I've lived in Alberta my whole life. I've raised a family here, started a business, and seen my family thrive. I want other Albertans to have these types of opportunities in the future. They deserve a chance to experience some of the Alberta advantage. Alberta was not only the standard which other provinces strived to achieve; we were also the benchmark for fiscal responsibility in Canada. Sadly, we have dropped to the bottom of the pack now, spending \$8 billion more than our neighbours in B.C. Unfortunately, the governments of the past squandered most of that advantage, and we don't need this new one snuffing out what little remains.

Alberta already collected the most business taxes per capita in Canada because it invited more investment and productivity in Alberta. I'd ask the members across the aisle to listen closely and try to understand this. Alberta has been taking in more tax revenue per person, both corporate and personal, than any other province despite our so-called unfair taxation system. The system itself is a key to our prosperity.

The members that spoke on behalf of Bill 2 seem to think there is no downside to raising tax rates. I bet a lot of them think that profit is kind of a bad word. It means that workers could have been paid more or the government could have spent more. They don't realize that the low rates and pro-economy parties that have governed this province over the last 80 or 90 years are themselves a big part of why there are four times more people in Alberta than Saskatchewan. Saskatchewan has oil. Saskatchewan even has potash. But you know what else Saskatchewan had for many decades? CCF and NDP governments that took a combative approach with business and entrepreneurs and scared them and the jobs they create right over the border to us.

Raising business taxes 20 per cent will not just affect them; it will mean higher prices and lower wages. This business tax increase will now make Alberta a less attractive place to invest. How will this affect Alberta? How will it affect the business climate? Will employers be forced to scale back projects and thus employees in this uncertain economic climate that our government is creating? What reputable studies have been done to vet and evaluate this tax hike, especially in the context of minimum-wage hikes, royalty hikes, and everything else they are doing? You can't force through legislation simply because you feel that being elected gives you a blank cheque. Remember, more Albertans voted against your party than for.

11:40

This bill needs further discussion. Albertans need to know what the impact will be on them. Royalty reviews, minimum-wage increases, business tax increases, and personal tax increases on the top earners, who pay the majority of income tax: how does this government reconcile this heavy-handedness with the soft words they speak in this House when they need more time?

This government routinely talks about Albertans voting for change. So far, it has been hard to see any change. They used the same budget that the PCs ran on in the last election and lost, plus they've added more taxes. They've denied common-sense amendments to Bill 1 to keep unions and corporations out of politics. They restricted debate on the minibudget, that has max-spending. Change would include a willingness to work with opposition parties and consult Albertans. We've heard lots about change, a change in how government does business, but we've seen no change.

We keep offering to help, and they keep laughing. That doesn't give any sign to Albertans that there is any difference between this government and the last. We're serious. We want to help. Albertans would like to see a more transparent, consultative government, not

just hear about one. Please show Albertans by action that you are willing to work with others.

I urge all MLAs in this House to support this motion so that this bill can be properly considered. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't have a prepared statement, but I think it goes without saying that a lot of the members of the Wildrose have already covered a lot of the meat of the subject here going forward, and I know comments like that may be somewhat offensive to the members opposite that may be more prone to vegetarian diets.

But it's certainly an important time. Having been in a previous sitting of this Chamber – the importance of proper debate on legislation is significant. The party that is now the third party in the legislature understands that, with the full vengeance of the voters that they received in the past election. The party now in front of us as the governing party has that to learn, and we'll see how that proceeds.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that it is important that we do take due diligence and time to fully examine the legislation in front of us. I therefore yield to you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to come at this issue – and I am in support of this, by the way, and I want to speak in support of this. But I want to talk to the issue of democratic institutions here. You know, one of the dominant issues during this last election, at least in Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, was the restoration of damaged democratic institutions. In my riding of Innisfail-Sylvan Lake in the 2012 election there was an overwhelming vote for a Wildrose MLA, and very shortly thereafter that MLA, without consulting the electorate, decided to cross the floor.

Some Hon. Members: Shame.

Mr. MacIntyre: It was a shame. And because of that action, not consulting either the constituency association for that matter or the electorate, that MLA, of course, suffered some disappointment in this last election because the voters still wanted a Wildrose MLA, thank God.

Now, part of the process of restoring damaged democratic institutions is to restore the institutions that are within this Legislature right here. I cannot believe that any honest member opposite believes that an election to remove an entrenched regime from power somehow equates to a blanket approval of everything orange. It just doesn't. I know deep down inside, Mr. Speaker, that they know this as well. I am sincerely concerned that now that the NDP have the reins of power, they're not using their position to strengthen this Legislature right here and its democratic institutions, something that I believe all Albertans voted for in this last election. That was why the change. Democracy had been severely hurt, and the people of Alberta said: we want you and us to fix that, to strengthen the democratic institutions that we have. Now, it seems to me that there is a growing attitude far too similar to the same attitude that voters just removed from government in this province.

Now, one of the pillars of our parliamentary democracy that suffered considerable damage in recent years was the Legislative Assembly and the organs within it such as standing committees. Their intent originally was to take time to reflect on bills, to gather evidence on the subject, hear from the public thoroughly on all the contents of the proposed bills, to hear from experts to give evidence for and against, then make appropriate amendments, and then bring

everything back here. That process has been in our tradition for a very long time, Mr. Speaker. It has been hurt severely.

I urge the members opposite to do everything they can to strengthen democracy rather than continue to damage it. By not accepting this motion, we are not strengthening democracy; we are instead continuing the legacy that just got voted out. So I encourage everyone in this House: please, support this.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in this House to show my support for this amendment and to talk about the reasons why I believe it's important to support it. We have heard about an election that just happened from the members opposite to us. They've talked about the importance of making sure that the peoples' voice was heard, that this body represents them. It's important for us to remember that important truth.

I've had the opportunity to speak to many people this past weekend about these bills that are going forward. The words that I've heard don't represent the idea of this being fair. In fact, often I would hear the words: "This isn't fair. How can they spend this kind of money so quickly and push it through so quickly? How can they implement these taxations so quickly without consultation and support from the people?" Often I heard many of these people say: is there anything we can do? I said to them that we just had an election and that was the opportunity to be able to say no to these things. I believe that the intent of the people was for change. I believe that that was the intent, and to state that the people gave them a carte blanche cheque to do with what they want – I do not hear that. I have not heard that yet in my riding.

11:50

So I believe that this is not fair. I believe that this approach of being able to ram this through quickly without proper consultation, without a proper economic impact study is something that is folly and that will not help Albertans and that will not help the credibility of this House. Albertans are looking for a change. They desperately want it. They have experienced years of feeling neglected, and they are looking for that democratic right to be instilled back in their hands again. They want it, and we have the ability to give it to them. But what we're doing here tonight in pushing this forward is destroying that confidence that we're trying to rebuild. In good conscience how can we sit back and say that this is okay? In good conscience how can we go back to our ridings and talk to people, look them in the eyes, and say that it's business as usual? We cannot do that. We should not do that. It's not right.

I've heard a couple of statements made tonight by members that have sat on this side of the House in the past. It's interesting how circumstances change a person's perspective. In fact, we've often heard the saying: power corrupts; absolute power corrupteth absolute. Are your values, is your belief in the way that you should actually run your house circumstantial? Does it change when your circumstances change? I don't think it should. I don't think Albertans believe it should. I believe that this is something that we need to seriously look at in an effort to regain the trust of Albertans. This is something that I hope the members opposite in the House will take a look at seriously and realize that we are trying to champion, all of us are trying to champion, democracy as it should be.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Barrhead.

Mr. van Dijken: Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock. Hey. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak in favour of the referral motion brought

forward by my caucus colleague. This referral motion is all about consultation, and this Bill 2 is of such major change to the tax structure of Alberta that we need to consult. Tax increases that will possibly have far-reaching effects on the Alberta economy, increases that will possibly have far-reaching effects on Alberta businesses, and increases that will possibly have far-reaching effects on Alberta families: I would submit that there has not been adequate consultation on this potentially destructive tax policy. I would suggest that we refer Bill 2 to committee.

Let us call in the experts, call in the senior officials from Alberta Finance and Treasury Board to hear their opinion of the implications of this tax bill at this time. I want to see Todd Hirsch from ATB Financial brought in for his opinion. I want to see Gil McGowan from the Alberta Federation of Labour. I might not like what he says, but I'm a small "d" democrat and want to hear his opinions also. The committee could review the impacts of these changes in the broader context of lower oil prices, minimum wage hikes, in the context of a royalty review and climate levies. Given that the Premier indicated that the budget won't be introduced until October, we do have time to make consultations by committee happen, Mr. Speaker. Bill 2 will only be ameliorated if we have the chance to consider it more thoroughly in committee. Experts and ordinary Albertans can then testify to the consequences they see of making these changes to Alberta's tax laws.

I will also appeal to the members of the governing party that are not in cabinet. You have an opportunity with a voice of freedom to prove to Albertans that you are willing to seek proper consultation. My father always encouraged me to seek the advice of wise counsel before making any critical decisions. I believe at this time that this is a critical decision at a critical time in the Alberta environment, in the Alberta economy. It would be wise for the members of the governing party that are not in cabinet to take into consideration your opportunity to go into the constituency and let the people know that you were willing to take advice and counsel, that you were willing to take this seriously.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: My apologies, hon. member, for not identifying all of your constituency.

The Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising this evening to speak in favour of the motion before the Assembly. I wholeheartedly support this motion. So far I'm able to piece together that we have Bill 2, a drastic increase in taxes, to pay for Bill 3, a seemingly ever-changing runaway budget. Maybe the challenge with all these numbers getting thrown around is that the NDP have no idea what sort of revenue Bill 2 will bring in. Maybe they've haven't properly costed Bill 3. Maybe it's both. Who can know? We can't be too sure because the NDP isn't telling us.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

It seems like the runaway, unaccountable spending of the previous government is becoming part of this government. We, quite frankly, were hoping for more: more information, more details, more debate. We can debate all night long. We wanted to provide answers to our constituents. All we have are more questions for our constituents. I can't answer my constituents about what's going on here because we're getting no answers from the government.

12:00

This is Alberta, the place people come to do business, all sorts of business, big business. We do what we can to cultivate an

entrepreneurial spirit, to encourage people and businesses that this is a place where you can take a risk. This is a place where you can invest in a business, where you can raise your family, where you can be part of this community, but the NDP is ruining that. They haven't had time to get a proper budget together, but they have had time to dismantle the Alberta advantage, and we have barely had any time to ask them how.

But back to Bill 2, which is about raising revenues to pay for the increased spending in Bill 3. Alberta had a spending problem under the previous government. Alberta is spending even more, causing a larger spending problem under this current government. Businesses come to Alberta because of our tax advantages. Ten per cent: we were the best in the country. We had the lowest business tax rate and this, combined with other tax advantages, a streamlined regulatory system, and a government that didn't meddle in the marketplace, meant that Alberta had the advantage over every other province in the country. Alberta was number one, but the previous government killed that Alberta advantage.

Mr. Bhullar: We made it number one.

Mr. Yao: Not after 44 years, my friend. Not after 44 years.

Mr. Bhullar: Number one in the country.

Mr. Yao: Yeah. After Klein it just went down.

Mr. Bhullar: Record growth last year. Record growth.

Mr. Yao: Record corruption.

Now the NDP are putting the final nails in the coffin of an advantage that was already on its last legs. When we had the Alberta advantage, it meant that businesses did flock to Alberta. It meant more revenue in all streams. I can personally attest to the businesses that invested in Fort McMurray despite the high real estate prices, despite the cost it took to get employees to go there to work. They invested millions and billions of dollars, and now every one of them is looking away. They're looking at other provinces.

My friends that work in the oil companies, they have said straight up that their companies are working and looking in Saskatchewan. Why? Because when these are international companies, we're a dot on that little map, and they have a whole bunch of dots all over that map, and right now they just look at that little dot in Alberta, and they think to themselves: "Okay. They have a new government now, and this government is antibusiness. They're going to raise taxes." It's not good for their business. The wrong movements happen by the government, and they just stroke that little dot off, and they go on to the next business.

Mr. Nixon: Stroke it right off.

Mr. Yao: Yeah.

With the 20 per cent increase to business tax Alberta will no longer be the first choice for businesses. Businesses can choose from B.C., Ontario, Quebec even, if they want a lower tax rate. Quebec. Good Lord. Then, if they want to pay the same tax, they can choose from Manitoba, New Brunswick, Saskatchewan. They're all at 12 per cent. We get to compete with New Brunswick. What incentive do new businesses receive from Alberta? Not too much under this new government. There's a question whether they could ease in these changes by phasing in these taxes over a slow period or, better yet, recognize that when oil is down, it's not a good time to raise taxes on those companies.

Just as the government is doing with minimum wage, I just don't agree with this. The phasing-in approach is much better than the

shock and awe of a 50 per cent overnight increase. Business killer. That said, the 25 per cent increase they are musing about for this year is staggeringly reckless. Staggeringly. To help small businesses cope with the increase to taxes and minimum wage, a decrease to the small business rate could be one ray of economic hope in this dark cloud of antibusiness reforms being ushered in.

As an added bonus, recognize that Fort McMurray does have a high minimum wage, and you will see the same prices that we pay in Fort McMurray. You'll pay two bucks more for that Happy Meal. You know, it's just ridiculous. It really is. Fort McMurray. What else do you want to pay for? What do we pay? Oh, we pay for everything much higher. Much higher. Beer, oh my goodness. You look like a bunch of – no. I withdraw that. Liquor, you pay much more. We pay like 25 per cent more for our liquor up there. We pay 30 per cent more for our groceries. Thirty per cent more: can you imagine that? Your friends that work at Air Canada, can you imagine those guys trying to pay that high price on their current wages? That would be pretty tough for them, wouldn't it? Every time you fly to the United States, you'll be picking up food and smuggling it across.

Small business needs to be protected. Our whole economy needs protection when we see oil in a prolonged slump. Growing up in Fort McMurray, I'm used to the ups and downs. That is the way it is. We deal with it. We persevere. We get by. We save our money. We don't rely on the government to do handouts for us.

Mr. Nixon: You spend your kids' money, Tany?

Mr. Yao: Oh, good Lord, no. No. We don't take that up in Fort McMurray if we can.

But, anyways, back to the discussion here. They are making our slump worse. Only ideology would lead a government in a time of economic downturn to raise business taxes 20 per cent, personal taxes for high earners and minimum wage 50 per cent, royalties and carbon levies who knows how much. Y'all will be living in that same trailer park with me.

I am calling on this government to take a step back from this quintuplet of a whammy and take some time to get advice on what they are doing. Truly seek the advice because we have heard nothing about fiscal responsibility from you. Have you evaluated your ABCs? Slide over the books. We'll give you a hand. We'll tell you where to cut. All you have to do is slide those books over because we are here to help you. I don't want you living in a manufactured home for half a million bucks. Take some time to hear from the experts, to consider the effects of these drastic changes on the people of Alberta before passing this legislation.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments to the hon. member?

All right. The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Welcome. Well, I believe that more time should be given to Bill 2. Bill 2 undermines the Alberta advantage. This has to be debated fully, not rushed through. Albertans need to know what this government is doing. I'm passionate about Alberta, like many of you. I chose to raise my family and start a business here. I want others to have those opportunities as well, the opportunities the late Premier Peter Lougheed famously dubbed the Alberta advantage. We need an open, honest debate on Bill 2. Albertans deserve to have their voices heard in their Legislature. I was elected to do that, as was everybody else here. It takes more time to get my kids ready in the morning than the time we're spending debating this bill. My children are skilled debaters.

12:10

What's worse is that this may mark the end of the Alberta advantage. Between their mismanagement and the recklessness of the NDP our families and their businesses are going to be drastically impacted. For decades Alberta has been a land of opportunity, a place you would come and start up business, raise a family, plant your roots. This government, however, is set to implement the largest business tax increase in recent Alberta history. It's unreal. Seems more like a late night bar thought than a well-thought-out bill. This bill needs further discussion. Families need to know what the impact will be on them. They need to know now. How is this bill fair if we railroad it through the Legislature?

What of our economic engine, the oil industry, Alberta's economic powerhouse, set to face turbulent times with the royalty review and carbon price review held over their heads? What can be done? What will the impact be on this important job provider? Will they be forced to lay people off? What sort of studies has the government done to evaluate this seemingly reckless tax hike? Seems like none. It's possible that an enormous amount of thought and work went into this bill. It's possible, but we really haven't had time to discuss it. A quick rush through, minimal debate: it all leads me to believe this is simply a campaign tactic. Unreal. Except this isn't quite a campaign anymore. One is coming.

Mr. Yao: Mulcair isn't pulling the strings, is he?

Mrs. Pitt: I don't know. I have no details.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, let me remind you, through the chair, please.

Mrs. Pitt: My apologies, Madam Speaker.

You know what? Quite frankly, we should expect more honest, open discussion on the details of this bill. We need more time. I urge all MLAs here to support the motion so that this bill can be properly considered and it has the time it deserves, as we were elected to do, to serve Albertans and represent them here in this House.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: I have confirmed that there is a five-minute question and comment period should you wish to take advantage of that.

Seeing none, I'll call on the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm rising this evening to speak in favour of the motion before the Assembly, brought forward by the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. My family, my husband and I, in our 21 years of marriage have had many businesses together. We've employed many people over the years, and we've had many ups and downs with those businesses. But ultimately the incentives that are in Alberta were what drew us to create businesses, to create jobs, and to create a life for our family here in this great province.

Over those years in pursuing those businesses, Madam Speaker, we've learned a tremendous amount about how to pursue the dreams that happen here in Alberta, which means raising our children, you know, paying taxes towards a great education, and other things like that. That is what we're all talking about here, about the Alberta advantage, where our tax dollars go. This runaway, unaccountable spending and these reckless revenue increases are reminiscent of the previous government, and we're disheartened, I believe . . .

Mrs. Pitt: I thought it was a new government.

Mrs. Aheer: I know.

... to see this trend continue, when Albertans so clearly voted for change.

In the many years that I've been running businesses with my husband – my husband and I have a car wash. I think it's every couple of weeks that he's in the mud, slogging mud out of the sumps, to get it out of there, as a small-business owner working like crazy to make this business work in a province that actually allows us to have a business, to be successful. Nobody would ever complain about having those jobs, Madam Speaker, because we know that ultimately, at the end of the day, we are contributing to the fabric of this province, and we're very proud of that. It doesn't matter how dirty that job is, how much mud, how many hours in a day that we put into it. We work hard because we know that we're contributing to something bigger than ourselves. It actually has nothing to do necessarily with ourselves. It has to do with contributing to a province that takes care of its own, something I'm very proud of.

We need answers for the communities that we represent, and they have more questions about the repercussions of these tax increases. It's clear, Madam Speaker, that the government has put no thought into these tax hikes; otherwise, business owners like myself would have been asked. I don't recall ever having one single member come to my house to discuss this situation with me, especially being a small-business owner and especially with the amount that I personally and my family contribute into the fabric of this province.

The tax hikes in their platform: it feels like it's something that they feel they could get away with. I feel that that's probably not the truth, but it's an uncomfortable feeling as a person who contributes in this way. That's how we feel. That is the optics of this situation. It doesn't feel right. It's misleading, and it leads us to be mistrustful of the government at this time. We deserve full consideration of the effects, that this is combined with the missteps that we believe that they are taking.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Speaker, Alberta has long cultivated the entrepreneurial spirit. They are attracted, myself included – and I think I can speak for many people over on this side – to the climate that fosters entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurs bring their ideas, their capital, and they have kept their businesses here because in return for their capital and ingenuity Alberta provides them with a fair taxation framework. That is the way that it has worked for us, that we are able, again, to contribute to this amazing province, something everybody in here should be extremely proud of. Alberta is a place where you can take risks, start a business, and, to reiterate what all of my friends over here have been saying, raise your family and be a part of our community.

12:20

Businesses come to Alberta because of Alberta's low business tax rate, and at 10 per cent, to reiterate once again, it has been up until now the lowest in the country. That Alberta advantage is not something to be taken lightly, Mr. Speaker. That Alberta advantage is a combination of Albertans working together to create something that is uniquely different from the rest of this country. It is called an advantage not because of – I mean, it's a combination of taxes and many, many other things, but it's also an advantage because it is unique to this province, something that we should be, again, let me reiterate, so proud of. How are we going to explain to our children one day that we have given away their future to the whims of

something that has had no research and has no background and will not contribute to the future fabric of this province?

The Alberta advantage means good public services, low taxes, and a government that does not interfere excessively in the marketplace. The previous government eroded most of that Alberta advantage with their fiscal mismanagement, that led to the 2015 campaign budget that raised 59 taxes and fees. Now the NDP are guaranteeing the absolute destruction of an advantage that was already on its last legs.

We have an opportunity here, Mr. Speaker, to change that. Whatever it is that was campaigned on – we understand that there were many, many campaign promises that happened, but it takes a bigger person to look at the situation once you are in a position of power and understand that changes to the original ideology take courage. It takes a great deal of heart and compassion to understand that the changes that you make right now will affect the future of our great-grandchildren in this province, and that's not a legacy that I want to leave for mine.

Mr. Speaker, businesses flock to Alberta, contributing to our revenue stream. If those businesses stop coming to Alberta, it will mean less tax revenue generated in all streams: income, corporate, gas, sin taxes, you name it. The only thing that will increase is the need for government services to cope with chronic unemployment. Speaking as a businessperson, with this triple-edged sword of having to pay more taxes ... [interjections] It's a triple edge. I'm sorry, but there's no double here. It's got a point and two sides. There is the side of having to pay more business taxes, the side of having to increase minimum wage – that is two already – and then on top of that everything else is changing, too. We don't understand where our dollars are going to be going. We have no clarity. We have no understanding of that. None of us has any information to go back to our constituents with. Nothing.

There are alternatives that must be considered. If they are dead set, Mr. Speaker, on these increases, why isn't the government easing these changes by phasing in both business and personal taxes? Here's what I heard from one of our wonderful staffers. She came to me last night, and she said: they haven't had time to get a proper budget together, but they have had time to dismantle the Alberta advantage.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would speak to the amendment as presented today. I guess it is today. I know that as a newly elected MLA there are many things that I have to learn. I know that this places me in good company with most of the elected members of this House. I think that we are learning a lot today. We are learning a lot today about how government functions and how it works and even how long we can stay up at night.

Mr. Mason: Everyone in our caucus is younger than you.

Mr. Smith: Yes. Do they have their parents' permission to stay up?

There is much to learn and much to consider when deciding to raise personal and business taxes. I'm a fiscal conservative, and it's never made sense to me that you could tax your way to prosperity. I realize that across the House you believe that redistributing wealth through a system of progressive taxation speaks to equity and to fairness in our society, but does that happen if in the process you have driven people out of the province of Alberta to those provinces that have a more enticing tax regime?

Let me assure my colleagues that compassion and equity for those less fortunate are found on both sides of this House. It has been my experience in life that when taxes are low and people are

able to find work and create businesses, it generates the wealth that is necessary for those people to take care of themselves and to take care of those people that have trouble taking care of themselves. In Alberta we need an economy that creates the kind of people that are reflected in our motto as a province; we need people that are strong and free. That does not mean that we don't care for those who need help, but we will only be able to care for and take care of those who cannot take care of themselves if we have a province that is prosperous, where the taxes are low, where the citizens have the wealth to provide world-class health care, education, and seniors' care.

When I was campaigning in the past election, I would go up to the doors of my constituents' houses and apartments, condos, and I would ask my constituents two very simple questions. "Are you happy with the government?" The people at the door either laughed or they swore. I would then follow that question with a very simple second question. "Have you figured out an alternative to the party in power?" The answer I received almost all of the time in the last days of the election in my constituency was, "Well, I'm either going to vote for the Wildrose, or I'm going to vote for the NDP."

That told me that this past election was more about wanting change than about ideology, but I also think that it showed me how desperate the people of Alberta were. They were so desperate for change that they set aside their deeply held fiscal conservatism, that had directed them to support in the past political parties like the Social Credit or the Klein Progressive Conservatives, and they were willing to consider either the NDP, that they hoped would be moderate, or the Wildrose Party, who had a new leader and who thought that the PCs had killed the Wildrose.

Well, I'm not asking anyone here to set aside their deeply held values and beliefs. I think that an honest conclusion about this past election is that while it was a mandate for the NDP to govern, it was not a mandate to use their majority to push forward legislation without pause for reflection and debate and that they would support a move toward sending this bill to referral. We all understand how a majority government functions. We've all been elected. We've all got a good education. We understand how this thing works.

12:30

This bill is, supposedly, about fairness and about taxation fairness, and I would encourage the NDP to consider how fair it is when people lose jobs because of the tax regime that they are proposing. This is not fiction. It is fact. You've heard today that there were 15 families in my home town of Drayton Valley that lost their jobs, that lost their incomes. I know that when I started into this election, the economic times were telling us that in the first two weeks of the election we had 15 people that handed their houses back to the banks in Drayton Valley. That's not something that we can ignore.

People and business owners in Drayton Valley and in Devon and in Thorsby and in Warburg and in towns and cities across this province are phoning all of us. They're phoning me, and they're wondering how raising their taxes will allow their families and their businesses to thrive. I don't think that I'm unusual. I don't think that I'm any different from you folks. I think you're hearing these things, too.

Drayton Valley is a young community. We've only been around as an incorporated community since about 1955 and Devon for only a little bit longer. The towns in my constituency were built by hard-working people who were willing to pay taxes, but they are worried about a government that would raise their taxes when their businesses and their families and their jobs are threatened by a downturn in the economy. It is these people – these friends, these neighbours, my electorate – that would support this bill going to

referral. They would support a conversation by their elected representatives, by a committee that represents all parts of this Legislature that would be able to review the wisdom of the proposals that are found in this bill. This committee would be able to invite experts to testify on the wisdom of raising personal and business taxes during a downturn in the economy. This committee could invite large businesses to explain how these additional taxes are going to affect their bottom line and whether they are planning to lay off people or to move to another province with a lower tax regime.

Bring in the banks. Bring in the tax experts. Bring in the families. Mr. Speaker, we need to listen to the people of Alberta and then, in due course, follow their lead. I believe they will tell you to reconsider your plan to raise taxes, but you will never know this unless you are willing to support this amendment and send this bill to the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future.

I therefore urge this House to support this amendment. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there any other members who would like to speak to the amendment? The hon. member.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and good morning. I would be remiss if I did not speak to this, really, because I remember being across the way and the hon. Government House Leader on many occasions making very impassioned pleas for us to consider.

Mr. Fraser: We should have listened.

Mr. Bhullar: "We should have listened," says the Member for Calgary-South East.

Mr. Speaker, this is such a significant decision. This is such a significant piece of legislation, something that is going to affect virtually every single Albertan. It has the opportunity to hinder their progress and their livelihood in a very short period of time. I've said this before, and I'll say it again. If the government can reconsider the Calgary cancer centre decision and say, "Hold on; this is complicated, and we need to assess our options," then they should surely be reconsidering this.

You know, I understand that they have a mandate. I respect them for that. There are many fine people across the way, but as fine people we have an obligation to ensure that ideological pursuits are not cause for us to be blinded from the realities of the day. The realities of the day, Mr. Speaker, are that our people are suffering. It is a very, very real fear for many Alberta families, for many great people in our province that they may be losing their jobs, that their companies may be picking up and moving elsewhere.

We have a series of very significant issues, and I say this with all sincerity right now. We have a series of very significant economic issues. One of them we cannot control. That is the price of oil. We cannot control that, but it has a very significant effect on us, on the government's revenues. You know, it usually takes about a year from the time that government revenues are affected for the broader population to be affected. We're starting to see it now very significantly, very seriously. You and I and this Legislative Assembly cannot affect the global price of oil. We could shut off the taps in Alberta and, realistically, it wouldn't have much of an impact on the global price of oil. That's something that we cannot control.

The other factor, Mr. Speaker, that we do have some impact over, number one, is our tax rates. That's what we're looking at here today. I agree with the members. We should refer this to the committee, allow the committee to do its great work. We have fine Members of the Legislative Assembly from all parties and

independent members who should get their feet wet, who should dive deep into the work of a committee and help provide the government with substantive feedback so that when they are ready to table their budget later this year, they will have had very significant feedback on the implications. I'm not saying: don't implement what they want. I'm speaking of the implications of the timing of their promises. I'm not saying: don't do it. I'm just saying: consider the timing. I come back again to, you know, if you're willing to do it on some infrastructure projects, why not this? It affects a heck of a lot more people. Taxes: that's something we control.

The next thing we control is the minimum wage. We can sit and have an ideological debate about a living wage and the minimum wage as it is today until all of us are red in the face, but the fact remains that if the cost of labour for a business goes up 50 per cent within a short period of time – say someone is being paid 10, 11 bucks right now and it goes up to \$15, for the sake of argument, the cost of labour goes up 50 per cent for a business or a nonprofit – that 50 per cent has to be made up somewhere. Nobody's going to come and stick a whole bunch of money in someone's pocket and say: "Here you go. This will cover that 50 per cent." They're going to make it up somewhere. So where are they going to make it up? They're going to make it up by charging more.

I've had countless conversations with many business folks. Actually, you know, I go to this one restaurant, Mr. Speaker, because they have the absolute best Caesar salad in Calgary. [interjection] Yeah, I eat salad once in a while.

Some Hon. Members: Where?

12:40

Mr. Bhullar: Chianti's on 32nd Avenue. The best Caesar salad in Calgary and it's cheap. I've been there. I believe it's actually in the Member for Calgary-Cross's constituency.

That Caesar salad, that's six bucks, is going to be 10 bucks. It's going to be \$10 if these changes are made overnight. I would ask the members opposite, then: what's next? Will you then be establishing new government programs to subsidize coffee, to subsidize Caesar salads? Is that what you will have to come to? A 50 per cent increase in the cost of labour will be likely matched with – I mean, that cost will be passed on to consumers. Somebody's got to pay, Mr. Speaker. Somebody has to. So that's the third piece, the third very critical factor that's affecting our economy today.

The fourth, Mr. Speaker, is a royalty review.

So you have four major factors that are affecting our economy today, one of which you have no control over. The other three the government of the day has all the control over, yet they seem to be a bit unwilling to consider the impacts of drastic action on the people. You know, I get it. You want to prove to your people that you're in here, that you're making change. But change isn't always a net outcome; change is also how you achieve something. You know, I've been lectured time and time again about how we did things. Now is the time to do something different.

I'll stand up, Mr. Speaker, and I'm very proud of some things we've accomplished, very proud. There are many things that – you know what? – I could have done without. But the fact remains that if I personally as a Member of the Legislative Assembly or as a cabinet minister at any point stood up and said that I was to do something, I tried my hardest to make sure it happened. You don't always win. It doesn't always happen, but if you don't try, it's not going to happen. There's no chance then.

Here I guess what's most concerning for me is the sheer fact that we have people across the way who continuously stood firm in their beliefs into the early hours of the morning repeatedly in this

Assembly, stood firm in their belief in doing things differently, arguing that we could do better, we should learn, we should consult, we should bring people together. Mr. Speaker, those same people now are trying to jam something through in the early hours of the morning. This is exactly what they said we were doing wrong. This is exactly what they said they opposed.

You know, the budget is one thing, Mr. Speaker, the tax hikes are one thing, but what is most concerning, what's absolutely the most concerning piece here is how quickly somebody changes when they get into those seats over there.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there any other members of the Assembly who would like to speak to the amendment? [interjections] The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Schneider: There is no confusion here, is there, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: Not with me.

Mr. Schneider: Not between you and I, I don't think. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A nonconfused Little Bow MLA rises to speak to the referral motion brought forth by my honourable colleague the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. I think this is an excellent opportunity to summon the most learned experts, to determine the impact on Alberta of Bill 2 before we go to vote on something that could be harmful to this province. Experts in finance, economics, business, and labour all need to be brought forth as witnesses to testify in order to provide another side of how raising business taxes, income taxes, royalties, the minimum wage, and the carbon levy will compound the low oil environment and kill jobs for Alberta families. Yes, every Albertan, even the Canadian Taxpayers Federation and the Alberta Federation of Labour, should have their chance to speak to Bill 2, directly to the decision-makers.

With this consideration in more detail, this bill can only be improved if we send it to committee. Major changes to tax laws, as proposed in Bill 2, should not be done without significant public consultation. Yes, you will hear the argument that the election was the consultation, but that was just a rushed job and not just about taxes, Mr. Speaker. The government, the Executive Council, will say that it did a consultation, but that was an internal and not necessarily transparent consultation. We do not know whom the Executive Council consulted.

It's time, Mr. Speaker, for the Legislature to hold public consultations on Bill 2. This stage in the development of legislation has been sorely lacking and rushed in recent years. The result has been bills passed, laws enacted, only to have to change them within months for mistakes that such a consultation would have caught.

Let us support this referral motion and bring in the experts and the general public for their opinions. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there any other members who would like to speak to the proposed amendment?

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I would seek unanimous consent to shorten the interval for the bells for the rest of the evening to one minute.

[Unanimous consent denied]

[Motion on amendment to second reading of Bill 2 lost]

The Speaker: We proceed back to the main motion. Is there anyone wishing to speak to the original motion?

Would the mover like to close debate?

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 12:50 a.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, S.	Goehring	Nielsen
Babcock	Gray	Payne
Bilous	Hinkley	Piquette
Carlier	Jabbour	Renaud
Carson	Kleinstauber	Rosendahl
Ceci	Littlewood	Sabir
Connolly	Loyola	Schmidt
Coolahan	Luff	Schreiner
Cortes-Vargas	Malkinson	Shepherd
Dach	Mason	Sigurdson
Dang	McCuaig-Boyd	Sucha
Drever	McKitrick	Sweet
Eggen	McLean	Turner
Feehan	Miller	Westhead
Fitzpatrick	Miranda	Woollard
Ganley		

Against the motion:

Aheer	Gotfried	Pitt
Bhullar	Hanson	Schneider
Cooper	Hunter	Smith
Cyr	Jean	Starke
Drysdale	Loewen	Strankman
Ellis	MacIntyre	Taylor
Fildebrandt	Nixon	van Dijken
Fraser	Orr	Yao
Totals:	For – 46	Against – 24

[Motion carried; Bill 2 read a second time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, given the hour and given the progress today, however painful, I believe that we should adjourn now – and I would so move – until 1:30 this afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 1:04 a.m. on Wednesday to 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, June 24, 2015

Day 7

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

First Session

Wanner, Hon. Robert E., Medicine Hat (ND), Speaker
Jabbour, Deborah C., Peace River (ND), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Feehan, Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (ND), Deputy Chair of Committees

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Rocky View (W)	Malkinson, Brian, Calgary-Currie (ND)
Anderson, Shaye, Leduc-Beaumont (ND)	Mason, Hon. Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (ND), Government House Leader
Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (W)	McCuaig-Boyd, Hon. Margaret, Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley (ND)
Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (ND)	McIver, Ric, Calgary-Hays (PC), Leader of the Progressive Conservative Opposition
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (W)	McKittrick, Annie, Sherwood Park (ND)
Bhullar, Manmeet Singh, Calgary-Greenway (PC)	McLean, Stephanie V., Calgary-Varsity (ND), Deputy Government Whip
Bilous, Hon. Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (ND), Deputy Government House Leader	McPherson, Karen M., Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill (ND)
Carlier, Hon. Oneil, Whitecourt-St. Anne (ND)	Miller, Barb, Red Deer-South (ND)
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-Meadowlark (ND)	Miranda, Ricardo, Calgary-Cross (ND)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, Calgary-Fort (ND)	Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (ND)
Clark, Greg, Calgary-Elbow (AP)	Nixon, Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (W), Official Opposition Whip
Connolly, Michael R.D., Calgary-Hawkwood (ND)	Notley, Hon. Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (ND), Premier
Coolahan, Craig, Calgary-Klein (ND)	Orr, Ronald, Lacombe-Ponoka (W)
Cooper, Nathan, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (W), Official Opposition House Leader	Payne, Brandy, Calgary-Acadia (ND)
Cortes-Vargas, Estefania, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (ND)	Phillips, Hon. Shannon, Lethbridge-West (ND), Deputy Government House Leader
Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake (W), Official Opposition Deputy Whip	Piquette, Colin, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater (ND)
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (ND)	Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie (W)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South West (ND)	Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (ND)
Drever, Deborah, Calgary-Bow (Ind)	Rodney, Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC)
Drysdale, Wayne, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (PC), Progressive Conservative Opposition Whip	Rosendahl, Eric, West Yellowhead (ND)
Eggen, Hon. David, Edmonton-Calder (ND)	Sabir, Hon. Irfan, Calgary-McCall (ND)
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Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (PC)	Shepherd, David, Edmonton-Centre (ND)
Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., Calgary-Buffalo (ND)	Sigurdson, Hon. Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (ND)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (ND)	Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (W)
Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (PC)	Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC), Progressive Conservative Opposition House Leader
Gray, Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (ND)	Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (W)
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Horne, Trevor A.R., Spruce Grove-St. Albert (ND)	Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (ND)
Hunter, Grant R., Cardston-Taber-Warner (W)	Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (W)
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Jean, Brian Michael, QC, Fort McMurray-Conklin (W), Leader of the Official Opposition	van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)
Kazim, Anam, Calgary-Glenmore (ND)	Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND)
Kleinstuber, Jamie, Calgary-Northern Hills (ND)	Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Larivee, Danielle, Lesser Slave Lake (ND)	Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)
Littlewood, Jessica, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (ND)	Vacant, Calgary-Foothills
Loewen, Todd, Grande Prairie-Smoky (W)	
Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (ND)	
Luff, Robyn, Calgary-East (ND)	
MacIntyre, Donald, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (W)	

Party standings:

New Democrat: 53 Wildrose: 21 Progressive Conservative: 9 Alberta Liberal: 1 Alberta Party: 1 Independent: 1 Vacant: 1

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Irfan Sabir	Minister of Human Services
Lori Sigurdson	Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education, Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour

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Drysdale Sucha
Horne Woollard
Kleinsteuber

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, June 24, 2015

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Let us reflect that we as members of our province's Legislature fulfill our office and duties with honesty, integrity, and mutual respect. May our first concern be for the good of all of our people. Let us be guided by these principles in our deliberations this day. Amen.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

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

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature a school group from Cypress-Medicine Hat, from Ralston and Jenner schools. It's great to have you all here today. I know what a distance you came at the very end of the school year. We met earlier and had great conversations, and it's also important to my colleague from Drumheller-Stettler because many of you live in his constituency as well.

As our Speaker knows, colleagues, what a neat part of the province these people come from. Of course, it's ranching country, but it's also prairie rattlesnake country. It is home to the largest military base in the Commonwealth, where between 6,000 and 8,000 British soldiers come annually and train in the Suffield-Ralston-Jenner area. Of course, many of the students are from Britain.

I would like to please ask you to stand as I call your name. I would like to first introduce teacher Ian Spiers from Ralston, teacher Jennifer Herrell from Ralston, education assistant Candice Worrall, and education assistant Elaine Osadczuk. We have parents making the trip as well: Patricia Knauer-Bravo, Toby Simpson, Ivan Jesse, Wayne Connor, Lesley Konosky, Jody Stennes, and Leslie Kochie. Could I now ask all the students from Ralston and Jenner schools to please rise and my colleagues to show them the generous warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: If the House would allow me, I would like to also echo the words of my fellow southeastern Alberta representative. Welcome. Good to see young folks coming out.

The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise to introduce to you and through you to members of this House one of my favourite people in the world. She's contributed to this province in many, many ways. Professionally she's working right now as constituency office manager for my colleague the Member of Parliament for Edmonton-Strathcona, Linda Duncan.

I hate this. You know, the minister here suggested I do this, and I have to say that I find that it's always a challenge for me to introduce dear friends. Nonetheless, let me say that, in general, perhaps with the exception of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, I'm not sure that any one of us on this side of the House would be here were it not for the contribution of this person. She has not only worked more recently, as I said, for the MP for Edmonton-Strathcona; she also managed her breakthrough campaigns. She's worked on my campaigns. A decade and a half ago she volunteered as provincial secretary for our little party, when

we couldn't afford to pay any staff. She's one of those people on whose shoulders we all stand. I would ask that Erica Bullwinkle rise and that the rest of you join me in welcoming her to the Assembly.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: I would recognize the Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Mr. Piquette: Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker. It is my great privilege today to introduce to you and through you to the members of the House my father, Leo Piquette. Mr. Piquette is the former Member for Athabasca-Lac La Biche, a large part of which is now part of my own riding of Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater. Although he is today most famous for the Piquette affair in 1987, where his refusal to apologize for speaking French in the Legislature touched off a national and international controversy, he has long been active in his local community, the francophone community, and provincial politics. He was a former school board member of the Conseil scolaire Centre-Est in 1994 and was chair of the board until 2004, when he was elected president of the Fédération des conseils scolaires francophones de l'Alberta. He is also a founding member and president of the Chambre économique de l'Alberta. Actually, I could keep going for another maybe half an hour on the other boards and things he's done. I would like to call upon our members to grant to Mr. Piquette the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-South East. My apologies again to the House. It was the fun that we had last night. That's my excuse today.

The Member for Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Pastor Bruce Gritter and Sharon Top-Gritter, husband and wife, constituents of Edmonton-South West. Bruce and his wife, Sharon, moved to Edmonton in 2001 and have enjoyed growing with and helping to build the social, physical, and spiritual infrastructure of southwest Edmonton ever since. Bruce is the lead pastor of the River community church, and Sharon is the director of Brander Gardens Rocks, a social service agency that supports various individuals and families living in low-income housing in southwest Edmonton.

Bruce and Sharon have been involved with numerous community boards, including TRAC, which helped get the southwest recreation centre built. Currently they are passionate about development of the new South Pointe community centre, a creative public-private initiative that will provide much-needed community space in southwest Edmonton. They are also co-chairs of the Heritage Valley Spectacular, a brand new Canada Day fireworks and music celebration launching this year at South Pointe on July 1. Bruce and Sharon have six children, including two beautiful aboriginal foster girls, and are proud to be Albertans and Edmontonians. I ask them to please rise so that all members of the Assembly may greet them with the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education and Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to introduce to you and through you to the members of the

Assembly the Elder Advocates of Alberta. This group supports elderly members of our community. They are actively involved in protecting the rights of seniors and fiercely advocate for their continued mobility. It is a great honour to have this group represented, and I applaud their continued hard work. They are seated in the members' gallery this afternoon, and I ask that they stand as I call their names: Jim Savoy, Kerry Modin, Ollie Schultz, Roy Avery, Mary Pelech, Julie Ali, Helga Martens, Shauna McHarg, Barry Snell, and Ruth Maria Adria. Please give them all the warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two incredible people. Although I was elected three years ago, this is the first time that I rise to introduce these two very special people. I'm incredibly blessed to have two of the most generous, supportive, and giving parents. I wouldn't be standing here today if it wasn't for their commitment, self-sacrifice, and hard work. I'd now like to ask my parents, Orest and MaryAnn, to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to introduce to you and through you to all the members of the Assembly Ms Maria Victoria Venancio, also known in her community as Vicky. Vicky is a 29-year-old from the Philippines who came to Edmonton to work in the service industry under the temporary foreign worker program. She came to Canada in search of a better life for her and her family. As the sole breadwinner Vicky would send money back home to her parents. However, in June 2012 she was struck by a truck on her way to work, leaving her quadriplegic.

Many people have rallied around Vicky to advocate in her best interests and the interests of other temporary foreign workers. One of them, joining Vicky today, is Marco Luciano, director of Migrante Alberta. Migrante is an organization that aims to educate, organize, and mobilize Filipinos in Alberta so that they know their rights. They also work to generate support and work to build a more just and humane society. They work with other migrant and social justice organizations as well as trade unions.

I would ask the members to provide these guests with the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly some very special guests. I met our first guest, a constituent of mine, Dr. Nhung Tran-Davies – and I'd ask her to stand if she would, please – about a year and a half ago on the front steps of this very Legislature as she organized a protest against the government's support for discovery, or inquiry, learning. This brave lady has been organizing Albertans and has been fighting to protect our system of education. Dr. Nhung Tran-Davies has been and is responsible for organizing the math petition of 20,000 Albertans who have spoken out against the inquiry methods of education. Sitting with her – and I'd ask these individuals to please rise – are Dr. Ken Porteous, U of A professor emeritus of engineering; Cynthia Cheung, with a

bachelor of commerce degree from the University of Alberta, a designated accountant; Dr. Marion Leithead, with a doctorate in education, retired; Mr. Bill Leithead, mechanical engineer, retired.

These Albertans have been tireless advocates for a world-class education system in Alberta, with a focus on preparing our children to be active and competitive citizens within Canadian society. I would ask my guests to rise, if they haven't done so already, and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Ms McKittrick: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to the House two guests from the Alberta and Northwest Territories division of the MS Society of Canada. This year was the 26th year of the Johnson MS ride, and over \$2 million was raised. This is the most successful ride across Canada. On June 13 over 1,900 cyclists left Nisku to cycle to Camrose, and on the following day they braved the elements to cycle back. It's a gruelling 180-kilometre ride. I've had the pleasure of doing this ride as a cycling marshal for the last few years, and I stand in awe of the number of cyclists with MS who do the ride.

One of those cyclists is the Johnson MS Bike Tour spokesperson Patrycia Rzechowka. Patrycia gave a moving speech on the Saturday night about her struggle with MS and how she was not going to let the disease beat her. Accompanying Patrycia is Julie Kelndorfer, the director for government and community relations for the Alberta and Northwest Territories division of the MS Society of Canada. I also have the pleasure to introduce a page for the Legislative Assembly, Matt Owens, who also was on the ride and raised a substantial amount of money and was one of the fastest riders.

I would ask that the House offer the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly to these guests. Thank you.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a great pleasure today to continue what is apparently bring your parents to work day in the Legislative Assembly. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to my colleagues in the Legislative Assembly my father, Gib Clark. After a very distinguished legal career of 35-plus years on both the prosecution and defence sides of the bar, my father has retired and spends most of his time now as a grandfather. He in fact has sought elected office for this very seat that I hold today, and it gives me great pleasure . . .

Dr. Swann: For which party?

Mr. Clark: I believe it was a different party. He has, however, seen the error of his ways.

So I would ask, please, with that, that my father, Gib Clark, please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members. Are there any additional guests to be introduced?

If I might just take a moment. In my short period of time along with all of you I think you would share the view that when we hear these introductions of our fellow Albertans, it is we who should be impressed rather than the way it is sometimes framed. Welcome to all of you who represent our strong province.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Environmental Advocacy

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud of my work as a faculty member of NAIT's School of Sustainable Building and Environmental Management. There is no question that government can do more to ensure Albertans can enjoy clean land, clean air, and clean water, but Albertans are also moderate and responsible citizens. They believe our energy industry should be approached as partners at the table and not as adversaries. They believe that through innovation and entrepreneurship Alberta can continue to be a leader in clean, renewable, and responsible nonrenewable production, and they believe all this and more can be done alongside our conventional energy producers while growing the economy and leading our province into long-term economic and environmental prosperity, powered by a mix of energy configurations using conventional and renewable sources, which is why, after reading a book that our environment minister helped to inspire, contributed to, and wrote the introduction for, I have some grave concerns.

An Action a Day Keeps Global Capitalism Away is the title of the book. It demands radical action against Alberta's economy. It seeks to inspire vandalism and militant action against our energy industry. It calls for blockades to stop Alberta's resources from getting to market. It calls for an end to capitalism and free markets, and at one point in the book it delivers a series of radical cheers. One reads: let's shut down the oil machine; the time has come for oil to go; you can't take us for a ride; you must stop the genocide.

1:50

Mr. Speaker, Wildrose stands for moderate and responsible advocacy for our environment. In my work as an author and instructor in the alternative energy industry I taught my students to separate between environmentalism based on emotion that hurts an economy and science-based environmental action that systematically leads to an increased economy.

Thank you.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Government Policies

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, we have come to the time in session where we have to deal with government's fibs, misstatements, and, as the Premier likes to say, hoey. Yesterday I asked the Education minister why he insists on using the figure of 12,000 extra students in Alberta's schools this fall. That number is false. It's incorrect. It's hoey. Public data from the school boards actually shows clearly that there will only be 7,500 students, not 12,000 students. His press secretary actually discovered all of this information a month ago, so he must know. Why are the minister and the Premier using the number that the government knows clearly is false?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. Certainly, it's important to clear this up. We are using numbers that are from the finance board, and they give us a figure of approximately 12,000 students. From all of the school boards across the province as well, if you add them up from our website, it adds up to about 12,000 as well. So I'm not sure where these guys are getting their math or how they're doing their mathematics on this, but certainly we know that we are financing \$103 million to ensure that students get the education that they need in the fall.

Mr. Jean: Actually, if you add up the numbers, there are over \$200 million in your own press release.

Yesterday I asked the Premier if she knew of any businesses which plan to hire more employees because of this government's plan to increase the minimum wage by 50 per cent. She said that she did, but when asked, she didn't name names. I'm surprised the media, actually, didn't pester her about this for more details. Exactly which employers have told the Premier that they plan to increase the size of their workforce because she is raising minimum wages by 50 per cent? Could she give us some names and table a list, please?

Ms Notley: Again, Mr. Speaker, I must say that the notion of a supplemental question is quite broadly interpreted right now. That being said, what the question asked yesterday was: in the current environment do we know of any employers that are going to hire new employees? And I answered that yes, I did, and as I said previously and yesterday, for instance, just on Friday I was at a press conference where Telus announced that it would be investing a billion dollars in the city of Edmonton, notwithstanding that they knew about our plan about minimum wage, and that there would be . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Jean: It's all about hoey. The labour minister and the Premier have both said more than once that increasing the minimum wage by 50 per cent will result in more jobs in Alberta. They say that the consequences of this policy are all good, all wonderful, and no harm will come to Alberta. So let me ask a policy question. Since the Premier says that there is no harm and only positives from boosting the minimum wage by 50 per cent in three years, why isn't she actually calling for a 100 per cent boost? If this policy increases employment, why don't you set the minimum wage at \$20 or \$25 or \$30 since we're going to get more jobs?

Ms Notley: You know, Mr. Speaker, it comes down to this. The folks over there think it's totally appropriate for a single mother of two or three to have to work 70 hours a week in order to earn a living wage. I say to you that they're just wrong, and that's why we are changing the minimum wage in Alberta.

The Speaker: The Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Environment Minister

Mrs. Aheer: Mr. Speaker, there's a big difference between being the fourth party in the Legislature and being the government. Some might say that it's akin to growing up. Being government means setting aside radical ideas of youth and making grown-up decisions. The Premier's environment minister wrote the introduction to a book, *An Action a Day Keeps Global Capitalism Away*. This radical book calls for blockades and street protests. It refers to our energy industry as genocide. To the Premier: what does she have to say about this?

Ms Notley: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, I think that the folks over there are confusing writing the foreword for a book with writing the book. So that's the first thing. Secondly, when you're in opposition, I understand that it is very tempting to engage in mudslinging, which is what these folks are doing right now. What we are interested in . . .

The Speaker: Hon. Premier.
First supplemental.

Mrs. Aheer: Mr. Speaker, anyone who's been around Alberta for a while has heard of Mike Hudema, the radical environmentalist. He's led all sorts of extreme environmental protests. He's a radical's radical. Albertans care about the environment, but Hudema is on a radical fringe of these issues. Hudema said that he could not have written this radical book without the help of the environment minister. Surely, the Premier recognizes that this sends the wrong signal to Albertans and industry.

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

The Speaker: The Government House Leader with a point of order. Are we on a point of order?

Ms Notley: Yes, for afterwards, I believe.

Mr. Speaker, you know, I think this is really interesting. Sort of a friend of a friend of a friend, so we're going to start attacking the government based on friendships that are 10 years old and all that kind of stuff. But let's just go back three and a half years, when the former leader of that party publicly said in an election debate that she didn't think climate change was real. That's radical, my friend.

Mrs. Aheer: Mr. Speaker, the radicalism of the environment minister is an issue. She embodies the issue we raised in Bill 1 about unions donating paid labour to the NDP. The environment minister was the Alberta Federation of Labour's person in Lethbridge, where the AFL has no office. She's also the spokesperson for the NDP in Lethbridge. She was paid by the AFL, but she worked for the NDP. If the Premier isn't worried about radical writings, is she worried that the minister is a poster woman for donation loopholes?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, what I'm worried about is ensuring that this government finally after many years establishes a reputation on environmental protection that will allow us to develop new markets and protect Alberta jobs. I am not at all worried about the ridiculous mudslinging that's coming from over there that actually embodies opposition efforts that do not work towards making things better for Albertans and certainly don't help Albertans.

The Speaker: Might I remind all of the House that in order for the Speaker of this entire Assembly to hear, I would show respect for the other parties as they answer the questions that are asked.

The Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Inspiring Education Framework

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will be tabling a petition today signed by thousands of Albertans urging the Minister of Education to reverse the implementation of the Inspiring Education doctrine. The Wildrose has opposed the fads in Inspiring Education since the beginning. Will the Premier assure Albertans that this government also rejects the failed approach of Inspiring Education?

Ms Notley: I think that the member is mistaken when he talks about the overarching issue of Inspiring Education. There are a number of elements of Inspiring Education that had value. I do however understand the issue that he's concerned about with respect to the math issue. I will say that I actually share a number of his concerns, and I've articulated that to the minister. We will ensure that there is a proper evaluation of the way in which math is taught in our schools because I want to make sure that Alberta students learn the way they need to learn. I think that there are some important points that we need to reconsider and revisit.

2:00

Mr. Smith: Mr. Speaker, given that there are questionable practices, which we can both now see there are, embedded in Inspiring Education such as placing methods ahead of content and academic results, mandating teacher instruction styles, replacing the three Rs with the three Es, will the Premier commit to an educational system that ensures that students obtain the basic foundational skills and knowledge needed to excel in the global economy?

Ms Notley: Well, I think that's sort of a given. We care a great deal about our K to 12 system, and that's one of the reasons why, unlike the folks over there, we thought it was really important to ensure that those 11,500 new students had a teacher when they started school in September. That's why we took action just yesterday to make sure that that happens, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Dr. Tran-Davies, the organizer of the petition tabled today asking the minister to reverse the implementation of Inspiring Education, is in the Legislature today. I introduced her to you earlier. She has written a letter asking the minister to meet with her. Will this Minister of Education meet with Dr. Tran-Davies today, and if not, why not?

Mr. Eggen: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the question. I think it's always important that we do these things in a congenial sort of way. The person is here, and certainly my door is open for meetings. We can book a meeting time for that to happen. I think it's important, in the spirit of collaboration, that we look for ways to strengthen our education system, as we did by putting \$103 million for the 12,000 students that are coming into the system. You know, let's do it that way, and I think we will end up serving children better in all ways.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Minimum Wage

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Restaurants Canada recently submitted information to the Premier and the Minister of JSTL on the \$15 per hour minimum wage threatened by this government. It is puzzling that a government such as this, which seems to want to appeal to young people, is actually taking jobs away from those in the age group 15 to 24. This May 40 per cent more of them are unemployed versus last May. About 1 in 5 Alberta careers starts in the hospitality business. To the Minister of JSTL: why would you intentionally hurt the very young people who helped elect you just last month?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak on this issue. It's something that I'm very proud of. You know, it's interesting. Federal labour data in the U.S. – people were asking where we got this – showed that 13 states raised the minimum wage in 2014, and in 12 of those cases all had higher employment in the first five months after raising the minimum wage. I'm not quite sure that I accept your premise, hon. member. I continue to believe that when you put money into the pockets of low-wage people, you actually generate economic activity.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, nonprofits sweat and struggle to raise money now. The Calgary Chamber of Voluntary Organizations,

when asked about the \$15, was quoted as saying: many nonprofits would have a hard time with that transition. They followed that with: they need time to plan it out and finance it. To the same Minister of JSTL: why would you intentionally hurt the nonprofit sector with this plan? Isn't it a bit early for this new government to alienate all of their friends who are not big labour?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you also to the member for the question. The Premier and I met not long ago with members of the sector he's talking about, and we also met with business and industry. We're moving forward on increasing minimum wage to \$15 an hour by 2018, and we're doing it with the consultation and input from all these stakeholders. Absolutely we're taking that into consideration. It's very important for us.

Thank you.

Mr. McIver: Yesterday the Premier was recorded in *Hansard* saying: "We do not want a province where the only businesses that survive are those that require people to be paid at two-thirds of a living wage. We cannot grow our economy on the backs of the poor." Mr. Speaker, we cannot grow our economy on the backs of the unemployed either. To the labour minister: now that your government has worked to take jobs from youth, older workers, nonprofits, energy, agriculture, tourism, and those that need their first job, who do you think is left to build the economy on the backs of?

Ms Sigurdson: Well, we know that when we support the most vulnerable workers, they right away are spending money in our economy, which means that they're investing in local economies, which helps all of us and actually does increase employment. We're doing that to invest in Albertans.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Childhood Immunization

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Under the previous government Alberta saw disease prevention programs weaken and child vaccination rates go down, raising the prospects of more outbreaks of serious preventable diseases. Recent data showed two-year-old vaccination rates at only 74 per cent. Action is required to protect Albertans, particularly children. Public policy experts have recommended a system that simply requires parents who choose to not vaccinate their children to be informed of the risks and sign a waiver. This simple requirement improves vaccination rates substantially and saves lives. To the minister: will your government show leadership and adopt this straightforward policy?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. I look forward to working with him to ensure that we move forward collaboratively in addressing the mental health needs of Albertans, and I'd be happy to review the study that he's just shared with me today in this House.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that another school year is starting soon, it's vitally important that steps be taken in the short term to improve Alberta's low vaccination rates: diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough, measles. Will the minister commit to

creating a system that informs parents of the risks and benefits of vaccinating preschool children, and if not, what is this government's plan to improve vaccination rates?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the important question that he raises. I'm glad that he raised it at such an early opportunity in our tenure so that we can have an opportunity to develop a strategy together to make sure that we do increase vaccination rates. I'm happy to announce that I recently reviewed the college of physicians report, and I'm really happy to hear that since more physicians are able to do vaccinations, rates have actually increased significantly over the last year. I'll be happy to share that information as well.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, it's a straightforward proposition, and I hope the minister will act promptly. Vaccinations save lives and health care costs. Given that Alberta is lagging behind, why is the government not ready to commit to a system that simply requires parents who choose to not vaccinate their children to sign a waiver? What's so difficult about that?

Ms Hoffman: I'm not ruling that opportunity out. I look forward to reviewing the report that's being shared by the hon. member and having an opportunity to take it into consideration just like all of the great opportunities that we have now that we're in government, and I look forward to working with members from all sides of the House to do that.

I misspoke to the last question. It's pharmacists. If you haven't had your vaccinations, look forward to going to get flu shots and other vaccinations at your pharmacy, please.

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

Injured Temporary Foreign Worker

Mr. Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Vicky Venancio, whom I introduced to the Assembly earlier today, has been living without medical coverage to pay for treatment since her accident. Fortunately, she has been receiving free physiotherapy as part of a research project at the University of Alberta. Vicky would like to stay in Edmonton to continue her physiotherapy and some day begin working once again. To this end, she has applied for permanent resident status on humanitarian and compassionate grounds. To the Minister of Health: how does the minister respond to the challenges Vicky is facing?

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the member for raising the question, and thank you, Ms Venancio, for being here today so that we can have an opportunity to hear a little bit more about your story and to communicate with you directly. I look forward to setting up a meeting with Ms Venancio in the days that follow session. She is an amazingly strong individual, who has overcome a very tragic situation and is making the best of it. I want to say thank you to her for her courage and inspiration as well as to the Albertans who have rallied behind her, donating financially. She has fallen through the cracks provincially, federally with the temporary foreign worker program and now with applying for permanent status. I look forward to getting to know how I can help you more.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Loyola: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Health once again: will you commit today to helping Ms Venancio receive the care that she needs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I just mentioned, we have a woman here who is falling through the cracks of a federal and provincial struggle. The College of Physicians & Surgeons recommends that the patient receive a full cycle of care. That's solid advice that's coming forward from medical professionals. I am wanting to explore every opportunity we have to ensure that she gets the support that she needs, and I think that we have an opportunity to work with the federal government, whether it's today or whether it's in the fall, to make sure that tragedies like this have happy endings, not sad ones.

Mr. Loyola: Mr. Speaker, the temporary foreign worker program, as we've seen from Ms Venancio's experience, is fraught with problems. To the Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour: what is being done to protect the people who come to this province to work?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. First of all, this program is a federal program. We in Alberta are concerned about how it's been laid out, and we're working very hard with the federal government to improve it. Temporary foreign workers here in Alberta have the same workplace rights as other Albertans. They are under the employment standards, occupational health and safety, and workers' compensation regardless of their immigration status, so they are able to access all of the rights of other Alberta workers. We're committed to developing Alberta's workforce here in Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Urgent Health Care in Sylvan Lake

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We needed the funding model for primary care networks fixed, and I'm grateful that the Health minister listened. Sadly, Sylvan Lake is still without access to any 24-hour emergency care for our sick and injured. Ours is the fastest growing community in Alberta, with over 15,000 residents today and 900,000 tourists annually. Will the Minister of Health please confirm that an urgent care centre for Sylvan is contained within this \$18 billion minibudget?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. I think he's referring to the interim supply bill that we've brought forward to this House. Interim supply is something that we've had an opportunity to vote on. We've proposed that we put \$500 million back into public health care, which the third party had proposed cutting. I wish that Members of the Official Opposition had supported us in that. The only way we're going to be able to fund health care is if we have additional revenue to do so.

Mr. MacIntyre: In the pre-election March budget our community was promised for the umpteenth time an urgent care centre. Frankly, the council, local health professionals, and the community have put years of resources and time into trying to make this a reality, even raising \$66,000 for equipment. We shouldn't make them wait any

longer. They just need an answer. Will the minister please confirm that Sylvan Lake will receive this desperately needed urgent care centre?

The Speaker: I presume there was a "given" in there at the beginning. I may have missed it.

The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: I am happy to answer the question, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity. In terms of negotiations that may have happened with past government and the Official Opposition around floor crossings and promised infrastructure projects, I can't speak to what happened before the election. What I can speak to is what happens after the election. On May 5 Albertans gave us a clear message. They voted for a party that believes in a strong public health care system, strong public education, and making sure that we create jobs, and we're proud to deliver on that mandate. We're not going to make announcements in the time it takes to write press releases. We're going to actually analyze data and make sure that when we do make a commitment, we follow through on it.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you. It really is unfortunate that we have to bother the minister regarding details of this minibudget. Will the minister please encourage her colleague the Minister of Finance to live up to her party's promise of transparency? We've been asking for details on this interim supply, and we haven't been given the details of this thing, so communities across the province don't have the information that they need.

The Speaker: Hon. member, what's your question?

Mr. MacIntyre: The question: will the minister please encourage her colleague to let the details be made known?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, I've actually gone into quite a great deal of detail around the Health estimates. I'm happy for you to review that, and if you have additional questions around the interim supply discussion that we had with regard to Health, I'd be happy to go into that in further detail. In the fall we will have a whole and fulsome budget for us all to be able to debate in great detail – we've been very clear about that – and we look forward to bringing forward a sunshine list around infrastructure projects as well.

Rural Economic Development

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, last year, after a province-wide consultation, Alberta agriculture and rural development released the rural economic development action plan. Rural Albertans supported this initiative, as they essentially wrote it. But now rural development has been dropped from the ministry's title, and based on a recent examination of the ministry's website, the rural economic development action plan has also mysteriously disappeared. To the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry: do you remain committed to the rural economic development action plan, and why has this plan been removed from your department's website?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the member for the question. I'd like to thank the member for reminding the House about the importance of that program, and I look forward to discussing it in more detail with him soon. As the House knows, farm families work extremely hard and are a pillar of Alberta's economy. That's why I've been meeting with farmers and producers to hear their concerns and their ideas and why as

government we're working actively to strengthen agriculture and the communities that they support to help grow Alberta's economy.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, that was certainly very well read.

Given the broad range of public consultation that went into the rural economic development action plan and given the vital importance of having a vibrant and sustainable rural economy to the economic diversification and overall success of Alberta, can the minister outline how he has determined that he knows better than rural Albertans on this issue?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I in no way think that I know better than rural Albertans, and that's why we are doing our best to consult with farming families and the rural communities. The interim supply bill is simply a way to keep current programs operating for this year. I look forward to discussing funding priorities in more detail with this member and this House as we develop the full budget coming into the fall.

Thank you.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, given the propensity of this government to ignore not only the recommendations of rural Albertans but rural Alberta in general – first on health, now on rural development – there's a palpable and growing sense of resentment in rural Alberta towards this government. To the Premier: what other recommendations from rural Albertans does your government plan on ignoring?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that the member is perhaps overstating his case just a little bit. We are very concerned about ensuring the sustainability of our rural communities. We are very concerned about ensuring that we give those kids who grow up in rural communities a reason to move home, to come back home. That means supporting our strong public services in our rural communities as well as ensuring that we focus on job creation opportunities in rural communities. As we move forward on our job creation strategy and as we move forward on our budget in the fall, we have every intention of ensuring that the interests of rural communities feature prominently in the work that we do.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

2:20

Wildlife Regulations

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the last election Albertans wanted openness, they wanted transparency, and they wanted consultation before any new laws or regulations were passed. Even the new minister has said that she believes that Albertans expect fulsome and comprehensive reviews before decisions are made. But the minister recently approved a series of controversial changes to hunting regulations that ignored the recommendations and objections of landowners. Why didn't the environment minister consult with landowners before she pushed ahead with these controversial changes?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for his first question of the environment minister. It's an auspicious day. I will take the member's concerns under advisement. I do know that there were some very small changes made recently, and I'm certainly happy to take it up with the member afterwards if there was anything in particular that he found problematic in those wildlife regulations.

Mr. Loewen: Mr. Speaker, given that these changes involve doubling the hunting days allowed in the big-game season, landowners had a number of ongoing concerns. Minister, we understand that there are competing interests here, but do you not think that more consultations would be a better solution to the issue rather than getting it wrong?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I would remind the member to speak through the Speaker when he asks questions.

I am happy to revisit some of those consultations if the hon. member has any particular concerns with the changes that were made. I'm happy to follow up with him outside of the House, and we can report back to the Assembly together.

Mr. Loewen: Mr. Speaker, I understand that this government is new, but Albertans I've heard from want to know how this decision got made, and given that the last government regularly ignored the rights of landowners – and I hope that this government isn't offering more of the same – I ask: did you know what you were approving, or did you just sign whatever the bureaucrats put in front of you?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will ignore for now the wording of the question and, leaving that aside, simply say that our province is dedicated to sustainable practices in hunting and wildlife and that we are dedicated to sustainable resource development on the land in consultation with landowners.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Cooper: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order has been raised.

The Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Minimum Wage (continued)

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the past few weeks we have heard the government casting themselves as the champions of the underprivileged and downtrodden, as if they hold a monopoly on all things charitable and decent. This morning, however, we heard from nonprofits and charitable organizations that not only talk the talk but also walk the walk every day on the front lines. They have expressed grave concerns over the dramatic rise in the minimum wage. Has the minister consulted with the charitable and nonprofit sector and asked how this policy will affect them?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you also to the member for the question. I must say that I not only have spoken with them, as has the Premier – we had a consultation regarding minimum wage – but, you know, I am a social worker by profession. I have worked for many nonprofits supporting vulnerable and marginalized people, and I've worked in child protection as a child protection social worker. I feel like I do have some good understanding and knowledge of serving vulnerable people.

Thank you.

Mr. Hunter: That's great news. I hope it's true.

Can the minister table a list for this House of charities and nonprofit organizations that she has consulted with?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has a commitment to make sure that Alberta is for all of us and that it's fair and just. We already have met with nonprofits, the business sector also and labour, and we will shortly be moving forward on what's happening with the minimum wage. We've done a fulsome consultation, and we're moving forward.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you. Given that the largest group to clamour for this increase is not those who are on minimum wage but, instead, the special interests of big labour, can the minister assure us that this policy is not designed to pander to their largest voting block?

Ms Sigurdson: Mr. Speaker, this commitment was part of our platform, to move to \$15 by 2018. Alberta has the greatest inequality of any province in Canada. We currently have the lowest minimum wage. We're moving in a phased way to increase it. It's the fairest thing to do.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mandatory Country of Origin Labelling

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The House of Representatives has recently voted to repeal mandatory country of origin labelling for fresh beef, lamb, pork, and other fresh items, which required producers and processors to identify where an animal was born, raised, and slaughtered. It was costing Alberta agricultural producers millions of dollars to comply. This vote to repeal COOL was a great step forward for Alberta agricultural producers. My question to the minister of agriculture: as this decision by the House of Representatives goes forward to the U.S. Senate for consideration, what are you doing to ensure that Alberta ag producers see this law repealed for good?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for bringing up this very important issue. Alberta livestock producers work extremely hard and are an essential pillar of Alberta's economy. Our government is working to protect Alberta's farmers, which is why we are pleased that the WTO has ruled again, for the fourth time, that these regulations are unfair. Our number one priority is always standing up for hard-working Alberta families and protecting Alberta jobs. We are committed to protecting our livestock industry, and we'll continue to encourage the U.S. to lift these unfair and damaging rules.

Thank you.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Premier: given that last week you confirmed that you have not spoken to Rob Merrifield in the Alberta Washington office or any other staff working abroad, for that matter, how can you say to the Alberta agricultural sector that you are working on their behalf to lobby our southern cousins to repeal this regressive legislation?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What I said last week, actually, was that I'd spoken with my deputy minister in that department. In fact, I've been advised not only through the deputy minister but through other people that our representative in Washington has done quite a good job on country of origin labelling issues and that that work is continuing to go on. So, you know, we're in good hands. I know we're making progress on that issue, and I anticipate more work being done through the minister of agriculture in conjunction with it.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister of agriculture: given that you will be receiving very little support from this Premier, what can Alberta agricultural producers expect from you to offset the negative effects of having a government that is solely urbancentric?

Mr. Carlier: Thank you again for giving me the opportunity to explain that these discriminatory practices do hurt Alberta's farming families and need to be changed. I met with the U.S. consul general just yesterday and discussed this issue. The U.S. House of Representatives has voted overwhelmingly to lift these unfair restrictions. It is now up to the U.S. Senate to follow suit. I understand there is a Senate committee hearing on this very issue tomorrow.

The fact is that the U.S. is almost out of stalling tactics. We are working with the federal government. I have spoken with Minister Ritz to offer our support to ensure that Alberta's interests are protected and that the appropriate measures are taken if the Senate does not act to remove these regulations.

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

2:30 Postsecondary Education Accessibility

Mr. Connolly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While thousands of students are able to attend postsecondary institutions, including myself, the province continues to have the lowest student participation rate in the country. Even though people want to attend our postsecondary institutions, many struggle to find the resources needed to complete an advanced education. My question is to the minister of higher education. What is this government doing to make higher education more accessible to all Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Our government is committed to making universities, colleges, and apprenticeship programs accessible to all Albertans and affordable. Last week we announced a reinvestment of \$40 million in postsecondary and apprenticeship programs and froze tuition to ensure that students have access. We're very proud of this.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Connolly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for her answer. Given that over the years advanced education has experienced huge funding cuts and given that while the province announced a new cash injection into postsecondary education, the previous government's grant rollbacks have led to reduced student spaces, what's the government's plan to ensure that there are enough postsecondary education spaces for all qualified students in our province?

Ms Sigurdson: Well, we are working both with postsecondary institutions and with student groups to hear what needs to happen to move forward. We're going to do an intensive consultation process over the next couple of years to make sure that we're moving forward so that students do have access to affordable, accessible education here in Alberta.

Mr. Connolly: As a result of the aforementioned funding cuts, institutions like Mount Royal University and the University of Alberta have had to cut programs to save money. What is the minister going to do to ensure valuable programs are preserved in Alberta's advanced education system?

Ms Sigurdson: Institutions regularly review their programs to see what is best. For some programs it makes sense for them to actually close. For other programs they might want to expand capacity. This is just done routinely. The insertion of new funding won't necessarily change these decisions by institutions, but we certainly are working closely with all institutions regarding those decisions and making sure that the right training is available here in Alberta.

Thanks.

Dialysis Service in Lac La Biche

Mr. Hanson: Mr. Speaker, Lac La Biche has been promised a dialysis centre for years. In 2010 a touring dialysis bus was provided as a bandage. The bus broke down in the parking lot. AHS removed the wheels, and it has remained there ever since. To the minister. This is a travesty and an embarrassment to all Albertans. There is room in the hospital for the unit. When will you get rid of this bus and give my community the permanent dialysis unit it deserves?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for raising the question again today. I did hear his member's statement yesterday and passed him a note saying that I will be looking into that, and I absolutely will. I want to work through Alberta Health Services to make sure that we're providing the best service possible for all Albertans no matter where they live.

Mr. Hanson: Given that there are no emergency services on the bus and considering that in May a patient collapsed on the bus and paramedics could not get a stretcher onto the bus, which meant that the patient had to endure the indignity of being treated on the floor, when will you tow this bus out of the parking lot and provide a permanent solution? When?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you for the question. Some previous governments may have heard a question like this, written a press release, and pretended that things were going to be fixed without actually putting a plan or funds in place. You don't have that in this government. We're not going to make a promise unless we can keep it. I can't make you a promise today, hon. member.

Mr. Hanson: Mr. Speaker, while Alberta Health Services was wasting millions of dollars on salaries, severances, and bonuses, the good people of Lac La Biche raised over \$100,000 for the dialysis centre the government promised them but never delivered. As the minister said, nothing needs to change at AHS, and things are stable. Should my constituents expect more of the same AHS hokey, or should we expect to see the treatment centre we need and were promised?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. What I was talking about was when the same party was asking for simply having a reorganization and that that would magically solve all problems. Albertans disagree. Albertans need stability in the public health care system. We've had only five years. We're trying to make sure that we have opportunities for the fatigue from change to actually be addressed and for the staff to be able to bring forward solid recommendations. I look forward to updating this House when I have an opportunity to do so.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-West.

Bail Process Review

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In this House two days ago the Minister of Justice talked of reviewing Alberta's bail process. Perhaps the minister is unaware that in 2009 a short-term bail reform pilot project was implemented at the recommendation of a task force that gave Crown prosecutors the role of the bail hearing officer, with the goal of putting more police back on the streets. We don't need more studies. We need action, and we need leadership. To the Justice minister: why reinvent the wheel when you can adopt this previous initiative and implement a better bail process in short order?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. It is absolutely crucial to this government to make sure that we are reviewing the bail process and that we make the right decisions to keep our communities and our front-line officers safe. In this case we want to look at the information, and we want to make sure that we are making the right decision so that we can move forward with the right solutions to keep everyone safe.

The Speaker: Hon. member, first supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, again, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Crime Reduction and Safe Communities Task Force provided a thorough review of the bail process and also suggested other ways to reduce crime in its Keeping Communities Safe report, which I have with me and will table later in the House, will you commit today to build upon the recommendations of the task force, which I will, of course, table in the House for your reference?

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. At this point we're moving forward with the review. We're looking into it. We would like to put information ahead of decisions because this is an issue that is critical. It deals not only with the rights of people who are subject to the state's power; it also deals with the safety of front-line workers and with all of our communities. So we would like to have information first and action second.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much. I appreciate you looking into this, but as I indicated, we need leadership on this.

To the same minister: given that you have worked as a criminal defence lawyer yourself and are well versed with the bail process and I, of course, am a former police officer with 12 years' experience and formerly recognized by the Chief Crowfoot Learning

Centre of the Calgary Police Service as a subject matter expert on bail hearings, will you accept my offer today to work with you to help improve the criminal justice system, to improve its effectiveness for all Albertans while ensuring both members of the public and first responders are better protected?

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. We are absolutely committed to working with all stakeholders going forward. The review will engage all of our stakeholders. It will engage with all the police forces throughout the province, and I would be happy to hear from the member on that matter.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Northern Hills.

Calgary Young Offender Centre

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The future of the young offenders in Calgary was called into question just a few short months ago, when it was announced that the Calgary Young Offender Centre would close and move young offenders to Edmonton. Concerned Albertans made their dissatisfaction about this decision clear. In response, Alberta's new government put interests of youth first and announced in May that the Young Offender Centre in Calgary would reopen to continue to serve youth in Calgary and southern Alberta. My first question is to the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General. What is the reason behind your decision to reopen the Calgary Young Offender Centre?

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. I think that reopening the Young Offender Centre shows the values of this government, and those values are in supporting vulnerable youth and supporting our communities in ensuring that they are safer. By reopening the Calgary Young Offender Centre, we have ensured the long-term safety and rehabilitation of the offenders as well as the safety of the communities.

Thank you.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: The closure of the Calgary Young Offender Centre was supposed to save the province money. Less than two months later it's being reopened. To the same minister: how much money will this reversal cost Albertans?

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. This was a common-sense decision that was made in favour of Albertans. We believe that the cost of reversing the decision is far less than the cost of closing the centre, which would have had an impact on youth of the southern Alberta communities. This will allow those residents to stay in their communities, to stay attached to their support networks, and to increase their rehabilitative possibilities, which will save the system money in the long term.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Again to the same minister: if you put the campaign platform aside, what does opening the Calgary centre really mean for the youth of southern Alberta?

Ms Ganley: Thank you to the hon. member for the question. The decision to reopen the Calgary centre will allow youth to access programs and support and education while staying in their communities and staying linked to their families and their wider support networks. Mr. Speaker, we believe that the effectiveness of these services is significantly increased when these young offenders not only have access to the programs they need but also have access to supports from their families.

Thank you.

Members' Statements

(continued)

Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day

Mr. Piquette: Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this occasion to extend greetings and best wishes to the francophones of Alberta on behalf of the provincial government on the occasion of Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day. Saint-Jean-Baptiste is the patron saint of French Canadians, and this day has been celebrated in Canada since 1636, yet to my knowledge this is the first time that Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day has been recognized by a statement in the Alberta Legislature. It's about time.

Thanks to the efforts of individuals such as my own father, Leo Piquette, who stood up in this Legislature on April 7, 1987, to ask a question in French and was silenced, the right to speak French in the Legislature has been affirmed, and I would now like to take advantage of it.

Je suis très fier de souhaiter aujourd'hui à tous les Franco-Albertains et à mes collègues dans la Législature une très bonne fête Saint-Jean-Baptiste. La fête Saint-Jean-Baptiste est une importante célébration de la vitalité de la Francophonie canadienne et albertaine.

Nous voulons, comme le nouveau gouvernement, remercier les importantes contributions des Franco-Albertains au développement économique, éducationnel et culturel de l'Alberta. Aujourd'hui plus de 200,000 Albertains parlent le français. Ceci est grâce à nos excellentes écoles francophones et aux programmes de l'immersion française. Les jeunes qui fréquentent ces écoles représentent une importante force économique et culturelle pour notre province.

[Translation] As a francophone I am very proud today to wish a very Happy Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day to all Franco-Albertans and my Legislature colleagues. The celebrating of Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day highlights the vitality of Alberta and Canada's Francophonie.

As Alberta's new provincial government we wish to recognize the important contributions Franco-Albertans have made to the province's economic, educational, and cultural development. Today more than 200,000 Albertans speak French. This is thanks to our excellent francophone and French immersion schools. Students in these programs represent an important economic and cultural force in our province. [As submitted]

Au nom du gouvernement néo-démocrate ... [Mr. Piquette's speaking time expired]

The Speaker: Hon. member, the clock, in French or English, is always still the same.

Rural Issues

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, a strong and vibrant rural Alberta is vital to the success of our province. In 2009 the Conference Board of Canada estimated rural Alberta's contribution to Canada's economic activity at \$77 billion. Our farmers produce wholesome, premium-quality foods that are highly sought after around the

world. Alberta is a leader in the development of innovative and sustainable agricultural practices.

That's why it's hard to understand why this government has apparently ignored agriculture and, in a broader sense, rural Alberta. There's not one word in the throne speech about agriculture, our largest renewable resource. Rural communities finally get mentioned on the very last page of the throne speech and then only to be told that they need to keep contributing to the prosperity of Alberta. Rural Alberta is little more than a cash cow for this government, and based on Bill 3, we're going to need some more cows. They want to milk those cows, but they could care less about the condition of the barn or her pasture.

Mr. Speaker, rural Albertans know all about contributing to the prosperity of Alberta. There are no farms or ranches, there are no forests, coal mines, or oil wells in our cities. The people who grow our food, log our forests, and extract our mineral wealth don't ask for much, but they expect to be treated with dignity and respect and not to be forgotten or ignored by their government. That's exactly the message they've received in this throne speech.

People tell me, "Well, all their MLAs are from the cities," but that's not accurate. There are 11 government members, fully 20 per cent of their caucus, that represent constituencies that are at least partly rural. I expect that even they are frustrated by their government's lack of commitment or attention to rural Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, a strong Alberta depends on strength in all regions, urban and rural, from the largest cities to the tiniest villages to the hundreds of thousands of Albertans that live on the land and provide the food that nourishes and sustains us. It's high time for this government to acknowledge this and show rural Albertans some respect.

5th on 5th Lethbridge Youth Services

Ms Fitzpatrick: Mr. Speaker, I am standing to make the following statement about a key issue among many issues in Lethbridge, the issue of youth support programs. At this time I'm going to speak about 5th on 5th, a youth support service for youth between the ages of 15 and 30. This is an amazing program which has operated in Lethbridge for the last 20 years. During this time the program and its incredible staff have supported thousands of youth in Lethbridge and from many areas of southern Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, 5th on 5th plays a pivotal role in youth homelessness prevention, crime prevention, reduction of those on income support, and increasing youths' self-esteem and their quality of life. I know because my grandson was one of them. Our communities are happier, safer, and healthier places because of the success of this program.

Some of the programs offered are resumé assistance, printing 14,000 and developing 500 annually; career mentoring of 300 people, with a 75 per cent success rate; express literacy, with 100 people per year meeting learning goals; referrals, with 60 to 100 calls and visits per day; a job board posting 400 non-online job openings; a resumé bank, with 25,168 resúmes on file for 12,244 clients.

The Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-South West.

2:50 South Pointe Community Centre

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to share with the Legislative Assembly a project under way in Edmonton-South West. A group of dedicated citizens have taken it upon themselves to convert a former church into the South Pointe community centre. Should funding be approved, this new community centre would be

a partnership between private business, the city of Edmonton, community leagues, and the province of Alberta. This remarkable group has been able to identify an ideal location for a new community centre that will serve the surrounding communities at a fraction of the cost of building an entirely new facility. Once completed, the centre will provide program and office space for local community leagues, a performing arts and theatre space, a banquet facility, a daycare, a small conference centre, and a community library. It will become a social hub for the residents of the neighbouring communities.

Southwest Edmonton is one of the most rapidly growing areas in the city and in the province. There is a need for space for public events, indoor programming, and meeting and daycare facilities. This new community centre will provide some of this much-needed space. The renovation and expansion of the proposed centre would provide an exciting, practical, and viable solution to addressing the needs of communities in southwest Edmonton. It would also expedite the provision of needed community space that would otherwise take years to develop.

It is exciting to see community members coming together with a vision and energy to make their neighbourhood a better place to live. I'm proud of the work being done by residents of Edmonton-South West to ensure that everyone has access to the very much-needed community space and services. I look forward to being a part of what lies ahead with this project.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Nathan O'Brien Children's Foundation

Mr. Rodney: A terrible tragedy occurred on June 29, 2014, when five-year-old Nathan O'Brien and his grandparents disappeared. However, Nathan's spirit continues to inspire people to make a change in this world for the good of society in the form of the Nathan O'Brien Children's Foundation.

With the support of volunteers and friends and colleagues and corporations, Nathan's family received a wonderful gift to honour Nathan, a hockey game at the Saddledome, to make his dreams come true while helping other children. It was an unforgettable evening which featured superheroes and flash mobs, TimBits hockey players, Flames and NHL alumni, and Nathan's heroes, which included Calgary police investigators, generous corporate citizens, and our MLAs. The O'Brien family felt that it gave them the opportunity to follow Nathan's lead in life, to always play hard and have fun. The game raised almost \$60,000 for children in need, and the family thanks every single supporter, whom they refer to as real-life superheroes.

Now, since then the Nathan O'Brien Springbank TimBits tournament donated their proceeds of \$11,000 to the foundation, and the Airdrie Dads golf tournament and Shaw Communications added to that, and the Cougar Ridge soccer association, Nathan's previous league, recently held a drive to send soccer jerseys to Central and South America, and there is more.

The first annual Nathan O'Brien Children's Foundation superhero decathlon with Kids First will be held on August 15 and 16 at Springbank park for all seasons. The fundraiser will keep children in sport by adding coaching and equipment and extra sport training. Jennifer and Rod O'Brien have told me: "We've seen tragedy turn into something beautiful and quite unbelievable. We've been blessed beyond belief with our foundation and our chance to be parents to Nathan's spirit forever. Our prayer is that other parents who've lost a child could receive such blessings. We invite everyone to follow the Nathan O'Brien Children's

Foundation on our Facebook page to see just how great his spirit is and the great work that continues in his name for other children.”

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Ms Jabbour: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Affordable, quality child care is out of the reach of far too many Alberta families, and this is particularly true in my own constituency of Peace River. Universal public child care has social and economic benefits. It enhances the education and the well-being, the social development and education of children, and it enables parents to contribute financially to their own families, which improves their well-being as well. It's an important issue for our government, and to that end I'm really pleased to present this petition. It's sponsored by the HSAA, the Health Sciences Association of Alberta, and the petition was signed by almost 2,000 Albertans. It reads:

We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, [petition the Legislative Assembly] to introduce legislation that will provide universal, accessible, affordable, quality and public child care for children in Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there other petitions?

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to table this petition on behalf of Dr. Tran-Davies. The petition is entitled Petition against Inspiring Education. It has thousands of signatures and represents massive support by Albertans for her position.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Three o'clock approaches, and we have not quite finished the Routine. I think it would be in the interests of the House if we did, so I would request unanimous consent to extend Orders of the Day until we complete the daily Routine.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The Minister of Infrastructure again.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising to give oral notice of Government Motion 12, which reads as follows:

Be it resolved that:

- (1) A Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee of the Legislative Assembly be appointed to review the Election Act, the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act, the Conflicts of Interest Act, and the Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Act, consisting of the following members, namely Gray (chair), Payne (deputy chair), Renaud, Cortes-Vargas, McLean, Nielsen, Miller, Loyola, Miranda, Anderson (W), Cyr, Nixon, van Dijken, Jansen, Starke, Swann, and Clark.
- (2) In carrying out its duties, the committee may travel throughout Alberta and undertake a process of consultation with all interested Albertans.

- (3) The committee shall be deemed to be the special committee of the Assembly for the purposes of conducting a comprehensive review of the Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Act as provided for in section 37 of that act.
- (4) In carrying out its duties, the committee may solicit written submissions from experts in the field.
- (5) The committee is deemed to continue beyond prorogation and may meet during a period when the Assembly is adjourned or prorogued.
- (6) Reasonable disbursements by the committee for advertising, staff assistance, equipment and supplies, rent, travel, and other expenditures necessary for the effective conduct of its responsibilities shall be paid, subject to the approval of the chair.
- (7) In carrying out its responsibilities, the committee may, with the concurrence of the head of the department, utilize the services of the public service employed in that department or the staff employed by the Legislative Assembly Office and the officers of the Legislature.
- (8) The committee must submit its report, including any proposed amendments to the acts, within one year after commencing its review.
- (9) When its work has been completed, the committee must report to the Assembly if it is sitting. During a period when the Assembly is adjourned, the committee may release its report by depositing a copy with the clerk and forwarding a copy to each member of the Assembly.

3:00

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the rural economic development plan, which is on the Agriculture website. It gives us a solid base to build on going farther to further develop rural Alberta.

Thank you.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, I have copies to table today of two documents that I referenced in my questions today, entitled Alberta Minimum Wage: Submission, by Restaurants Canada, and also the media article Non-profits Raise Concerns over NDP Plan to Hike Minimum Wage. I have the requisite number of copies.

The Speaker: Are there any other reports or returns to be tabled?
The hon. member.

Mr. Ellis: Yes, thank you. Mr. Speaker, I have five copies of the Keeping Communities Safe reports, which I will be tabling to you.

Thank you very much.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the Hon. Ms Hoffman, Minister of Health and Minister of Seniors, pursuant to the Health Professions Act the Alberta College of Medical Diagnostic and Therapeutic Technologists annual report 2014, the College of Medical Laboratory Technologists of Alberta annual report 2014, the Alberta College of Pharmacists 2014-2015 annual report, the Alberta College of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists 2014 annual report, the College of Alberta Denturists annual report 2013, the College of Licensed Practical Nurses 2014 annual report, and pursuant to the Public Health Act the Public Health Appeal Board 2013 annual report.

Point of Order
Imputing Falsehoods against a Member
Reflections on a Nonmember

The Speaker: I'd like to move the Assembly now to the two points of order that had been addressed today. I'll call upon the Government House Leader to speak to the first point of order.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. During question period the member for Chestermere-Rocky View engaged in some questions to the minister of environment and the status of women. I have two citations, which I would like to cite. First of all, that the hon. member opposite imputed false or unavowed motives to another member, being the minister. This is under section 23(i) of our standing orders.

The second thing that occurred, Mr. Speaker, was a reference to Mr. Hudema, who was the author of a book that was referenced by the hon. member in her question. There I would like to cite *Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules & Forms* at page 151. It is section 493(4). "The Speaker has cautioned Members to exercise great care in making statements about persons who are outside the House and unable to reply."

First of all, I'd like to deal with that portion, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member in her question referred to Mr. Hudema – and I don't have the Blues – as a radical's radical. She made a number of disparaging comments about Mr. Hudema, who is not present in the House to defend himself. That is certainly not in keeping with the direction of Speakers and the precedents of this House. That is not acceptable practice.

But then the member went on to try and smear the reputation of the minister of environment through guilt by association. Having smeared Mr. Hudema in the way that she did and used the disparaging language that she did, she then attempted to associate the minister with him. Mr. Speaker, that is unacceptable. That is really, in my view, a very low form of criticism in question period. Unfortunately, it's very consistent with the pattern that we saw with the Wildrose opposition before the last election, where personal attacks and smears are substituted for constructive criticism of the government and its program, and it is unacceptable.

The minister indicates to me, just to set the record straight, Mr. Speaker, that at the time that Mr. Hudema wrote that book, he was the president of the University of Alberta Students' Union and the minister was an employee of the students' union whose job it was to edit the introduction of the book. She is in no way associated with the statements made by Mr. Hudema in that book and takes no responsibility whatsoever for those opinions and comments.

For the member opposite to attempt to associate the minister with all of the comments and opinions of the young man who was the president of the students' union at that time is completely unfair, unwarranted, and unacceptable as far as I'm concerned and certainly constitutes imputing false or unavowed motives to another member. I would argue very strongly that in doing so, the hon. member has transgressed the rules of this House and has dealt very unfairly and unacceptably with another member of this House by associating with her views that are not her own or were not her own at the time. Furthermore, she has spoken very disparagingly about an individual who is not present in the House to defend himself, which is also in contradiction of the rules and practices of this House, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. House leader – Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Cooper: We'll all get there some day. I mean to the House leader part. I don't mean you, sir.

It's my pleasure to rise on the point of order. I guess there's a large smattering here this afternoon that quite possibly could become a matter of debate. I'm just not a hundred per cent sure where to start, but let me start with addressing Mr. Hudema. It seems to be the start here.

The hon. member across has suggested that we made disparaging comments against Mr. Hudema. I just have a couple of points of reference. In fact, I think that we didn't say anything disparaging about this particular individual because he says these things of himself. I have a newspaper article here that I am more than happy to table where he's quoted saying: I am radical to the core. He speaks in his book, which I'm also happy to table in the House, about his first experience with radical cheerleading as he is a radical cheerleader. The hon. member was merely pointing out that this individual is a radical. He has associations or had had associations with the minister, and this side of the House was looking for some clarification around those associations and some of his radical viewpoints.

I might just add that when it comes to an individual that's not in the House to defend themselves, there is a wide range of opinion as to exactly who they're referring to, whether it's former members or if it's the general public, so there's a matter of debate within the good reference books that we use. But I might just add that moments after this interaction, which, clearly, is a matter of debate, the Premier made disparaging comments about some other member who used to be in this place. So if the Government House Leader is rising to say, you know, "You can't be talking about people outside of this House," and the Premier mere moments after is making disparaging comments of not just the general public outside of this House but of former members, who many of us agree or disagree with, I just think it's a little bit disingenuous to use one argument to benefit themselves and another when it benefits them.

The last thing that I will say on this point of order is that perhaps we will take the point under advisement and we will be much more cautious in the future when describing close, personal friends of the minister.

3:10

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

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just wanted to offer some comments from the third party with regard to this matter. I, quite frankly, agree with the Government House Leader with regard to the nature of the comments. But I do have to point out that using that same clause or that same subsection from *Beauchesne*, from page 151, with regard to references to persons absent from the House and unable to reply, I have to confess, sitting here in the third party caucus over the course of the last several days, that if I were to leap to my feet every time a person who is absent is disparaged using terminology like "corruption," "incompetence," "mismanagement," and some of the other stuff that's been thrown around both by the government and also by the Official Opposition, I'd have worn out the floor under my chair from leaping up and down so much.

So, Mr. Speaker, while I would agree with the Government House Leader that the comments I think went a little too far, it is indeed a difficult thing to parse that down to determine exactly where that line exists, and it is unclear exactly where that line exists. If I could offer my own personal opinion on this, I think we err better on the side of not impugning those not present and not impugning those present. Quite frankly, as has been ruled by Speaker Zwozdesky in the past Legislature, this only serves to raise

the temperature within the Chamber and reduce the level of co-operation between all parties within the House.

As a result of that, Mr. Speaker, you know, from our standpoint this point of order I believe is in fact well taken, but at the same time I would caution that, again, if we go down this path of leaping to our feet on a point of order every day on *Beauchesne's* page 151, which is a very commonly cited section of the rules and orders, we're going to waste a lot of time defending those not in the House.

The Speaker: Are there any other hon. members who would like to speak to the point of order?

Hon. members, a recent citation that members should exercise caution when making statements about persons who are outside the House and unable to reply: *Beauchesne's*, paragraph 493(4) as well as the *House of Commons*, page 616 to 617. I have the advice of the table on a particular ruling on this order. I have however decided to take it under consideration myself and report to the House tomorrow.

I can't say enough to this issue. The hon. member just cited time. This is the most valuable commodity that you have in this Assembly. I, too, do not wish to rise as often as I have because every time that I do, I'm taking away time from you. The word of caution applies across the House, not just on the opposition side.

I share with you these preliminary views. If you do not wish this Speaker to rise and interrupt and take time from your questions, I would ask all of you – and I think there are some specific ones in the House, that I choose not to name at this point, that already know who I might be speaking about.

I, therefore, at this point in time would defer my decision until tomorrow.

The second point of order. The hon. House leader of the Official Opposition.

Point of Order Insulting Language

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll be brief here. I just wanted to bring to your attention, sir – I will be citing section 23(j), "language of a nature likely to create disorder." In question period earlier today we saw the minister of the environment and the status of women, in response to a question from the opposition, used the words: I'm going to ignore that. While the word "ignore" itself may not be unparliamentary, we have all been elected to this House to debate the issues and to debate policy, and if there was any question today that was specifically based around policy – we were speaking specifically around a hunting regulation issue, and the response of the minister was: I'm going to ignore.

Here we have a situation where the government in the form of the minister is clearly being disrespectful and, some on my side have suggested, insulting. As the citation indicates, they used language that is disrespectful of the debate, to ignore one side of the House that's been elected to represent their constituents. If this type of language and attitude towards the Official Opposition isn't likely to create disorder, I'm not entirely sure what is. Sometimes it's not the words, whether they be radical or some other language that we can debate is parliamentary or not. Sometimes it's how we say the words that may be determined parliamentary or not.

When we take this sort of position – and I understand that there may have been some frustrating parts of question period for the hon. member, but to use language that is likely to create disorder certainly goes beyond the scope of our rules, and I would hope that in the future this type of language wouldn't be used when it comes to addressing questions that are fair and reasonable to be asked in this place.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With the greatest respect to my friend opposite, I do not believe that there is a legitimate point of order. I don't have the Blues, but my recollection is that the question went along the lines: is the minister making her own decisions, or is she just signing documents her staff put in front of her? There was an insulting implication in the question, which the minister then responded to by saying that she would ignore that and went on to answer the meat of the question, so quite the opposite of what the hon. Opposition House Leader is suggesting. I would suggest that it was actually the question that was more likely to create disorder as it was very insulting in its insinuation, and it was to the credit of the minister that she chose to ignore that implication and that insult and went on to answer to the best of her knowledge the meat of the actual question.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I will read from the Blues that have been provided to me. I believe the sentence in question is as follows: "Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will ignore for now the wording of the question." The minister, I believe, was simply commenting on the innuendo in the member's question. I would also interpret the sentence to read: "I will ignore for now the wording." I would therefore rule that there is no point of order.

3:20

Orders of the Day Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call the committee to order. Before we proceed, I just realized that there was an oversight when we first called the committee to order last week. For the newer members, who perhaps don't understand the process as well, when we're in committee, it's a little bit more relaxed. The men are allowed to take off their jackets, people can walk around, and you're able to sit in another seat as long as when the vote actually comes, you are in your own seat. Some of this arose last night when we were still in session, that members were sitting in different seats, which is not allowed until you are in committee. So, you know, feel free to be relaxed. You can bring in your coffee in the proper cups and that sort of thing and kind of enjoy that slightly less formal committee atmosphere.

Bill 2 An Act to Restore Fairness to Public Revenue

The Chair: I'll recognize the Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today to Bill 2, a bill which the Wildrose caucus cannot support in any way. Raising taxes to cover the excessive spending by this government and the previous government is not good or responsible governance. Since the NDP will not listen to reason and abandon this bill or even send it to committee for study, I hope that they will accept this amendment.

Madam Chair, I would like to present an amendment to Bill 2. I will pause while the House distributes copies.

The Chair: This amendment will be known as amendment A1.
Please proceed, hon. member.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Madam Chair, small businesses are the engine of Alberta's economy. According to Industry Canada, here in Alberta

there are 165,607 businesses; of those, 158,049 are classified as small businesses. That means that small businesses make up 95 per cent of the businesses in Alberta. They, just like large businesses, are job creators for Albertans. Small businesses like Rocky's coffee shop and bakery in Strathmore are hubs of local activity. One of the best shows on TV in recent years, *Corner Gas*, was based on a small Canadian business. Although life isn't always that funny in rural Canada, that show portrays the effects of a small business and what it can provide for a community.

I am worried, Madam Chair. I am worried about our small businesses. That is why I have submitted this amendment. Let me read it into the record. I move that Bill 2, an Act to Restore Fairness to Public Revenue, be amended in section 1(3)(b) in the proposed section 22(2.1294)(b) by striking out "9.0%" and substituting "10%".

Let me explain for a moment what this amendment means. This amendment changes the difference that small businesses pay compared to large businesses. Small businesses do not make as much as their larger counterparts; thus, Canadian provinces tax them differently. The effective tax rate at this moment is 3 per cent. By changing 9 per cent to 10 per cent, we lower the effective tax rate from 3 per cent to 2 per cent. This amendment would take some of the bite out of the economic hardships of the NDP bills before us on small businesses.

The government is imposing onto Alberta policy after harmful policy that will hurt small businesses. Many who both own and work in small businesses in my constituency of Strathmore-Brooks have expressed their concerns to me directly. They have told me face to face that they are worried for their jobs, for their businesses, and for their futures. They do not know how they will afford to pay their employees 50 per cent more and still keep their doors open.

They have to stay competitive with larger businesses. Larger businesses can keep their prices low by the sheer volume of product they produce. Larger businesses have an army of accountants, lawyers, and other employees on staff who can assist them in finding places to cut or to move money offshore. Small businesses do not have that luxury. Small businesses do not necessarily have anywhere to cut. Large businesses can often absorb losses by many different means. Small businesses are limited to a few options such as how many employees they pay or by raising their prices. Small businesses are operated sometimes by two or three employees, not counting the owner or his or her wife or husband. By forcing those businesses to pay 50 per cent more for their employees, two employees will now cost what three employees used to cost.

Jobs will be lost because of the minimum wage increase. I have not seen one serious study to suggest otherwise. According to Industry Canada, private businesses employ 1,315,227 people here in Alberta. Of those, 1,053,244 are employed by small businesses right here in Alberta. This increase to the minimum wage directly threatens, by some estimates, upwards of 10 per cent of Alberta's jobs. The only questions are: how close to that number will we actually come and what portion will come from small businesses? Small-business workers need our help. Small-business owners need our help. They need all of our help. This amendment will help them. By cutting the tax rate for small businesses, they may be able to recoup the cost of the minimum wage increase. This tax cut will allow small businesses to stay competitive with larger businesses.

I admit that I am doing this for somewhat selfish reasons. I want to make sure for selfish reasons that small businesses will stay open. I want to be able to ensure that the schnitzel truck around the corner stays there and doesn't go out of business. I want to make sure that Smiley's in Strathmore continues to provide their delicious products at a competitive price. I would rather that none of these tax hikes

go into effect, but the least that we can do here is try to protect small businesses and mitigate the damage.

My worries about small businesses are increased by the negative effects that the royalty review could have on this province. With jobs already being cut from the energy sector and companies backing out of Alberta, the number of people with money to invest in small businesses or at all is shrinking.

3:30

In Duchess, just outside of Brooks in my constituency, the Whistle Stop for years was a busy hub of business activity. It provided sandwiches to oil patch workers who needed a tasty meal at a cheap price really quickly. If you go there today, Madam Chair, it's empty. They're barely keeping the doors open. They're hurting.

When the recession of 2008 hit the global marketplace, the Bank of Canada wisely reached out to help Canadians. The people at the Bank of Canada knew that during times of economic downturn something needed to be done. The Bank of Canada lowered interest rates to help Canadians get through the rough times, but we cannot expect interest rates to stay low forever. The low oil prices and the royalty review are pushing Alberta to the brink of another economic downturn. We should not turn a moderate economic downturn into a full-blown recession. The NDP should follow the example of the Bank of Canada and help Albertans instead of hindering them.

Don't raise Albertans' taxes. We are trying to hold the line on raising all taxes for Albertans because we know that this will not help them. But since the NDP insists on raising personal and business income taxes as well as the minimum wage, we believe that this small-business tax cut is both affordable and fair. This tax cut will be a minor stimulant to the economy, in need of desperate help. This tax cut will possibly generate more revenue.

Let me refer back to everything that the Wildrose caucus has stood for and said over the last week: lower taxes encourage growth; lower taxes encourage new businesses; lower taxes create more jobs. Growth, new businesses, more jobs: all increase the tax base and thus increase the overall revenue for the government. At the moment Alberta has the highest – let me repeat: the highest – small-business tax rate in western Canada. British Columbia's rate is 2.5 per cent, Saskatchewan's is 2 per cent, and Manitoba's small-business tax rate is zero, an NDP accomplishment which I hope can be replicated here someday. This decrease, a 1 per cent decrease in small-business taxes, would give Alberta at least some competitive advantage. This bill effectively removes Alberta's advantage when it comes to attracting large businesses. So let's give small businesses a helping hand. Give Alberta a slight help toward bringing back the Alberta advantage by lowering the small-business tax rate by 1 per cent.

Now, I know that we can agree on this amendment because this idea is not mine. As the House leader will know, I love to take credit for ideas and coming up with something brilliant like the idea of cutting the small-business tax rate. Instead, I must unfortunately hand all of the credit to the Premier herself. Let's all give a round of applause for the Premier. In 2012 the Premier campaigned on lowering the small-business tax rates. I will read a quote from the Premier that she gave on the 29th of October 2012.

In the last election campaign the NDP proposed to raise corporate tax rates by 2 per cent while reducing taxes for small businesses by one-third to help them grow. We were, ironically, the only party of any of the political parties in the election to propose a tax reduction. That was a tax reduction for small business.

Well, I've never agreed with the Premier more, Madam Chair.

The Premier has kept her promise, unfortunately, to raise taxes on large businesses. The Premier may have forgotten that she promised to lower taxes on small businesses. It's a good thing we're

here to help and remind the government. I'm helping the Premier bring in an amendment that she herself campaigned on. I am helping the Premier by introducing an amendment that helps small businesses.

This amendment will provide a beacon of hope in a storm of increasing personal taxes, changes to the royalty structure, increases to the minimum wage, and increases to business taxes. This amendment may not fix the damage that the combination of these bills will create, but it will help. Members of this House, I plead with you: let's help small businesses; let's help the Alberta economy; let's vote for this amendment.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I won't be supporting this amendment. The reason I won't be supporting it is that the 2012 NDP platform did talk about reducing the small-business tax. That was in a very different economic climate. Fast-forward to March 2015. The PC budget that was produced really showed everybody, because of the economic outlook, that it was going to be a tough, tough fiscal environment. The budget that this NDP government ran on did not include a tax cut at that time for small business.

The environment for all businesses in Alberta, including small businesses, is very strong in terms of what they can have. We have a low-tax environment overall. We have many other things that small businesses rely on. We have an educated population and strong infrastructure, both physical and social.

The cut itself that's being proposed would cost a significant amount of money, about \$167 million. We have a different fiscal environment. We need to ensure we have stable revenues. It's really interesting that the member opposite wants to chastise government on one hand for not having put forward a budget this month but on the other hand is proposing a tax cut when he really has no understanding or idea of the impact on our programs and services.

I would say that, on balance, we have a good plan going forward. Small business will benefit because we have a globally competitive environment in this province. They're going to benefit from all that's going on here. A reduction like this, on the back of a napkin, perhaps is not the best way to do things.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Madam Chair, how much time do we have left for this?

The Chair: That was it. Oh, you have 20 minutes yet. I apologize; the timer hadn't been set.

Mr. Fildebrandt: I'll briefly respond to this before allowing my colleagues to continue the debate. I think it is incredible that the government would accuse anyone of not costing something out under the present circumstances. I will remind this House that the Wildrose balanced-budget plan actually added up before we presented it to the media during the election.

I'll remind this House that the government has given us six or seven different figures in the span of 24 hours on what their new spending will be. The best answer we got was that it was somewhere in the \$600 million area. This is a bill that is raising taxes without any idea about how much their total revenue will be for the year. They have previously passed a bill in which they have no idea how much new spending they will be putting forward to Albertans this year.

If the minister is concerned about costing and the affordability of this tax cut, then I would recommend that he table figures to this House detailing what he expects the total revenues of the

government to be. Unfortunately, I have asked him nearly a dozen times, and at no time has he ever been able to provide that answer.

The Chair: I'll recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Chair. I have to admit to being just a little bit gobsmacked when the Finance minister popped right up and knew it was \$167 million. Wow. That is, like, the first answer we've gotten from you that's complete and to the point. Thank you. I'm amazed.

But what I find amazing about it is that when I asked the government, you know, for example, how much they thought they'd raise by increasing corporate taxes by 2 per cent, something that they had in their election platform, something they've talked about for months, something that they dragged into this House in a bill, they haven't got a clue. Why do I know they don't have a clue? Because they said that they don't have a clue. I'm taking their word for it that they don't have a clue, Madam Chair, because they said that they don't know how much the tax they want to raise is going to bring in. That's why I'm so sure, because the government told me. That's why I know.

3:40

However, it's amazing that when the opposition brings up a tax decrease, well, that number came right to the Finance minister's mind between – I don't know – the time the document was handed out and the time the minister was on his feet, maybe seven minutes. You are brilliant. I just wish that you took a little more time with your own work. If you are waving around the Wildrose document, which is against the House rules – but we'll ignore that right now – I would be embarrassed, if I was you, that the opposition parties know more about what they're talking about than the government does.

The Chair: Hon. member, just a reminder, please: through the chair.

Mr. McIver: Yes, Madam Chair. I thank you for that reminder. I am grateful for it, and I will heed it.

Consequently, I find this amazing. The government minister – I think it was the House leader at the time – a couple of days ago, when I was asking questions about other topics, also didn't have answers about where the other \$500 million has gone. Actually, the government's numbers are so inaccurate, Madam Chair, that they couldn't actually tell me whether it was \$500 million or \$600 million, couldn't actually tell me whether they are spending less than the \$1.8 billion or, if they were indeed spending that, what the heck they were spending it on. I believe that, too, because I heard it from the government. That's why I am so very sure that I'm right about that, because I heard it from the government.

Madam Chair, referring to the Restaurants Canada document that I tabled in the House today, they did talk about a typical restaurant business 101, and in the document that they furnished the government with, at least the labour minister and the Premier, they talk about a \$10 restaurant bill. Their breakdown of the \$10 restaurant bill goes like this: \$3.48 for wages and benefits, \$3.40 for food and beverage, \$2.41 for operating expenses, and 71 cents for pretax profit. So if you've got a 7 per cent pretax profit and the government is taking 3 per cent out of that, that's taking a big bite out of small business, a very big bite.

Now, I appreciate it's not the sense of the bill, but it does speak to how important this is, Madam Chair, and to what a good idea this amendment is, which is why I'm going to support it, and I hope all members of the House do. When you've got the average restaurant, which is probably not completely typical of all small businesses –

but I'm sure there are a lot that mirror that – and government has already taken 3 per cent out of that 7 per cent, down to 4, leaving them with 5 instead of 4 has got to be a good thing, particularly when we know that those same small businesses, be they restaurants or otherwise, are still, I assume, going to have a \$15-an-hour wage increase inflicted upon them.

Let's keep them open. Let's keep them open. Let's not tell Albertans: you have to cook at home because we're closing up all your restaurants. If the restaurants stay open, there's no way they're going to be able to do it without radically increasing prices. That's what restauranteurs and bars do. I do have the occasional adult beverage in a pub, Madam Chair, and the people in those pubs tell me – their words, not mine – that when this \$15 comes in, the cost of the beer on tap is going to go from \$6 to \$9. In terms of percentage – it's one and a half times – I think that is probably a believable number. You know who's going to suffer the worst? The people making the 15 bucks. If they could afford a beer once a month now, they won't be able to afford a beer once a year. So if you think you're helping them, you're not.

That takes us right back to the amendment before us. The government has said that they are going to torture and hurt small businesses by adding to the minimum wage by 50 per cent. Let's let them live. Let's let them live. The House leader said this to me the other day, because I asked him that, and his words were pretty close to: the same as they were with your government, \$500,000. But just doing quick and dirty math, \$500,000 a year divided by 365 days is \$1,300, \$1,400. If that's not exactly right, forgive me, but I know it's not far off.

So if you've got a business that's doing \$1,300, \$1,400 a day worth of business, how much profit are they making? Seriously, I mean, even at 30 per cent they're making \$500 a day. A small-business owner typically puts in 12, 14 hours a day, and that's assuming that they have no other expenses to take out of that. So letting them have a little bit more so that they can keep their business open, so that they can keep employing other Albertans – be they young, be they seniors, whatever – seems like a very good idea. Giving a smaller tax burden on businesses that are already small is a very good idea.

I support the opposition's motion, and I encourage all other members of this House to do the same.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Madam Chair. I apologize for waving the piece of paper. I'm learning many things here in this House this week, my second week, sitting in a chair when I shouldn't be sitting in a chair and waving a piece of paper I shouldn't have waved, and I apologize. Forgive me.

The paper in question was something that I pulled off the Wildrose website. It came out at 11:48. It talked about a 1 per cent tax cut to the small-business tax rate. So I asked my staff if they would cost what that was, in the time between when it came out, earlier today, and sitting here and rising to speak to this point. The small-business tax rate, at 3 per cent in the March budget of the PCs, would have brought in \$503 million. When you take a point off that, that's \$167.7 million. The idea that we should do that on the back of a napkin or as a result of a press release doesn't seem like a really strategic way to look at a fiscal plan going forward.

I do want to remind everyone that the tax environment in Alberta is still, even with the tax changes that we're talking about in this bill, An Act to Restore Fairness to Public Revenue, towards the low end, all across the country. That is why I'm suggesting that we not do this. I insist as Finance minister in this government that we look at the revenues and at doing the best job with the expenditure of

revenues to support small businesses and other businesses in Alberta through a competitive economic environment in this province.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to talk about the amendment to Bill 2 and to express my concern that the governing party is not in support of this. I have to say that as a small-business man, I know what this would have done for my business.

In order to be able to clearly articulate my concerns about this refusal to support this, I want to give you an example. There seems to be a misperception about small-business men, that they make huge amounts of money. I have been a small-business man since I was 14 years old, the first time that I had the opportunity to be able to rent a lawn mower from my father, the first time that I had an opportunity to be able to use his rake and go out and generate money. I worked hard. It gave me a sense of purpose. It gave me a sense of the ability to do something on my own and to have ownership. This is the sort of thing that is at risk here.

3:50

There is a perfect storm beginning in Alberta. Where the Alberta advantage defined us, now we seem to have this perfect storm starting where small-business men are being squeezed out. I don't think that that's the intent of this government, and I'm not saying that it is. But I want to just point out that if you do squeeze out the small-business man or the small-business woman, it creates less competition in your economy. It provides larger corporations, who have higher margins – they have higher economies of scale, so they can weather these bad policies, in my humble opinion. I don't think that it is the intent of this government to punish small businesses, but in reality their policies are punishing small businesses. Because small businesses don't have the ability to weather these things as larger companies do, they will shut the doors, and there will be less competition, and that's always bad for an economy.

Now, I tell you this from my own perspective. I didn't read this in a book. I did go to university. I did get as much education as I could, but this is knowledge from the school of hard knocks. I have had the opportunity of running many businesses, starting up from scratch, which is the most difficult thing to do, and I have seen what the Alberta advantage did for me. If there is opportunity, an entrepreneur will look for that opportunity, and they'll try to make it happen. They put in their own time, their effort. They wear many hats. They invest what scarce resources they have, and they become chief bottle-washer in every way.

This is the sort of thing that every economy – if you take a look at historical precedents, every economy that has helped small businesses and given them what they need has prospered. Every economy that has not helped or has hindered – red tape, barriers to entry, whatever it is, lack of competition – has always faltered. I am concerned, greatly concerned, at the tone and the optics of what we're seeing here.

I'm concerned that we have other provinces in western Canada, B.C., at 2.5 per cent, as my colleague has said; Saskatchewan, at 2 per cent; Manitoba, at zero. Now, obviously, we need to address an issue here that seems to be lacking. I've brought this up a few times, and I think it needs to be brought up again. We are losing our comparative and competitive advantage. In small business we understand that principle. We understand that in order for you to be able to make it work, you have to be comparatively advantaged to another company. You need to be competitive, and if we lose that competitive edge, then as small-business men we have to close our doors.

Now, I think that on a micro scale that can transfer to a macro scale as well, as the government is a larger business. There's only one income. That's taxes and fees. If you take a look at that as a static, nonmoving pie and you just need to take some more of that, then, obviously, if you have a spending problem, you're going to try to take more of that pie. A conservative approach – the reason why I am a conservative is because conservatives take a look at the economy and say: "You know what? This pie can be grown. What can we do to be able to help this pie grow?" The best way to help a pie grow is to stimulate the economy through helping small businesses grow. They are the major driver in an economy, the absolute major driver in any economy that actually is doing well.

I think that with the intent of the sitting government being to help the economy, to help supply social programs that I believe in – I believe they're important. They help the people who need it the most. You want to have that pie or the portion of that pie to be able to do that. I would caution you to think about this for a second. If you want that pie or you want more, to be able to increase social spending – to take more of that pie just means that you're going to drive out businesses. If you take more out of a small business's pocket and they don't have high margins to be able to cover that, then there's no way that they can survive, and they go out of business. Then your pie shrinks, and now you have less that you can actually use for those social programs. If you really, really are concerned about having the money to be able to provide for these social programs, then the best approach to this is to be able to help small businesses.

Now, making us competitive, which I believe this amendment will do – it allows us to be more competitive. It stimulates small businesses. This is why I'm in support of this amendment to Bill 2. I hope that by doing this amendment, it does actually restore the fairness to public revenue. I hope that this argument has been heard, and I understand that there might be ideological reasons why it hasn't been. But I can tell you again that this is not coming from a person who's read a book about some possible way of being able to do this. I've actually lived it. I've lived it most of my life.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, it was brought to my attention – and I apologize; I didn't notice – initially that you weren't in your proper seat to speak, and that was something I neglected to also mention. While you can move around in committee, you must be in your seat to speak or to vote. Just to clarify that for any other members who wish to do that. That's in accordance with Standing Order 16.

Hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, did you want to be recognized to speak? Then I can recognize you next.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. It's a pleasure to get up to speak in support of this motion. I think anyone who was part of the campaign recognizes that the Alberta Liberals were pushing the agenda for small business to get a break, especially during these down economic times. We don't have the lowest small-business tax in the country. We have an opportunity to give an olive branch, especially during the challenges faced in these last six months and the foreseeable future, frankly.

I think we have to assume that there may be a longer downturn than we initially anticipated, and some of the best predictors, as if anyone can claim to be a best predictor – but many of the pundits in the oil industry and internationally are saying that this could last longer than we thought. The Saudis have a large reserve. They can play this game indefinitely, and I think we need to look beyond party lines to see how we can reach across to the small-business community, enhance new economic opportunities, increase or

stabilize the jobs where we can, and look at the opportunity to send an olive branch, I guess, during these times of challenge.

There's been a little too much polarization in our debates in these last 24 hours, 48 hours. I'd like to see some opportunity to reach across and find some common ground here. It's a small change. It's a reasonable and responsible change. I think it would send a good message, especially at a time when we're looking at so many uncertainties. The government is looking at a royalty review, a carbon levy, both of which I supported, but it is going to have to be seen in the context of some of the negative impacts it's going to have on jobs and business.

Actually, if we adopted this amendment, we would fall into closer line with the rest of the country and send a strong message that we're not totally ideological, not entirely going one way. So I would encourage the government to really, seriously think about it and allow a free vote on that side. It would also send a good message to the Legislature that this is something that has partly to do with balanced thinking, a balanced approach, a democratic response. I dare say that many people on that side of the House are in touch with small businesses and have a sense of what this would look like in their communities as well. I don't need to say very much more except that it would be a powerful statement, reaching across the aisle and seeking to co-operate at this early stage in our work.

I support the amendment, and I hope others in the Legislature will.

4:00

The Chair: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Chair. I want to thank the Member for Calgary-Mountain View for his very constructive comments. It's a very rare and strange day when we agree on very much, and today is one of those days. He is an elder statesman in a Legislature that does not have – not to impugn his age or imply an expiry of any kind . . .

Dr. Swann: I just changed my mind.

Mr. Fildebrandt: We have now lost the support of the Liberal Party.

But he is an experienced statesman in a Legislature that does not have very many experienced statesmen, and I think that we would be well served to heed his advice, to not blindly follow our ideological zeal. We all have it. We all have our own ideas, our own principles, ideologies, or philosophies, but we should not blindly follow them without being open to evidence or to amendment or compromise. In my maiden speech to this House I said that we should stick to our principles but not refuse to accept "a proverbial half-loaf of bread" at the expense of those principles.

This is a responsible measure. This is a measure that will help take the bite off some of the other measures the government has proposed or already passed. Whatever those members think about how correct those policies may be, they must recognize that they will have adverse effects on businesses, especially small businesses.

I want to thank the Member for Calgary-Mountain View for his comments. He brings a lot of wisdom to this Chamber, not wisdom that I will agree with most of the time. He is a member of this Legislature who appears to agree with the governing party on the vast majority of the issues. Perhaps his independence of mind relative to members of the government gives him a certain clarity, and I beseech members of the government to listen to his advice.

The Chair: I'll recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Madam Chair. I, too, rise to support this amendment, making that perhaps nearly unanimous on this side of House. I echo the comments of the Member for Strathmore-Brooks and echo the request from the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, that we do have an opportunity here to demonstrate to Albertans that, in fact, those of us here in this House in the 29th Legislature are ready to operate and to govern differently, to hear good ideas irrespective of which side of the House they come from, and to support those ideas. And I encourage all members of the House, both on the front bench in government as well as private members on all sides, to think very hard about what this amendment will do, the positive impact it will have.

One of the great things about this province that I think we lose sight of sometimes: as Albertans if you have a good idea, if you work hard, if you're honest, you will do well in this province. That's the entrepreneurial spirit, that makes Alberta a great place, and it's something that, unless you have lived and worked overseas – in my case my wife has moved from overseas to Alberta. We sometimes lose sense of that perspective. Even in other parts of this country that entrepreneurial spirit is not as strong as in this province. So this allows a vibrant and strong culture of small business. It allows Albertans to hire Albertans. It creates jobs. It creates prosperity. It creates wealth, and when we have wealth creation, all Albertans benefit. So this policy is consistent, certainly, with Alberta Party policy, and I support it without reservation.

One thing I would encourage the government to think about is the consequences of their policies, whether intended or unintended. Now, one of the key concepts of taxation policies is the concept of integration. Integration is an important principle in the Canadian tax system, especially for businesses of all kinds, Canadian-controlled private corporations, and their shareholders. It's based on the premise that an individual earning an income through a corporation should be in the same tax position as if an individual had earned the income directly. In other words, an individual should be indifferent, from an income tax perspective, as to the type of entity used to earn income. Now, this may sound like dry accounting-speak, Madam Chair, but it is very, very important. It is a critical and very key point to understand when we talk about tax changes of all kinds.

Income earned in a corporation is first taxed in the corporation, and the after-tax amount is then further taxed at the personal level when it is distributed to an individual as a dividend. The combined personal and corporate tax represents the effective tax rate of earning income through a corporation. So in order to achieve integration, dividends received by individuals from taxable Canadian corporations are subject to a dividend gross-up and dividend tax credit mechanism. The individual shareholder includes income in a grossed-up amount representing an approximation of the corporation's pretax income and then gets a credit representing the tax paid in the corporation, so in theory the tax is effectively paid at the personal tax rate.

Now, that's a very important point. Prior to the introduction of this bill Alberta entrepreneurs and shareholders enjoyed near-perfect integration as the Alberta dividend tax credit effectively operated to provide taxation rates on the flow through of business income at 39.6 per cent for income earned at the small-business rate and 39.3 per cent at the general business income tax rate. So when compared to the top marginal tax rate for personal taxation, previously 39 per cent for Albertans, there was essentially no material difference between earning income personally or corporately. With all the numbers the important point, I'll say again, is that there was essentially no material difference between earning income personally and corporately.

Now, with the changes announced here in Bill 2, the gap between earning business income and earning personally has grown

dramatically. I won't quote the numbers, but I can assure you that there is an imbalance here. This amendment, Madam Chair, creates an opportunity for businesses to generate more income, to generate more wealth, and to create more jobs for Albertans.

Let's state again that Alberta has a higher small-business tax rate than our provincial neighbours. B.C., Saskatchewan, Manitoba, all have lower small-business tax rates. Add to that – the fact that Alberta is no longer in a strong position of integration creates the very real possibility that Alberta entrepreneurs will perhaps purchase a revenue property in B.C. or Saskatchewan, and perhaps they will declare that as their taxable residence on the 31st of December each tax year. That means that there's significant tax leakage risk out of the province of Alberta. Whatever we can do in this House to prevent that from happening and keep those tax revenues in this province to fund the very important programs that Albertans rely upon – I think it is incumbent that we do that.

I also think we need to think about not just the revenue side of the equation; we do need to think of the expense side of the equation. We need to think about whether our Alberta tax dollars are in fact spent effectively. I find it unfortunate that we haven't had much discussion in this House about the cost-efficiency side of things, about good management of Alberta's public services and good stewardship of our finances. Is our public service as efficient and effective as it could be? Has the government taken steps to ensure that key ministries like Health but all others focus first on cost efficiency before simply asking for more dollars? What has the government done to change the culture of Alberta's public service, that is significantly more expensive than other public services around the country? My worry is that if there is what seems to be an infinite amount of someone else's money in the mix, there's an awful lot less incentive to find savings.

So, Madam Chair, with that I would again reiterate my support for this amendment and encourage all members of the House, on both sides but in particular government private members, to give very serious consideration to supporting this amendment.

Thank you.

4:10

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Madam Chair. I also rise in support of this amendment today and to reflect on a few topics that maybe I see here emerging. I see big government, I see big taxes, and I see big labour, none of whom seem to be overly concerned about the plight of small business here today.

Deficits – I think small businesses call them losses – cannot be financed by a wave of the Finance minister's magic wand. Let's keep that in mind. Small businesses live and die by their annual revenue that they keep, by the taxes they pay, by the wages that they pay, all issues that we've discussed here today. Those deficits, those losses mean a loss of livelihood, employment, and ultimately, in many cases, the failure of small businesses, hard-working owner-entrepreneurs, risk takers that help build this province. I think the figure, that 95 per cent of businesses in this province are small to medium-sized businesses, has been stated before.

But when I think about my constituency – we don't have a lot of big corporations in my constituency. It is primarily small businesses that add vibrancy to the community. They take risks. They pay rent. They employ young people or maybe senior citizens, in many cases, or people who are looking for part-time employment. I look at the Cornerstone café: owner managed, hard-working people there. They have coffee, they have homemade food, and they provide a venue for local music. A popular spot. Only about 25 or 30 seats there. I'm sure they struggle at the end of every month to decide

whether the owner-manager can take any wages themselves to support the risk that they take to run that enterprise. Madam Chair, I worry about businesses like that.

A new business, that I actually met the owner of during the election, Around the Bend soft pretzels: in the community he's tucked away back in a strip mall, probably the only spot he can afford as a new business. He actually lives in Calgary-South East, but he wants to move closer to his business, so he's going to buy real estate there. He's going to invest. He's looking at schools for his children. He and his wife both work there. She has a full-time job, but she comes there. And the opportunities I've had to go into that store: young people from the community, living in the community, are employed there quite happily, with a new entrepreneurial – a new concept. First concept of its type, I think, in Alberta.

I worry about their viability, their ability to survive. I hope that they can come through this. But every little bit helps. A minimum wage, which is going to deeply affect them, is already a problem. This amendment at least allows some relief on the other side of the coin if they're lucky enough to have a profit that is going to be taxed. Let's hope that they can achieve that.

Sunshine, a local Vietnamese noodle house; Razors Edge Barber Shoppe; Deer Valley Florist; the local Bonavista computer shop: all their success, viability, or failure could hinge on the small latitude which could be accorded by this amendment. As mentioned before, small business is big business in this province. It's the entrepreneurial spirit of Alberta.

Madam Chair, I support this amendment to protect the businesses. And let's be honest. If those businesses disappear, there will be no taxes. The livelihoods and the people and the families affected by this and by what seems to me to be a blatant disregard for Alberta's entrepreneurial spirit and by extension the Alberta advantage – thank you.

The Chair: Hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, you're on my list. Did you wish to speak? Go ahead.

Mr. Nixon: Thanks, Madam Chair. I thank you for the opportunity to speak on this amendment. Just as my friend the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks said earlier, I'm not for raising taxes. I think we've been pretty clear on that over the last few days.

Having said that, though, I do believe that this amendment can undo some of the harm that this bill will do to Albertans. A 50 per cent increase to minimum wage is much easier for a large business to absorb than a small business. Small businesses are run by a very small number of employees. Forcing a small mom-and-pop shop to pay 50 per cent more for their employees will mean, in some cases, that they can only afford to keep 2 out of 3 employees. Madam Chair, this is just not a viable option for small business. I've heard members across the way from the NDP caucus say time and time again that they support local business, and I'm sure that they do believe that, but this is their opportunity right now to prove that that is really true.

Local businesses, Madam Chair, are not Walmarts and they are not Starbucks in your local area although I'm sure that you can expect the price of your nonfat soy milk latte to go up. They are, though, in fact, the shop on the corner whose owners wake up every morning to make breakfast for their neighbours. They are the shops at the local farmers' markets in my community, that bring fresh fruits, fresh vegetables, local meat, and fresh-made doughnuts. This amendment would help those small businesses cope with the harsh policies that this government is implementing. This amendment would help those small businesses cope with the increase to the

minimum wage and an economic downturn that a royalty review may encourage, that this government is planning.

This is a small tax cut, Madam Chair. This is a 1 per cent tax cut, but it would help Albertans. We want to help Albertans. The members across the way say that they want to help Albertans. Well, this amendment helps Albertans. To the members opposite through you, Madam Chair: I would like them to know that even your Premier suggested that this tax cut would help offset the overall hike to 12 per cent. Even your leader wanted to lower small-business taxes. Even your leader saw the benefit that a 1 per cent tax cut would make for Alberta.

Now, the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks went on at length about what the Premier said in regard to small-business tax cuts. I suppose, though, that the argument could be that a lot of that was said in 2012 and that the climate may change. So maybe we should have a look at what the now Minister of Municipal Affairs said when he was in opposition just a little over a year ago, on April 22, 2014, Madam Chair.

I'd like to remind the House that the Alberta NDP was the only party during the 2012 election that had in our platform a reduction in the small-business tax. We would have reduced it by a third. We understand that small businesses really are what drive the Alberta economy. But, again, instead of helping out the little guy, this government . . .

And he was referring to the government of the day.

. . . is interested in returning the favour of the bigger corporations, the ones that help them get elected election after election. You know, it's quite frustrating.

This is now the current NDP Minister of Municipal Affairs.

I would say again through you, Madam Chair, to the members across the way that this amendment can help Albertans. Everybody in this House claims to want to help Albertans, so they should want to get behind it. So I'll say on behalf of all small businesses in Alberta: please vote, all members, for this amendment.

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

Mr. Barnes: Madam Chair, thank you very much. I rise today in support of the amendment by the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks to amend section 1(3)(b) in the proposed section 22 by striking out "9.0%" and substituting "10%," which will effectively make Alberta's small-business tax rate 2 per cent instead of 3 per cent, as the New Democratic government is proposing, on top of the already 11 per cent charged by the federal government to small businesses.

I support a lower tax principally for four reasons: first of all, the nature of small business; secondly, the timing of this tax increase and the nature of our economy now; thirdly, the efficiency and the value and the wealth that the small-business economy adds to Alberta like no other part of our economy does; fourthly, the \$167 million that this cut would put back into the pockets of Albertans, potentially, is about one-third of 1 per cent of what already the most expensive per capita government in Canada is spending, and that's where we should look first.

4:20

I want to talk about the nature of small business. I've had much opportunity to work with small-business people, be friends with small-business people, and see what small-business people add to our province and our community. Madam Chair, you cannot walk into a small business without somebody behind you asking that business owner for a donation, a helping hand, a barbecue spot, some things that 99.9 per cent of the time small-business people do to make our charities stronger, to help our people, to help our communities.

Owning a small business: I think the statistics are that 4 out of 5 go broke or shut down in three years. I think the statistics are that very, very few of them are that profitable anyway. I can't count the number of times that I have talked with a small-business person who has said something to me like: I don't have an RSP; my RSP is my business. Or worse yet, during times like now they say things like: I had to take my RSPs out to pay my suppliers, to pay my staff, to pay my rent, to keep my business going.

To the New Democratic government: these are the people you're hurting. These are the Albertans that the Wildrose is fully prepared to stand up for and make it so that they have a better chance to share. And we owe them. They provide so much for us. Every community has many businesses that provide us choice and options and competition and give us better services and better pricing. Their reward, after the New Democratic bill is through, will be the least competitive small-business tax rate in all of western Canada.

Needless to say, small businesses also employ our friends, our children, our neighbours. They purchase goods and services so that all of us have jobs, so money flows through the economy. I've heard many small-business men talk about how hard it is to stretch a dollar. That dollar generally has three or four places to go – and it's amazing how they make it work – and our new government is adding to this burden.

The second reason I'm totally in favour of the amendment of the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks to keep our small-business tax rate competitive is the timing. There's one bad-news announcement after another of people being laid off, of businesses closing in Alberta, big ones and small ones. The economy is cyclical here. It's part of the process. It's part of what could happen, for sure.

Many of our good small-business men will get under this, find a way to be more efficient, find a way to be more competitive, work longer hours, stretch that dollar even further. But now they're going to have to find a way to pay our government, already the most expensive government per capita in all of Canada, even more of the fruits of their hard-earned labour. At the same time in the next three years they will be facing a 50 per cent increase in their cost of labour. My goodness. How much do you expect them to do? How much do you expect them to give up rather than look at your own house first? And I know you inherited that house. That's maybe the best opportunity to take a look.

The third reason that I'm in favour of a 2 per cent small-business tax rather than the 3 per cent increase the new government is providing is the efficiency, the efficiency of money that small business leaves to the economy: how this money circulates, how other jobs are created, other taxes are paid, other purchases are made. Small businesses and the not-for-profit sector of our economy are easily the most efficient, are easily the best way for us to have more quality of life and more choices, and every chance we get, we should promote it and help encourage it and help make it stronger.

We've talked a lot in Alberta for many, many years about diversifying the economy. Many people will say that the best way to diversify the economy is through competitive tax rates, nationally and internationally. You combine competitive tax rates with stable utility prices – and we all know what the previous government did to our transmission costs on our utility bills, especially for our seniors, and I wait for the day when we can talk about that again.

Balanced budgets: it's important to have balanced budgets.

Running deficits: businesses know that it's just a future tax, and they know that a lot of the time they are the target of that future tax, so they prefer to locate in a jurisdiction that doesn't run deficits.

Minimal bureaucracy is another way to diversify the economy. You're inheriting a government that the Canadian Federation of Independent Business has given a D to for five or six years in a row, so there should be lots of room for improvement there.

The last thing is property rights. The government needs to have strong property rights for individuals as those are the foundation of wealth. Governments need to know their limits so that individuals and businesses can create wealth and have their say.

One PC Premier several years ago cut taxes, put in a 10 per cent personal flat tax, cut corporate taxes. It led to \$17 billion in the sustainability fund. It led to several years of prosperity, wealth creation, and job growth. It's a model that works. It's a model that will allow individuals to flourish, that will allow governments to then tax them. The pie can be bigger. Individuals can have more freedom.

I just want to close by saying thank you to all the small-business people for all they've provided in terms of the choice, in terms of the jobs that they provide, in terms of the wealth that they create. I would ask this government to at least stay competitive with other provinces, with other states. Look for that \$167 million from the \$45 billion we already spend annually, and let Albertans have the freedom and the choice that that would provide.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to speak to the amendment put forth by my hon. colleague, neighbouring colleague, Strathmore-Brooks. As I'm sure like all ridings throughout the province – everybody here represents one – my constituency of Little Bow contains a number of small mom-and-pop-style businesses that do not make more than \$500,000 a year in profit.

4:30

Small local businesses provide job opportunities for local residents. This can be in the way of part-time help or full-time management. Local jobs keep the residents in town, so the advantage is generalized outward as the employee spends money at the local restaurant during meal breaks, gasses up at the local gas station to get to work, and stops at the local grocery store on the way home at night. The advantage of a small local business employing local residents creates a domino effect that helps the community as a whole.

Small local businesses support the area through their everyday needs. Small businesses open accounts at local banks, hire local CPAs and attorneys. When they need supplies, they can simply step out, go down the street, and pick them up. Reducing the small-business tax from 3 per cent, the highest in western Canada, to 2 per cent keeps the money at home, so to speak. It allows small businesses to retain earnings and reinvest in their businesses during this time of economic uncertainty.

British Columbia and Saskatchewan joined with Alberta to form the New West Partnership in order to reduce trade and investment barriers across our three economies. It would be a real step in the right direction to be able to harmonize that small-business tax across the three jurisdictions to show how friendly the west is to small business in these troubling economic times. Alberta's small-business tax rate is one full per cent above Saskatchewan's and a half per cent higher than B.C.'s, and of course we've heard that Manitoba's is zero. Alberta appears to be the true sore thumb here.

Now, the NDP have talked about this very subject in the past. In 2012 the NDP proposed reducing the small-business tax. It was within their platform, on page 18. There are even references going back to 2004 that the NDP wanted to reduce this tax. In fact, as has been said here twice already, the Premier supported cutting small-business tax. Her quote is within *Hansard*, and I don't need to read that again. Although I don't necessarily agree with what the comment from the Finance minister may have been regarding the

context of what was going on in the world at that time, I would say that was a quote. This isn't a court of law. It's just something that is in *Hansard*, so we quoted it.

While the amendment alone will not stop the NDP government's philosophical agenda against entrepreneurs, it will provide a beacon of hope for small businesses from every corner of this province, small businesses like the Coffee Bureau on Jasper Avenue, here in Edmonton; or the Coaldale Bakery, in downtown Coaldale; or the local food producers who attend the farmers' markets all over this province. This tax reduction would be a boon to those who want to promote and buy local food.

A high tax on small business is one of the least efficient ways to raise money. High taxes hurt jobs and economic growth and directly impact local communities. We hope that the NDP will put pragmatism before ideology and work with the opposition to make this positive change to the legislation.

The Wildrose will continue to stand up for Albertans by standing up for small Alberta business, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other speakers to the amendment?

If not, then we'll call the vote.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:33 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Fraser	Pitt
Barnes	Gotfried	Schneider
Clark	Jean	Starke
Cooper	Loewen	Stier
Cyr	McIver	Strankman
Drysdale	Nixon	Swann
Ellis	Orr	Yao
Fildebrandt		

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Ganley	Payne
Babcock	Goehring	Phillips
Bilous	Hinkley	Piquette
Carlier	Hoffman	Renaud
Carson	Horne	Rosendahl
Ceci	Kleinstauber	Sabir
Connolly	Larivee	Schmidt
Coolahan	Loyola	Schreiner
Cortes-Vargas	Mason	Shepherd
Dach	McCuaig-Boyd	Sigurdson
Dang	McKitrick	Sucha
Drever	McPherson	Sweet
Eggen	Miller	Turner
Feehan	Miranda	Westhead
Fitzpatrick	Nielsen	Woollard
Totals:	For – 22	Against – 45

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Chair: Back on Bill 2. The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Actually, Madam Chair, I'm rising pursuant to Standing Order 32(3), requesting unanimous consent of the House

to shorten the bells' interval to one minute for the remainder of this session.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Chair: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Madam Chair. At this time it's my pleasure to introduce an amendment, which I assume will be called A2. I'll give the pages a moment to come around and pick it up so that it can be distributed, and then I'll chat more to it.

The Chair: This will be amendment A2.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to move amendment A2 to amend Bill 2, An Act to Restore Fairness to Public Revenue, that it be amended in section 1(2) and (3) as follows: (a) by striking out "July 1, 2015" wherever it occurs and substituting "January 1, 2016" and (b) by striking out "June 30, 2015" wherever it occurs and substituting "December 31, 2015."

Madam Chair, it's a rather straightforward and simple amendment, the intent of which is to afford the opportunity of the corporate entities, the businesses that will be affected by the 20 per cent increase in the corporate tax rate, at least a little bit of time to adjust and to budget properly for this rather significant change that now is scheduled to take effect in six short days.

4:50

It's been discussed at some length in the Assembly already that there are a number of things where the new government has let the House know that they need time to prepare a budget and to study things. You know, I'm prepared to accept that discussion because, certainly, putting together a budget is a complex piece of work, and they are new at it. So I am quite prepared to cut them some slack on that although I'd certainly like to see it happen as early in the fall as possible, but it needs to be done carefully.

In the same breath, for this government to introduce this taxation act and to bring in a corporate tax increase 15 short days after the Speech from the Throne to me is acting with undue haste. Last evening we had considerable discussion about the merits of referring this bill to committee, and that was rejected, which in my view is unfortunate. But in lieu of that, Madam Chair, I think it's a very good idea and I think it would be very prudent on the part of the members of this Assembly to put back this increase to January 1, 2016, so that companies could have a chance to do proper budgeting and not, if you want to use the term, change the rules in the middle of the game. This is a major change, and it will have major effects.

I'm sure the Minister of Finance has probably already got the calculations from his office because I know that the Finance deputy minister and staff are excellent at doing those sorts of calculations. I'm sure he has the numbers as to how much revenue this will mean that the government will forgo. I understand completely, when we see the kinds of spending increases both accounted for and unaccounted for in other pieces of legislation, that this government wants to turn on the revenue tap full blast as fast as it possibly can. But, Madam Chair, that is not without consequences. That is not without effects on our economy.

Again, I will offer the experience that I had serving on Treasury Board in the last government. One of the things that, you know, all of the economists we spoke to told us very carefully is that these changes to the budgeting process and to the taxation structure need to be made carefully, and you need to take the time to do them and to give proper forewarning. Instituting a 20 per cent increase in

corporate tax rates with virtually no warning other than that it was policy in the election, but then to turn around and do it so quickly, with so little warning in my view is not prudent, and it does not allow the corporate entities – hence, the amendment that I am moving. I would encourage members to carefully consider this, and I look forward to the debate.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. It's a delay, of course, of several months, half a year in this case, of CIT. Six months' delay in CIT, when we know that CIT on an annualized basis will bring us in \$350 million to \$550 million is quite an expensive endeavour to take. It's an expensive hit to take. I can't recommend it. It would only balloon the rather large deficit even larger. So I would urge my fellow members on this side to reject it out of hand because we can't afford it.

The former government and the third party's own PC budget would have added to the PIT rate. It would have been slower and lower; I grant you that. Nonetheless, they were talking about taxes at the PIT level. But what they didn't talk about was corporate taxes even though, I think, a rather large percentage of Albertans who chimed in on an Internet survey to that extent, to look at what they wanted to see in government revenues going forward and the balance, were quite supportive of CIT. About 69 or 67 or 70 per cent of the people on average wanted to see that, and for some reason that didn't show up.

The hon. member is correct. It did show up in the successful party platform of the NDP government as a 2 percentage point increase from 10 per cent. Frankly, when I was at the doors talking to voters, they were quite supportive of raising the CIT, not because they wanted somebody else to pay for it but because they knew that we all had to share in the burden that was before us in terms of the deficit of this province.

So, Madam Chair, I would say that the amendment put forward by my friend across the aisle would just be going down a bad road. We can't afford it. We need to stick with the program. I think we've got a good fiscal plan going forward that will get us out of this deficit in four years.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Madam Chair. You know, I want to speak a little bit about my dad, whom I love to death. As I mentioned before, a single dad, he started a business back when I was a little kid, and I learned everything about that business. As I got older and in between a not-so-stellar professional hockey career and school, I worked for him and learned about the business. One of the things I remember about my dad is that under the Progressive Conservative government – I don't typically do this, where I mention the Progressive Conservative Party, but I guess since I'm on this side now, I'd better get used to tooting our own horn a little bit harder – he had the ability to groom that business, that, you know, at one point employed 30 people and fed 30 families.

The one thing that I do remember: the government of the day, whether it was even the federal government, when they made changes, it affected our family. When there was a downturn in the economy or something changed in the housing market, it affected our family. It affected things like the ability to pay for postsecondary education, the ability to go on vacations, the ability to do home renovations. Once again, I think that we've got an opportunity here. Everybody understands the platform of the governing body. Certainly, you feel that's your mandate to govern. But I think that

one of the important things in any kind of leadership is that you have to have grace. Far too often what we see in this Chamber, in this House is not too much grace afforded to the people that went before us because it's easy to armchair quarterback after the fact.

I think we also need to recognize the contributions of businesses, large and small, throughout the province, what they've been able to give Albertans, the charities that they helped fund, the events that they put on. We've all been a part of that. I think, once again, that this would be a great opportunity to afford these folks some grace, to afford families some grace. In all honesty, the people that I'm talking to are concerned about jobs. They're concerned about their jobs. Now, whether it's oil prices or some of the new things that the government is instituting in terms of policies around finances, this would be a great opportunity to allow people some time and some grace to put their own fiscal house in order and, you know, provide some breathing room.

So I ask the members of this House to support this amendment. Thanks for your time.

5:00

The Chair: Any others? The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate your recognizing me this afternoon. I rise in support of the amendment from our colleagues down the aisle here a little to the left. You know, I think we've heard a lot from this government about the importance of consultation, the importance of getting things right, the importance of spending time to prepare and to plan. They're taking May, June, July, August, September, October: six months to get it right. As an everyday Albertan I hope they do. I hope that our province is better because of their governance rather than worse, and I hope that we can play a role in ensuring that happens.

Today I rise in defence of the many, many, the thousands of Albertans and the family businesses and businesses that don't have a voice here in this Assembly. They have been given no time – and by no time I mean seven days till the 1st of July in one case and to October in another – to make the necessary adjustments to their planning. I think it's a little disingenuous of the government to talk about the need for planning but then not give the very people who elected them that opportunity or that same ability to plan.

I think that this afternoon we have the opportunity to do what's right for Albertans, not just to move this desire of the government to rush through this. You know, it's becoming more and more clear that the government has a desire to rush into these massive increases of 20 and 50 per cent in some cases. But this could potentially be a small token, a gesture to recognize the importance of those outside of this place by allowing them the opportunity to take the necessary steps to prepare for the incoming change that this government is bringing.

So I rise in full support of allowing that to happen, and I encourage all members of this Assembly to think about the individuals and the Alberta businesses that don't have the same sort of ability and latitudes that this government does.

The Chair: Any other hon. member who wishes to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Madam Chair. I will be brief, but I rise also to speak in favour of this amendment. You know, I committed to the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, when he told me what this amendment was going to be, to listen to the case and the arguments that would be made on both sides of the House and that I would make up my mind based on the evidence presented in the House. Based on the evidence presented by the hon. members who

have spoken, I do support this amendment, in particular the very short time frame that businesses of all kinds have been given to adjust to this change.

Business demands predictability. It demands a stable environment. I believe that amending this to give them just that, an additional six months, is more than appropriate. Ultimately, over the course of the next three and a half years, I suppose, from the time this amendment will come into force to the time of the next election, this government will be able to collect increased revenue, as is their desire. But I believe in predictability and also as an indication to Alberta's business community that this government is willing to work with them not only in word but in deed and in action.

With that, Madam Chair, I'll sit. But, again, I speak in favour of the motion. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to the amendment?

If not, then we'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Chair: Moving back to the bill itself. The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. At the risk of inciting the statement that doing the same thing over and over and over again and expecting a different result is the first sign of insanity, I do have another amendment.

An Hon. Member: The first sign of opposition.

Dr. Starke: And that, too, I'm getting used to. Thank you.

I'll wait for the pages to distribute this amendment. I'll maybe just say a few words to preface this. Where the last amendment dealt specifically with the sections of Bill 2 that were dealing with the change in the timing of the implementation of the increase to the Corporate Tax Act, this has to do with the sections of Bill 2 that have to do with Alberta's Personal Income Tax Act.

So I'll allow the pages to complete the distribution of this, and then we will go into the details of the amendment.

The Chair: This amendment will be known as amendment A3.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Madam Chair. The sum effect of all of the changes that are listed in amendment A3 are essentially, again, as was attempted in the last amendment, to move the effective date of this to January 1, 2016. Specifically here – and we discussed this briefly last night – one of the portions of this amendment is the coming-into-force date. The coming-into-force date is on the very back page, on page 22 of the bill, in subsection (20), which indicates that the coming-into-force date will be January 1, 2015. There is a practical or, shall we say, a mechanical reason for that, and that is so that the tax rate that is to be instituted as of the 1st of October can then be applied for the full taxation year, from January 1 to December 31, but at a one-quarter rate to reflect the one-quarter portion of the year that it applies to. I'm certainly familiar with how all of that works.

My difficulty, Madam Chair, is that by setting a coming-into-force date, in fact this government is taking ownership and actually applying what they are doing, the changes in their policy, to a period of time where they weren't actually elected. I have a fundamental democratic problem with that. I cannot tell you if it is completely unprecedented. It has not to my knowledge happened in the time that I have been here in this Chamber, but that does not mean that it has never happened before. Indeed, my concern is that it introduces a retroactivity to what is being done within this motion.

You know, I'm opposed to the degree of the increase in personal income tax. Hon. members on both sides of the Chamber will know that our party proposed in our most recent budget prior to the last election a modest increase in personal income tax phased in over the course of a couple of years to those income earners over a taxable income of \$100,000 per year, which would be approximately 9 per cent of Albertans, and a further half per cent taxation on those Albertans earning over \$250,000, which would be approximately 44,000 Albertans, roughly 1 per cent of the population. To me it's essentially very similar to what the members of the government proposed in their platform, differing only in degree and magnitude and differing only in terms of how quickly it was imposed. Here, again, the reason for that more gradual imposition of those changes is simply because the best advice that we received from the Finance department was that doing it more quickly and more suddenly would in fact be negative to the economy and create difficulties for our economy.

To me it is cleaner, it certainly makes things a whole lot easier if these changes are instituted as of the 1st of January, at the beginning of the tax year. Then we don't have all these transitional issues, we don't have the things with the different calculations, and we don't have, you know, the truthful and the very real situation where people will now be taxed additionally for income they've already earned and income for which they have already had their tax deducted. To me that's a sort of retroactivity that says: well, your take-home pay was X number of dollars from January to June, but now we're going to take a little bit more of the taxation off so that that rate can be applied for the full year. I have an issue with that. I don't think it's fair.

5:10

I know that this government ran on a platform of fairness. It was one of the big watchwords in the platform: let's be fair. You can also make the argument, because I've certainly heard it, that: well, for someone who has a taxable income of \$200,000 a year, you know, it doesn't matter. Fairness doesn't have a price. Fairness applies whether you earn \$50,000 a year or \$500,000 a year or \$50 million a year. Fairness applies at all levels.

Quite frankly, I'm concerned – and it really bothers me – when I sense that members of this government, in their zeal to adopt some of the socialist policies which they haven't been able to adopt for 110 years of Alberta's history, now having the levers of power and the keys to the treasury, are very enthusiastic about following socialist dogma and bringing it into place just as fast as they possibly can. You know, that's certainly the appearance. I hear my friend from across the way suggesting that that simply isn't true, but that's the way it appears to me. I would suggest to my colleagues across the way that this is the time for pragmatism. It's better to be pragmatic than dogmatic. For a veterinarian to say that is a little odd. Nonetheless, it is a time where we have to consider the pragmatic effects of these changes and recognize that these effects can be profound.

Madam Chair, it's perhaps a quixotic attempt to tilt at a windmill, to move this particularly amendment. But I would again suggest to the members of this Assembly that a retroactive clause, as subsection (20) lists, and a coming-into-force date a full five months before the actual election date are unprecedented. I think that it is a dangerous precedent, and I would question whether that, then, would allow this government the opportunity to bring in legislation that has a coming-into-force date that might precede the date of their election by one year, two years, five years, or longer to rewrite history that they feel has been wrong over a period time.

So, Madam Chair, I would encourage members, as the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow indicated, to listen to the debate that

will ensue on this particular issue, and I would encourage members to vote in support of this amendment. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I would urge people not to support this amendment.

There is just one small correction in something that was said. This change for personal income tax would be from October 1 forward, not from June 1 forward. I think it was just misspoken.

So we're really talking about a tax change that comes into effect after we got here. We got here on May 5. We're talking about October 1 for changing the taxes going forward. The reason that it's written the way it is in the bill, Madam Chair, is that the personal income tax system only supports one annual rate. As a result, the lower pro-rated rates are being introduced for 2015, and they have to be introduced effective January 1, 2015, to reflect the October 1 introduction of the full rate. That's why these numbers for 2015 on the personal side are things like 10.5, 10.75, 11, and 11.25 per cent. When you annualize that, it comes out to the 10, 12, 13, 14, and 15 per cent that will be in place for 2016.

I just wanted to also point out that we're not changing the level at which the tax rate jumps from 10 per cent to 12 per cent. It's at \$125,000, and 93 per cent of tax filers in this province as a result won't see a change in their taxes; 93 per cent of tax filers are at \$125,000 or less. That 7 per cent balance goes up the graduated levels up past \$300,000.

I'll just use the word "fairness," that was identified earlier. Bill 2 restores fairness in our income tax system by asking the most successful corporations and the highest income earners to contribute a little more. This bill establishes a progressive tax system for those who earn \$125,000 and beyond. It will be implemented on October 1, and salaried individuals will see their tax change at that point in time. For self-employed individuals who file their taxes at the end of the year, the tax rate will be pro-rated, as I said, Madam Chair, so that they contribute the same amount as individuals who are salaried.

That's why I think we're not doing anything untoward or in any way other than being clear about why we need to see the taxes change on the personal side. I think there is precedent, actually, or I heard there was precedent from members of the ministry, in that a province in this country introduced a change in taxes mid-year, and they went through a similar process as we've got before the House in this bill.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. In listening to the Finance minister, I have no reason to doubt that he believes what he's saying, but I am saying that his argument actually indicates, maybe even better than my colleague did, just how unfair this is because what he's saying is that this goes back to January 1 of this year. It's one thing to say that we're only going to give somebody five or six days or a short period of time to get ready for a tax increase. This isn't changing the rules in the middle of the game. This is changing the rules after the game is just about over for the year and after people have put budgets in place and made financial arrangements and estimated revenues and estimated expenses and estimated whatever other personal and business costs they may have and saying: "Yeah, well, your estimates are no good. We've just changed them because we can."

With all due respect to the government, Madam Chair, what I just heard indicates even more strongly that what is being proposed in this amendment actually makes it more fair, much more fair. For a

brand new, shiny government, that I think would say that it prides itself on fairness for Alberta, unless you support this, you're not proving it. It's just the way it is.

I will ask you and other members of the House to support this. It's a way of saying to Albertans: "We actually want to treat you in a fair and equitable way. Even though it doesn't match our particular philosophy or dogma exactly, we're going to do it because it's the right thing to do." I'm going to support the amendment, and I urge other members of the House to do the same.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise also to support this amendment. One of the key reasons that I think it's very important to move the date to the 1st of January is that it has become significantly more complex for Albertans to file their taxes based on a couple of elements of Bill 2, the first being that going from a single tax bracket to five tax brackets makes it more complex for ordinary Albertans to figure out how much exactly is above this amount and below that amount or above this amount and below that amount. It's a challenge, and it's another reason why Albertans would then need to seek assistance of an accounting professional to complete their taxes, which are complex enough as it is.

5:20

But I also wonder how many Albertans are going to receive a significant bonus on September 30, 2015. I also wonder how we're going to determine how much income was earned from January 1 to September 30, 2015, and how much income was earned from October 1 to December 31, 2015. Are we going to require Albertans to get two T4 slips? That adds confusion. It also adds, I think, the opportunity for Albertans to shift income into a certain period and to perhaps not have the desired effect that the government would like. At the end of the day, I think we'll find that the difference between making the changes effective October 1 and the changes effective January 1 is probably not that significant and material to government but, I can tell you, is very significant and material to Albertans.

In my statement in speaking to the previous amendment, I talked a lot about efficiency and the importance of asking the questions: "Why do we have taxation at all? What's the purpose of it and making sure that the government is always mindful of the value of the money that Albertans entrust to them? Why do we have taxes?" Well, we have them to pay for badly needed programs that Albertans rely upon. I want to make sure the House understands that I'm not against taxation. The Alberta Party ran on a platform of subtle, measured increases to corporate taxes, 1 per cent, not 2, which would have maintained Alberta as the lowest corporate taxed jurisdiction in the country, which would have allowed us to ensure that we have a low-tax advantage and not created any incentives for companies to perhaps seek a different jurisdiction in which to do business.

The reason we have those taxes is to pay for important programs in public health care and public education. I am a strong believer and the Alberta Party is a strong believer in public health care and public education. We're strong believers in long-term care and home care for seniors. We're strong believers in a strong and robust postsecondary education system. We believe in our parks and recreational opportunities. We believe in strong, equally enforced, and predictable environmental regulation. We believe in infrastructure building, including – and I'll note it especially – flood mitigation. But those things won't be there if we don't manage our public finances well, if we don't deliver government services

efficiently and effectively, if we don't get good value for the tax dollars that Albertans entrust to us.

I encourage the government and all private members in this House to consider supporting this amendment from the perspective of fairness to your constituents, transparency, and ease of completing their own taxes when that time comes.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other speakers to amendment A3? Hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, you wish to speak?

Mr. Gotfried: Just brief remarks, please, Madam Chair. I know that we're talking about some key issues here. I know that the term "balanced budget" is not necessarily something that is going to be well known across the floor here, but many households actually try and live by a balanced budget. They have tax and retirement planning to do, and much of that is done before the end of February every year. Many of those people also have no pensions, so their ability and their planning for contributions to RRSPs and to RESPs for their children's education is extremely important. Tax deductions, if I'm not mistaken, are generally distributed by employers in January to set the rates of deductions for the year ahead.

Granted, \$125,000 sounds like a lot of money, but if you have a family of five, you're trying to save for retirement, you're trying to save for your children's education, and you're planning for a mortgage, you may be stretched on that a bit, as many Albertans are, but you've made those commitments and you've made those plans for a balanced budget. You have family costs. You have sports. You have extracurricular activities. You may have uncovered costs. If you do not have a pension, if you don't have a health plan, you may have kids' braces or you may have health care costs that come up. Here we're going to change the game in the middle of the year albeit it said that it's going to be in the fourth quarter of the year, but in fact it's not. It's actually going to be retroactive and stretched across the entire year.

I would encourage this House to support this motion, again, in support of fairness for Albertans. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other speakers on A3?

If not, we will call the question.

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Chair: We're back on Bill 2. Any further speakers? We've got the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Chair, for allowing me to speak on Bill 2 and what are its short-sighted, misguided, and detrimental provisions. No matter where I've travelled in this province, I have found one thing to be universally true. Albertans are a motivated, industrious, and humble people. We are prudent with our finances. We work diligently towards success. We don't expect more than our share, nor do we object to sharing the fruits of hard-earned labour.

Why do we do these things? Because Albertans are builders. I believe it's in our DNA and our heritage, and it defines this province. We work to build better lives for ourselves, better communities for fellow citizens, and a better future for posterity. We toil, and we create. We strive, and we achieve. We work, and we build. I say this so that the human element to our discussions may not be forgotten.

If there's one lasting remnant of the previous regime that I found truly discouraging, it's the depersonalization of the Alberta taxpayer. I've listened intently to this debate, not just now but months prior. From the previous government I've heard time and

time again about the need to find new revenue streams. Madam Chair, Albertans are not revenue streams. We are people: builders, creators, entrepreneurs. We are neighbours, family members, and caregivers. Albertan taxpayers are not a piggy bank to be smashed when the mood strikes nor a limitless supply of blank cheques for the latest spending scheme.

Let's dispense with the euphemisms and cut right to what this is about. This government wants more money and must take it out of the pockets of Albertans. Make no mistake; this money will come out of the pocket of Albertans, all Albertans. Any tax involves a certain amount of economic disruption. There is no such thing as a consequence-free tax, and the cost is ultimately borne by everyone in the economy. When money is moved from the productive sector, it shrinks investment and deters entrepreneurship and growth. This is why Winston Churchill famously said that a nation trying to tax itself to prosperity is "like a man standing in a bucket and trying to lift himself up by the handle."

Of course, that is not to say that taxation doesn't have its place. Society accepts a certain amount of taxation, harmful though it may be, as a necessary cost of running a government. Given that taxation depresses economic activity, the art is in finding the minimum levels necessary for the administration of the province.

We are being told by those across the aisle that the province has not been collecting the appropriate levels. Let's address that for a moment. This fiscal year is projected to be the third highest – the third highest – for revenue collection in Alberta's history. For all the talk of a revenue roller coaster we have seen this increasing steadily for years. Consider that even now, with our economy on unsteady footing and projected royalties down, we are still expected to bring in this tremendous revenue. We have been asked repeatedly by our government to pull together or to do our part. Albertans could be forgiven for wondering why the government refuses to hold up its own end of the bargain.

5:30

Before trying to extract even more money from our economy, from our communities, from our job creators and innovators, I would again suggest that the government explore many possible ways to bring our runaway spending back to sustainable levels. Before asking for yet another blank cheque, perhaps this government should produce some results for the vast resources it has already been given.

There's no question that the previous administrations did not provide enough value to show for the wealth hard-working taxpayers gave them. It's also true that we let a fantastic opportunity waste away by not building savings instead of accumulating debt. But for this administration to turn to the people and ask for even more money to finance sprawling, bloated, inefficient government is to only compound the mistakes of the past. Worse, it serves to put the blame for those mistakes on the people, Albertans, who have provided more and more money to the government. The government is telling Albertans that despite near-record revenues, the problem is that Albertans still aren't providing enough. Hard-working and prudent people who have wisely managed their own finances – wisely managed their own finances – are being asked to provide even more to a government that cannot manage its own.

What more does this government need to properly do its job? They've insisted that they require more money from the productive sector to finance health and schools and public service. Given our untamed levels of spending, have they first considered fixing the administration of these programs? If the governing party is so insistent that we have not seen appropriate results in these programs, then I would suggest to them that they now have all the tools

and levers of power necessary to go about improving the delivery of these programs.

Instead, the new NDP government appears to be doubling down on the trends of the past. They're continuing the old way of trying to fill the holes we've dug with barrels of hard-earned taxpayer money. The waste and inefficiencies of the existing system have made it seemingly impossible for the government to live within its income at any level, and the only solution we've seen proposed is to accelerate the ever-bloating levels of spending.

You know, a constituent joked to me years ago that the only reason the NDP couldn't beat the PCs was because they could never figure out a way to outspend them. Well, they're certainly giving it their best shot now, and most troubling is that they're giving it their best shot on the backs of Albertan taxpayers and the Albertan economy.

I mentioned how often the government has asked Albertans to chip in to do their part because we are all in this together. If only they could live by their own rhetoric. What a glorious day it would be if only they, our new government, understood what it means to be a part of an integrated economy. Yes, we truly are all in this together, and it's high time that this government started to respect that. A tax levied on the productive sector is a tax on all.

I understand that there has been a fair bit of an attempt to suggest that some people don't contribute their fair share. I understand that there are political motivations behind who gets targeted by this legislation and publicly castigated, but we're all in this together. Not one of us here is immune to what happens in the Alberta economy. These are tax increases on Albertans, first and foremost Albertan people, Albertans who work earnestly to provide for their families and spur growth in our economy. They are creators, builders. They are employers, entrepreneurs and innovators. They are your friends and neighbours.

While it is important to support small business, why should we put burdensome tax rates on those who wish to grow to become a large business? Why should we discourage their ambition? Don't we want to promote the idea that this is a place where one can do his or her best, strive forward with new ideas, and build something productive for the benefit of Alberta and all Albertans?

Madam Chair, my colleagues across the aisle have perhaps gotten caught up in the rhetoric at times. They appear to have forgotten that the people of this province are the economic engine. Those affected by this tax may very well be your local farmer or successful restaurant owner or locally owned oil-service business. They employ others. They innovate. They reinvest, reinvest the fruits of their labour back into their businesses and our communities.

You know, Medicine Hat is a bit of a long drive from Edmonton, and most of Alberta is farther north still. Every once in a while, as I'm stuck in one of those long drives, I'm amazed by the sheer enormity of our province. More so I am struck by the thought that somebody had to carve what we see today out of this rough, untamed wilderness. What we have now was once built by weathered and work-weary hands. It's an overwhelming testament to the building spirit of Albertans. It's a spirit that has lived on for generations and one that has turned this land into the economic powerhouse it is today. In the past, we have actively tried to encourage that spirit by promoting the Alberta advantage, and what an advantage it was for many years.

As you know, the riding of Cypress-Medicine Hat borders Saskatchewan, and I have always found it fascinating to get to know people who have come here during various points in their lives from different jurisdictions. They came seeking opportunity. They came here seeking prosperity, that we had to offer in abundance. They came here, like us, to build something for their families and for their and for our future. That advantage has resulted in enormous –

enormous – economic benefits for all people. It was John F. Kennedy who said that “a rising tide lifts all boats.” Well, that rising tide, set in action by our competitive and equal tax rate, lifted the prospects of all Albertans.

The governing party has said much about minimum wage increases lately also. I'm sure they mean well, but as we've seen right here in Alberta, the best – the best – way to raise the minimum wage is to actively encourage and sustain the economic conditions that make higher wages possible. When the economy grows, so, too, do the opportunities for workers, entrepreneurs, and job creators alike.

5:40

Now, my hon. colleagues across the aisle will say that our rates will still be competitive after their hike. They'll point out other places that have comparable tax rates. They will say that we're in line with the average. With due respect this has never been an average province. Alberta has always been a remarkable province with remarkable people. I don't want to live in an average province, and, I suspect, neither does anyone else in this House.

If average results were good enough, we just as easily could have continued with business as usual: mediocre performance from the services we pay for, endless expanding budgets with little accountability, and an increasing reliance on Albertans to bail this mismanaged system out. But Albertans expect and deserve better. Alberta should be a place of boundless opportunity, where we are free to pursue our goals and dreams. Alberta should be a place known for its vast wealth, produced by the hard work of all generations since its founding, and shared with those who seek it within our borders and beyond.

The NDP may feel that it has a mandate to scrap the Alberta advantage, but I do not believe that they have a mandate to change the fundamental spirit that has built this great province, the spirit of building, the spirit of creating and innovating. Albertans have never had a problem carrying their share of the load, but it's time we started seeing that from our government. I stand with my colleagues in the Wildrose opposing tax increases to finance the inefficiency and wastefulness of the past when the government, our new government, has expressed no willingness to get this fiscal house in order.

Madam Chair, I will not be voting for Bill 2. I implore my colleagues from all parties to carefully consider the serious impact these proposals will have for all who live and work in our communities and our economy – our community builders, our workers, our producers, and our friends – and ask you all to do the same.

The Chair: Strathmore-Brooks, go ahead.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Is this questions and comments or new?

The Chair: This is on Bill 2.

Mr. Fildebrandt: This is just to Bill 2? It's not questions and comments?

The Chair: No, not in committee.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Madam Chair, I would like to introduce an amendment to Bill 2. I will not speak long to it, but I will allow a chance here for the pages to distribute it to the members of the House.

The Chair: This will be known as amendment A4.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Chair. Since the government has not seen fit to support my first amendment, which was

supported by every single member of the opposition in all parties, from centre right to centre left, we have put forward another amendment. We believed that the effects of Bill 2 are damaging to all businesses and the economy of Alberta, and my first amendment sought to take some of the bite out of that and to relieve the concerns of small businesses to ensure that they are not abandoned by this government. In the past the government has always portrayed itself as against big business. Their voting against my first amendment, I believe, should be seen as being against small business.

Now, the government has said they can't give up the money of \$167 million, so let's see if they can give up \$16.7 million. This amendment proposes to cut the small-business tax rate from 3 per cent to 2.9 per cent. That is a cut of one-tenth of 1 per cent, Madam Chair. I believe that we should show as a House, as a democratic Legislative Assembly, that regardless of the ideological intents of this government, we are not against small business. I believe that by voting for this amendment to cut the small-business tax rate by one-tenth of 1 per cent, this House can give a symbolic gesture to small businesses to know that you are not against them, that you want to work with them as the primary job creators of this province, as the engine of the economy in this province.

Madam Chair, let's show that this government might be against big business but that it's not against small business. Let's vote for this as a symbolic act that will only cost the government \$16.7 million, a sum of money that they can lose beneath the couch in an afternoon. Let's vote for this to show our support for small businesses.

The Chair: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I want to address a couple of things. The hon. member has said that voting against their first amendment and if we vote against this amendment are proof that we're against small business. Nothing could be further from the truth. In the last election, when I was the leader, we put forward a proposal to reduce the small-business tax from 3 to 2 per cent, which was the equivalent of the Wildrose's first amendment. At that time we felt that the province could afford it. We believed that there are benefits to reducing the small-business tax, and if the economic and financial circumstances facing the province were not as severe as they are today, we likely would have supported that particular amendment.

Now, I want to disabuse any members of the notion that we're opposed to small business. I've met, during my time as leader, with the Canadian Federation of Independent Business many times with different people, and we often found areas of common agreement. So I just want to indicate that.

However, we've been left with a very serious situation by the previous government. Of course, their previous leader, Mr. Prentice, went on television to talk about the very serious situation, the very large deficit that was included in their budget, which we have inherited, as well as a number of tax measures that the former government also introduced, which we have replaced. We have cancelled the tax increases and many of the fee increases that the former government had proposed in their budget and would have been imposed had they won the election. We would have been debating their budget and approving their budget at this time, at the same time. We've replaced it with things that are more consistent with the mandate that we believe that we have received.

Which brings me to this particular amendment. I regret to say it, but I think that this is a rather pointless amendment. I think the Wildrose seemingly wants to prove some kind of point, perhaps that we would never entertain any reduction in the small-business tax at

all. That's not the case at all, Madam Chair. We would embrace a much larger reduction than envisaged in this particular motion if we were in different economic and financial circumstances, but we're in a very serious period of time in terms of a loss of revenue relative to falling oil prices. All members are aware of that. So I don't really see what this accomplishes. The hon. member says it'll only cost the government \$67 million. I would put that a little bit . . .

Mrs. Aheer: Sixteen point seven.

5:50

Mr. Mason: Sixteen point seven. Thank you for the correction, hon. member.

I would just phrase that a little differently. It will only add \$16.7 million to the deficit, and that's something that we don't choose to do. Frankly, I don't understand the purpose of an amendment with a fraction of a per cent change in the tax rate. It won't help small business in any significant way, in my view, and will only increase the deficit that the government has to undertake.

With the greatest of respect to the hon. member I urge all members of the House to reject this amendment.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Chair. I do appreciate the member opposite's new-found enthusiasm for eliminating the deficit. If he is concerned about adding \$16.7 million to the deficit, perhaps they should bring forward \$16.7 million of spending reductions.

The member opposite said that this was pointless. I couldn't disagree more. I don't believe there's anything pointless about showing confidence and support in small business.

The member opposite talked about different economic circumstances. Well, if I am not mistaken, I do believe that the hon. Premier just a few weeks ago said that the economic circumstances and fiscal outlook of the government were more rosy than she had been led to believe during the election, so perhaps the economic circumstances have changed, and they would make this more affordable.

If we are talking about economic circumstances of 2012 and 2015, the government was running a deficit then, and it's running a deficit now. This amendment would cost \$16.7 million and provide a small stimulus to the economy. We think that it is a common-sense amendment and that the government would be ill advised to vote against it.

The Chair: Any other speakers to the amendment?

If not, we'll call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A4 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:53 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Fildebrandt	Orr
Barnes	Fraser	Pitt
Clark	Gotfried	Schneider
Cooper	Hunter	Starke
Cyr	Loewen	Stier
Drysdale	McIver	Strankman
Ellis	Nixon	Yao

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Hinkley	Phillips
Babcock	Hoffman	Piquette
Bilous	Horne	Renaud
Carlier	Kazim	Rosendahl
Carson	Kleinsteuber	Sabir
Ceci	Larivee	Schmidt
Connolly	Loyola	Schreiner
Coolahan	Mason	Shepherd
Cortes-Vargas	McCuaig-Boyd	Sigurdson
Dach	McKitrick	Sucha
Dang	McPherson	Swann
Drever	Miller	Sweet

Feehan	Miranda	Turner
Fitzpatrick	Nielsen	Westhead
Ganley	Payne	Woollard
Goehring		
Totals:	For – 21	Against – 46

[Motion on amendment A4 lost]

The Chair: Hon. members, it is now 6 o'clock. Pursuant to Standing Order 4(4) the committee is now recessed till 7:30 p.m.

[The committee adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday evening, June 24, 2015

Day 7

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

First Session

Wanner, Hon. Robert E., Medicine Hat (ND), Speaker
Jabbour, Deborah C., Peace River (ND), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Feehan, Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (ND), Deputy Chair of Committees

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Rocky View (W)
Anderson, Shaye, Leduc-Beaumont (ND)
Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (W)
Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (ND)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (W)
Bhullar, Manmeet Singh, Calgary-Greenway (PC)
Bilous, Hon. Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (ND),
Deputy Government House Leader
Carlier, Hon. Oneil, Whitecourt-St. Anne (ND)
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-Meadowlark (ND)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, Calgary-Fort (ND)
Clark, Greg, Calgary-Elbow (AP)
Connolly, Michael R.D., Calgary-Hawkwood (ND)
Coolahan, Craig, Calgary-Klein (ND)
Cooper, Nathan, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (W),
Official Opposition House Leader
Cortes-Vargas, Estefania, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (ND)
Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake (W),
Official Opposition Deputy Whip
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (ND)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South West (ND)
Drever, Deborah, Calgary-Bow (Ind)
Drysdale, Wayne, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (PC),
Progressive Conservative Opposition Whip
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Ellis, Mike, Calgary-West (PC)
Fildebrandt, Derek Gerhard, Strathmore-Brooks (W)
Fitzpatrick, Maria M., Lethbridge-East (ND)
Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (PC)
Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., Calgary-Buffalo (ND)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (ND)
Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (PC)
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Hunter, Grant R., Cardston-Taber-Warner (W)
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Luff, Robyn, Calgary-East (ND)
MacIntyre, Donald, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (W)
Malkinson, Brian, Calgary-Currie (ND)
Mason, Hon. Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (ND),
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McLean, Stephanie V., Calgary-Varsity (ND),
Deputy Government Whip
McPherson, Karen M., Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill (ND)
Miller, Barb, Red Deer-South (ND)
Miranda, Ricardo, Calgary-Cross (ND)
Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (ND)
Nixon, Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (W),
Official Opposition Whip
Notley, Hon. Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (ND),
Premier
Orr, Ronald, Lacombe-Ponoka (W)
Payne, Brandy, Calgary-Acadia (ND)
Phillips, Hon. Shannon, Lethbridge-West (ND),
Deputy Government House Leader
Piquette, Colin, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater (ND)
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie (W)
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (ND)
Rodney, Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC)
Rosendahl, Eric, West Yellowhead (ND)
Sabir, Hon. Irfan, Calgary-McCall (ND)
Schmidt, Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (ND),
Government Whip
Schneider, David A., Little Bow (W)
Schreiner, Kim, Red Deer-North (ND)
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-Centre (ND)
Sigurdson, Hon. Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (ND)
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (W)
Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC),
Progressive Conservative Opposition House Leader
Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (W)
Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (W)
Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (ND)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (ND)
Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (W)
Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (ND)
van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND)
Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)
Vacant, Calgary-Foothills

Party standings:

New Democrat: 53 Wildrose: 21 Progressive Conservative: 9 Alberta Liberal: 1 Alberta Party: 1 Independent: 1 Vacant: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, June 24, 2015

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: The committee is now called to order.

Bill 2

An Act to Restore Fairness to Public Revenue

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments with respect to this bill? No one wants to speak to the bill? All right. Are we ready to call the question, then?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 2 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Mr. Bilous: I move that we rise and report Bill 2.

[Motion carried]

The Chair: The committee will now rise and report.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mrs. Schreiner: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 2. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 2

An Act to Restore Fairness to Public Revenue

Mr. Ceci: Madam Speaker, it's my privilege to rise today and move third reading of Bill 2, An Act to Restore Fairness to Public Revenue.

The Deputy Speaker: Any members wish to speak to the bill in third reading? The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Does this government think that Albertans are children? Is the NDP worried that Albertans will blow their paycheques on beer and popcorn? Is that why the NDP thinks they are the ones best suited to decide what Albertans do with their money? Maybe they can help me out. Why aren't the NDP looking for cost-saving measures? If they want, I have a few

suggestions. Instead, they just tax, tax, tax. "Raise taxes; give us your money," the NDP says. "We know what to do with it." I doubt that.

We even pitched in. We proposed a reasonable amendment: soften the blow to the job creators in this province. The economic climate is scary enough: tax hikes, royalty reviews, drastic minimum wage increases. We are trying to be the voice of reason here. Let's be reasonable. Let's not tax job creators out of business or out of the province. I feel like we aren't being heard here. Many Albertans agree.

What we really would like is if this government would send this bill to committee. Let's have a fulsome debate on the impacts. Let's do a bit of research. We can call stakeholders in. The Premier can bring in her big-labour report writers, but we can also hear from independent experts and real-world businesses to make sure that we are taking a measured approach. Rushing this through seems reckless.

The thing is that we over here at the Wildrose want strong and effective front-line programs, too. We want families living in poverty to have the tools to get by and gradually thrive. We want to protect our vulnerable. We just don't think a bloated bureaucracy is the way to go. Similar to how we feel about Albertans knowing how to spend their money best, we think the front-line service workers, the people on the ground, know the best way to administer services. All this can be done with current revenues, which are headed for the third highest ever this year.

We also spend lots of money, and we still can't be sure how much this government is spending, because they aren't being transparent. Spending alone cannot be the measure of success. If it were, our government would be 20 per cent more successful than B.C., but we aren't. It's how many people that are served and how well they are served that matters. In fact, how well you serve the needy with the fewest dollars taken from Alberta families should be the measure.

For starters, I'm not sure why this government sees the need to fill every vacant spot at AHS when everyone knows they're already bloated. Why not spend half as much and spend it directly on surgeries? But from what we've seen, this government's priorities are government workers and raising taxes to pay for them. I hope we get a different impression before long.

I imagine this is a steep learning curve for these new NDP ministers, but let's slow this down. Let's get this right. Let's talk about it. We may have some ideas that could help. Albertans deserve more. They deserve a better government.

The Deputy Speaker: Next I will recognize the hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. W. Anderson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to the House today on Bill 2, An Act to Restore Fairness to Public Revenue. With this legislation the government is proposing an increase in taxes on Alberta businesses from 10 per cent to 12 per cent, a 20 per cent increase. Alberta will no longer be the lowest taxed province for businesses in Canada. In fact, only Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland and Labrador will have higher business taxes, and that's no advantage.

While Wildrose has helped this government already, namely by lending them our policy of ending corporate and union donations – and I can say that you're welcome – it seems not even Wildrose's sound, pragmatic amendment of lowering small-business taxes by a meagre 1 per cent was able to break through the antibusiness armour this government has cloaked itself in. It was an opportunity this government chose to waste despite the fact that their own party campaigned on it three years ago today, and I'm sorry.

I would be remiss if I didn't highlight that business taxes aren't the only taxes this bill raises. Bill 2 proposes an increase in the income tax on higher income earners. Those earning more than \$125,000 a year will now be paying a higher tax rate at 12 per cent. The bill's name, An Act to Restore Fairness to Public Revenue, implies that these changes will make Alberta taxation more fair, but this is not the case. It wouldn't be so bad if Bill 2 was the only time this government had chosen to go against well-established, modern economic policies in favour of an extreme, dangerous antibusiness legislation, Madam Speaker, but this government seems intent on doing its best to destroy the Alberta advantage in its first hundred days.

Another example of this government's fanatical antibusiness mania is their foolhardy proposal to increase minimum wages by nearly 50 per cent. While this proposal sounds helpful – and I'm sure it's well intended – the truth is that it does exactly the opposite. Earlier this week the Premier was asked whether she believes that increasing the minimum wage will lead to more jobs in Alberta. Her response: "I absolutely believe that increasing the minimum wage will lead to more jobs." She goes on to say that study after study shows that increasing the minimum wage actually "grows jobs and it grows economic activity." With that, Madam Speaker, trickle-up Notleynomics was born. [some applause] Thank you for that applause. Thank you.

7:40

I know that I speak for many in this Chamber when I say that I would love to see these studies. In fact, I can think of more than a couple of universities that would be interested in seeing these studies as well. The economics department at the University of Chicago would, I'm sure, be very interested in seeing these studies. When asked about what studies the Premier was referring to, all she could cite was a Unifor study that even the left-leaning government of Ontario has cashed out on. The Premier also made an unfounded claim that raising the minimum wage helps the poor. That might be true for the poor who are getting minimum wage but not overall and certainly not for those who are getting laid off.

While I won't hold my breath on seeing anything other than a big-labour sponsored study for evidence of her claims, I thought I would share some of the studies I found. I'll preface it by saying that these are studies conducted by academics from universities and not big labour. The study entitled *The (Non) Impact of Minimum Wages on Poverty: Regression and Simulation Evidence for Canada*, by Michele Campolieti, Morley Gunderson, and Byron Lee, discovered that

the effect of minimum wages on poverty for Canada using data from the Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics (SLID) for 1997 to 2007 [finds] that minimum wages do not have a statistically significant effect on poverty and this finding is robust across a number of specifications . . . Furthermore, we find that job losses are disproportionately concentrated on the poor.

A similar study, *Teen Employment, Poverty, and the Minimum Wage: Evidence from Canada*, by Anindya Sen, Kathleen Ryczynski, and Corey Van De Waal, found that

a 10% rise in the minimum wage is also significantly associated with a 4%-6% increase in the percentage of families living under Low Income Cutoffs . . . A higher minimum wage [may] paradoxically result in a significant negative shock to household incomes among low-income families.

According to these numbers a 47 per cent increase, as the one we're seeing here, would reduce employment by as much as 4.7 per cent to 14.1 per cent. What does that look like in real jobs? Well, according to Stats Canada in 2014 there were 2,054,499 people employed in Alberta. So that means we can expect a loss of jobs anywhere between 96,000 to 290,000 jobs lost in Alberta.

But there might still be hope for Notleynomics. Stephen Gordon, an esteemed professor of economics at Laval University, wrote in a 2006 article:

- When minimum wages are 'low' – say, less than 40% of the average hourly wage – then moderate increases won't have a significant short-run effect on employment.
- When minimum wages are around 45% of the average, they significantly reduce employment.

What is the skinny on Alberta's average hourly wage? Given that the average hourly wage in Alberta is around \$25 to \$29, depending on your source, a minimum wage of \$15 is more than 50 per cent of the average, so it would indeed significantly reduce employment. Stephen Gordon wrote a piece in *Maclean's* in 2013 discussing the theory being pushed by big labour, that minimum wage hikes mean more jobs. In his survey of the literature he found that there was no proof of it and that Canada, even more clearly than the U.S., has shown a clear relationship between wage hikes and job losses.

In addition, in the survey of the literature he cites a peer-reviewed 2012 study that finds that, quote, our results highlight that, political rhetoric notwithstanding, minimum wages are poorly targeted as an antipoverty device and are at best an exceedingly blunt instrument for dealing with poverty. Why? Because most people making minimum wage are not in poverty. They are young people or others who share a home that is not under the poverty line. But young people and the poor are the ones hardest hit when the lower wage jobs get cut. There are many more articles Gordon surveys in the *Maclean's* piece, and unlike the Premier, I'm happy to table this article that lists an array of them. In fact, I'll be tabling all of the reports and peer-reviewed articles I mentioned tomorrow afternoon.

Don't get me wrong. I genuinely want Notleynomics to do what it promises: increase jobs, help the poor, lead to a stronger, more robust economy. Why wouldn't I? Why wouldn't anyone? I think we can all agree that more people working for more money is exactly what we all want. Unfortunately, the studies and statistics and, more importantly, common sense simply don't lend themselves to Notleynomics, and I fear that by the time this government finally figures it out, it will be too late for hundreds of thousands of Albertans. I believe the changes proposed in Bill 2, raising business and personal taxes, will not result in a better economy for all Albertans and that we need to reconsider these major changes to Alberta's tax structure.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) comes into effect. Are there any questions or comments?

If not, I'll call on the hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you for giving me the opportunity to rise and speak against Bill 2. The Alberta advantage is a comparative advantage. Bill 2 compromises the delicate balance between revenue and expenditure that Albertans must maintain in order to ensure that the Alberta advantage is sustained. This revenue stream depends on and is maintained by the commitment by industries to build Alberta's economy. We in the Wildrose caucus are troubled by the NDP's unwillingness to heed our pragmatic concerns regarding this ill-conceived proposal.

Alberta is not the place for radical experiments. After British Columbia increased their business taxes, private investment declined sharply, dropping 3 per cent in 2012. In contrast, the rest of Canada saw a 1.5 per cent increase. Madam Speaker, Alberta depends on private capital investment to encourage economic growth. Between the minimum wage increases of nearly 50 per cent, a 20 per cent increase in income taxes, adding multiple new provincial personal income taxes, imposing uncertainty on our

energy industry by royalty reviews, and carbon levies that will stifle private investment – we haven't even heard about the carbon levies, if anybody can clarify. Albertans with high-paying jobs like our doctors will leave this province in search of locations with more favourable taxation conditions to work and grow business in. Large businesses will leave Alberta for more favourable taxation conditions, and we are deeply concerned about the impact their exodus will have on individuals they employ and the mom-and-pop businesses that provide services to larger companies.

Alberta will no longer be able to claim that we are the lowest taxed province in Canada for business. It's this low-tax business climate that has attracted business. The NDP are destroying the Alberta advantage. This province will see an overall effect that will end and negatively affect all business to one extent or another.

Madam Speaker, an energy company can drill a well in Saskatchewan or in North Dakota just as easily as it can drill in Alberta. Albertans are advantaged greatly from having the lowest business tax rate in the country. Because of our friendly business climate we have the highest level of investment and the lowest unemployment rate, something to be very proud of. Jack Mintz said that Alberta would lose 8,900 jobs for each one-point increase in the business tax rate.

The passing of Bill 2 will push away businesses that contribute to the revenue stream with unfavourable economic conditions. It will push away the highly skilled workers that are instrumental in this province's intellectual capital, individuals who are a critical part of this province's knowledge economy. Madam Speaker, 800,000 people voted for someone other than the NDP, and they also deserve to have a voice at the table.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Does anyone have any questions or comments for the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View?

If not, I call on the Member for Calgary-Elbow.

7:50

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I believe in a progressive income tax. I also believe that large corporations can and should pay more, and I believe that Albertans are willing to pay fair value for efficient, high-quality public services. That, I think, defines modern Alberta, but we've missed the balance here.

I believe five brackets of personal income tax are too many. I believe a 50 per cent increase in the top marginal tax rate for individual earners is too high. I think a 2 per cent increase to corporate taxes eliminates Alberta's low-tax advantage and creates a risk of capital flight to other provinces. The Alberta Party proposed in the provincial election to increase corporate tax 1 per cent, maintaining Alberta's low-tax advantage, the lowest taxed jurisdiction in the country, but generating badly needed revenue. The same with personal income taxes: we believe in raising the top marginal tax rate to 13 per cent across three tax bands. This delivers more revenue, which I do agree is badly needed, but it also creates an incentive and a requirement for the government to exercise fiscal discipline to ensure that the public services that we deliver are in fact delivered efficiently, to ensure that we get more value for the money that we spend on our public services in this province. That's the balance that I believe has been missing from this discussion.

I also reiterate the argument around integration of the tax system and the fact that we, I believe, inadvertently on the part of the government created what will likely result in tax flight away from the province of Alberta. Those dollars, that are badly needed in this province, will end up in the treasuries of other provinces. That is a significant risk that this government must understand.

In the end, Madam Speaker, as much as I do understand and agree with the basic principles of progressive taxation, ensuring that large corporations pay their fair share, I cannot support Bill 2. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Five minutes of questions and comments for the hon. member?

Seeing none, we'll proceed with Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise tonight to speak against Bill 2. I promised my constituents in Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre that I would fight against the tax hikes being brought in by the NDP, and tonight I'm here to do just that. It would seem that we now have a government with a narrow-minded mission to destroy the Alberta advantage. They're blinded by ideology, and hard-working families are about to pay the price. That's why we are here fighting against higher taxes that are going to hurt Alberta.

These tax hikes are going to hurt seniors, who spent their lives building our province and the economic engine that it is today. These tax hikes are going to kill jobs and provide a disincentive to move to Alberta. It's going to send a signal to the world that Alberta is not open for business, that Alberta is no longer the best place to live, to work, or to raise a family. Madam Speaker, that's exactly the wrong signal that we should be sending to the world in a time of economic uncertainty.

When thousands of Albertans are being told they no longer have a job, why on earth would the government raise taxes? It's just plain dumb. When Alberta businesses are facing competition like never before from within Canada and around the world, why would the government raise taxes? Seriously, it's just dumb.

In my life before politics I worked with disadvantaged Albertans. They were down on their luck, but we did everything we could to help them. We didn't rely on the government; we relied on donations from generous Albertans. Now the government wants to take more of their money. That's not being very helpful, Madam Speaker.

In this House we shouldn't be finding ways to make Alberta less competitive. We should be doing the exact opposite. We should be working to ensure that Alberta remains the most charitable jurisdiction in Canada. Taking money away from hard-working Alberta families does the opposite of that. We have heard absolutely no details on where the government is planning on saving money or finding efficiencies. Not a single detail. This government does not have a plan. Personally, I think it's because the NDP has no plan to make the government more efficient. They have no plan to find savings with existing programs or spend existing tax dollars more responsibly. They're just going to take more money from hard-working Alberta families instead. It's shameful, Madam Speaker.

On this side of the House we're going to stand up for hard-working Alberta families. That's why we're fighting against these tax hikes. Hard-working Alberta families need a champion, and this NDP government is anything but. They're not standing up for Alberta families. They're not keeping the Alberta advantage. They're doing just the opposite. They're making us less competitive. They're making it harder to live and work and raise a family in Alberta. They're implementing a tax hike for the sake of their blind ideology. They're playing politics with the future of Alberta and with the livelihoods of Alberta families. It's shameful, Madam Speaker.

Albertans expect more from their government, and we're going to hold them to account. We're going to vote against Bill 2 and not put up with it.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments?

Seeing none, I'll next recognize the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak during third reading of Bill 2. I want to spend a little time considering the effect the tax will have on Albertans, specifically seniors. Living on a fixed income, as many seniors do, requires budgeting, careful planning, and an eye for savings. Based on the sort of budgeting and numbers we've seen from the government so far, they could use some advice from the people living on a fixed income.

I need to communicate to people who live carefully and responsibly what the NDP has planned for the budget of this province. The Wildrose needs to communicate and the NDP certainly needs to communicate why increased revenue is the only option. We're here to advocate for everyday Albertans, all of them. We want to advocate for the front-line workers, for small business, for farmers, for seniors, and for families. How can we do that if there aren't any details provided for the spending? How can Albertans know how to budget if the NDP has no idea what the impact of the tax increases will be? How is it going to impact our seniors?

We have proposed changes to Bill 2, adjustments, ways that this could be implemented without making rash decisions. You cannot tax your way to prosperity. You cannot tax us all to a healthy economy. It's never been done. Give businesses and people the chance to get jobs to buy houses, to keep our economy successful. Give them a chance to absorb the measures by making them less sudden and less drastic. Let's talk to business owners. Heck, even talk to big labour. That would mean that we'd have the chance to fully debate this.

Wildrose wanted to try a more measured approach because I'm concerned about the impact of these tax increases on seniors. How can we communicate these changes to people on fixed incomes, who will be sure to feel the effects of these significant economic changes? What studies have been done? What research? What stakeholders have been met with to consider this question?

Rather than raising taxes, we should instead look for savings. If we can figure out how we can save money so that those who are delivering the services, those that best understand the needs of our communities, are served to the fullest capacity.

Let's go off script for a second here, shall we? Wake up. All right.

Madam Speaker, in my previous life I've had the pleasure of working in communities such as Ponoka, Lac La Biche, and Peace River. I did educational stints in Edmonton and Grande Prairie. I flew the air ambulance and ground ambulance all across this province and all of western Canada, B.C. and Saskatchewan, from the Territories, even to the States. We dropped patients off. I have been everywhere, and I have literally seen every type of habitat that seniors live in. They don't live much differently than the rest of us, but there is one difference. Their homes are dilapidated. Everything is old. The fences and the houses aren't painted. Everything is worn down. They need adjuncts in all their homes to be ambulatory. They need rails in their houses so they can walk around. They need bars on the sides of the toilets so they can literally use a toilet, and they need medications and so many other things. They need wheelchairs, they need walkers, they need a whole lot of things, and they do it on a very fixed income.

When we increase taxes for Albertans, we should be confident that this is actually to help Albertans. So far we've seen no evidence, no studies to show that this is the case. I hope that this government will truly reconsider the decisions that they are about to make.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of questions or comments.

Seeing none, go ahead, hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

8:00

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I enjoyed the hon. member's comments about his travel and visiting other locations. I was wondering if he could just expound on that a little bit because I gather from that that he's seen how seniors are treated and managed in other jurisdictions. I was wondering if he could expound on that a little bit, please, because I'm thinking that they are and have been and have gone to different tax jurisdictions.

Mr. Yao: Why don't you throw me puffballs like what the NDP throw out at each other? I can honestly say, Madam Speaker, that the seniors issue is a widespread issue right across this country. It's actually a North American thing. There are issues. Not too many jurisdictions have invested in their seniors. They rely mainly on local support, and eventually they get the government sponsorship. There are hospitals everywhere that continue to have seniors.

Seniors live in apartments, houses, lodges, shared accommodations of various types. They live in the basement, a room of their children. They live in hospitals. They live in trailer parks. They live in all sorts of various accommodations. Truly, I haven't seen – some communities do have, like, some amazing facilities. I hope that Fort McMurray can get one such facility because it is long overdue.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other questions or comments under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It seems to me that we've come to a point here where earning \$125,000 is subject to punishment in Alberta, which I think would be interesting news to those people who work hard and invest their time and energy in this province, many of them working long hours, some of them in manual labour, some of them in trades, others in professions, to achieve that.

I'm going to make it a little bit more personal. I'm going to use an example of a gentleman that I know.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, is this under 29(2)(a), or were you speaking directly to the bill?

Mr. Gotfried: No. Sorry. This was to the bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. Then I will call on you again in just a moment.

I'd like to recognize for the moment the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms Drever: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak on Bill 2. I would like to keep this brief. The term "Alberta advantage" was never directed at the majority of Albertans, just the top 7 per cent and large corporations. This bill changes that. The Alberta advantage now represents the majority of middle-class Albertan families. This new tax system will give Albertans the proper services and infrastructure so desperately needed in our health care, social services, and education. This is what they voted for, a fair taxation system, which requires everyone to pay their part towards moving Alberta forward.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments for the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow under 29(2)(a)?

If not, we'll move on, and I'll now recognize you, hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Again, I'll just go back to saying that it seems that we're moving towards punishing people that work hard and are lucky enough to earn more than \$125,000. As I said, I would maybe bring this down to a bit more of a personal story of an individual who I think maybe started out well below that. A gentleman I know came to Canada as a new immigrant in 1982 with nothing but an education, which he got at the University of Manitoba, paid as a foreign student to achieve that education. He chose Alberta for his new home. He came to Canada and worked hard – in fact, he worked in an ice cream shop while his spouse worked to complete her CA – and nurtured a dream to start his own business.

He took risks, made well-reasoned investments, employed people, only a few at the start but has now turned his operation into well over a hundred individuals working directly in hundreds of trades and other suppliers working for him as well. He made commitments, both short and long term. He built relationships with integrity, honesty, and trust; struggled with ups and downs and economic cycles; and even carried employees through times of difficult economic conditions.

Early on in his success – actually, before his success, when he probably was not even taking a paycheque home himself – he made a \$100,000 a year commitment to a childhood cancer organization. He shared with me that there were many times in the early years when he wasn't sure where that \$100,000 was coming from. In fact, he hadn't paid himself at all in many of those years. Since that time, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, through being an entrepreneur, starting out as a small-business man who did not make \$125,000 – in fact, he didn't take a paycheque home – I'm sure that gentleman worked himself up somewhere through that period to be taking home \$125,000 in the business that he and his wife grew and sacrificed for and worked long hours for.

Over the past decade that same gentleman and his wife have done some of the following things: given directly \$1.6 million to childhood cancer and helped raise over \$5 million for the same cause, supported a local multicultural festival to the tune of \$1.5 million, committed a further \$1.5 million to a regional nonprofit recreation facility, donated a million dollars to Mount Royal University to establish a centre for continuous learning, donated \$3 million to a local college to establish a business school, and committed \$2.5 million to a foundation focused on social enterprise to support sustainable practices in the nonprofit sector.

Madam Speaker, these are the people that we're disrespecting, that we're going after now as if they deserve punishment for their success and hard work, who support not only our economy but our society in many ways that are too great to measure. I would suggest that this bill attacks people that this province works hard to attract: entrepreneurs, spirited people, people looking for a bright future, people looking to establish homes for their families with a bright future. We hear that all the time. That's why people come here. This bill appears to punish those same people, and I object to that.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: I will call on the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's no secret that Alberta's economy is slowing. A large part of our economy is suffering through low world oil prices. Jobs are being lost, as seen by the recent elimination of 185 positions with TransCanada. When we are facing extended low oil prices, the government should be

offering policies that help the economy grow, not shrink it further. Families are suffering. Businesses are suffering. The problems are compounding, and this poorly conceived bill is adding to Albertans' burden.

While the economy is in a downturn, why does this government want to railroad through changes to the minimum wage, changes to business tax, and changes to personal income tax for those 10 per cent who already pay 50 per cent of the income tax? As if this isn't enough, the government compounds the problem by suggesting a vague royalty review as well. A review. Let's be realistic. A review is an open dialogue. This is a punitive action, plain and simple. You can't tax yourself into prosperity no matter how noble you perceive your actions to be.

This government was elected to serve all Albertans. You can't begin a process in the middle. That doesn't help Albertans. It simply compounds the problems they already face. This government needs to start at the start. You find where to start after you do everything to become more efficient. That's a simple principle of business. You cut the waste, cut the inefficiencies, the duplication of positions.

8:10

Alberta already runs the most expensive government in all of Canada. There needs to be a concerted effort to make government more efficient. Streamlining doesn't mean harming the vulnerable, as our opponents would have you believe. It can be done without impacting front-line services. It's the logical place to begin.

An obvious step would be scrapping half of the AHS managers, consultants, travel, advertising, and conference budgets. Everyone knows that there is too much management bloat at AHS, money that could be best utilized flowing in to front-line staff. The majority of this could be achieved through job attrition. This would save \$300 million, roughly the same amount as the damaging business tax hike being proposed.

Another possible saving measure could be a wage freeze on government of Alberta upper managers and political staffers. Reducing those managers by a third and reinstating a three-year salary freeze on remaining managers could save an amount close to the business tax hike revenues as well.

Why should the burden always fall on taxpayers when so much could be achieved by simply running a more efficient government? Why not start with basic efficient policies and see where that gets you before you start raising taxes and punishing the people and businesses that have embraced the Alberta advantage? If you are struggling to pay household bills, you find ways to cut spending; you don't tax your neighbours.

Taxes are one of the least efficient ways to raise money. It hurts jobs and economic growth. This isn't about big, faceless corporations. It has a lot to do with regular businesses that employ plenty of Albertans. Despite assurances by the government that study after study shows that raising the minimum wage is good for Alberta, they can't produce more than just the one done by big labour, and that's because the studies in Canada show that it leads to job losses.

In fact, a recent piece in *Forbes* talking about the city of L.A.'s comparable raise in minimum wage contains that increasing minimum wage results in "reduced employment opportunities for the most vulnerable among our workforce." So where is the benefit to having jobs paying \$15 or more if there are fewer jobs available? That only helps the ones who get the raise instead of being laid off, and it certainly doesn't help small businesses. The government hasn't mentioned any research they've done on what the overall effect of a 20 per cent business tax hike, a 50 per cent income tax on high earners, a 50 per cent increase in minimum wage, a royalty

review, and a carbon levy will have on our economy when we are already hurting from low oil prices and job layoffs.

The Wildrose believes that in order to offset this increase in taxes, the government should work with us and help reduce the burden placed upon small businesses. The government talked about the \$600 million, plus or minus, increase in the budget. We suggested, through an amendment, a .1 per cent reduction in the small-business tax, \$16 million. When we look at \$600 million, plus or minus, we don't know if it's \$500 million, \$600 million, \$700 million. All we asked for was \$16 million, and that was too much, too much to help the small businesses in Alberta.

The Premier expressed support for tax decreases when she was in opposition. It is pretty embarrassing that she's allowing partisanship or ideology to defeat helpful amendments now that she's in government. We've tried to improve this bill, but to no avail. Please join me in defeating Bill 2.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments?

I will call next on the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I really in some ways hate to say this, but when I first read the title of the bill, An Act to Restore Fairness to Public Revenue, I kind of liked it, when I first saw the title. When I opened the booklet to see how this government would envision their idea of fairness, I guess I was a little surprised. I think I have a very different idea of fairness than my esteemed colleagues across the aisle. Fairness sometimes is in the eye of the beholder. Sometimes it can be governed by self-interest. It can be very personal. I understand that.

So what is fairness in the context of the economic crisis that we are facing in Alberta? Fairness would be creating an economic climate that encourages investors to come to the province and to start businesses. Fairness would be encouraging the businesses that currently are here to grow and to prosper, fuelling the economy. This is fair to everyone. This encourages growth. In the name of fairness this government has decided to increase taxes on businesses. This is a tax on being entrepreneurial, on being innovative. Is it fair when increased taxes put small businesses under, causing lost jobs and lower revenues?

Bill 2 has also introduced changes to the personal income tax. This is the end of Alberta's famous 10 per cent flat-tax. This government believes that it is fair to take a higher percentage of taxes from people who earn more, but this also discourages people from taking risks and from being innovative. With this bill we are losing the title of the lowest province for business tax. We are losing our status as the only jurisdiction with a flat personal income tax.

These policies encouraged reinvestment and were a fundamental part of the Alberta advantage. At the very time that the government needs to be attracting investors, the government intends instead to scare them away by hiking business sales taxes. Under this bill Alberta, which currently has the lowest business tax rate in the country, will be in a tie with Manitoba, New Brunswick, Saskatchewan, and 0.1 per cent higher than Quebec.

In the course of Bill 3 we saw that this government's approach to increasing spending was to simply extrapolate the PC spending and add more spending on top of that, based on their campaign promises. This bill, close on its heels, brings in higher taxes but, again, without enough background. What is the rush, Madam Speaker?

They are not sure how much revenue will be gained and have not taken enough time to consider all of the implications of these quick tax increases. We wanted them to spend the summer consulting on this in committee, but they are in a rush for some reason. Earlier the

Member for Strathmore-Brooks tabled an amendment that would have reduced the tax on small businesses, but this was voted down by the government members.

Fairness. It is unfair that this government is not telling us where the money is going and how we will know if our hard-earned dollars are being used wisely. Madam Speaker, fairness is when you work together and you make decisions that are mutually beneficial. Fairness is about everyone participating and owning decisions. Albertans are being asked to chip in just a little bit more to see us through this period of low oil prices, yet when that little bit more comes from just two parts of the equation, families and businesses, the third part is getting a free ride. That third part is government.

This government has done nothing to shoulder their part of the responsibility. They have not reduced their spending. They have not begun to try to shrink the bloated bureaucracy. I can tell you that I have talked to many people that work in that bloated bureaucracy, and they have come to me and said: there are a lot of ways that you could shrink that bloated bureaucracy. Government is asking the productive side of the economy to do just a little bit more to help out yet has not even begun to address its own responsibility.

8:20

We've had some conversations about: what should a civil society look like? I would suggest that a civil society will only be fair when it recognizes the right of all Albertans to freely pursue wealth and to accumulate that wealth free from unreasonable government intervention. Albertans have a right to their own labour. The wealth that is generated by their labour does not belong to the state. It does not belong to my neighbour. It belongs to the person that generated that wealth from their labour. And unlike the ideology of socialism, at least what it seems to believe, labour and the wealth that is generated from that labour is not owned even by the poor. That is not to suggest that anyone in this House on this side or that side wants to have a poor underclass, but to suggest that we can deal with that by simply taking from the labour of hard-working Albertans in an unreasonable manner is not going to solve the problem.

As a citizen I freely choose to share that wealth, that labour that I generate, and I freely choose to pay taxes, but I have some problem supporting a bill or a government whose philosophy believes that it can take more of that labour simply because I have earned more money as a result of my labour. While we all acknowledge that there is very little anyone can do about the price of crude oil, government can and must develop sound fiscal policies to ensure that the economy stays competitive and strong in the long run and that earners and businesses take home wages that they work so hard for.

So, Madam Speaker, I do not support Bill 2, and I encourage my fellow MLAs to vote against it.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, we will go to the hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to address Bill 2, an Act to Restore Fairness to Public Revenue. Six days from now the business tax will increase in this province. Six days. The business community will not have much time to react, but I guarantee you that over the summer businesses will start passing on those tax increases on the goods and services sold to you, to me, to all Albertans. The effects of this decision along with all the other policy changes causing business expenses to rise will be paid for by you and me.

Business taxes, minimum wages, royalty reviews, carbon levies. Some of us, and that includes those of us in this House, won't really notice when the coffee goes up 50 cents or the lunch goes up a dollar or the shoes go up \$5. But you know who will? People on fixed incomes, like seniors. Whether it's the minimum wage hike or this tax hike on businesses, it all contributes to inflation at a time when a lot of Albertans are expecting to make the same, less, or even get laid off. It's just not very well thought out. Retired folks know that they won't be benefiting from any minimum wage hike. They're on fixed incomes, so they are really going to feel the pinch of the inflation it will bring. Higher prices and less money to buy will mean fewer sales, and with fewer sales come layoffs. It is a perilous scenario that is already playing out, and Bill 2 is not helping.

The Premier and I have received a letter from the owner of a small health food store in Morinville. The owner already has three employees making minimum wage. As the business owner she is making less than minimum wage in a desperate attempt to keep the business afloat. If the minimum wage rises to \$15 an hour, she will have to lay off one or two of her staff, people who can ill afford to lose their jobs. After a period of time, trying to do even more herself, this business will likely fail. This is the impact of the minimum wage hike.

Then we have the pending royalty review, Madam Speaker. The royalty review is spooking investment in the oil and gas sector. Last night you heard the testimony from my hon. colleague from Innisfail-Sylvan Lake. The trucks and the drilling rigs are parked in the yards. The workers are being laid off. There is no work.

Then we have the rumoured increase to the carbon levy. The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek put into evidence capital flight being under way. Hundreds of millions of dollars to be invested are already leaving the province to more business-friendly environments. You may want to try and blame this on geopolitical events like OPEC, Saudi Arabia, Russia, and the like, and while the price of oil has played a part, this NDP government is also playing a part, a voluntary part, by introducing a whole suite of policies that are antibusiness. Capital is globally mobile, Madam Speaker, and it picks up and leaves for places where there is a strong, stable investment climate.

Tax increases, minimum wage increase, royalty review, carbon levy: this NDP government is moving too fast. Madam Speaker, Albertans I talk to, even those who admit they voted NDP, are in shock as to the implications of their decision on May 5, and they're absolutely aghast to watch the last of the Alberta advantage be wiped away. The Alberta advantage, or, rather, I would tend to call it the Alberta incentive – low taxes, small government, and fiscal responsibility – was an incentive to develop your business, hire employees, and contribute to the lifeblood of this province, knowing that the government would not get in your way. Nowhere in all these pieces of legislation is there any move to cut spending.

Madam Speaker, Alberta is home to some of the toughest, smartest, most enterprising, self-reliant individuals the world has ever seen. Settlers came here and turned the wilderness into productive farmland. Sawmills and pulp mills were set up to make good use of our abundant forests. The oilmen developed the province as a world-class leader in the production of petroleum.

An Hon. Member: And women.

Mr. van Dijken: I'll give you that.

Along with these industries every supporting business you can imagine set up shop here and made Alberta an economic powerhouse. The important thing to note is that all of this was done by far-sighted individuals, individuals who saw opportunity. I believe sound public policy is critical to the success and

sustainability of these Alberta industries. Government does not create wealth. Government does not create jobs. People do. Government consumes wealth. Money in the hands of individuals is always spent more wisely than by bureaucrats. Government by its very nature is a destructive force and if allowed to grow too big will impede individuals . . . [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, please.

Continue, hon. member

An Hon. Member: Say it again. It sounded so good last time.

Mr. van Dijken: Madam Speaker, I will say it again because I do believe it. I do believe that government can get in the way of building a business in this province and in this country, and sound public policy is critical.

8:30

Ms Notley: I assume you're against fire trucks.

Mr. van Dijken: If you're overspending to run that fire truck, I am against the overspending. I am not against the fire truck.

Government by its very nature is a destructive force and if allowed to grow too big will impede individuals, suppress and eventually destroy wealth generation by ever-increasing regulation and taxation. The government that governs least governs best.

This NDP government is prepared to risk it all while they experiment with Alberta and put Alberta families at risk. This NDP cabinet is taking us on an experiment, and they are doing it with great speed with their socialist tax-and-spend policies. If they are allowed to continue, the Alberta incentive will be over. Taxation will be crippling, and we will be forever stunted by insurmountable debt.

I have received no assurance that this government has any intention to address the bloated bureaucratic spending that has been allowed to run out of control. Rather, they are asking even more from Albertans and are prepared to saddle future generations with their failure to address the real problem, wasteful spending. I would ask this government to focus some of their efforts to improve the efficiency of bureaucratic expenditures. We can and we must do better, Madam Speaker.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: There are five minutes of comments or questions. Anyone wish to take advantage?

Any other hon. members wish to speak to Bill 2? The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you so much, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and have a better understanding about just exactly what makes the NDP government a little excited. Clearly, there are some significant divides when it comes to the opinions on government, and they take the "Hi, I'm from the government; we're here to help" position quite to heart and that clearly government knows best and that government knows better than the people, because that's what we're seeing all throughout this session.

All throughout the debate we're seeing example after example of policy that says: we know better than Albertans. If we look at things from large tax increases to the lack of accountability and openness when it comes to, as some would say, the minibudget – others would say interim supply – we see this continued narrative throughout the government and this cabinet that they know better.

You know, we just have to look back through Alberta's history to see that the greatest successes of our province were when the government was doing its best job to get out of the way of

Albertans. We saw that with the introduction of the flat tax a significant number of years ago. At the time media reports all throughout the country, both provincially and nationally, were talking about the incredible new era that would be ushered in in Alberta because of a tax rate that was fair for everyone. What we saw through that time was a period of time in Alberta's history not because of what the government of the day did, although they may have set somewhat of a stage, but because they cleared a path for Albertans to succeed. They cleared a path for the entrepreneurial spirit of Alberta to flourish.

When we look at what's happening today – and even the government of the past had forgotten that success and were moving to a tax structure that this government has embraced with open arms that doesn't spur on that spirit. It doesn't say to Albertans that the more labour you put in, the more opportunity there is. In fact, it has the ability to create a disincentive. Madam Speaker, from my perspective, it's un-Albertan because the foundations of this province were built upon men and women who worked hard, who put their families first and fundamentally believed and continue to believe that they know better than government and that they can spend money better than government and that they can make the best decisions for their children.

It brings me great concern that we may be entering into a period of time where we're going to see just the exact opposite, a time where we're turning our back on the fairest taxation method in all of this great land. In fact, you know, we've heard some great comments on fairness this evening, and in this province we've done a great job of balancing a number of different things. We look at things like having the highest tax-free threshold in the province, and you put on top of that a flat tax, where the people that make the most money give the most money. A flat tax creates an environment in which we are equal, where all Alberta families can be treated equally when it comes to the tax system of Alberta, a system that inspires growth and an expanding economy. This government seems so committed to destabilizing that.

We look at a number of their government-knows-best policies when it comes to increasing the minimum wage, when it comes to increasing taxes on hard-working Albertan families, when we talk about royalty reviews. There are just a number of different avenues where this government is rushing to destabilize our economy, to not encourage growth, to not encourage head offices to stay here. I'm not suggesting that they go in the opposite direction and incentivize that. What the Wildrose believes in and what I believe in and what the vast majority of the good people, the hard-working people of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills believe in is that the government can always do what's best to get out of the way.

You know what else Albertans do when they're faced with a challenge? Albertans take personal responsibility for the predicament that they find themselves in. Today I heard the Premier get excited about: of course the lack of oil revenue is a massive contributor to our challenges. But what an Albertan does when they find themselves in a bad spot is that they look around and find ways that they can solve the problems for themselves. That's exactly what this government should be doing, looking at what they can do themselves, not turning to hard-working families, not turning to businesses that drive our economy.

8:40

But some would say: look in the mirror and see just what the government can do to pull its own bootstraps up. When it comes to pulling its own bootstraps up, that means looking at the massive amounts of waste that we can find inside the government. In the last election the Wildrose laid out a very clear plan of ways that we can cut corporate wealth.

The Premier might think it's funny. She might think that driving business out of the province is funny. She might think that raising taxes on Albertans is funny. What she ought to be doing, Madam Speaker, is looking at areas that she now has direct control over and turning the taps of government to a cool stream, not a full-blast, all-out, \$600 million, or in that area, in new spending, looking at the spending streams that they have control of, pulling up the bootstraps of government, just like Albertans do when they come upon a challenge.

Madam Speaker, I challenge all of us to do that because we are spending and the government is spending billions and billions and billions of dollars. It's easy to lose track of just what a billion dollars is. Earlier this week the government passed an appropriations act that had \$18 billion.

An Hon. Member: How much?

Mr. Cooper: Eighteen billion. If billions were seconds, a billion seconds ago I was barely alive.

It's important to know, Madam Speaker, that we don't lose track, that our eyes don't glaze over when we get fast and loose with \$600 million or in that area, when we get fast and loose at the possibility of a tax cut for business. We get fast and loose like it doesn't matter that it was \$16 million that earlier this government said no to because of what that could have communicated to our businesses: that we value business in this province, that we value the hard work that they do, that we value the fact that they drive our economy, that they employ our people.

I want to be sure that I, as what I hope to be, a responsible legislator, look honestly, openly, transparently on each dollar and ensure that the dollars that we're spending on behalf of the hard-working families in this province are done in a way that reflect the Alberta spirit. I'm firmly in the camp that raising taxes on those individuals and those businesses that drive our economy is just not that. It's not the Albertan way, and that's exactly why we won't be supporting this.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments for the hon. member?

Any other speakers to the bill? The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It is interesting to rise on third reading of this bill, and it's interesting to be listening to the discussion that we've had here. I think what we're starting to hear this evening are some of the different ideas and some of the different ideologies that perhaps we can agree on and certainly some of the ideologies that we don't necessarily agree on. That has certainly been an interesting discussion.

As has been discussed in earlier readings of this bill, this bill, primarily setting out to change the taxation structure, both on the corporate side and the personal income tax side, has some profound effects. As we've said and as they have asserted throughout the process, the government has the power to make those decisions and to bring in those changes, which they feel they have a mandate to move forward on. Through various different amendments that were proposed, the opposition parties have proposed various ways to soften what we feel is a negative blow to our economy. Those were all summarily rejected by the government, which is a pattern of behaviour with which I'm somewhat familiar, and I will tell you that there are times when I sat over there, Madam Speaker, where I questioned whether that was truly the best thing to do.

I will tell you now that, sitting here, I question it even more because one of the things that I said in my maiden speech in this Chamber three years ago is that no one party has a monopoly on all

the good ideas. It really shouldn't matter if it's a Liberal or an Alberta Party idea or a Wildrose idea or a Progressive Conservative idea or an NDP idea. What really should matter is if it's a good idea. I stand by those words, quite frankly, Madam Speaker, and over the course of the last Legislature I listened to what was at that time a much smaller caucus from the NDP members – the hon. Premier, the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, and the Member for Edmonton-Calder – and they brought forth points that were rooted in their firmly held beliefs in terms of how a socially just society should run. You know, quite frankly, some of those points resonate with me because that's the beauty of having different points of view being brought forward in a situation like this.

But now, with the changes in government, this Legislature and this government is in the hands of a different party, and clearly this party has a different set of ideas as to what is best for the province. The truth of the matter is that all of us can probably go out and quote from a think tank or go find a source or go find an academic that happens to have the same leaning that we do and demonstrate definitively that our course of action is the right course of action. The truth of the matter is that in many of these situations the only proof is time, and time will tell.

From my standpoint, I am very concerned about the changes that are being made in this. I am concerned about the rate and the degree to which they are being made. The attempts to soften that blow and to have that blow be less pronounced and profound were rejected by this government, and that is fine, but I do have to agree with my honourable friend the Member for Calgary-Elbow in saying that these changes could have been made more gradually and could have been made less profound and have less of an effect. But the truth of the matter is that we will only know the effects as we go forward.

Quite frankly, there has been a lot of talk in the course of this debate about the Alberta advantage, and that's, of course, I think, what we're learning this evening, that that is a term that means something a little different to everybody, that some people have one view of the Alberta advantage and others have others. I tend to take a somewhat objective view in terms of trying to measure the Alberta advantage in terms of how we're doing economically, and there is absolutely no question, Madam Speaker, that Alberta has been for some time the economic powerhouse of Canada.

The numbers bear me out on this. If we even were to look at the period of time from 2010 to 2013, so a three-year period, according to statistics from Statistics Canada, over that period of time the per capita GDP for the province of Alberta went from a figure of \$71,988 to a figure of \$84,000, an increase over three years of 17.2 per cent. The \$84,000 figure is by far the highest level of any province in Canada.

8:50

The next highest is our friends, our neighbours, to the east, the province of Saskatchewan, who had a per capita GDP in 2013 of \$73,948, but in the last five years they're gaining on us. The province of Saskatchewan's GDP has in fact increased by 22.6 per cent in those past five years.

When we look at some of the other provinces that we have in our dominion, the province of British Columbia, to the west of us, has a per capita GDP of \$50,121, a nearly \$34,000 lower GDP for every man, woman and child. That is economic strength, and that is economic power, and that is indeed what affords us the opportunity to enjoy the standard of living, the quality of services, the quality of infrastructure, and the things that we've been able to enjoy here in our province. Contrary to what has been expressed by another member of the House, the Member for Calgary-Bow, that Alberta

advantage does not accrue to 7 per cent; that Alberta advantage indeed accrues to all Albertans.

Madam Speaker, if we were to look at another measurement, and that is one of fiscal capacity – fiscal capacity is the measurement of the ability of a jurisdiction to generate revenue within itself, a combination of various forms of taxation, consumption taxes, business taxes, that sort of thing, but it is very much a measurement of economic strength. In fact, it is the measurement that is used by the federal government to determine whether or not provinces receive equalization payments. The fiscal capacity of the province of Alberta is 180 per cent of the national average. Let me say that again. Our fiscal capacity is 80 per cent higher than the national average and 37 per cent higher than the next highest province, the province of Saskatchewan.

Madam Speaker, I read all these numbers into the record, and perhaps some people think that numbers are crazy or that numbers, you know, don't tell the whole story, or that, you know, there's lots that can be hidden in numbers. Of course, I'm expecting somebody to trot out that old quote that statistics are like a bikini: what they reveal is interesting; what they conceal is vital. Nonetheless, what is important in talking about this and why I bring these numbers forward is that they are an objective measurement of the Alberta advantage and the economic power that we currently have. Since we're now going to embark on this experiment that is being brought forward by the NDP government, this experiment that they've been waiting so long to be able to open up the laboratory door, to put on their white lab coats and their safety goggles and start manipulating the levers of power, we will see as we get on this ride of the province of Alberta where these numbers will end up in four years' time.

I am concerned, Madam Speaker, that our economic performance over the next four years' time, because of decisions made by this government, will not nearly be as good as what it has been for the past 44 years. But I am prepared to be wrong, and if I am wrong, then I will say: "Hats off to this government. The changes that they have made have been good ones." I am not clairvoyant, and I am not gifted with the power of prophecy, so I don't suggest that I will know one way or another. I would respectfully suggest that there is probably nobody else in this Chamber that can tell us exactly what the future holds. But I will be watching. The members of my caucus will be watching. But most importantly, Albertans will be watching. We will be watching to see what effects these changes have, the ones in Bill 2, with the increases in taxation, the ones in other pieces of legislation and initiatives that are yet to be brought forward by this government but that I similarly suggest could be highly damaging to our robust economy. We will see, indeed, what happens.

Madam Speaker, I am interested to see how this all turns out. It's a little like going to a movie when you haven't read the book that the movie's based on and you really don't know how things are going to end. I certainly hope that over the next four years this province prospers and thrives because I don't wish any ill, certainly not on the province, and quite frankly I don't wish any ill on my colleagues across the way in the government. But I am concerned. We will watch to see how these numbers change, and we will watch to see how the Alberta advantage defines itself and changes over the next four years.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) allows for five minutes of questions and comments. Did you want to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Jean: Yes, I did.

The Deputy Speaker: Go ahead, hon. leader.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I listened intently to the member, and I wanted to have an opportunity to speak, but I've been quite busy lately. I know the members opposite have been wondering what my position on taxes is, but I can assure them, if they haven't heard, that my position is that I wouldn't raise them.

I do want to ask the member in particular that just spoke a question relating to a particular sector of our society that I think will be greatly negatively affected by these changes that the ideological NDP have brought in, and that's, particularly, seniors. I know that most seniors don't work and can't work. Frankly, they shouldn't have to work. The \$15-an-hour wage is not going to help them at all. In fact, we know quite clearly it's going to hurt them, especially because it's going to raise prices on things through inflation and otherwise. I see in particular that the first bill that they brought forward was an attempt at a change in democracy, and the second one was a taxation increase to hurt seniors, in my opinion.

I'm just wondering. We haven't seen anything as far as increased housing benefits or more housing being built for seniors. We haven't seen any seniors' benefits at all go up, just taxation go up. I'm wondering if the member has thought about any other particular issues that are going to affect seniors that I haven't brought up today, how these particular measures by the NDP are going to hurt those people on fixed incomes, the 450,000 seniors in Alberta and the million or so that are going to be here by 2030. I was wondering if you could comment on that because that is a huge part of our society and those that are the most vulnerable, in my opinion, in our society.

Dr. Starke: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. Leader of the Opposition for the question and for the discussion point. Certainly, seniors are a population sector within our society that have perhaps one of the least abilities to be able to respond to the negative changes within the economy. As the member correctly pointed out, many are on fixed incomes. Many have limited capacity to increase that income, and that is a characteristic that is not only common to seniors but is also common to other sectors within our society that I have similar concerns for.

Quite frankly, I believe that some of the changes that are being discussed, the increase in corporate taxes, the increase in the minimum wage, will result in increases in the cost of living in our province and the cost of living of goods and services that are purchased by those groups because they have to; they have no choice. They purchase groceries. They have to buy housing, or they have to supply themselves with housing. In the case of seniors, many of them have health issues. In many of these situations the costs that they will face will go up. It's a little bit like the farmers I used to do work for, where they said: you know, we live in a business where we can't set our selling price but our input costs we have no control over. They would remind me of that when I tried to raise the price of the caesarean section by \$5.

Madam Speaker, it is indeed true, as the hon. member has stated, that our seniors population is also growing. We know that that is the case. Demographics don't lie. In ten years I will reach that threshold myself. It is certainly a concern of all Albertans, I would suggest, that these changes don't adversely affect the most vulnerable in our society. But the concern that I have is that the social engineers on the other side will then devise other programs to fix the problems that they've now created by the initial set. Unintended consequences. Certainly, the social engineers are always interested in bringing about another program and another program and another program to fix the problem when, indeed, they caused the problem in the first place by monkeying with the economy.

Madam Speaker, while I may not agree with all the members in the caucus to the right of me as far as the role of government or what role government should play, I will say that government does have a role to play in some of these areas, but sometimes more harm can be done. One of the principles of medicine, that even veterinarians learned, is to first do no harm. That can be applied to government as well.

9:00

The Deputy Speaker: Any further speakers to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. At the risk of being a little bit redundant – and I know this Legislature detests redundancy – I have to rise after 11 years in here and ask my colleagues to the right: having had 44 years to find the right balance between the contributions of citizens and corporations and the support services and infrastructure that is needed for a successful province, I guess I would have expected a little more humility from this side, having had 44 years at in some cases \$100-per-barrel oil, in some cases much lower, but now in a position of deficit, debt, untold social deficits in our young people, in our First Nations, in our seniors' care, and, in all fairness, in our infrastructure and maintenance. I think it's fair to say that you didn't have the balance right between the money coming in and the needs of a society.

To quote again from *Follow the Money*, our leader did a careful analysis in 2012 of the changes in our public returns on investment. Corporations in Alberta pulled in profits three times the rate per capita of any other province during the period leading up to 2012. The big jump in corporate profits began in the '90s but accelerated in the mid-2000s. In 1989 corporate profits in Alberta were about \$4,400 per person. By 2004 to 2008 the profits ran at \$16,000 per person, three times the average of \$5,000 per person in the nine other provinces. Balance?

In the 2005 and 2007 reports of Toronto-Dominion Economics Taft reported that corporate profits in Alberta as a share of GDP were 23 per cent compared to 12 per cent for the rest of Canada. So our GDP indeed was growing significantly, and the corporations were taking more and more while we were moving less and less towards serving the people and the infrastructure needs of this province.

I have to say that this is all about finding the balance. Albertans decided that this past government did not have the balance. Whether these folks will have the balance remains to be seen, but they are moving in the direction that Albertans are saying is more fair, more likely to produce resources for the other essentials that we need besides business. We need business, but we also need to start redressing the imbalance between infrastructure and social supports and an environment that is actually properly monitored and where standards are enforced so that the world can trust what we're producing. All of those things have been progressively neglected.

You have to accept some humility, I think, for the state that we're in today and the fact that many Albertans, let alone many other countries, have lost confidence in this province's ability to deliver on its commitment to sustainability, to environmental responsibility, to social supports, and to government that finds the balance between revenue generation and supports for the people and the infrastructure of this province.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Would anyone like to take advantage of 29(2)(a), five minutes of questions or comments?

Seeing none, I will recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. You know, much of what I can only try to say but not as eloquently as my hon. colleague has obviously been said. But I think I've learned from some of the most effective third parties around; namely, the Premier and the Government House Leader when they sat on this side of the room. For that reason I feel I must speak. The members opposite are probably wondering: "We got the votes. Why do these guys care to speak? Why do they care to say their piece when they know they're going to lose a vote?"

Mr. Mason: It never stopped us.

Mr. Bhullar: Exactly. That's exactly it.

There is something great about the people of Alberta, Madam Speaker, and that is that the ill-conceived, ideological, I'm going to say ridiculous piece of legislation we are about to pass will not stop the spirit of the entrepreneurial people of Alberta, because all of those people know that although they may have to suffer for the next couple of years, there are proud, proud people in Alberta with strong conservative values and an entrepreneurial spirit that will ensure that these wrongs are corrected. They will ensure that these wrongs are corrected.

I would love to hear from the Premier herself as to why she feels the decision about the location of the Calgary cancer centre, such an important part of the NDP's policy around the Calgary region, is a decision that can be delayed because it requires further investigation and further research, yet this, something that will affect virtually every single Alberta family, is something they are not willing to consult on. I don't understand that. I just cannot understand it. One piece of infrastructure – it's a very important piece of infrastructure; don't get me wrong – that they used to get votes with they're willing to delay, they're willing to rethink and examine. But the fundamental backbone of Alberta's business climate they're willing to mess with in a second? Come on. Seriously? Honestly?

I actually believed these individuals when they sat across the way and said: "We would do things differently. We would do this, that, and the other thing." Now here they are doing exactly what they said they would not do. That's exactly the way they said they would never behave. They said: "We would never, you know, just come into the Legislature and push things through. We would give our members free votes." I remember all the times we used to be – I won't say heckled. Actually, I will say heckled. The Government House Leader is acknowledging this, I think with a certain degree of pride. We were heckled repeatedly.

Mr. Rodney: We still are.

Mr. Bhullar: We still are. Exactly.

Madam Speaker, I would say that I'm incredibly disappointed, not just in the policy positions of this government – they believe in this stuff. Cool. I am disappointed in their lack of attention to the pragmatic reality that the people of Alberta face today. I just cannot imagine, when so many people are concerned about the economic well-being of their families, their loved ones in our province collectively, that this is what they're concerned about.

9:10

I mean, there's news from economists around the world about Canada, even today, about our housing, about Alberta's housing situation. There are reports out of the U.S. that there are many individuals, many big funds that are actually betting short on the Canadian housing market. They're doing that because they predict a crash. We have challenges with our oil and gas sector. We have incredible challenges because of the low price of oil. You have

some very large investment firms that are starting to predict that there can be a Canadian housing crisis. And they're jamming through a bill to raise taxes on top of that. Even the charitable sector is saying, "Hold on a second here" about their minimum wage increase. Even the charitable sector, the nonprofit sector. I'd love to see how they're going to acknowledge all that. I'd love to see how they plan on dealing with that.

I posed questions to the ministers last week. I still haven't seen the written answers, but they were committed to them. I hope I get them. How are you going to deal with this? How are you going to deal with more layoffs? Where are the dollars for more layoffs? Where are the dollars to make sure that people are looked after? You know, a simple example: your rental accommodation rates. With the increase in minimum wage do you not think rental accommodation rates for apartments are going to go up? You're at a place right now where in Calgary and Edmonton vacancy rates are incredibly low. Incredibly low. So you jack up minimum wage. Do you not think the costs of landscaping and snow removal and maintenance are going to go up in those buildings? Where are they going to make that up? Where are they going to make that up, Madam Speaker? They're going to jack up rents.

Then what? How are you going to deal with that? Do you have plans to deal with that? What's coming next? Do you have social programs, then, that will deal with that? Where's the money for it? I don't remember voting on that in interim supply in the budget of something in the area of roughly, approximately, figuratively, give or take the \$600 million range. I just don't get it. I don't get it.

You know, this is a very significant situation. This is a very significant economic situation. To be quite honest with you, I hope we're wrong. I hope this is just a little blip in our economy. I would rather put my head down in front of you all than to see my friends and neighbours lose their jobs and maybe lose their homes. I hope to God I'm wrong. I hope to God all of us are wrong on this side of the House. I really do.

But if we're not, you folks better be prepared. You better be prepared to ensure Albertans aren't losing their homes. You better be prepared to ensure Albertans are not losing their homes. You best be prepared to make sure people have income and that strong, dignified people that are used to working for themselves, to making a go of their own entrepreneurial pursuits, are not left to rely on the charity of others. You know, we have a saying, Madam Speaker. Forgive me, but I'm going to say a line in Punjabi if you would allow. Thank you. We say [Remarks in Punjabi]. What that means is: with the strength of my own chest. We always say, you know, that people succeed on the strength of their own shoulders. I hope to God those strong and courageous people are not left to be charity cases in this province because of these economic policies. You know what? If their businesses suffer, they'll rebuild, but if their spirit suffers, that spirit with which they have created everything they have today, that will do this province more damage than anything.

So I hope that the members opposite take the time – I know they want to get out of the House as soon as they can – to go and visit with at least a couple of business owners in their constituencies. I can tell that many of you are fine people. I've enjoyed getting to know you so far, but I'm talking to a lot of your constituents as well, many of them business folks, some of whom actually voted for you. Now, though, they're saying: "Why is nobody talking to us? Why is no one talking to us? We thought we were voting for something different. Why are they not talking to us?"

An Hon. Member: They don't care.

Mr. Bhullar: Exactly. Something to laugh about, nice to see. Something to laugh about.

Madam Speaker, I guess that's just it. Regardless of what happens – I said this yesterday; I'll say it again – once people get new seats, all bets are off. I hope that I'm wrong. I don't think I am, though.

Mr. Eggen: Yes, you are.

Mr. Bhullar: Standing Order 29(2)(a), hon. member, is about to come up. You know, you could just wait. I thought we were talking about decorum in this House. You could just wait and ask questions then. But, Madam Speaker, no; they choose to heckle. I do see that as your responsibility. I am a member. I as a member of this Assembly have my rights to speak in this Assembly interfered with when people are heckling me. How was that for change? Exactly.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, would anybody like to take advantage of 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms Drever: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would like to make a comment on the definition of the Alberta advantage that various members were speaking on and perhaps discuss who hasn't seen the Alberta advantage. The single mother who has three children and is forced to work 70 hours a week to pay for rent in the city has not seen the Alberta advantage. Who hasn't seen the Alberta advantage? The people who are desperately trying to get into a shelter haven't seen the Alberta advantage. You know who didn't see the Alberta advantage? My family and myself when I was growing up here. The Alberta advantage is all well for the 7 per cent top earners. But what about the rest of Albertans? Where is the Alberta advantage for those families depending on food banks? There is no shame in paying your fair share to ensure that all Albertans have access to basic resources.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, I apologize. I saw you begin to stand. Do you want to speak on 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Jean: No, thanks.

The Deputy Speaker: Go ahead, hon. member.

9:20

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow: you know, there are a lot of people who came to Alberta because the economic structure of this province provides an advantage. I'll give you the story of my own parents. They didn't show up with any advantage in their pocket. You know, my grandfather didn't write a cheque for 20 million rupees and say: "Here you go, son. Go off to Canada; go off to Alberta. I've stuck a bunch of that Alberta advantage in your pocket. Now you can make something of yourself." He came here. Alberta was the advantage. Alberta was the advantage, and it's because of that advantage he had of being in Alberta that he made something of himself.

You've got nearly 100,000 people moving here every single year. Every single year. They're not in some top 7 per cent you speak of. They come here because of the Alberta advantage. They don't have, you know, some big corporate bank accounts or daddy's whatever accounts. They come here because this province gives them an advantage, and it's not always easy.

Madam Speaker, I can tell you that in my own family I remember the days when my mom used to come home from working in a plastic factory and tell us stories about her racist supervisor in the 1980s and how much we used to celebrate when she got, like, an 18 cents an hour raise. Eighteen cents an hour. We celebrated. Then

she went on to a window factory, and she worked hard. She worked very hard. They provided us with the ability to achieve a lot. There are millions of these stories out there. It's not government's job to write these stories. It's government's job to make sure that the conditions are there so that people can step up and write these stories.

When things get tough and you slip and you fall, somebody's there to help you up. Everybody slips, everybody falls, but when you slip and you fall and you need a little help getting up, you want to make sure those same conditions that allow for success are there. It's really that simple. That's the advantage. That's the advantage we cherish. That's the advantage we'll fight for every single day.

The Deputy Speaker: A couple of seconds left on the questions and comments.

Ms Drever: That's the advantage we have now.

Mr. Bhullar: Madam Speaker, I'd just like to remind all members of this House . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Sorry, hon. member, your time is up.

Mr. Bhullar: . . . that they can't speak unless you recognize them first. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: That's a good reminder. Thank you.

Any further speakers to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm probably pragmatic to a fault, kind of a practical person, and what concerns me about this bill is that through reports done, through research done, we're pretty sure that with the increase of the corporate taxes, there are going to be about 20,000 fewer jobs in this province. We know that, and that is no small matter because, as my colleagues so eloquently said, people come here for opportunities.

What I hope the members on the other side – I think they made up their minds today. I hope I'm wrong, but I think they have. What I hope they take the time to notice later on is that people don't move as easily as money does. My dad, a welder – there were seven of us kids growing up – used to refer to himself as a working stiff. He said: "We're staying where we are, but if the people that own my company decide that they don't like it to be here, they'll push a button on their computer, they'll move their company somewhere else, and I'll be out of work." That is my concern not just for Alberta but for all of Canada.

Frankly, whether you like it or not, for most of the last 44 years Alberta has been the place where people could come to from the rest of Canada when they couldn't find work there to find it here. If you kill that and you think that you're going to get support from the rest of the country – there are precious few other provinces with the ability to do that. It's a real crime – it is a crime – when you reduce the ability of the province with probably, almost for sure in my mind, a hundred per cent for sure, the best ability to provide that support to the rest of the country and you turn it into a place that people can no longer move to. You've actually done more damage than will become apparent in the first year or two. That's why I won't be supporting this bill.

If you love Canada, if you love Alberta, you should actually think about how you vote here. I know you've got your orders. I know you'll never be in cabinet if you don't do everything you're told. I'm sure you've all been told. But I'm sure that when you went door-knocking and talked to people on their doorsteps, you said to them: I will represent your interests. I'm sure you never said: I will

represent your interests as long as it's good for me, and if it costs you your job, then so be it. I don't think anybody said that. I'm pretty sure nobody said that. All I will say is that if you care about this country, if you care about this province, please care about the people that you said you wanted to represent when you were door-knocking.

To the member talking about people that are at the food bank and need help: yes, they need help. The best way to give people help is through a job. The best way to give people help when they're unable to get a job through whatever conditions life has thrown at them is to be helped by the taxes and the generosity of other people that have a job. But when you take away the ability to have jobs in the first place, it all falls down. And that is why I will not be supporting this bill. I genuinely believe that this is taking part in killing the Alberta advantage, which is the ability for Albertans to have a job, to better their own lives, and to better the lives of their family, their friends, their neighbours, and even strangers.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments for the hon. member?

Any further speakers to the bill?

If not, then I'll call the question.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:29 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, S.	Hinkley	Notley
Babcock	Hoffman	Phillips
Bilous	Horne	Piquette
Carlier	Kazim	Rosendahl
Carson	Kleinsteuber	Sabir

Ceci	Larivee	Schmidt
Connolly	Littlewood	Schreiner
Coolahan	Loyola	Shepherd
Dach	Luff	Sigurdson
Drever	Malkinson	Sucha
Eggen	Mason	Swann
Feehan	McCuaig-Boyd	Sweet
Fitzpatrick	McKitrick	Turner
Ganley	McLean	Westhead
Goehring	McPherson	Woollard
Gray	Miller	

9:40

Against the motion:

Aheer	Fraser	Rodney
Anderson, W.	Gotfried	Schneider
Bhullar	Jean	Smith
Clark	Loewen	Starke
Cooper	MacIntyre	Strankman
Cyr	McIver	Taylor
Drysdale	Nixon	van Dijken
Fildebrandt	Pitt	Yao

Totals: For – 47 Against – 24

[Motion carried; Bill 2 read a third time]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Madam Speaker. That, I think, was a good day's work, not nearly as painful as yesterday's but equally productive. I will move, then, that we now adjourn until 1:30 tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 9:43 p.m. to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday afternoon, June 25, 2015

Day 8

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

First Session

Wanner, Hon. Robert E., Medicine Hat (ND), Speaker
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Feehan, Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (ND), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Anderson, Shaye, Leduc-Beaumont (ND)
Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (W)
Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (ND)
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Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (PC)
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 Horne Taylor
 Hunter

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Ms Miller
 Deputy Chair: Mr. Nielsen
 Cyr Piquette
 Ellis Renaud
 Malkinson Taylor
 Miranda

Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee

Chair: Ms Gray
 Deputy Chair: Ms Payne
 Anderson, W. Miranda
 Clark Nielsen
 Cortes-Vargas Nixon
 Cyr Renaud
 Jansen Starke
 Loyola Swann
 McLean van Dijken
 Miller

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Sweet
 Deputy Chair: Mr. Smith
 Goehring Pitt
 Hinkley Rodney
 Jansen Shepherd
 Littlewood Swann
 Luff Westhead
 Orr Yao
 Payne

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Ms Woollard
 Deputy Chair: Mr. Dach
 Bhullar Nixon
 Connolly Shepherd
 Cooper Sweet
 Cortes-Vargas van Dijken
 Kleinsteuber

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Wanner
 Deputy Chair: Mr. Schmidt
 Cooper McLean
 Fildebrandt Nielsen
 Goehring Nixon
 Luff Piquette
 McIver

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Ms McPherson
 Deputy Chair: Mr. Kleinsteuber
 Anderson, W. Hinkley
 Babcock Littlewood
 Connolly McKitrick
 Dang Rosendahl
 Drever Stier
 Drysdale Strankman
 Fraser

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Dr. Turner
 Deputy Chair: Ms Fitzpatrick
 Carson Loyola
 Coolahan McPherson
 Cooper Schneider
 Ellis Starke
 Hanson van Dijken
 Kazim Woollard
 Larivee

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. Fildebrandt
 Deputy Chair: Ms Gray
 Barnes Malkinson
 Bhullar Miller
 Cyr Payne
 Dach Renaud
 Gotfried Turner
 Hunter Westhead
 Loyola

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Ms Kazim
 Deputy Chair: Mr. Loewen
 Aheer MacIntyre
 Anderson, S. Rosendahl
 Babcock Schreiner
 Clark Stier
 Drysdale Sucha
 Horne Woollard
 Kleinsteuber

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, June 25, 2015

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Members of the Assembly and guests, let us reflect. As we conclude these last two weeks of our work in this Assembly, we renew our energy with thanks, thanks for the freedom of opportunity to speak, our work here, and for the people in the constituencies we all represent.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, on your collective behalf it is my privilege to welcome former Premier Mr. Dave Hancock and his family to the Assembly. If I might, I would just reflect on some of the service that the hon. Premier has made. First elected to this Assembly in 1997, Mr. Hancock subsequently served as minister of federal and intergovernmental affairs in 1997, as minister of intergovernmental and aboriginal affairs from 1997 to 1999, as Minister of Justice and attorney general from 1999 to 2004, as minister of advanced education from 2004 to 2006, as minister of health and wellness from 2006 to 2008, as Minister of Education from 2008 to 2011, as Minister of Human Services from 2011 to 2013, as Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education from 2013 to 2014, and as Deputy Premier from 2013 to 2014. He also held the role of Government House Leader or Deputy Government House Leader in 16 out of the 17 years that he served in this Assembly. In 2014 he became Alberta's 15th Premier.

I ask that Mr. Hancock and his family, seated in the Speaker's gallery, rise as I call their names: Mr. Dave Hancock; his wife, Janet Hancock; his daughter Janine Hancock; Ally Ismail, a good friend of Janine; daughter Janis Stauffer; granddaughter Miya Stauffer; and grandson Kai Stauffer. Please join me in thanking the entire Hancock family for their contribution, support, and services that they have made, all of them, over the 17 years of Mr. Hancock's service as the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Before I ask for that round of applause and appreciation, I must tell you, if you allow me, a personal story. I had the pleasure of meeting the former Premier in the cafeteria this morning, and he wears on his lapel a pin that speaks about children. I saw him four years ago, and I learned – it was renewed again yesterday – that he first accepted that pin, I think, in his first year in this Legislature, and he's worn it every day since on his suit. Would the House please rise and welcome our guests. [Standing ovation]

If the House would allow the Speaker one additional comment that all of us can reflect upon. If we receive this kind of attention and respect after our service in this House, that may serve as an example of an outcome that we are proud to represent. Thank you, hon. Premier.

I would now recognize the leader of the third party, the Member for Calgary-Hays. I believe you may have a visitor. Is that correct?

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce Dave Quest, in the Speaker's gallery or wherever you are. Dave, I can't see you from where I am. Mr. Quest served this Legislature in a very respectful and responsible and a great way over a number of years. Amongst other things, he was associate minister of seniors. He was one that could always be counted upon to put Albertans' interests first and foremost. He has remained a friend, a supporter,

and a great Albertan. It's my honour to ask him to rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly my constituency assistant, Sherry Hunt. Sherry was born and raised in Kimberley, B.C., and became a resident of Lethbridge about 20 years ago. This is the place where she met her husband, Aaron, and where she and Aaron have chosen to live and have their home and have their two boys, James and William.

Sherry has been a public service worker for a number of years. She is an avid community, PSAC, and agricultural union and social justice activist. With the birth of her two boys she experienced the difficulty of finding affordable and quality child care. Her activism surfaced, and she became a member of the Children's House Child Care Society in Lethbridge. She has been a member of that organization for 10 years and has been the board chair for eight of those years. She has also participated in a child care advocacy committee with Public Interest Alberta. Sherry is someone who puts her money where her mouth is. She steps up, and she takes positive action. Lethbridge-East is extremely fortunate to have her as our constituency assistant. I'd ask Sherry to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Statement by the Speaker

25th Anniversary of Death of Constable Ezio Faraone

The Speaker: Before we move to the additional guests, there was an oversight that I made, and I would like to use that moment now. Today is the 25th anniversary of the death of Constable Ezio Faraone of the Edmonton police force. I would remind the House to remember that member and his family and his peers as we think about the events for today.

1:40

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: Now other guests. The Minister of Education and Minister of Culture and Tourism.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce through you and to you two people that are very important to me, my wife, Somboon, and my eldest daughter, Genevieve. They, of course, have seen the Legislature before – I've been here since 2004 – but they've never seen it quite like this. Genevieve just came back – she was away for five weeks or so – and came home and asked, "Dad, what have you been up to?" I said, "Oh, not too much, but why don't you come by and see how things are?" It's very exciting for them to be here today.

I also just wanted to very briefly express my admiration for Dave Hancock. You know, I've only been doing this for about a month or so, and I'm just so tired. Dave has always been someone I looked up to and tried to emulate in so many ways, and I just wanted to mention that, too.

If my family could stand, please, and receive the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs and Minister of Service Alberta.

Mr. Bilous: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. If you'll indulge me, I also have an introduction to deliver on behalf of the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General, with which I'll begin. It gives me great pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly on behalf of the Minister of Justice a group of 16 employees and mediators from the civil mediation program, a program of resolution services in Alberta Justice. The civil mediation program is an effective and confidential way for Albertans to resolve a lawsuit. Through the facilitation of mediators, parties to a civil suit are given the opportunity to dialogue about their issues and problem solve together. Mediators assist the parties with communication and help them write up an agreement that works for all parties, in many cases thereby settling a lawsuit and negating the need for a trial. I would ask the members to join me in welcoming them to our Legislature, and I'll ask them all to please rise.

Mr. Speaker, for my next introduction I'm going to introduce three individuals briefly, three valued members from my team. First, a young lady named Clarice Eckford. She's been working in my constituency office since February of this year. She brings years of experience working in project management, she's an accomplished actress, and I can say that she always has a smile on her face and is full of energy. As well, Marcela Lillo just joined my team as my constituency assistant. I'm excited to work with her as she brings to the job experience a social justice activist background and working with women who are fleeing domestic abuse. Thirdly, a young man by the name of Garrett Spelliscy, who was my constituency assistant from 2012 until recently. I can tell you that he started with me prior to 2012. He's actually been working with me since 2011, and without his help and support I can tell you that I would not have been a member in this Assembly in 2012 and re-elected this year. I definitely want to thank him for all of his countless hours and hard work for me and on behalf of me. He's done an incredible job helping constituents in Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. I'll ask my guests to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. minister, if I might be allowed to indicate to the mediators that you introduced to the House that there was a mediator in the province who took on a role far more than he ever expected in terms of mediation. So as they look at new career opportunities, there's a lesser supply of mediators in the province than there was before.

. The hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the participants in the Alberta public service policy internship program, 15 of whom are with us in the galleries today for question period. This unique corporate human resources program recruits recent university graduates to the Alberta public service and provides them with formal training, mentorship, and professional development opportunities, with the intent of building the policy capacity in the Alberta public service. The policy internship program gives these recent graduates valuable experience in policy development, planning, and implementation through two 8-month placements with policy areas in ministries across government.

Please stand as I call your name and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly. The members of the APS policy internship program are Astrid Arzu, Erica Woolf, Helaina Zyp, Zeo Xiao, Glennis Leathwood, Trenton Broens, Lindsay Salloum, Kam Aujla, Charlene Campo, Bola Sowemimo, Jeffrey Chalifoux, Jesse

Vreeken, Jordan Vincent, Sami Brar, and Jonathan Beauchamp. Mr. Speaker, there they are.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to introduce to you and through to the Legislative Assembly Sarah Hogendorp and Jennah Martens-Forrester. Sarah and Jennah have worked tirelessly to promote the inclusion of consent into Alberta's sex ed curriculum. As a father of daughters I am a strong supporter of this work, and only yes means yes. Later today I'll be presenting a petition signed by over 1,300 Albertans asking for consent to be added to Alberta's sex ed curriculum. It is my honour to introduce you to my friends and colleagues in the Legislative Assembly of Alberta. I'd ask my guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I have the pleasure of introducing to you and through to all of the members of this Assembly my guest, Leah McRorie. Leah is a community activist with a passion that matches my own: social justice for those with disabilities, promoting inclusion for all people. Leah is currently the manager of children's supports and services at the Gateway Association and a parent facilitator at Getting Ready for Inclusion Today. In addition to being a certified facilitator for the Alberta Caregivers Association, she is the proud mother of three daughters. In recognition of Leah and the Gateway Association's commitment and passion to building a more inclusive and caring province, I would ask that she rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks and minister responsible for status of women.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the group of people that keeps my life together so that I can do this job. My mother, Barb Phillips, or as she is now known, Grandma Barb; her new life partner, retired RCMP officer Mike McCague; and the guest of honour for me today, my six-year-old son, Finn Phillips-Davies. Finn has recently graduated from kindergarten, where he has very much enjoyed his numbers and his letters and putting together sentences and making little drawings to go along with his stories and, of course, his beloved, beloved movies, that his mama lets him watch on weekends. When I look up in that gallery at his little head peeking from behind that pillar, I remember exactly why we all worked so hard to make change for all Alberta. Please give the warm welcome of the Assembly to Finn, Barb, and Mike.

The Speaker: I met the minister's son in the cafeteria, and he had aspirations for the Speaker's chair.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, we have some important business to attend to, so I would move that we extend the Routine so that we can complete ministerial statements before going to question period.

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

1:50

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise for the first time in this Assembly to introduce to you and through you to the House five bright young individuals who join us in the members' gallery this afternoon.

Zachary Gee is a graduate of Old Scona academic high school. He was on the executive for his student union and participated in their model Legislatures.

Darren Choi is a graduate of Strathcona senior high school and will soon be studying astrophysics at the University of Alberta. He has a love for the arts and drama and is a skilled pianist.

Nimesh Jayasuriya is a graduate of Ross Sheppard high school, with honours. He was captain of the indoor track team and aspires to be a neurosurgeon.

Yahya Jama is also a graduate of Ross Sheppard high school, a member of the Muslim liaison committee for the EPS, and director of youth activities at the Muslim Association of Canada. He was the co-captain of the Ross Sheppard debate team and is a volunteer for Fort Edmonton Park, working to preserve Edmonton's heritage.

Lastly, L.J. Valencia is a member of my constituency and also volunteered on my election campaign. Recently graduating from Ross Sheppard high school, he was an executive member of the debate team, a member of his high school choir, and will soon be studying economics and political science at the University of Alberta.

I would now ask that my guests rise, which they have already done, to receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly. Thank you.

The Speaker: We will proceed with the remaining two additional guests. The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to all members of the House for indulging me on this rather long day of introductions. I promise that I will keep them as short as I can. With me today I have two guests. The first is a constituent in Edmonton-Gold Bar, a long-time supporter and member of the NDP. This is his third visit to the House this session because he still can't believe that there are so many New Democrat MLAs sitting here, and he'll continue to come until he convinces himself that it is real. I would ask that the House give the traditional warm welcome to Mr. Merle Schnee.

For my second introduction, Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today to introduce to you and to the entire Assembly here my wife, Tena Trefz. Tomorrow we'll be celebrating our 10th anniversary, and I know that this introduction carries a lot of weight on it because depending on how well it goes, it may have an impact on our celebrations tomorrow. We were married 10 years ago tomorrow at the Sedgewick Seventh-day Adventist church, a house divided a little bit like this one, with people on this side who love me dearly and people on that side who are just learning to love me. For the past 10 years we've been raising three children together. I've supported her while she went to university to get her degree in nursing, and in turn she supported me through two provincial election campaigns.

Now, we all know that the 25th anniversary is the silver anniversary and the 50th anniversary is the golden anniversary. But not many know that the 10th anniversary is the Legislative Assembly anniversary, Mr. Speaker, because, really, I can't think of anything more romantic than to say "I love you" through a neutral third party like you.

The Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'll keep this brief as well. It is my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to this House two constituents of mine, Liz Acheson and Ken Zinyk. Liz and Ken are retired today. Liz was an accountant, and Ken was a teacher. They are joining us today just to watch our question period. I would now ask that my guests please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Tribute to the Hon. Dave Hancock, QC Former Premier of Alberta

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today in order to be the first to rise to provide a tribute to our former Premier Dave Hancock. I can see that he is here but just barely, around that corner, so I'll just be leaning over a bit, like this, every now and then as I talk.

You know, there are very few Albertans who have had the honour and the privilege of serving our province as Premier, and I rise today to acknowledge someone who filled this role with grace and integrity and good humour. Premier Dave Hancock has joined us in the Speaker's gallery for this afternoon's proceedings, and I would like to extend again the warm greetings from this government to him and also to thank him for his service to our province and its people.

Now, all of us in this Chamber know that politics is especially challenging for families, and I would like to take this opportunity as well to thank Janet, Ian, Janis, and Janine for sharing Dave with Albertans. I would also like to welcome them and his grandchildren Miya and Kai to this Assembly today.

Premier Hancock, the son of a fur trapper, was born in the Northwest Territories, the first Premier of our province since it joined Confederation in 1905 to be born in the Territories, from which our province itself was carved. Spending large swaths of his youth in the northern part of our province, Premier Hancock became involved in politics at a relatively young age, flirting with the Socreds before making what would be a lifelong commitment to the Progressive Conservatives, although it's never too late to change.

Throughout his youth he encountered many who disagreed with him, both from the right and from the left, as the hon. Government House Leader can attest personally. But Dave Hancock's commitment to his party remained steadfast throughout, and that is one of the things for which I have great admiration.

Premier Hancock served in this Chamber for more than 17 years as the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, a riding in which he was highly respected and extraordinarily well liked, a popularity the longevity of which all members of this House would no doubt be thrilled to have for themselves. This popularity extended out of his riding and into this Chamber, where Premier Hancock won the respect and the friendship of many members regardless of their partisan stripe.

As House leader for the NDP I sat in more than a few meetings with Premier Hancock where we attempted to negotiate Assembly procedures. Suffice to say that we probably disagreed as much as we agreed, probably more, in fact, to be fair, because I was a bit disagreeable back in those third-party opposition meetings, I'm sure he would say.

Mr. Mason: Not any more.

Ms Notley: Not at all any more.

But even with that, I never really understood how well Premier Hancock did his job as Government House Leader until after he left it. And notwithstanding our frequent disagreements about House procedure or about the policies that it was facilitating, there was always one characteristic about which I could never disagree, and that is Dave Hancock's work ethic and his obvious dedication that he brought to his work every day in this House, days that regularly spanned 12 to 14 hours as a matter of course. Notwithstanding the frequent, shall I say, wrong-headedness of his policies, there is and was no denying that they were all prosecuted through the lens of what I could see always was a genuine commitment to providing pure public service to a province and an Assembly that I could tell always he clearly loved.

At the time of his retirement Premier Hancock was known as well for his excellent parliamentarianism as he was for his accomplishments in the government of the day. Now, over the years he served in nearly every cabinet portfolio, a testament to his skill and his character. Through years of growth as much as through years of downturn, through years of stability as much as through years of tumult and change Premier Hancock provided our province with steady and competent leadership in each of the roles he filled, from International and Intergovernmental Relations to Health and to Education. The Member for Edmonton-Calder actually quipped to me today: you know, Dave pretty much quarterbacked the whole operation. That's what it looked like to us sitting over on that side.

Though his tenure as Premier was brief, Dave Hancock nonetheless had a tremendous impact on the public discourse of our province for almost 20 years. His legacy will not be soon forgotten, and I'm honoured today to welcome Premier Hancock back into this Chamber this afternoon, to congratulate him, and to thank him once again for his incalculable contributions to our province, to our communities, and especially to this Assembly.

Thank you.

2:00

The Speaker: I recognize the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a privilege and an honour to acknowledge a fine man and a true public servant, both in this House and his life beyond, Premier Dave Hancock. Throughout his years in public service he never stopped trying to make our province a better place. We did not always agree, but he never let that get in the way. You could say, as they say, that he disagreed without being disagreeable.

He was the Government House Leader for the vast majority of his career, and he was pretty darn good at it. I know he was good at it because he drove the opposition crazy. It is a pleasure to see Premier Hancock back in the Legislature today, but I think I speak for all of my Official Opposition colleagues when I say that it's a relief to see him in the gallery instead of across the aisle, where he used his tremendous abilities to foil our plans.

Mr. Speaker, we can joke now, but as a newly elected MLA three years ago I couldn't help but respect his competence at all things in the House and his commitment to being an effective legislator. It was actually six years ago, not three, that I first met Premier Hancock. At that time he was serving as Minister of Education, and I was attending a school board meeting with him present. I still remember being instantly struck by his experience, his knowledge, and his caring. He was ready to listen to our local concerns and eager to contribute to the discussion.

You see, Dave was never just a politician; he was a public servant. That's not to say that he wasn't good at the politics of

public service. I would argue that he was one of the best. But he was never in the game for the glory or the perks. He was here to serve his community. That hasn't stopped since he left office, and I have no doubt his community service will never end. That's what makes him one of the best and is why he is so fondly remembered in this House.

In retirement he's an elder statesman, though I don't think that's necessarily fair. He's more middle-aged.

For years I heard him described as the best Premier we never had, and then, seemingly overnight, he was our Premier. With his party at its lowest point and with faith in this institution and the democratic process completely and utterly destroyed, Premier Hancock stepped up, took the mantle of leadership, and did his best to right the ship. Thank you for that, sir. For that and for his service, that spread across several ministries under three different Premiers, this province and this House have much to thank him for.

Premier Hancock's time as Premier may have been brief, but his commitment to public service has been an entire life's work. Mr. Speaker, I can assure you that his impact on Alberta lives on today. Premier Hancock, to you and your entire family: Alberta thanks you all.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I beg the indulgence of the House to grant unanimous consent so the leader of the PC opposition, the leader of the Liberal Party, the leader of the Alberta Party, and, very briefly, myself may offer some brief remarks.

Thank you.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise today. As I do, I first want to thank our current Premier for her grace in allowing this to happen today – thank you; that's classy – and of course the House leader of the government. Classy. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker, I always referred to Premier Hancock as the master of the game, and I think we've heard a little bit of evidence of that today. Believe me, Premier, that's a compliment. During my time here we've already heard of Premier Hancock's ability to control the current government when they were over on this side of the House, to control the Official Opposition or at least do his best to on that side of the House, and it was a real example of skill. When House leaders get up – and there is none better than you, sir – they typically get out the green books, looking for references, as they do, and that's doing their job right. The one thing that I thought was always different? Premier Hancock already knew what was in there. He was just finding the official reference and always being careful. He was that good.

I did get to spend some time under his tutelage, as a deputy House leader, and almost nobody knows that because he never missed a day's work. He was so good at what he did and he knew he was so much better than me and everybody else in this House that he wasn't about to leave the important proceedings in the House in my hands when his hands were so much more confident, competent, capable. That's just how it was. We heard from the government and the Official Opposition of his ability while he was and remains a tremendous public servant to control the politics of it. He was that good within our party, too, Mr. Speaker.

I can tell you that Dave Hancock was probably on the more progressive side of our party, and I believe I'm more on the conservative side of the party, so even, you know, when we had

caucus discussions, we didn't always agree on things. I don't remember ever beating him. I don't think I ever did, and that's a real testament to the man because he does his homework. He pays attention. He was always a competent person and a calming influence in the House, in caucus, and I expect every place else that he spent his life.

Thank you to the Premier, to the teacher, to the man, to the husband, to the father and grandfather. Alberta is better off for having Dave Hancock.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. leader of the third party, I would like to tell you that Mr. Hancock has agreed to give me tutorials in the green book over July and August.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and salute the former Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, the interim Premier, and his family, a true and tireless stalwart of the PC caucus for almost a century.

An Hon. Member: A century?

Dr. Swann: Sorry, Mr. Speaker. It just seemed like that at times.

He comported himself most effectively and respectfully in a number of ministries, most recently in creating the challenging omnibus ministry of Human Services. He tried in all his activities, including his short tenure as interim Premier, to put Albertans and especially children first. He welcomed youth involvement, mostly nonpartisan, in education reform, from which Inspiring Education emerged. In particular, he must be honoured for the dark days when we reviewed unreported children who died in care, convening a round-table with Human Services to address archaic and secretive policies that needed to change in order to put children first.

2:10

An intrepid debater, he gave no quarter, but I always found him informed, forthright, and I appreciated his efforts to open up new avenues of consideration and do, again, what he felt was in the best interest of Albertans even if his party didn't. With extraordinary prescience that exceeded most observers', he stepped aside in anticipation of a change in Alberta. He proved himself a true public servant by agreeing to serve as interim Premier of this great province.

To my former colleague I extend my sincere thanks, best wishes for many, many more years of contribution to Alberta, and for the greatest joy, more time with family.

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

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As usual, the Member for Calgary-Mountain View is a tough act to follow. It is an honour to rise today and welcome this distinguished guest, who has given so much to our province over his long career and who I know is nowhere near finished his contribution to Alberta. While I personally haven't had as much opportunity to interact with Premier Hancock as I would like, I certainly hope to have that opportunity in the very near future. I know he was a mentor and a role model for members on all sides of the House and for many who consider themselves progressives in Alberta and certainly within the Progressive Conservative Party, although all things are relative.

One of my staff members worked directly with Premier Hancock and has nothing but great things to say about him. Natasha Soles tells me that it was Premier Hancock who inspired her to become engaged in participatory democracy at a very young age, when she

sat on his board in an advisory capacity at age 8. I guess that's part of the secret to the PCs' long run in government.

He has been described to me as an übercitizen, and his own political involvement started young, as president of the PC Youth at the University of Alberta. Some say that he may have even started a Liberal club just to have someone to debate with. He has a well-earned reputation for focusing on children and youth in Alberta as well as being a champion of economic, environmental, and, especially, social innovation in our province, and I know he still proudly wears his Children First pin today.

Thank you, Premier Hancock, for your service to Albertans, to your constituents, and for standing up and being one of the people who made a difference. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm really pleased to have the opportunity to talk about my friend Dave Hancock. Dave served as minister of eight different departments during his time plus as the Premier, plus he was the Deputy Premier and the House leader. So over the time he was here, he had 11 jobs altogether in just 17 years. That means something. It means that he couldn't keep a job. I'm going to be gentle on Mr. Hancock because he's not here in the House to reply, and there is that rule, which I learned from him.

He has just been the recipient of an honorary degree at the University of Alberta and, I think, one at Athabasca University as well, and that, I think, is a great honour as well.

I enjoyed my time when I was House leader of our caucus, sparring with Dave in the House, and I learned many, many rules from him and had many lessons in the parliamentary rules, which I hope I can turn to some good use. He was the Premier for a brief time, eight months, which he describes as the best summer job he ever had.

I won't tell any stories about our time together at university in the Fiji house. We both lived in this fraternity. I was not a member; he was. They invited me there, and I went to live there for the very affordable price of the room and board, only to discover to my horror that it was the young Tory frat on campus.

You know, he was very effective as a legislator and a politician. During the time that he spent in this Assembly, the NDP caucus never exceeded four members. Once he left, you can see what happened.

I want to thank his family and particularly Janet for standing by him while he served our province so ably and so well, and I just want to say that I'm proud that I can call him my friend. [Standing ovation]

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, looking at the time, I'd like to request unanimous consent of the House to wave Standing Order 7(7) to allow for the Routine to continue past 3 p.m. today.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Energy Policies

Mr. Jean: I have some questions about today's tax announcement. I say tax announcement because it was not an announcement about emissions. Since the specified gas emitters regulation was enacted, no emitters have actually reduced emissions. Instead, they pay a tax to pollute. Emissions are just the way this government calculates this tax. Will the Premier act on the Wildrose's natural gas GHG

policy, which actually moves us towards a lower carbon fuel, or will raising taxes remain this government's only policy?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and that's a very good question about a very important announcement that was made today. We know that Alberta needs better access to world markets, and to do that, our government is addressing one of our biggest challenges, climate change. We need a climate change plan that is bold, that is ambitious, and that will bring Alberta into a new era of responsible energy development and environmental sustainability. Today's announcement with respect to the specified gas emitters regulation was just one small part of that. The other important piece was the fact that we've appointed a panel chair to meet with Albertans and industry leaders to figure out a way to go forward and bring about real change that will impact our marketability going forward.

Mr. Jean: One of the things said at today's taxing announcement concerns me. The environment minister talked about incenting renewable energy. That should actually worry Albertans. In other jurisdictions such incentives have become boondoggles. It has been a disaster in California, in Germany, in Ontario. In Spain it got so bad that crooks were actually running diesel generators to power floodlights to shine on solar panels at night. This they did so they could pocket the subsidy. What will the Premier do to prevent a renewable energy boondoggle here in Alberta?

Ms Notley: As we move forward on developing Alberta's climate change policy, what we will do is that we will develop that in consultation with key stakeholders, including industry. I was very pleased to see that the CEO of Shell appeared with the minister of environment today at this announcement along with the head of Capital Power, along with the head of the Pembina Institute. I think that's a good start to show that we're all going to be working together. But we'll do that transparently, and we will consult with all Albertans to make sure that what we do works.

2:20

Mr. Jean: There was one part of today's announcement that didn't concern taxes. It was when the environment minister declared that the Energy minister will very soon be announcing the details of the royalty review. Now, very soon isn't today, and the Leg. rises today, not to return until after the federal election. The opposition will have absolutely no chance to ask the government questions for Albertans about the details of the royalty review. Why is the Premier avoiding Legislature accountability with regard to the royalty review that is so, so important to Albertans?

Ms Notley: You know, as we've been consulting with industry over the course of the last four weeks, when we became government, we heard from them, and one of the things they told us was: "You know what? As you go forward on the royalty review, as you go forward on the climate change review, two things that we acknowledge need to happen, be sure that you deal with the two in a similar way and that they're working together." So the announcement with respect to the royalty review will be coming very soon, Mr. Speaker, and it will be a very transparent, open process. Members opposite as well as members on this side and all Albertans will be able to hold that process accountable as we move forward.

Mr. Jean: But absolutely no accountability here.

Legislative Process

Mr. Jean: Today is the last day of this session, so let's sum up. Bill 3: the government claims they were being champions of democracy by bringing Bill 3, their minibudget, to the Assembly for debate, but as soon as their numbers were tabled, they limited debate at every single stage. It took them no time to fall back on using the PC playbook to limit debate in this place. Will the Premier commit to end the shameful practices by accepting the Wildrose's 12 proposals to improve democracy in this Assembly for Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With respect to the interim supply bill the rules that were used are rules that have been in place for a long time, and there were no special rules used to limit debate. With respect to Bill 2 debate could have gone on much longer. There were certainly no efforts made by this opposition to limit debate. So the length of debate that we enjoyed was the length of debate that the opposition chose to engage in. But moving forward, I know that my House leader and the House leaders opposite will be meeting to talk about a number of different initiatives that we can take to improve the way this House functions, and I look forward to hearing from them about what their suggestions are.

Mr. Jean: Chose? We had no choice. The orange is the new blue. PC 2.0.

Let's go to Bill 2. When the NDP was in opposition, the Premier and the Government House Leader were strong advocates for consultation and thorough debate, but that is not what we see now. That is not what we have. On Bill 2 they didn't want any consultation. The Finance minister actually said that he couldn't consider even a symbolic tax cut without a fiscal plan. But he didn't need a fiscal plan to bring in the largest tax hike in Alberta's history. Will the Premier admit that this Legislative session was called just so her caucus could rubber-stamp a record tax hike?

Ms Notley: As I've said before, this session was called because we needed to get interim supply because otherwise we would have run out of money in June, and that would not have been good governance. The other option was special warrants, in which case none of us would have been here and we wouldn't have been able to spend all this great time getting to know each other. You know, it just wouldn't have been as fun. So this was the happy medium. The other thing would have been to bring in a budget with four weeks' notice, and that, quite frankly, would not have been responsible either. But let me just say this. In terms of debate on Bill 2 there was a provincial election on it. We were very clear in that election about exactly what we were going to do, and Albertans made it very clear about the way they thought we should go.

Mr. Jean: Well, I'm glad to see the Premier admits that this is not responsible either.

Now Bill 1. The NDP in opposition used to believe that it was the Assembly's duty and responsibility to get legislation right the first time. Wildrose supported the intent of Bill 1. After all, it was our idea. But when we presented amendments designated to close NDP loopholes which violate the very spirit of Bill 1, this Notley government said no. That might be because the NDP uses those very same loopholes in every election. Is the Premier counting on these loopholes to help the NDP in the Calgary-Foothills by-election?

Ms Notley: Well, I'm glad that this issue came up in question period because it gives me an opportunity to correct the members opposite with more people listening. Let me be perfectly clear. It has been the position of the Alberta NDP going back to at least 2004 to ban corporate and union donations. The Wildrose and the various parties that preceded it did not exist then, so it was not your policy. It was our policy, and I'm very glad that you came alongside with that.

With respect to the other issues, that were good issues, that you raised, the fact of the matter is that election financing reform is complicated and complex, and we believe quite strongly that it requires everybody's engagement, including the engagement of . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Child Protective Services

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A couple of days ago I stood on the steps of the Legislature with colleagues from all parties. We heard stories from parents who lost their children in provincial care. I can't imagine the heartache, and I know that everyone in this House wants to improve how we protect our kids. We want to work with the government to improve the system, and we want to be able to tell parents the mistakes of the past that we learned from. Will the minister plan to improve and strengthen protective services for children in care?

The Speaker: The Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. Actually, I was also on the steps of the Legislature on that day. It's a really sad and concerning situation. I mentioned there as well that we are committed to improving the system and we are committed to bringing in more independent oversight and transparency so that the public knows what's happened and so that we can improve the existing systems.

Thank you.

Mrs. Pitt: I appreciate the government's thoughts, and I know our colleagues know that we need a better system. It's a system that is often detailed with stories of tragedy. We are wondering about the situation of a child who was removed from one dangerous situation and later died in provincial care. The child was left unchecked for five hours. There is a provincial inquiry into the death of this child. Will the minister update us when the inquiry is complete, and how will we be changing this policy?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Member, and thank you, Mr. Speaker. When a child dies in our care, it's a heartbreaking situation. As the member identified, there is an inquiry going on. I think it's inappropriate at this point for me to comment on that inquiry, and I think that if there are any recommendations, we are committed to improving the system, and we will do that.

Mrs. Pitt: When it comes to the children in this province, let's put our politics aside. We need to protect our kids. What is the plan moving forward so this will never happen again?

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Member. I agree that the ministry deals with vulnerable Albertans, and it's not a partisan thing that government has a responsibility, we as a society have a responsibility to provide for and protect those. In that spirit, I think I've reached out to the member and the member from the third party as well, and we'll

make sure that we sit together and we reach out to our partners and we put together a plan that works for all Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

2:30

Energy Policies (continued)

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, this morning the Environment minister held a media conference. A journalist asked if the current rules requiring carbon levy funds to be spent in Alberta would continue, or would they be able to be spent elsewhere, to which the minister replied: I am open to that. The government won't help industry develop pipelines to export product, but it seems open to exporting Alberta tax dollars and, by extension, jobs. Will the Premier rein in her minister before she actually does this?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said earlier, the plan going forward – there's been no plan set to change the way the emissions management fund is expended or where it is expended. What we have done is ensured that the contribution to that fund will slowly increase over the next two years, while at the same time we're working in partnership with industry, with stakeholders, with community members in order to develop a comprehensive climate change strategy that will (a) bring about positive outcomes for Albertans and (b) improve our ability to access markets with respect to our product outside of this country.

Mr. McIver: It sounds like the Premier is open to that, too, Mr. Speaker, because she didn't say no.

Mr. Speaker, given that the previous government was proposing increasing the stringency levels from 12 to 24 per cent and what was presented this morning, in my understanding, may actually water that down, certainly not increase it – I know that the minister wants to impress her fancy foreign friends in Paris later on this year, but why, in order to do that, would she weaken and water down the rules that a previous Environment minister was going to bring in?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, when it comes to climate change, this government will do better than previous governments, and I rise today to report to the House that we have proposed an increase in specified gas emitters regulation from \$15 to \$30 per tonne by 2017 and increasing the stringency to 20 per cent. These numbers have not come as a surprise to industry. There have been conversations on this topic since we assumed office, and we look forward to future conversations that we are going to be having with industry, environmental groups, and Albertans as we move forward.

Thank you.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, the government's plan looks like a rehash environmentally of what was going to happen anyway except that we're seeing more rules and more regulations, undoing the Alberta Energy Regulator, adding a royalty review, higher taxes, higher cost of doing business. To the Premier: how can you reassure hard-working Albertans that they're not going to lose a whole lot of their hard-earned dollars with these increased costs that have to be passed along to them in the form of higher energy costs, and are you actually going to help with pipelines so that if better and cleaner energy is developed, we'll be able to sell it to someone?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think there are about 19 questions in there. It's going to be a little bit hard to get to all of them.

I think it's interesting that the hon. leader of the third party, on one hand, is suggesting that we didn't go far enough with the tax with respect to the specified gas emitters regulation and then, on the other hand, he's suggesting that we're going too far in terms of some of the other things that we're discussing. What we've decided to do is to move forward on the changes that his former government delayed putting into place for years and years and years. They talked a lot but never actually put them into place. So we've moved forward with those in consultation with industry. In the meantime, we're working with industry and other stakeholders about other important issues . . .

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

Health Care System

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Now, we've talked about a lot of issues in this brief session, but there's been very little discussion about health care, which is consistently the number one concern for Albertans. Our province has the highest per capita health spending in Canada, but outcomes are in the middle of the pack, and wait times are unacceptable. Twenty per cent of Albertans do not have a family doctor, and, as a result, our emergency rooms are badly overcrowded. To the Premier. We know that the only thing that will bend the cost curve of health care over time is consistent access to primary care. Do you support the primary care network model, and if not, what is your plan for primary care?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I mean, it is certainly very true that we need to do a better job ensuring that Albertans have their health care needs met when they need them, and there are a number of different tools at our disposal. We talked in the election about the need to do a better job with respect to long-term care. We talked about ensuring that we didn't willy-nilly drag a billion dollars out of the system without ever managing to know where it would come from. We also know, of course, that primary care up front is the best way to manage health care. So we're going to be meeting with stakeholders to talk about how we can improve outcomes through primary care going forward.

Mr. Clark: So no answer on PCNs, whether or not you support primary care. More meetings with stakeholders.

The Minister of Finance has recently confirmed that half of Alberta's budget goes to wages and benefits, and I want to ensure that our health care system is viable and sustainable over the long term. More money isn't always the answer, but better management always is. Again to the Premier: what specific plans do you have to ensure that the management of Alberta Health Services is efficient and effective?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. One of the things that we felt we needed to do in order to improve outcomes in health care and to get better care for the amount of money that we are investing in health care was to begin by establishing a sense of stability. We have a health care system which has been in complete chaos for several years now, and with that chaos comes waste. Stability was the first order of the day. Then, I went ahead and appointed a Minister of Health in whom I have complete faith, who

I know is working, day in, day out, hours every day with stakeholders to find ways to ensure that we get better outcomes going forward.

Mr. Clark: Again not much of an answer. I'll try one more time.

To the Premier. Your Environment minister has taken decisive action on an important and complex file, so there's at least a plan to come up with a plan. What's taking so long in health care?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. I'm happy to update the Assembly on some of the work we've done. As was mentioned by the Premier, I've been on the job for four weeks. I've had the honour of meeting with the AMA as well as a number of other stakeholders as well as the PCN physician leads. We'll be working with them in the months ahead to make sure that they're being financed in a way that's sustainable, that they're not sitting on \$70 million of reserves moving forward, and that Albertans get the best possible care when they need it where they need it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Midwifery Services

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is experiencing a baby boom, with over 55,000 babies born annually in our province. Given that Alberta midwives offer an alternative to obstetrician care for low-risk pregnancies and birth, to the Minister of Health: what is this government's position about the value Alberta's midwives bring to our system?

Ms Hoffman: I'd like to thank the hon. member for the question. Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to say that this government is a strong proponent of midwifery and of choice for women when it comes to that exciting and important time in their lives. Today midwives support thousands of pregnancies in our province. Midwives also have their own profession body, an excellent program at Mount Royal University, and they often work in teams with nurses and other physicians and caregivers to welcome new babies into Alberta, and we're proud of that.

Ms Payne: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: given that many Alberta women are on wait-lists for midwifery care, can you explain what barriers may be preventing Albertans from accessing this important, publicly-funded service?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the question and to the member for raising it. Midwifery became funded under the previous government in 2009. I know a lot of women who are grateful for that. The number of babies delivered by midwives since that time has doubled. It's good progress, and this government is committed to doing more. We have recent graduates from Mount Royal who we know are looking outside our province, potentially, for a placement because of some of the limitations around funding here in Alberta. That's something I will be addressing with my colleagues in the months to come because, of course, we want to ensure choice and safe deliveries for all Albertans.

2:40

Ms Payne: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister: will your ministry review the funding model for maternity care so that dollars follow

babies and that more mothers are allowed the opportunity to choose midwifery care if that's the best option for them and their families?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm not the only woman who knows a number of mothers out there who called a midwife before they called the father because midwives are in such short demand in this province. Midwives have been doing a lot of work through the Alberta Association of Midwives on behalf of their association as well as the moms in demand of their service. Because of the fact that this House is working to reverse the cuts that were being proposed by the last government, we have some money to actually increase funding, not significantly, but we will increase funding in the short term between now and the fall budget. I look forward to having an opportunity to discuss this more thoroughly when we bring forward a detailed budget in the fall.

Health and Seniors' Care in Strathmore-Brooks

Mr. Fildebrandt: Mr. Speaker, in Strathmore-Brooks health care and seniors' care is a serious concern. Our hospitals are older than most members of this Legislature. While the previous government promised for years to upgrade and maintain our facilities, residents and especially seniors continue to go underserved. They have been promised action by the government for over a decade, but it has not delivered. We've been told that the money has been budgeted, but we've seen nothing. Will the Minister of Health commit to my constituents that she will follow through on the long-standing promises made to them for health and seniors' care in Strathmore-Brooks?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for the question. I'm really glad that we have a government that's actually committed to reversing the cuts. They obviously would have seriously impacted the ability to deliver.

What wasn't impacted in the weeks leading up to the last election was the number of press releases that went out – I believe it was eight in six weeks – specifically talking about infrastructure announcements without actually having any money budgeted for the actual delivery of those health care services in those regions. I won't be making promises that this House can't keep. At this point you're going to have to stay tuned, hon. member.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Well, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the minister's answer and also her generous promotion to my position in this House.

A specific case in my constituency is the hospital in Bassano. Since the Newell Foundation has worked with community stakeholders to produce a detailed plan for the construction of a new seniors' care facility that includes acute-care beds and continuing care units and all that is needed is the final follow-through from the province, will the Minister of Seniors commit to working with the Newell Foundation and myself to ensure that this critical project does not fall through the cracks?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you to the member for the question, and thank you, Mr. Speaker. What she giveth in terms of promotion, she can taketh away, I guess. My apologies for using the wrong title, hon. member.

I look forward to receiving correspondence from you on this issue, and I will certainly follow up with my department to make

sure that we can provide you with updated information on the project.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Mr. Speaker, I think we can all appreciate that the ministers are new in their portfolios, and we will be patient, but we will continue to do our job and press them.

The Strathmore hospital is the busiest hospital in rural Alberta and does not provide adequate and accessible care for seniors. Since the former government promised to upgrade the facility in 1997, 2008, and in 2012 and all we have seen are large novelty cheques and building Alberta signs in the empty field next door, will the Minister of Health commit to working with myself and the municipalities of Strathmore and Wheatland on renewing the Strathmore hospital?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you to the member for the question. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to having an opportunity to be able to work collaboratively with the Minister of Infrastructure and our cabinet to bring forward a sunshine list that really reflects the needs of Albertans. In the fall we expect that we'll be able to do that, and we'll be able to have a dialogue with all members of this House. In the interim I encourage members at any time to send correspondence to me about questions and concerns that they have, and we'll certainly do our best to get back to them in a timely way.

The Speaker: I must express to the House cautious optimism, but the Speaker appreciates that today I can hear most of the discussions.

Constituency Office Administration

Ms Jansen: Mr. Speaker, constituency assistants are the non-partisan eyes and ears helping connect MLAs to the people in their constituencies. They perform vital work, helping Albertans on a daily basis. So I'm surprised to hear from some job seekers that they need to submit their resumes to an individual who is serving as the executive director to the Alberta New Democratic Party and they have to be NDP partisans. My question today is to the Premier. Is this the way her government is going to conduct itself going forward?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe there was a period of time when the executive director of the NDP was on a leave of absence from the NDP and was assisting my office in terms of helping with the staffing processes around our brand new MLAs, who didn't have constituency office staff. I also believe that he has returned to his previous position and he no longer has anything to do with that hiring process and that, in fact, there are people in my office – I think now they're in the caucus office – who are assisting in providing support to MLAs around the process of hiring constituency office staff.

Ms Jansen: Mr. Speaker, constituency assistants are also being told that they're going to be unionized, and some have been told that they need to do business such as hotel bookings and catering with unionized shops. Again to the Premier: is this the new way of doing business?

Ms Notley: In fact, for the last many, many years – I think it's probably been about two decades; it would go back to the '80s – the NDP caucus has had a voluntarily recognized relationship with their staff that looks like a union. It is not technically a union because

they can't be unionized underneath the legislation, but we have agreed to treat it like a union. That's been the case for about 25 years now. That applied to our previous staff, and with respect to incoming constituency assistants, we are also offering them access to the same rights.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have copies of job postings for the constituencies of Calgary-Cross, Banff-Cochrane, Edmonton-Gold Bar, Edmonton-Manning, and more. I will table a copy of these in the House at the appropriate time. Given that each of these requires applicants to send their resumé to an individual who is the executive director of the NDP, my question again to the Premier. NDP credentials, only union shops get business, the party hiring their assistants, unionizing our constituency assistants: is Alberta's new motto Go Union Or Go Home?

Ms Notley: Again, as I've said, I don't believe that the postings say, "Submit your application to the executive director of the NDP." I think the postings say, "Submit your application to [this person]," who at that point was not fulfilling that role. However, the key issue here is that it is the motto of this government that our employees will be treated with the respect and the dignity that is often employed with respect to people who are members of unions. We've done that for a long time. Why would we change the way we do that now?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Environment Minister

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A short, simple, but very important question. The Minister of Justice is a lawyer, so I'm sure she knows that a lawyer can never, ever counsel or advise someone to break the law. Does the Minister of Justice think that the same standards should apply for the ministers of the Crown?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on behalf of the Minister of Justice. I'm not quite sure what the premise of that question is asking as it was quite vague and a hypothetical question. I'm happy to respond to questions around our government and our policies, but I don't have an answer for a hypothetical question.

The Speaker: Could the hon. member try and make it more clear?

Mr. Cyr: Given that Mike Hudema said that the minister of environment directly contributed to the content of a book and since this book actually advocates for breaking federal criminal laws and provincial law, will the minister apologize to Albertans for contributing content to a book that counsels breaking the law?

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

2:50

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much for that question. I'm sorry that the Wildrose feels the need to continue its campaign of guilt by association, but it strikes me, Mr. Speaker, as a little hypocritical. One of their members sitting on the front bench here deliberately violated the law by trying to sell his grain and actually was . . .

Mr. Strankman: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order has been noted by the Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Mason: It's a little hypocritical in my view, Mr. Speaker, for them to ask a question like that, which is entirely hypothetical, when in fact members of their own caucus have deliberately flouted the law.

The Speaker: Hon. member, we are going to be addressing at least a portion of this matter at the end of our discussion day on the point of order that was raised yesterday. So I would remind the House that I may have been too optimistic in my hopes that the decorum between the two sides would continue.

Mr. Cyr: Given that this is an easy problem for the minister to get out of, she needs to apologize. She needs to move on, needs to commit to being a moderate, balanced minister. But instead of an apology, we get a story about her role. Will the minister apologize to Albertans for her direct contribution in writing a book that asks people to blatantly break the law?

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, you know, I think it's a new low for this session to ask the question. The explanation was given in a point of order yesterday, and the minister has nothing to apologize for.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Provincial Fiscal Policies

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the past couple of days we've heard from the NDP that the PCs are to blame for layoffs and lack of investor confidence because they didn't diversify the economy. To the Finance minister. Can he explain exactly: how does raising taxes help diversify our economy?

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much to the hon. minister across the floor.

An Hon. Member: Member.

Mr. Ceci: I'll taketh away, too.

Hon. member across the floor, we are addressing stable and fair taxes in this province so that we can plan a fiscal plan going forward. In the fall we'll have our economic plan, come forward with that. Without doing stable revenues, we'll be on the roller coaster, up and down on oil revenues, and that's not good for anybody, including the whole province.

The Speaker: I would remind the ministers that at the rate you're going, the numbers are going to be changing here.

Mr. Cooper: Given that raising taxes on hard-working Albertan families in Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills will hurt our economy and destroy the Alberta advantage we all know and love and given that I hear from my constituents that hiking the minimum wage to \$15 an hour is going to destroy jobs and small businesses, why is the minister responsible for creating jobs, killing jobs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Our government believes very much in supporting people who are working here in Alberta. Right now we're investing \$40 million into education programs, apprenticeships to help people have good jobs here in Alberta. Telus is investing \$1 billion to create 1,500 jobs here in Edmonton. Alberta is still a great province for businesses to work in.

Mr. Cooper: Given that I have heard from Connie, a small-business owner in Olds who's going to be forced to close her café, the Bean Brokers, due to this massive minimum wage hike and 10 people will lose their jobs, why does this government believe in putting politics before the livelihoods of hard-working Albertan families?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We as a government care very much for working Albertans. We want to make it more fair, especially for the most vulnerable workers in this province, the single moms who are supporting their kids on very low incomes with a high cost of living in this province. We know that giving money to the most vulnerable people by raising the minimum wage prudently and in a phased-in way is going to support all Albertans.

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

Nonprofit Organization Employee Wages

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and good afternoon to the minister of jobs. I'd like to follow up on that particular response. If the minister says that they'll be looking to support Albertans in every way, the average nonprofit that employs 20 people that'll have to have a 50 per cent increase in wages is going to have to come up with \$192,000 a year. How, Minister, will you support these nonprofits?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Of course, we care very much about the significant contributions of nonprofits and the work that they do to help people here in Alberta. We know that raising the minimum wage and working with nonprofits, who we've already consulted with and will do further consultations forward to do a phased-in approach prudently, will support everyone.

Thank you.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. If that's how you show people you care about them, I think a lot of people really don't want you caring about them anymore, Minister. We have 23,000 nonprofits in this province. If just 5,000 of them are affected, that is nearly \$1 billion in additional funding that they will require. To the Minister of Finance. That is money no one is offering, sir. Where will you come up with this?

Mr. Ceci: I'm not sure I accept the premise that the hon. member is putting forward. But I do want to say that in this latest interim supply there was an increase to a very important program that nonprofits rely on, and that's called FCSS. We'll continue to do that if I have anything to do with it going forward, year after year after year.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That, Minister, was a few million. Here we're talking about to close to \$1 billion. Now, given that the vast majority of these nonprofits are not unionized, is this an attempt by the government to invade territory that they currently don't have power and control over because of the entrepreneurial

spirit of many of our nonprofits and unionize and bring further work into the government's direct purview?

Mr. Ceci: I wasn't sure who was going to get to respond to that, but I will say that I don't think that grand plan that the hon. member is talking about is anything close to what this front bench or this caucus is contemplating. Our grand plan is to support Albertans, to support business, and to make sure we balance the budget going forward in four years.

3:00 Transportation Infrastructure Priorities

Mr. Piquette: Mr. Speaker, I know all members of the House were deeply saddened to hear of two recent collisions on highway 63, with one resulting in a fatality. Could the Minister of Transportation please update the House on our government's progress in improving safety on highway 63?

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much for that question, hon. member. Mr. Speaker, I do share the member's sadness and want to express my condolences to the family of anyone who was involved in that terrible collision on highway 63. Improving safety on that highway is a priority for our government, and Alberta Transportation is working hard to ensure improvements are on track. I can inform the House that 70 per cent of the twinning between Grassland and Fort McMurray is expected to be completed by this fall.

The Speaker: Hon. member, first supplemental.

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the importance of highway 63 to moving people and goods to Fort McMurray and other communities in northern Alberta, could the minister please update the House on longer term measures to improve safety on highway 63?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the hon. member. We can expect big changes on highway 63 this year and next. By the end of this construction season motorists can look forward to having access to over a hundred kilometres of newly twinned highway 63 and 240 kilometres by the fall of 2016.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That's excellent news, not only for the people in my constituency but, I'm sure, you know, the other ones as well.

Given that my constituents are concerned about the conditions of roads in their community and across the province, would the minister please update the House on some of the road improvement priorities Alberta Transportation will be pursuing in the future?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thanks, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the hon. member. The safety of Alberta's roads is my top priority as Minister of Transportation. We have over 31,000 kilometres of provincial highway, 28,000 kilometres of which are paved. Alberta Transportation plans to provide much-needed rehabilitation to approximately 1,400 kilometres this year, an improvement over previous years. Furthermore, Alberta Transportation will rehabilitate several thousand kilometres of roads and highways in order to ensure our vast network of roads and highways meets the needs of our growing province.

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

Health Care System (continued)

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just recently Alberta Health Services rolled out a new patient-first strategy for the delivery of health care in Alberta. Now, on paper this sounds like something all Albertans want and something that we have been desperately needing for many years, but I do have to ask the Minister of Health: if AHS is just now getting around to putting patients first, who were they putting first before?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. That announcement was actually when I was in my first week on the job, so if you want to know what was happening in government before I got here, you'll have to ask the members of the third party.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, the government and AHS have been unable to solve our growing health care problems for years. Given that in the past we've seen AHS put managers first, bureaucrats first, expense claims first, and sole-source contracts first, what assurances can the minister give us that this new strategy is not just another bureaucratic make-work project that will accomplish nothing for Albertan patients and families?

The Speaker: I'm going to check *Hansard* to see if there was a "given" at the front of that question and not afterwards.

Ms Hoffman: Given that, I'm honoured to answer the question, Mr. Speaker. I really was proud to be a part of the announcement. I was standing there with patients and family members and staff, who are all committed to the patient-first strategy, and I think it's something that we all should be proud of as Albertans. If the hon. member would like more information about it and the direction that we're taking through Alberta Health Services moving ahead, I'd be happy to have a conversation with him after he reads the document.

Mr. Barnes: Given that the current structure of our health care system has produced mediocre results at ever-inflated prices and considering that the government has firmly committed to doubling down on the flaws and mistakes of the past by piling more hard-earned tax dollars into a broken system, will the Health minister commit to making real changes that cut through the massive waste and bureaucracy and inefficiency and see that our money gets to the ground level and the front lines so that patients and Albertans are truly served first?

Ms Hoffman: It's clear to me that a number of people aren't pumped about what happened on May 5 – that's people in this House – but what I can tell you is that the people of Alberta were very pumped to elect a government that actually stands by the Canada Health Act, that will reverse the cuts that were coming to public health care and front-line services, and that's going to work together, of course, to find areas for efficiency but not at the cost of patient care.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

International Trade Strategy

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that broadened market access ensures Alberta companies get the best price for their

products or services, this is an important part of building upon the Alberta advantage in an increasingly competitive global economy. Albertans have proven, with the support of the previous administration, that they are able and competent competitors on the global stage. My question to the Premier. International market access is key to export market development, diversification, and protecting jobs. Will your government move beyond its insular and big-labour-focused policies and tell us how your government will effectively utilize our international offices in support of our policy-battered economy?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, I will say that I think one of the things we all know that is really challenging our issues around market access is, in fact, our environmental record. It is, in fact, how we are perceived internationally, and I think our leaders in the oil and gas industry understand that better than even the folks over there. So one first key step that we are taking when we do go overseas is to ensure that we develop a climate change strategy that will actually ensure confidence on the part of international markets. I would like to have something to say before I go off to these international markets to sell our product.

The Speaker: The first supplemental.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In defence of hard-working Albertans and, again, to the Premier: given our current economic environment and your industry-killing policies with resulting layoffs and idle capacity, what specifically are you doing to help Alberta companies in their survival in developing export markets?

Ms Notley: Well, of course, I completely and entirely reject the premise of that question. What I am doing and what I have been doing since pretty much the day after I was elected is that I've been reaching out to people in industry to talk about how we can build relationships and work together on critical challenges that we have here in this province that are focused on getting us off the oil and gas roller coaster, diversifying our economy, and creating long-standing, mortgage-paying jobs for Albertans. That's my focus, that's what Albertans elected me to do, and that's what I will work with our partners to achieve.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: given that within the international economy we are already in a relatively high-cost, low-productivity environment and your government is determined to further inflate labour and other costs while increasing taxation, what specifically are you doing to ensure Alberta companies remain competitive in the international business community?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, I think I pretty much answered that question. Again, I reject the premise. I think that what we are doing is ensuring economic stability in Alberta. We are focusing on economic stability. We are ensuring that we have more investment in education and retraining, not less. We're ensuring that we have more revenue stability, not less. We're ensuring that we have more prosperity shared amongst all Albertans, not less. All those things contribute to sound economic growth and, ultimately, to a growing capacity to export.

Thank you.

3:10

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Crêpe and Shake Café

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour and a privilege to stand for the first time in this hallowed hall. It is my pleasure today to speak about a small business in my constituency of Leduc-Beaumont. We've had many discussions about big businesses and corporations and some about small businesses, but today that's what I want to focus on, a small business that exemplifies Alberta values, the Crêpe and Shake.

Mr. Speaker, I make this statement today about the Crêpe and Shake not because of my healthy love for all things ice cream, as we can see, but instead about a family, Kerri and Jeff Bauer, committed to connecting their fellow citizens and protecting a special building in Beaumont's history. The business is located in one of the oldest buildings in Beaumont, the original convent of les Filles de Jésus, Daughters of Jesus, which operated from 1939 to 1969, until the Bauer family purchased it. The business has invested time into ensuring that the community understands the history of the home and also has a place to relive memories they may have had by spending time in the front yard and with other members of the community. As Beaumont was originally a French-Canadian community and still has many French-Canadians, much of the history includes family connections to the rest of French Canada, and the Bauers intend to integrate that into their model to encourage those family and historical ties.

In a time when corporate focus is largely on cutting costs, one of my favourite parts of the Crêpe and Shake is that they take the time and the money to locally source their ingredients and divert 90 per cent of their waste to compost facilities or recycling. This model is not only good for them but an example of how a local business can support the creation of jobs and innovation.

The owners employ many young people in the community, even taking time off to celebrate their graduations and special events with them. They encourage youth to come and spend time at the Crêpe and Shake, and they hold a youth open mike weekly to showcase their talent. In a town with few business services for youth, this is an important touch point for them. Mr. Speaker, when a business works so hard at maintaining and strengthening the community, we really appreciate having them in our community.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Grassroots Change

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One of the most amazing things to happen in the tech world was the switch from centralized software development to open-source programming and content. At first everybody said, "It'll never work," but it did and it does because amazing and incredible things happen when everybody participates. We now have open-source everything. Even the staid *New York Times* is going to an open-source newsroom.

The recent election was another indicator that our world has changed. The failure of the past government was the failure of centralized thinking, with a command-and-control vision of management; cabinet knew best. Rather than consult with citizens, they created a massive centralized health authority where everything comes from the top down. They created one massive centralized power distribution line where today technology begs for low-cost network power generation and distribution. This is why cabinet

control of land zoning, use, and rights is utterly intolerable in democracy. Their party even tried to control who could run and where because the boss is the only one who knows everything, and that is why Alberta voted for change.

Grassroots means that the life and ideas of our constituents and everyday Albertans matter more than the elite. This is a core Wildrose belief. Some of our previous members didn't understand that and are forever gone. That's why even though everyone thought we were dead in December, the people just elected even more of us in May. If this government reverts to this failed model of big bureaucracy and centralized decision-making, we will tell all Albertans, because they do care: it's time to create a lean, efficient civil service, not bigger bureaucracy. Change is here, but it's not trickling down from any ivory towers. The days of networking with Albertans to create an open-source society are here.

Thank you.

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

211 Information and Referral Service

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. 211 Alberta is an information service similar to 311, 511, or 811 that provides Albertans with reliable information and referrals to community, social, health, and government-related services. This one-stop-shop approach is an important preventative tool and gives people convenient and stigma-free access to everything from advice on child care available in their community to information for an adult child seeking transportation for her or his aging parents to mental health supports and suicide prevention.

211 is also multilingual, with over 150 languages supported, providing a 24-hour information and referral system for thousands of services available across the province, making it easier to navigate the often confusing maze of community, health, government, and social services information. 211 can help with finding solutions to day-to-day needs as well as coping with stressful situations before they escalate into a crisis.

Unfortunately, despite the promises of the past government and despite clear evidence that the program helps Albertans, 211 service is only available in approximately 60 per cent of our province, primarily urban Alberta: those living in Edmonton and area, Calgary and area, the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo, and Red Deer. Rural 211 service will ensure that all people, regardless of where they live, will have equal access to this vital information.

The good news, Mr. Speaker, is that province-wide 211 is cost-effective. A 2013 Safe Communities report showed the start-up cost for a provincial 211 is only \$1.2 million, and the annual operating budget would be cost-shared with municipalities, meaning the province's share is only \$1.35 million a year. The demand for the service is high because the benefit of the service is significant, so significant that the communities around the province are demanding their own 211 service, and one-offs are starting to pop up.

I call on our new provincial government to make this urgent and very cost-effective investment in the health and well-being of Albertans and deploy integrated 211 service around the province. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Meadows Community Recreation Centre and Library

Ms Woollard: Mr. Speaker, I'm honoured to rise today to tell you about a new and exciting facility in my constituency of Edmonton-Mill Creek. This is the newly opened Meadows branch library, which is sharing a building with the Meadows community

recreation centre. It's the first collaboration between the Edmonton public library and the city of Edmonton to bring together a public library and a recreation centre under one roof. This example of integrating services shows how a community hub can be created where people can learn, be active, and connect with others. As well as being an environmentally friendly facility with a green roof, it is colourful, open, welcoming, and conveniently accessible.

When my children and later my grandchild were younger, going to the library regularly was an important part of our routines. As a teacher I knew that reading to and with preschoolers is the single best predictor of success in school. As well, I always ensured that my children and my granddaughter knew how to swim for safety, exercise, and fun.

As I toured this innovative building, I reflected that having a library and a recreation centre in the same building perfectly illustrated the concept of *mens sana in corpore sano*, a healthy mind in a healthy body. As Brent McDonough, an Edmonton public library trustee, noted, "libraries are integral to the educational and cultural hub of a city and society. Libraries must be non-threatening places where people of all ages, educational background and economic status can gather to be enriched." As well, the recreation centre part of the collaboration provides benefits that are essential to the health and well-being of individuals, communities, the economy, and the environment of Alberta, as noted by the Alberta Recreation and Parks Association.

It's exciting to see a development of this kind be built to support a great quality of life to all those who make their home there. Thank you.

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

Killarney-Glengarry Community Association 60th Anniversary

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to acknowledge the forthcoming anniversary in my constituency, the 60th anniversary of the Killarney-Glengarry Community Association. Founded in 1945, the Killarney-Glengarry Community Association represents one of Calgary's oldest suburbs. The majority of the houses in the area were built after World War II. Soldiers returning from the war were sold lots for just \$25 to help them settle down, rebuild their lives, and raise their families.

3:20

As in 1945 Killarney-Glengarry is changing today to reflect the changing needs of families of the new millennium. A new LRT line has reached the area, and infills replace some of the original houses. Such change is never smooth. The Killarney-Glengarry Community Association has been there to help the community through these changes, with an aim to preserve the character of the area. This is a neighbourhood where all voices are heard, one that residents want to call home and raise their children in.

The community associations are citizens' first level of contact with their government, and Killarney-Glengarry Community Association is a prime example of doing good in the community. I had the honour of being there for their recent AGM, and the level of connection with the community as well as with the board was truly inspiring.

Again I congratulate the Killarney-Glengarry Community Association on their 60 years of service to the community and look forward to attending their anniversary Stampede barbecue on July 4. I also look forward to representing their views and commitments to a strong, healthy community as a part of Alberta's new government. We know that the issues that matter to local Albertans are

also important to us here in the House, and I look forward to bringing their concerns to this House.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake.

Impaired Driving

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to try not to cry. The morning of October 28, 2011, I was woken by a phone call from Sheila Wilson, grandmother of my godson Vincent Stover. She said to me: Vince is gone. I listened in shock as she shared that the night before, 16-year-old Vince and three of his friends were killed when their car was hit by a truck driven by a drunk driver. My smiling, caring 16-year-old godson was gone along with fellow Warriors football team members Walter, Tanner, and Matthew.

Since that day I've had to watch Vince's two young brothers struggle with the loss of their brother, who had in many ways helped their single mother to raise them. I have watched his extended family and friends, his grandmother and aunt, who are in the gallery today, struggle as birthdays, graduations, anniversaries of his death, and other special days passed reminding them of their loss. I've watched his mother, Jenny, also here with her partner, Mike, today, suffer through wave after wave of grief as she faces again and again that her son was lost in a completely preventable accident.

Since then several of us have become involved in the work of MADD Canada, a grassroots organization committed to stopping impaired driving and supporting its victims. Each year thousands of Canadians are killed or injured in impaired driving crashes: irresponsible, dangerous, and intolerable acts. MADD Canada strives to offer support services to victims, their families, their friends to heighten awareness of the dangers of impaired driving and save lives and prevent injuries on our roads. That is what we all want, to end the senseless loss of life so nobody else has to suffer the way the family and friends of Vince have.

Please, please do not drive impaired.

The Speaker: I think I speak for all the Legislature when I express our regrets.

Presenting Petitions

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a petition to present, with over 1,300 signatures, stating as follows. "We, the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to mandate the inclusion of the topic of legal, responsible, healthy, and affirmative sexual consent as part of the sexual education curriculum developed by the Ministry of Education." I'm pleased to see that Sarah Hogendorp and Jennah Martens-Forrester, who collected these signatures, are still here with us this afternoon.

Thank you very much.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Highwood, you have a tabling?

Mr. W. Anderson: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last night I spoke to Bill 2. While speaking, I referenced various articles, a survey of employment, Stephen Gordon of *Maclean's*, the impact of minimum wages on poverty, anti-poverty policy in Ontario, and the Warwick economic research papers. I now wish to table the appropriate number of copies.

Thank you.

Mr. Clark: I have a tabling, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. It's my pleasure to rise and table the requisite five copies of the Alberta Justice and Solicitor General Safe Communities 211 Alberta discussion and options paper that I referred to today in my member's statement.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Ms Sigurdson, Minister of Innovation and Advanced Education and Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour, pursuant to the Veterinary Profession Act, the Alberta Veterinary Medical Association 2014 annual report; pursuant to the Land Surveyors Act, Report of Proceedings of the One Hundred and Fifth Annual General Meeting; pursuant to the Workers' Compensation Act, the Workers' Compensation Board Alberta 2014 annual report.

The Speaker: Hon. members, a point of order was raised today by the Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Ms Jansen: Mr. Speaker, have you done tablings?

The Speaker: Yes.

Ms Jansen: I have a tabling, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Yes. Proceed.

Tabling Returns and Reports

(continued)

Ms Jansen: All right. Thank you. I rise to table five copies of each of eight job postings in NDP-held constituencies. They include Calgary-Cross, Banff-Cochrane, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater, Edmonton-Gold Bar, Whitecourt-Ste. Anne, Lethbridge-East, Edmonton-Manning, and Peace River. Mr. Speaker, each requires the applicant to submit their CV to an individual who is the executive director of the NDP. They also describe Alberta's NDP as an employment equity employer even though the actual employer is the LAO.

One more, Mr. Speaker. I also have five copies of the current LinkedIn resumé of the individual vetting potential new non-partisan constituency assistants. As of today he is still listed as the executive director of the New Democratic Party.

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

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I rise today to table the requisite number of copies of a letter to the Clerk that I've just recently submitted asking him to investigate the practices of the hiring of constituency assistants that was advertised in a number of different advertisements in which the employer is not correctly identified as the LAO and, indeed, the employees are identified as reporting to the MLA and the director of caucus. I table these five letters and look forward to the Clerk's investigation into this matter.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, we were on such a roll in question period. I rise on the point of order today on behalf of the Member for Drumheller-Stettler. I would say that the Official Opposition was very, very quiet during question period today, and I thought we were doing a great job trying to do move the House forward.

The Speaker: Hon. member, could you say the point you made, that the hon. Government House Leader was – did you make that comment?

3:30

Mr. Cooper: No. I said earlier that the Member for Drumheller-Stettler rose on a point of order, and the citation will be under section 23(i), "imputes false . . . motives to another Member" of the Assembly. Let the record show that this member has received a pardon for any accusation that the member across may make of him when it comes to actions in the past. As such, it is as though that never took place. In fact, a law was changed as a result of this hon. member's actions. He received a full pardon from the Prime Minister of this great land.

I find it so disingenuous of the Government House Leader to impute such false motives at a time when he's speaking about another member of the Crown and his frustration with the way the opposition may have asked a question. To use as a defence, "Well, that guy did something wrong," even though that guy received a full pardon, is likely to cause disorder, and as a result that individual rose to call the point of order.

Additionally, if we continue into the standing orders under 23(k), it says: "speaks disrespectfully of Her Majesty or of any . . . member of the Royal Family." Given that this member has received a pardon from the Prime Minister in his function as the head of our government and subsequently the Queen, that leads our country, it could be said that this member is speaking disrespectfully against the federal government and then onwards to the Queen.

But the biggest challenge here is the very fact that while he is rising to answer a question that was based in facts on what this individual has said about himself, the defence he used is to try to impute the motives of a member on this side of the bench. Totally unacceptable. I would be more than happy for him to withdraw his comments so that we can go home for the rest of the afternoon.

The Speaker: I would certainly, again, as a part of my studies over the summer – I may have misunderstood and misread the history of the place, but I thought that the government was responsible to the Legislature and not to the Queen. But I may be wrong, hon. member.

The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View rose with questions with respect to the minister for the status of women and the environment's participation in a book written over 10 years ago while she was attending the University of Alberta. I rose on a point of order and expressed in the strongest possible terms my concern that the opposition, Wildrose, was again lapsing into the same pattern of behaviour we had seen before the election, and that is to engage in character assassination and guilt by association. We, unfortunately, have not received the Speaker's ruling on that matter, which bears directly on the question that came today from the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

I just wanted to indicate, with respect to the arguments of the hon. Official Opposition House Leader, that I don't agree that I imputed false or unavowed motives to another member. I merely suggested that the opposition was being hypocritical in suggesting that because some passages of a book written by someone else, not the minister, had suggested civil disobedience as an approach – it was somewhat hypocritical given that the hon. Member from Drumheller-Stettler had been involved in a civil-disobedience action with connection to the Canadian Wheat Board, in which he refused to pay a fine. [some applause] You see? There you go. You

see? This is exactly my point. Now we've got the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre applauding that action because he told the House about it yesterday. He stood up and said that the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler had accepted a short jail sentence because of his actions in attempting to sell his wheat illegally into the United States.

Whether or not there is a pardon involved doesn't change the fact that that occurred, and members opposite are very proud of the Member for Drumheller-Stettler for the actions that he took. That was just witnessed once again with the applause of Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. So with respect to that, I did not impute false or unavowed motives. I simply stated a fact and accused the Official Opposition of hypocrisy on this matter, which is a statement, Mr. Speaker, that I do stand by.

With respect to the argument made by the House leader for the Official Opposition that this amounts to speaking disrespectfully of her Majesty or of any other member of the Royal Family, Mr. Speaker, I can say that I've heard a lot of real long shots in my time here. That one is the longest shot I think that I've ever heard in this House. To suggest that you can't be disrespectful towards the federal government without violating our rules, because you're effectively criticizing the Crown, is something I hope that the Official Opposition takes to heart when they try to speak disrespectfully of our government, because we, of course, derive our authority from the Crown in the same way that the federal government does. So thank you for that. I'm looking forward to nothing but great respect from the Official Opposition going forward.

But, Mr. Speaker, I don't wish to cause offence to the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler, whom I have found, over a considerable amount of time, to be an honourable member and a hard-working member for his constituents. While I disagree with many of his views, I respect the fact that he holds them and he brings them to this place. So with a view to trying to create good harmony in this place and to set an example for some members opposite, I would respectfully apologize to the member and the House for raising that matter in the way that I did.

The Speaker: We understand this matter to be closed. Thank you, hon. Government House Leader.

Point of Order

Imputing Falsehoods against a Member Reflections on a Nonmember

The Speaker: I would now address the point of order that was raised yesterday in the House. I took under advisement a point of order raised by the Government House Leader about comments made by the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

I've had time to review the *Hansard* and consult the authorities on the subject, and I'm now prepared to make a ruling. The point of order was raised during the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View's first supplementary question concerning a foreword, written by the Minister of Environment and Parks and minister responsible for the status of women, to a book. The member referred to the author of the book as a "radical's radical." The questions and responses can be found on pages 231 and 232 of yesterday's *Alberta Hansard*. The point of order was argued by the Government House Leader, the Official Opposition House Leader, and the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, and it is found on pages 240 to 242 of *Alberta Hansard*.

3:40

When the questions were asked, I wondered what they had to do with the government's actions or policies. Members may wish to

refer to the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, at pages 501 to 502, where it states that the primary purpose of a question period is "seeking of information from the government and calling the government to account for its actions." The thrust of the Government House Leader's point of order was that members should not cast aspersions on those outside of the Assembly, a point which finds some support in *Beauchesne's*, sixth edition, paragraph 493(4), and *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, at 616 and 617.

I am very much aware that members enjoy the freedom of speech in this Assembly. I do not want to be seen as limiting the ability of members to ask questions or to raise matters in debate. Members of the Assembly, with this great freedom comes great responsibility. Members must remember that when they refer to people outside of the Assembly, those individuals have no ability to respond to the allegations that may have been made in here.

Balancing those principles, I do not find that the member's comments constituted a point of order; however, I'd like to caution yet again the members that their conduct reflects not only on them but on this institution and to use their language carefully in accordance with the rules and precedents by which this Assembly conducts its proceedings.

We are all going to take a break from this House. I want to remind members of their collective commitment to demonstrate respect for each other and, lest you forget, to this institution. You are about to go into a period where you will not be in this House, but you will be speaking to the media. I hope that you remember that when you come back here in the fall. I hope that members will strive to maintain their commitment to this principle of respect for the upcoming sitting and beyond.

Statement by the Speaker

Page Recognition

The Speaker: Hon. members, if I might. We are soon going to end this session. One of the things that is very important to do is to recognize the role played by the pages, the support to this Legislature. If you don't mind, I'd like to just have us do a collective recognition of the pages before we continue the Routine. [Standing ovation]

With the indulgence of the House, could the pages please come to the front. Now, I may be making the Sergeant-at-Arms nervous by this request. I've learned not to make the Sergeant-at-Arms nervous. I would ask that the pages come to the front of the House. I'd like to read the following letter.

Dear Mr. Speaker,

The 29th Legislature may have just begun, but we face the regrettable reality that, for some of us, our time as Pages on the Chamber floor has come to an end. To you, we are the students who distribute bills and collect amendments. However, to us, our time at the Legislature has been a lesson in life and politics that no high school or University, could provide.

You're right about that.

For this, we would like to express our sincerest gratitude for the incredible opportunity we have had to serve the Legislative Assembly of Alberta.

We would like to thank the Table Officers, for their guidance and support; the Sergeant-at-Arms for being a model for leadership and service; the staff in 315 and 412 for teaching us what it means to be truly devoted to one's work; and the Security Staff for showing us that it's important to find a job you look forward to, with people you enjoy working with. And we would like to thank you, Mr. Speaker, and all the Members of the Legislature Assembly, without whom, our role in the Chamber

would not exist. It has been an honour to serve every member of this Assembly, each with their own unique talents, quirks . . .

There's a footnote.

. . . and interpretation of Standing Order 23 H, I and J.

Lest any of this Assembly think that we are wiser than these young people, let that stand as a statement.

None of us could have imagined walking out of the Legislature with the amazing breadth of knowledge we possess today. But it is not the Parliamentary procedure that will stay with us. Rather, it is the broader understanding of the human side of politicians and those who support them. We now appreciate that members are regular people, forming relationships, entering into negotiations, and resolving conflicts. And given the opportunity to observe them, we have seen first-hand the capacity for regular people to do great things with their lives. Letting these members stand as an inspiration for ourselves, we wish to never cease striving for more than we ever thought previously possible.

Now that our time is up, we look forward to passing on the torch to future Pages, each of whom we can only hope has as incredible an experience and education as we have been privileged to have. If nothing else, our immersion in Alberta politics has taught us that all members, regardless of party affiliation, share in one common goal: to make this great province an even better place. It is now our turn to use that knowledge and our knowledge of the political process to improve society in whatever path we choose. Farewell, and don't forget us.

Hon. pages, words cannot express our thanks, nor can any particular gift, but our deputy is going to try to do both right now. The hon. Member for Peace River and Deputy Speaker.

Ms Jabbour: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hon. members, it's with regret that we are going to say goodbye to 10 of our hard-working pages at the end of this session. They are: Perrin Michalyshyn, head page; Matt Owens, Speaker's page; Melina Sinclair, training development page; Brendan Samek; Christina Luo; Danielle Seymour; Devyn Godziuk; Jenna Geldart; Isaac Bushewsky; and Tianna Groeneveld.

3:50

I ask that you join me in recognizing the efforts of our diligent pages, who daily show patience and understanding of our many demands. They carry out their tasks with grace and attention to detail. On behalf of all members each departing page is given a token of our appreciation and our best wishes. We are truly honoured to have our pages work with us here in the Legislature and help us serve Albertans. I know you guys are headed for great, wonderful things.

I'd like to ask our Deputy Chair of Committees to hand a gift to the Speaker's page, Matt Owens, who is representing all of the retiring pages, and Matt will in turn present a gift to each of the retiring pages.

Thank you. [Standing ovation]

The Speaker: Thank you. We in turn learned much from you today. Thank you very much.

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

Adjournment of Spring Session

9. Mr. Mason moved:
Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 3(9) the first session of the 29th Legislature 2015 spring sitting of the Assembly shall stand adjourned upon the Government House Leader advising the Assembly that the business for the sitting is concluded.

The Speaker: Members of the Assembly, this is a nondebatable motion.

[Government Motion 9 carried]

Committee Referral for Mental Health Amendment Act, 2007

10. Mr. Mason moved:
Be it resolved that:
1. The Mental Health Amendment Act, 2007, be referred to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities for the purpose of conducting a comprehensive review of the amendments to legislation made by that act;
 2. The committee may without leave of the Assembly sit during a period when the Assembly is adjourned or prorogued;
 3. In accordance with section 54 of the Mental Health Act the committee must submit its report to the Assembly within one year after beginning its review, and that report is to include any amendments recommended by the committee.

The Speaker: This is a debatable motion. Are there any questions?

[Government Motion 10 carried]

Committee Referral for Personal Information Protection Act

11. Mr. Mason moved:
Be it resolved that:
1. The Personal Information Protection Act be referred to the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future and the committee shall be deemed to be the special committee of the Assembly for the purpose of conducting a comprehensive review pursuant to section 63 of that act;
 2. The committee may without leave of the Assembly sit during a period when the Assembly is adjourned or prorogued;
 3. In accordance with section 63(2) of the Personal Information Protection Act the committee must submit its report to the Assembly within 18 months after beginning its review, and that report is to include any amendments recommended by the committee.

The Speaker: Any members who wish to speak?

[Government Motion 11 carried]

Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee

12. Mr. Mason moved:
Be it resolved that:
1. A Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee of the Legislative Assembly be appointed to review the Election Act, the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act, the Conflicts of Interest Act, and the Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Act, consisting of the following members, namely: Gray, chair; Payne, deputy chair; Anderson, W.; Clark; Cortes-Vargas; Cyr; Jansen; Loyola; McLean; Miller;

- Miranda; Nielsen; Nixon; Renaud; Starke; Swann; and van Dijken.
2. In carrying out its duties, the committee may travel throughout Alberta and undertake a process of consultation with all interested Albertans;
 3. The committee shall be deemed to be the special committee of the Assembly for the purpose of conducting a comprehensive review of the Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Act as provided for in section 37 of that Act;
 4. In carrying out its duties, the committee may solicit written submissions from experts in the field;
 5. The committee is deemed to continue beyond prorogation and may meet during a period when the Assembly is adjourned or prorogued;
 6. Reasonable disbursements by the committee for advertising, staff assistance, equipment and supplies, rent, travel, and other expenditures necessary for the effective conduct of its responsibilities shall be paid, subject to the approval of the chair;
 7. In carrying out its responsibilities, the committee may, with the concurrence of the head of the department, utilize the services of the public service employed in that department or the staff employed by the Legislative Assembly Office and the officers of the Legislature;
 8. The committee must submit its report, including any proposed amendments to the Acts, within one year after commencing its review;
 9. When its work has been completed, the committee must report to the Assembly if it is sitting; during a

period when the Assembly is adjourned, the committee may release its report by depositing a copy with the Clerk and forwarding a copy to each member of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there any comments or questions with respect to Motion 12?

[Government Motion 12 carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with great pleasure, humility, and fatigue that I want to thank all members of the Assembly for their contribution to our short spring session. I think that we have done good work. There's been good, healthy debate and very good questions that have been raised in the Assembly. By and large, I think that we should all be very pleased with the work that we've done together. But as sad as it may seem, we have come to an end of the business of the House, so I must advise you that our business for this session is concluded.

The Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to the Government Motion 9, agreed to earlier this afternoon, and Standing Order 3(4)(b), the Assembly stands adjourned until Monday, October 26, 2015, unless otherwise ordered. Fellow Assembly members, enjoy your vacation. Please be safe as you travel around this province. It's been a pleasure working with you.

[The Assembly adjourned at 3:59 p.m. pursuant to Government Motion 9]

Bill Status Report for the 29th Legislature - 1st Session (2015)

Activity to June 25, 2015

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 1 to 200 are Government Bills. Bills numbered 201 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills numbered with a "Pr" prefix are Private Bills.

*An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If a Bill comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel, Alberta Justice, for details at (780) 427-2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned chapter numbers until the conclusion of the Fall Sitings.

1* An Act to Renew Democracy in Alberta (Ganley)

First Reading -- 9-10 (Jun. 15, 2015 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 30-38 (Jun. 16, 2015 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 85-94 (Jun. 17, 2015 eve), 152-157 (Jun. 22, 2015 eve, passed with amendments)

Third Reading -- 157-159 (Jun. 22, 2015 eve, passed on division)

Royal Assent -- (Jun. 29, 2015 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 15, 2015; SA 2015 c15]

2 An Act to Restore Fairness to Public Revenue (Ceci)

First Reading -- 104 (Jun. 18, 2015 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 161-162 (Jun. 22, 2015 eve), 183-193 (Jun. 23, 2015 aft), 201-213 (Jun. 23, 2015 eve), 213-227 (Jun. 23, 2015 eve, passed on division)

Committee of the Whole -- 242-257 (Jun. 24, 2015 aft.), 259 (Jun. 24, 2015 eve, passed)

Third Reading -- 259-271 (Jun. 24, 2015 eve, passed on division)

Royal Assent -- (Jun. 29, 2015 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force January 1, 2015, with exceptions; SA 2015 c16]

3 Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2015 (No. 2) (\$) (Ceci)

First Reading -- 77 (Jun. 17, 2015 eve., passed)

Second Reading -- 107-114 (Jun. 18, 2015 aft., passed on division)

Committee of the Whole -- 145-152 (Jun. 22, 2015 eve), 159-161 (Jun. 22, 2015 eve, passed on division)

Third Reading -- 182-183 (Jun. 23, 2015 aft), 213 (Jun. 23, 2015 eve, passed on division)

Royal Assent -- (Jun. 29, 2015 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 29, 2015; SA 2015 c14]

201 Assuring Alberta's Fiscal Future Act (Fraser)

First Reading -- 104-105 (Jun. 18, 2015 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 128-139 (Jun. 22, 2015 aft., adjourned)

202 Alberta Local Food Act (Cortes-Vargas)

First Reading -- 105 (Jun. 18, 2015 aft., passed)

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Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, October 26, 2015

Day 9

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

First Session

Wanner, Hon. Robert E., Medicine Hat (ND), Speaker
Jabbour, Deborah C., Peace River (ND), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Feehan, Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (ND), Deputy Chair of Committees

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Rocky View (W)	Malkinson, Brian, Calgary-Currie (ND)
Anderson, Shaye, Leduc-Beaumont (ND)	Mason, Hon. Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (ND), Government House Leader
Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (W)	McCuaig-Boyd, Hon. Margaret, Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley (ND)
Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (ND)	McIver, Ric, Calgary-Hays (PC), Leader of the Progressive Conservative Opposition
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (W)	McKittrick, Annie, Sherwood Park (ND)
Bhullar, Manmeet Singh, Calgary-Greenway (PC)	McLean, Stephanie V., Calgary-Varsity (ND), Deputy Government Whip
Bilous, Hon. Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (ND), Deputy Government House Leader	McPherson, Karen M., Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill (ND)
Carlier, Hon. Oneil, Whitecourt-St. Anne (ND)	Miller, Barb, Red Deer-South (ND)
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-Meadowlark (ND)	Miranda, Ricardo, Calgary-Cross (ND)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, Calgary-Fort (ND)	Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (ND)
Clark, Greg, Calgary-Elbow (AP)	Nixon, Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (W), Official Opposition Whip
Connolly, Michael R.D., Calgary-Hawkwood (ND)	Notley, Hon. Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (ND), Premier
Coolahan, Craig, Calgary-Klein (ND)	Orr, Ronald, Lacombe-Ponoka (W)
Cooper, Nathan, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (W), Official Opposition House Leader	Panda, Prasad, Calgary-Foothills (W)
Cortes-Vargas, Estefania, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (ND)	Payne, Brandy, Calgary-Acadia (ND)
Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake (W), Official Opposition Deputy Whip	Phillips, Hon. Shannon, Lethbridge-West (ND), Deputy Government House Leader
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (ND)	Piquette, Colin, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater (ND)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South West (ND)	Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie (W)
Drever, Deborah, Calgary-Bow (Ind)	Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (ND)
Drysdale, Wayne, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (PC), Progressive Conservative Opposition Whip	Rodney, Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC)
Eggen, Hon. David, Edmonton-Calder (ND)	Rosendahl, Eric, West Yellowhead (ND)
Ellis, Mike, Calgary-West (PC)	Sabir, Hon. Irfan, Calgary-McCall (ND)
Fildebrandt, Derek Gerhard, Strathmore-Brooks (W)	Schmidt, Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (ND), Government Whip
Fitzpatrick, Maria M., Lethbridge-East (ND)	Schneider, David A., Little Bow (W)
Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (PC)	Schreiner, Kim, Red Deer-North (ND)
Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., Calgary-Buffalo (ND)	Shepherd, David, Edmonton-Centre (ND)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (ND)	Sigurdson, Hon. Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (ND)
Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (PC)	Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (W)
Gray, Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (ND)	Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC), Progressive Conservative Opposition House Leader
Hanson, David B., Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills (W), Official Opposition Deputy House Leader	Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (W)
Hinkley, Bruce, Wetaskiwin-Camrose (ND)	Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (W)
Hoffman, Hon. Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (ND)	Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (ND)
Horne, Trevor A.R., Spruce Grove-St. Albert (ND)	Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Hunter, Grant R., Cardston-Taber-Warner (W)	Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (ND)
Jansen, Sandra, Calgary-North West (PC)	Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (W)
Jean, Brian Michael, QC, Fort McMurray-Conklin (W), Leader of the Official Opposition	Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (ND)
Kazim, Anam, Calgary-Glenmore (ND)	van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)
Kleinstuber, Jamie, Calgary-Northern Hills (ND)	Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND)
Larivee, Hon. Danielle, Lesser Slave Lake (ND)	Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Littlewood, Jessica, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (ND)	Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)
Loewen, Todd, Grande Prairie-Smoky (W)	
Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (ND)	
Luff, Robyn, Calgary-East (ND)	
MacIntyre, Donald, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (W)	

Party standings:

New Democrat: 53 Wildrose: 22 Progressive Conservative: 9 Alberta Liberal: 1 Alberta Party: 1 Independent: 1

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Brian Mason	Minister of Transportation, Minister of Infrastructure
Margaret McCuaig-Boyd	Minister of Energy
Shannon Phillips	Minister of Environment and Parks, Minister Responsible for the Status of Women
Irfan Sabir	Minister of Human Services
Lori Sigurdson	Minister of Advanced Education, Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

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Deputy Chair: Mr. Nielsen

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Ellis	Renaud
Malkinson	Taylor
Miranda	

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Coolahan
Deputy Chair: Mr. Schneider

Anderson, S.	Jansen
Carson	Larivee
Fitzpatrick	McKitrick
Gotfried	Schreiner
Hanson	Sucha
Horne	Taylor
Hunter	

Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee

Chair: Ms Gray
Deputy Chair: Ms Payne

Anderson, W.	Miranda
Clark	Nielsen
Cortes-Vargas	Nixon
Cyr	Renaud
Jansen	Starke
Loyola	Swann
McLean	van Dijken
Miller	

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Sweet
Deputy Chair: Mr. Smith

Goehring	Pitt
Hinkley	Rodney
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Littlewood	Swann
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Babcock	Littlewood
Connolly	McKitrick
Dang	Rosendahl
Drever	Stier
Drysdale	Strankman
Fraser	

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Coolahan	McPherson
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Ellis	Starke
Hanson	van Dijken
Kazim	Woollard
Larivee	

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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Deputy Chair: Ms Gray

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Bhullar	Miller
Cyr	Payne
Dach	Renaud
Gotfried	Turner
Hunter	Westhead
Loyola	

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Ms Kazim
Deputy Chair: Mr. Loewen

Aheer	MacIntyre
Anderson, S.	Rosendahl
Babcock	Schreiner
Clark	Stier
Drysdale	Sucha
Horne	Woollard
Kleinsteuber	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, October 26, 2015

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Welcome back.

Let us reflect. As we commence proceedings today in this Assembly, let us think about and contemplate our opportunity to once again work together; to find a way in which our collective efforts will make our world and our province better; to find hope, not fear; to co-operate, not compete; to be inclusive, not exclusive; to share, not keep. As we move forward, let us reflect on all families who have shared the burden of public life. Amen.

Hon. members, as is our custom, we pay tribute on our first day to members and former members of this Assembly who have passed away since we last met.

Mr. Elmer Elsworth Borstad
August 27, 1924, to July 18, 2015

The Speaker: Mr. Elmer Borstad was elected to the Alberta Legislative Assembly as the Member for Grande Prairie on March 14, 1979. During his term in office Mr. Borstad spearheaded the establishment of a women's shelter in Grande Prairie and then worked with fellow members to set up provincial provisions for the ongoing funding for shelters. Mr. Borstad also brought about amendments to the urban parks program to allow smaller cities in the province to receive funding for redevelopment and maintenance. In 2004 he was the first recipient of the Grande Prairie Regional College Alumni/Foundation's volunteer award, and in 2005 he received the Alberta centennial medal.

Mr. Harry Keith Everitt
April 2, 1923, to August 26, 2015

The Speaker: Mr. Keith Everitt was first elected to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta as the Member for St. Albert on June 18, 1959. He was subsequently re-elected in 1963 and again in 1967 in the same constituency. Over his 12 years of service he sat on many standing and special committees. Mr. Everitt carried on the family tradition when he purchased his grandfather's farm and set up as a dairy farmer. After leaving provincial politics, he became a school trustee for Sturgeon county from 1977 till 1986 and a councillor from 1980 to 1992. He and his wife, Thelma, were married for 72 years.

Mr. Stewart Alden McCrae
December 30, 1929, to September 2, 2015

The Speaker: Born in Gladstone, Manitoba, Mr. Stewart McCrae moved to Calgary to take a position in corporate law. In 1973, when a by-election was called for Calgary-Foothills, Mr. McCrae successfully ran for office. Mr. McCrae was re-elected in 1975 and again in 1979. He was a minister without portfolio from 1975 to 1979 and minister of government services from 1979 to 1982. During his tenure Mr. McCrae served on many committees, including those of the offices of Ombudsman, Auditor General, and Chief Electoral Officer.

In a moment of silent reflection I ask each of you to remember Mr. Borstad, Mr. Everitt, and Mr. McCrae as you may have known

them. Rest eternal grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them. Amen.

Hon. members, ladies and gentlemen, we will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Mr. Robert Clark, and I would invite all of you to participate in the language of your choice.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
Car ton bras sait porter l'épée,
Il sait porter la croix!
Ton histoire est une épopée
Des plus brillants exploits.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Hon. members, welcome back to the First Session, second sitting of the 29th Legislature.

I would invite the Leader of the Official Opposition, the hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Conklin, to proceed to the main doors of the Chamber.

Presentation to the Assembly of Mr. Prasad Panda Member for Calgary-Foothills

The Speaker: Hon. members, I have received from the Chief Electoral Officer of Alberta the report of the returning officer for the constituency of Calgary-Foothills containing the results of the by-election conducted on September 3, 2015, which states that a by-election was held in the constituency of Calgary-Foothills and that Mr. Prasad Panda was duly elected as the Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present to you Mr. Prasad Panda, the new Member for Calgary-Foothills, who has taken the oath as a member of this Assembly and has inscribed the roll and now claims his right to take his seat in this Chamber.

The Speaker: Congratulations. Let the hon. member take his seat.

Thank you to the House for acknowledging the very newest member of this Assembly.

1:40 Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. members, with our admiration and respect there is a gratitude to the members of the families who shared the burden of public life and public service. Today I would like to welcome on your behalf members of the Borstad, Everitt, and McCrae families who are present in the Speaker's gallery. If the family members would please rise as I call their name and remain standing until I've introduced everyone. First of all, from the Borstad family: Lane Borstad, son; Jeanette Borstad, daughter-in-law; Owen Borstad, grandson; Noel Borstad, grandson; Chloe McMillan, granddaughter. From the Everitt family: Judy Heap, daughter; Barb Wilcox, daughter; Murray Wilcox, son-in-law; Warren Everitt, son. From the McCrae family: Mary McCrae, wife; Clint McCrae, son; Chantal McCrae, daughter-in-law; Mike McCrae, son; Lori McCrae, daughter-in-law.

Thank you, all, on behalf of this Assembly for the service that you, your families, and each of your loved ones has paid in their public service to this province. I would ask the House to express our greetings to them.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Are there any school groups with us today?

Seeing none, I would call upon the new Minister of Municipal Affairs and Minister of Service Alberta for some introductions.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased today to introduce to you and through you Marcel Desjarlais, a resident of East Prairie Métis settlement in the wonderful constituency of Lesser Slave Lake, who is the former treasurer of the Metis Settlements General Council, a strong member of the Frog Lake First Nation, a powerful advocate for the cause of missing and murdered indigenous women, as well as one of my very caring, supportive people in my life. Thank you so much. I'd ask that all members join me in giving these guests our warm welcome.

The Speaker: The Minister of Advanced Education and Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour today to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly Mr. Bill Kobluk. Bill is a constituent of mine who kindly adorned his lawn with one of my campaign signs. Bill is a retired high school teacher, and for 28 years he brought his students to the Legislature to view question period. He also ran for the NDP four times. I'm pleased that we could make his dream of an NDP government come true and that he is here today to witness the first day of the fall session with us. He is seated in the members' gallery this afternoon. I ask that you join me in giving him the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Westhead: It brings me great pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two very important people without whom I would not be here today. My parents, Linda and Tim Westhead, have travelled to our fine province from Whitby, Ontario, to see for themselves if it's really true that their son was elected as the MLA for Banff-Cochrane here in Alberta. Mr. Speaker, I trust that you can vouch for me and that my attendance record in this House has been impeccable.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take this opportunity to recognize the lifetime of public service both my parents gave to the province of Ontario during their careers. My mother worked the majority of her career as a court reporter and spent the last few years working at the office of the public guardian and trustee before her retirement. My father was a high school English teacher for 30 years, most of them as head of the department and also teaching English as a second language to thousands of new Canadians in Scarborough, Ontario. Having now both retired, they are gradually circumnavigating the globe and spending my future inheritance as quickly as possible. The many years my parents dedicated to public service and the deep satisfaction they derived from their working lives inspired me to choose a career where I, too, could make a positive difference to those in my community, much like they did. I'm truly grateful for their support and guidance, that helped me to get where I am today. They are now standing, and I ask the members of this Assembly to please give them the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: I'm sure the hon. member would agree that since he has a new income, his parents could spend all of the money.

Mrs. Schreiner: Mr. Speaker, I have two guests today. First I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Mr. Brian Brake. Mr. Brake is the executive director of Habitat for Humanity in Red Deer. Originally from the proud province of Newfoundland, Mr. Brake joined the Canadian Forces and served

our country for 37 years, retiring as a lieutenant colonel. Since then he has used his exemplary leadership skills in the private and nonprofit sectors. He has been honoured with several prestigious formal recognitions, including the 125th anniversary of the Confederation of Canada medal and the Alberta centennial medal.

Joining him today is Mr. Alfred Nikolai. Mr. Nikolai holds an unwavering belief that home ownership through Habitat for Humanity can transform generations of families from the cycle of poverty. Under his leadership the nonprofit moved from helping a handful of families per year to the largest Habitat for Humanity affiliate in Canada. Just earlier this month as a reflection of his service and commitment to the community Mr. Nikolai was recognized with a special citation award from Ernst & Young as a social entrepreneur for the prairie region.

Would the House please welcome these giving and generous individuals, Mr. Brian Brake and Mr. Alfred Nikolai.

The Speaker: The Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly my immediate family members: Michèle Carlier, my wife and constant companion in this exciting world of public life; my parents, Ervin and Jacqueline Carlier, visiting from my hometown of Val Marie, Saskatchewan, who in a few days will be celebrating their 65th wedding anniversary; my brother Ervin Carlier Jr.; my sisters Vickie Reid and Lesley Stone; my brother-in-law Dave Stone; and my mother-in-law, Maxine Brekke. I'd ask them to remain standing to receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to be back in the Legislature with one more Wildrose MLA.

Provincial Budget

Mr. Jean: Tomorrow Albertans will finally see a budget from this government. That's helpful. What isn't helpful is that this budget will have a record deficit. Indeed, we now know that this government has no plans whatsoever to balance the budget for many, many years to come. To the Premier: when exactly did her government first decide that they would not balance the budget in fiscal 2018?

Ms Notley: Well, thank you. Mr. Speaker, first of all, let me just say that it is also a pleasure to be back in the House, and as well I'd like to extend my welcome to the new MLA for Calgary-Foothills.

As the member has outlined, our Minister of Finance announced last week that the year in which we would be balancing the budget would be pushed out one year as we become more aware of the extended low projections for the price of oil. This was an issue that was put to Albertans in the last election. They said, "Take a balanced hand, act as a shock absorber, and take care of families," and that's what this government will do.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, during the election campaign the NDP said that they would balance the budget in fiscal 2017. That's what voters voted for. But then they realized they got their budget math wrong by almost \$4 billion, and they said that 2018 would have to do. Last week the Finance minister told us that, whoopsie, 2018 wasn't going to happen. We might get a balanced budget by April 2020. To the Premier: why has she broken her most important

election promise? Why won't she balance the budget before the next election?

Ms Notley: Well, as I said, Mr. Speaker, what Albertans talked about in the last election was the fact that we are faced with an unprecedented drop in revenue for this province as a result of becoming unnecessarily reliant on it. They were asked to consider draconian, radical cuts, or they were asked to consider a measured, balanced approach that protects families, and we've seen the result. We will do what we promised to do for Albertans. I know that's kind of a new thing for you, but we are going to keep our promises and protect families.

Mr. Jean: With this many waffles by the government we'll balance in 2052.

The government is blaming the downturn in oil prices for their inability to balance the budget. Albertans might believe that except that this summer, when the Finance minister presented the Q1 fiscal update, he increased the projected price of oil. This government jacked up oil revenue projections in August, but now the low price of oil is their excuse to push back balancing the budget. Will the Premier admit to Albertans that this government won't balance the budget no matter what the price of oil is?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, we've talked to Albertans, and what they've told us is that they agree with our three-pronged plan. First of all, they want us to stabilize public services to ensure that Albertans have those front-line services that contribute to their resiliency and their ability to respond to the downturn that we face. Secondly, they want a plan to balance, a reasonable, careful one, and that's what we're going to be offering. Thirdly, they want someone who is going to focus on job creation, not layoff after layoff after layoff, and that is what this government will deliver.

The Speaker: Second question. The Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Jean: NDP promise made, NDP promise broken.

Provincial Debt

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, in a recent media interview the Dominion Bond Rating Service warned that it would rethink Alberta's triple-A credit rating if total provincial debt surpassed 15 per cent of GDP. For that to happen, the provincial government debt would have to be around \$30 billion. All indications are that this NDP government is going to dramatically exceed that number. Will the Premier set our debt limit at a number that does not risk our triple-A credit rating?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I urge the members opposite to stay tuned for tomorrow because I think they'll find that their concerns are allayed. But that being said, let me just say that what we are focused on doing is keeping the promises that we made to Albertans. I understand that that sort of sounds like duping the electorate over there, but in fact that's how democracy works. You tell people that you're going to make these priorities your priorities, and then you plan on that basis. That's what we've done, and that's what we're going to do.

Mr. Jean: Having a triple-A credit rating is very important to municipalities, to universities, to any agency that borrows through this government. A lowering of the rating will increase the interest that we have to pay on debt. That makes debt much more expensive and takes away money from programs and services that Albertans are so relying on. Losing the triple-A rating significantly increases

the amount of money that goes to paying interest on the debt. Does the Premier understand how much this issue matters to all Albertans?

The Speaker: Madam Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know what else hurts jobs and security for Albertans? A \$3.5 billion cut to services, laying off tens of thousands of employees and front-line service workers, and undercutting our education and our health care: that – that – is what creates instability and creates job loss and hurts the economy. So we are not going to do that. Our budget will be a shock absorber, yet it will still engage in good, sound accounting measures, which I am sure the member opposite will be pleased to see.

Mr. Jean: Like all Albertans, I'd appreciate a promise made by the government and a promise kept, and that hasn't happened in this case.

Recently Alberta Finance has had to increase the sweetener that it pays to place our bonds with creditors. Our 2.35 per cent, 10-year bond now actually costs the government of Alberta 2.587 per cent. Not all that long ago these bonds actually cost less than the posted coupon rate. Lenders don't think our bonds are as safe as they used to be; that's clear. Losing the triple-A credit rating will make matters much, much worse. Will the Premier commit to doing all she can to protect Alberta's credit rating?

The Speaker: Madam Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What I will do is commit to doing all that I can to protect the people of Alberta. The member opposite may not have noticed, but essentially the price of oil has tanked, and we're going to lose over \$6 billion in revenue. So the question is: what kind of leadership navigates through those troubled waters in a way that makes sure Alberta families are protected and maintain their resilience and are able to come through it and in a way that protects and builds diversification and new jobs? That is the plan that this government will introduce tomorrow, and I just can't wait.

The Speaker: Third question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Budget Document Preview by Opposition

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, let's stay with the budget. Tomorrow the government has said that they will release the hundreds of pages of budget documents. The media will get the documents at 8 a.m. and will have at least seven hours to analyze them before the information becomes public. Seven hours. The members of the opposition: well, we get to see the documents for about an hour and a half. That's 10 seconds per page. Now, we're really good, but does the Premier really think that this lives up to her promise to do things differently than the last government?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, in terms of the length of the lock-up, which I believe is what the Leader of the Official Opposition is talking about, the length of the lock-up will be as long as it always has been. Meanwhile we will have many, many, many hours in this Legislature to debate the details of the budget. Indeed, additional hours were offered and rejected, I'm told, but either way . . .

Mr. Mason: Not rejected. Accepted.

Ms Notley: Accepted. Were offered and accepted. Excuse me.

So there have been additional hours delegated as per the opposition's request and negotiated as per the opposition's request, and I hope that after all that time they'll vote in favour of the budget.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, as you know, we're here to help, but I have it on good authority that the Premier, when she was the leader of the third party, expressed strong feelings about this particular issue. In fact, she knew it was ridiculous – knew it was ridiculous – that the previous government had shrunk the amount of time the opposition had to review the budget. Albertans would think that it would be helpful if the MLAs got more than 90 minutes with the budget before they had to comment on it. It would certainly help. Will the Premier allow elected MLAs to have the same amount of time as the reporters get with the budget? Yes or no?

2:00

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, we're going to move ahead with the lock-up procedures that have been in place for a very long time. The thing of it is that we've got almost the full month of November laid out for budget deliberations, and I have no doubt that throughout those many weeks the members of the opposition will take every opportunity they possibly can to comment to the media over and over and over again about the budget. I feel very confident that it will be well reviewed and well canvassed in the media as well as on this floor before we get a chance to vote on it. I'm quite confident in the way we're going to go forward.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, it's obvious to all Albertans that this government is struggling to learn its business. The budget will be a record one in the wrong direction. The government's economic policies are being rejected by businesses, rejected by economists. Their policies have our energy industry more concerned than they have been in over 50 years. But this government could maybe, just maybe, get something as important as accountability right. To the Premier: what good reason is there to allow the opposition parties only 10 seconds per page with the budget? What good reason could there possibly be to ignore accountability of this government?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I've said, I think there's a great deal more time than has already been outlined for the opposition to review the budget, so I think that's quite good. What we have heard from businesses, though, is that they're looking for a government that is actually interested in partnering with them as we move forward through the economic downturn that we are facing right now, and that's why I've created the first economic development ministry since 2006. I've heard nothing but good things from business about the fact that we've made that focus, from many of your friends across the way, who said: "You know what? This is a good thing." That is what we're doing to work with business. You'll see that in the budget, and I'm very proud with how we're moving forward.

The Speaker: The leader of the third party.

Government Policies

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, after leaving Albertans without the certainty of a budget for nearly six months and actually causing tens of thousands of unnecessary job losses, to the Premier: will you give hard-working men and women in Alberta the assurance that you will not tax more of them out of their jobs or increase the cost of living with new taxes beyond what they've already suffered from under your government?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, I'll start with two things. You know, we could have had a budget already if the previous government had chosen to pass the budget before they called an election a year earlier than the legislation that was in place at the time. That being said, the budget will come tomorrow, and we will see the outcomes. You know, overall Albertans will pay less in taxes in our budget than they would have under the budget that was put forward by the folks over there.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, Albertans have come to depend upon the Premier of Saskatchewan, who was in Alberta on the weekend, to be their go-to voice in Canada to protect jobs, the economy, and quality of life for their families since May 5 of this year. To the Premier: have you heard enough from Albertans during the summer of discontent to convince you to redirect your government in favour of creating jobs, to stick up for the great work done on the environment by Albertans, and to remove the uncertainty caused by your changes to the Energy Regulator and possible changes to royalties?

The Speaker: Madam Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Speaker. I had a tremendous opportunity to travel across the province over the summer and in the early fall and not only there but to meet with investors in the U.S. as well as eastern Canada. In meeting with those people, one of the things that I heard about, actually, was that they were looking for a government that would engage in a partnership on job creation and economic diversification. As I've said, I heard that message, and we developed that ministry, as announced last week, and you'll see the economic plan that will be laid out in the budget by the Minister of Finance tomorrow. I actually think that we have heard a lot of that message, and I'm very pleased with the opportunity to work collaboratively with business leaders around the province.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, our caucus has talked to Alberta leaders who provide jobs, build seniors' housing, and create wealth to benefit Albertans. In almost all cases they feel they've been ignored with a we-know-better attitude by this Premier's ministers when they've met. Madam Premier, would you ask your ministers to go back and listen this time, do the job right, and actually pay attention to the Albertans that are already creating jobs, already supporting the economy, and actually get it right, because they don't feel heard so far?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I actually think my ministers have been consulting an incredible amount, and I've heard a lot of amazing feedback in terms of how accessible everybody in this government is. But you know what? We can always do better, and we will do better just because we love our province and we want to talk to as many people as we can. I have faith in all of my ministers that they will continue to do that. In particular with the folks that this minister is talking about, I suspect they're going to see a lot of the new Minister of Economic Development and Trade in the weeks to come.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Bow.

Calgary Southwest Ring Road Contract

Ms Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many constituents in my riding have approached me regarding the completion of the ring road. There are many questions and concerns revolving around the west end, which crosses through my riding. Throughout this summer a question that was frequently asked was about the implications of

proceeding as a P3. My question to the Minister of Transportation: why the decision to go forward with a public-private partnership to develop Calgary's ring road, and what is the current status of the evaluation of tenders?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much for the question, hon. member. It's a very important project for the people of Calgary, and it involves a historic land transfer agreement with the Tsuut'ina First Nation. There is a seven-year time frame on the completion of the ring road; otherwise, the land will revert to the Tsuut'ina First Nation. So on the basis of that and the advice of my advisers in the department that a delay would be engendered if we moved away from a P3, I made the decision that we would proceed with a P3 development. I can tell you that we finished the . . .

The Speaker: I know that the hon. minister is such a novice here that he forgets to speak to the Speaker, but I'm sure it'll come back to him soon.

First supplemental.

Ms Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Could the minister go into details regarding the timeline for completion and touch specifically on the west end of the ring road?

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much for that question, hon. member. We will be announcing the selected contractor for the southwest Calgary ring road in the summer of 2016, and we'll begin construction before the end of next year. As we progress further through the construction of this important project, our government will consider future options for delivering transportation infrastructure to Calgarians.

The Speaker: Final supplemental.

Ms Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister please speak to the government's financial commitment to the ring road and whether or not it will exceed the \$1.9 billion currently committed? Thank you.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much for that question, hon. member. It is our intention to complete the southwest portion of the Calgary ring road on time and on budget.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Flood Mitigation on the Bow and Elbow Rivers

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In June 2013 Calgary and neighbouring communities were hit hard by flooding, including many members of my constituency. I know that residents in my riding of Calgary-Glenmore have been waiting for information on flood protection, and today the government announced flood protection along the Bow and Elbow rivers to protect the city of Calgary and neighbouring communities. My question to the Minister of Infrastructure: can the minister please tell us more about the project and why the government is confident that this is the right project?

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, hon. member. The minister of environment met today with Mayor Nenshi and the Calgary River Communities Action Group copresident, Brenda Leeds Binder, to announce this important flood protection for the city of Calgary. We'll protect families and businesses from the 2013 flood levels by

investing in flood mitigation. That's why the government asked Deltares, a world-leading international research institute, to look at projects on the basis of how well they would protect from floods, the cost benefits, risks, and environmental impacts. They have recommended that we go forward with the Springbank off-stream dam, and that's what we're doing.

2:10

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The residents in my riding and across Calgary have been waiting for this announcement since June of 2013. The plans have been subjected to delay after delay under the former government, and quite frankly, many Calgarians have become frustrated with the process. I need to go back to my riding with the confidence that there are specific measures to protect Calgary and the residents of Calgary-Glenmore. What exactly does today's announcement mean for Calgarians and my constituency particularly?

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, hon. member, for that question. The former government's delays and lack of action on flood mitigation have put families and businesses at risk. The Official Opposition's plan is to cut \$9.3 billion from infrastructure. That would mean no protection for Calgarians.

Our government has taken swift action to work with the mayor of Calgary, stakeholders, and experts to build a plan that's right for Albertans. In addition to the \$297 million to the Springbank project, our government also announced \$150 million over 10 years to build flood protection works within the city of Calgary, allowing the city to develop a multiyear flood protection plan.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat – my apologies. I forgot to ask at the front end about a little bit more patience, the same stuff I asked for in the spring. So this is my second time to ask for that. We had a second supplemental waiting.

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned, Calgarians have been frustrated with the process up until today, and many are saying that they're concerned that future plans to protect the Bow River with adequate flood protection will be delayed. Essentially, people need to know that future protection will move forward without delay. Can the minister please tell us in detail what future plans government has to address outstanding concerns?

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, hon. member. Well, timeliness is key to all Albertans affected by floods. Literally, thousands were directly impacted by the events of 2013, and individuals remain vulnerable to future flooding. We believe that we can build Springbank in less time than other options. The mayor of Calgary said that he's very supportive of the creation of the Springbank off-stream reservoir. We look forward to continuing to work with stakeholders and our department to move this important issue forward to protect Calgarians and other Albertans.

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

Alberta Health Services Board

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, while in opposition the current Infrastructure minister blasted executive salaries, expense scandals, and the bureaucratic mess at Alberta Health Services. At that time, he asked the previous Health minister if he would, quote, reduce waste, confusion, duplication, and mismanagement and abolish Alberta Health Services. To the Health minister: will you follow through on your party's criticisms and reduce waste, confusion,

duplication, and mismanagement by at least decentralizing Alberta Health Services?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, I think I need to point out the irony. That member opposite is proposing that we actually create a whole bunch of waste and confusion and decentralization through having a variety of different health regions. That is never what we proposed in the platform. The Premier was very clear in the election about what she was proposing, and while members opposite maybe don't have intentions to fulfill their commitments, we do.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Infrastructure in his previous life in opposition attacked administrative chaos, escalating operational costs, systemic inefficiencies at Alberta Health Services. He received thunderous applause from his caucus and even the Premier herself. Now, despite the promises of her own party the Health minister has declared that AHS is here to stay, with even more bureaucrats. To the Health minister: as per your own colleagues will you stop creating confusion and waste and wasting money on this bureaucratic nightmare?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very proud of the board that we announced on Friday. We have seven tremendous community leaders who are willing to invest their time and dedication to make sure that we address inefficiencies and find the very best system possible for Albertans. I have to say that I am very confident in their expertise, and I would much rather have seven individuals running the board of Alberta Health Services than cut \$3 million or \$4 billion or whatever billion dollars the members opposite might propose today just simply to say: we're having a balanced budget. There will be a smart board that makes smart decisions to increase efficiencies.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, with answers in very short supply I'll change my approach and ask the Minister of Infrastructure himself. The minister has in the past boldly declared – and, again, I'm quoting directly – “A New Democrat government would abolish Alberta Health Services altogether.” To the Minister of Infrastructure, in your own words, please: what will it take for this government to admit that the structure of the Alberta health superboard was a failure and finally return to local decision-making?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you for the question. Since it's a health question, I think it's appropriate that it be directed to the Health minister. What this government campaigned on was making sure that the services were protected that Albertans rely on, making sure that they get the right care by the right professional at the right place at the right investment, and we've got a board that's going to be amazing in helping us deliver on that. Members opposite might think that you can just rearrange, just reorganize, and blame others for the things that they would like to do, which is cut billions of dollars from the system, which would create chaos. This government is committed to stability and delivering for health care.

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

Agricultural Policies

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past summer farmers and ranchers from across Alberta experienced some of the most challenging weather in years. Drought conditions, the worst in over 50 years in some areas, caused tremendous stress to hard-working farmers. Starting in early July, rural municipalities and

counties all across our province, some 20, declared a state of agricultural disaster, yet the agriculture minister waited until August 21 to finally offer assistance to drought-stricken farmers, assistance that was for many too little, too late. To the minister: why did you wait so long in offering assistance to Alberta farmers?

The Speaker: The Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. While it was true that there were some very dry, adverse conditions across the province, it's also true that the results coming in with the yield are closer to 85 per cent of our five-year average. So I do believe now that we were correct in being prudent and waiting to see how the harvest was maintaining throughout the season and helping farmers when they needed it, where they needed it.

Thank you.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, that points out just how out of touch this minister is. Given that the producers were the worst affected by the drought and that the hardest hit were cattle ranchers and that they were unable to buy feed – in some cases feed was three to five times the regular retail cost – and that summer pastures were drying up and that in some cases these ranchers were selling off the very cow herd that produces their livelihood, Mr. Minister, can you tell us why you failed to take prompt and decisive action to assist and to support our farmers and ranchers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Farming families work hard and are an essential pillar of Alberta's economy. Working with the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation, we provided direct, timely support to farmers during this tough growing season and found creative solutions to problems posed by this year's dry growing conditions. Making sure that the member didn't misunderstand my first statement, overall the yields were good, but recognizing that there were areas that were drier, they did get the support that they needed at the right time.

Thank you.

2:20

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, it's a given that producers all summer long were desperate for any good news on the agricultural front, then in October it came in the form of the trans-Pacific partnership. Now, given that the signing of this landmark trade agreement was universally hailed by producer groups across our province because of its potential for expanded market access, why was the agriculture minister so lukewarm in his response to this agreement? Was it because he didn't want to contradict the federal NDP's objections to this deal?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I see that we've changed gears to the trans-Pacific partnership. I think it's important to realize that the trans-Pacific partnership is still just an agreement in principle. No country has yet signed off on it, and we have yet to see any detail whatsoever. All that anyone has been able to see is in the press reports, the releases themselves. Trade is important for Alberta, and our government supports responsible growth opportunities for export sectors. When the actual text is released, for sure we will be looking very carefully at it.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Two Hills Mennonite School Construction

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The provincial government is trying to build a school in a swamp in the community of Two Hills, and the project has been delayed for years as a result. The ground is saturated, there are barely three walls up, and those are starting to crumble. The project has had issues with mud, water, and methane gas. This is all because the previous government decided to build on an artesian well, and this current NDP government is not making any better decisions. The community has suggested a better site for this school. Mr. Minister, will you listen to the community, cut bait, and change the location?

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much for the question from the hon. member. I did meet with the hon. member, and I did investigate this issue at his request. I can tell him that the site was not ideal and that the problems have been mitigated. The cost to complete the school will be 25 and a half million dollars at the current location. That's nearly \$10 million more than originally budgeted. The cost to move the school to the other location would be in excess of \$35 million, and that does not include land. There is no guarantee that the new site will be safer.

Mr. Hanson: Mr. Speaker, this has turned into an expensive embarrassment for the government, and worst of all, our students and families aren't even close to having the school that they were promised in 2010. The minister has had some time to settle into his new role, and now we deserve some answers. Can the minister explain why none of the high-paid bureaucrats did a proper assessment of this land before they started building on it and why they now refuse to admit that they made a mistake? Why is the bureaucracy insisting on going ahead with an unsafe build?

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is not an unsafe building. It was not an ideal site; however, the groundwater and methane issues have been dealt with. This will be a safe school. It would cause about a three-year delay, potentially, to start over at a new site. That site is on private land and has not been acquired. No land has been publicly made available by the school board or the municipality. So those land costs would be in addition to the \$35 million to move the site.

Mr. Hanson: Mr. Speaker, we all know that if you're in a hole, stop digging, especially if it's a wet one. This project is already years behind schedule and \$10 million over budget. All the government has to show is three gymnasium concrete walls and a 10 per cent failure rate of the foundation pilings currently in place. The last government made a mistake in choosing this site. To the minister: why are you doubling down and making the problem worse without regard for the safety and concerns of the community?

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you . . .

The Speaker: Hon. minister, I wonder if you could make your comments to the Speaker, please.

Mr. Mason: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

I think I've answered the question. I don't think the member is hearing me. This was not an ideal site. It's now \$10 million over budget, but if we move to the other site that you're suggesting, it's an additional \$10 million over and above that plus the cost of the land, and we don't know if that land will be any different in terms

of its geology. It's a very high water table there, so there's no guarantee that the next site will be any better than this one.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Disaster Recovery Program

Mr. W. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Following the appalling management of the disaster recovery program by the Alberta Emergency Management Agency and nearly two years of constant public pressure, the AEMA finally committed to holding an independent review of their administration of the 2013 flood recovery. We know that the review took place as hundreds of my constituents and many stakeholder groups were interviewed. We know that the report was delivered to the ministry before the election, and to date this report and its recommendations have not been released. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: what does the report say, and will you commit to releasing the full report today?

Ms Larivee: Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, I have to say as someone who has lived through both flooding and forest fires in my hometown of Slave Lake that I understand how hard it is to go through something like that. It is clear that there are a number of problems with the disaster recovery program set up by the PCs and that we need to do better. Very shortly, integrating feedback from the report, we will provide an update on our plans to move forward and the lessons we've learned to make the changes to the disaster recovery program so that it's there for Albertans the next time it's needed.

Mr. W. Anderson: Given that a similar government report launched after the 2005 flood was not released for nearly six years and given that there remains over 600 DRP files outstanding, Albertans in general deserve to see the report for themselves. To the same minister: will you please explain why you have not shared this report already so that it could provide benefits to resolving the remaining 602 outstanding DRP claims in my constituency?

Ms Larivee: Mr. Speaker, when disaster strikes, Albertans do need to have confidence that there is an effective and well-managed program to help them recover and that all information will be used to move forward. It is clear that there are a number of problems. The bottom line is that we will use the lessons we've learned to move forward, and we will take into consideration the member's desire to see that report.

Thank you.

Mr. W. Anderson: Seven ministers, five years.

Given that the government committed to improving communication between the DRP and the applicants and that it's infuriating to hear that the Alberta Emergency Management Agency continues to close files without contacting the applicants in my constituency, again to the same minister: what specific actions will you commit to that will ensure that AEMA is communicating with all claimants with any changes to their applications?

Ms Larivee: Mr. Speaker, once again, as someone who, myself, has lived through natural disasters I have great compassion for those individuals. As I previously stated, there are a number of problems with the system that was set up by the PCs, and we do need to improve it. The bottom line is that Albertans that are hit by disaster need help and that the government needs to be there, and we're committed to making that happen.

Affordable Supportive Living Initiative

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, irrespective of political leanings we can all agree that taking care of Alberta's elderly population is a high priority. The previous government recognized this and in October 2014 announced \$180 million in grants to create 2,612 new affordable supportive living spaces. My question is to the Minister of Seniors. These projects continue to sit stagnant, delayed due to your government's inaction. Why do you continue to put Alberta seniors at risk by delaying these important ASLI projects, with a full construction season now behind us?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the question. The reason why we're in such a backlog in terms of needing to have deferred maintenance caught up on is because the party that just asked the question neglected it for so many decades.

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, as a point of clarification, these are new projects and not maintenance projects. But thank you.

Again to the same minister: given that in the spring session we heard that a decision was imminent and a letter was sent on July 16 stating that Alberta Seniors staff would meet with proponents in the near future and that there's still no word to the affected parties confirming or denying the funding they were promised, when in concrete terms will these groups get a firm commitment on the funding already announced?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What we've committed to do is to make sure that we have our due diligence in terms of reviewing the projects that the last government was so keen to announce over and over again right before the last election. What we've done is that we've made sure we've met with the different proponents over the summer months, reviewed the projects, and also reviewed where the demand is because we want to make sure that if we're investing public money, it's focused on addressing the needs of seniors whether they're in the hospital or whether they're at home. So we're doing that work, we're meeting with the stakeholders, and I look forward to giving an update to this House very soon.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, to the same minister: given that \$180 million in grants that was allocated to create only 1,500 ASLI spaces ended up creating a framework for 2,612 new spaces through innovative public-private partnerships, will this government do what is right and continue to partner with both public and private organizations, or will ideology win the day and reduced or more costly public, unionized staff facilities take ultimate precedence over not-for-profit organizations who have made land and other commitments in good faith and not in good time, unfortunately?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much for the question, Mr. Speaker. It's interesting that the member opposite talks about how public-private partnerships are so great, when the last government realized that they weren't being effective and they changed the plan on the new school construction because they weren't able to get good proponents. I'm really proud of the fact that Albertans voted this government in on a platform that includes the building of 2,000 long-term care beds. That platform commitment is under way, and

we'll be able to update this House shortly, but know that we are committed to making sure that we bring those beds on stream in a timely fashion.

Municipal Infrastructure Funding

Ms Miller: Mr. Speaker, Red Deer is one of the many Alberta communities that have seen rapid population growth, leading to many pressures from municipal governments, especially as it relates to infrastructure. What is the Minister of Municipal Affairs doing to ensure that municipalities receive the support they need to start and complete infrastructure projects?

Ms Larivee: Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, our government ensured through interim supply that funding for municipalities was provided to move local infrastructure projects forward. Our government will not repeat the mistakes of the past. I look forward to the budget and capital plan being presented in the House tomorrow, which will demonstrate our commitment to building much-needed municipal infrastructure. We promised our municipal partners we would support their local infrastructure needs, and we are keeping that promise, including for the Red Deer region, where we recently invested \$6 million to expand the Red Deer airport, create jobs, and support that growing community.

Ms Miller: Mr. Speaker, given that many municipalities are also worried about these much-needed infrastructure projects being completed on time, how is the minister working to ensure that these municipalities have the stable, long-term, predictable funding they deserve?

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We heard from local leaders that predictable funding was critical. We listened, and we responded by delivering on these programs that they most value, such as the MSI. MSI delivers funding that is flexible, and municipalities can apply future years' allocations to fund projects. This supports long-term planning and respects community priorities. Through the MSI, Alberta community partnership, federal gas tax fund, and small communities fund the province is providing significant funding to advance long-term priorities.

Ms Miller: Mr. Speaker, given that the years of neglect by the previous government has led to the shortage of much-needed municipal infrastructure, what is the minister doing to ensure that projects are being funded according to priority and to help municipalities get shovels in the ground?

Ms Larivee: Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, a key aspect of MSI is that municipalities get to decide what projects to spend their allocations on. They set the priority; we meet it. On the competitive-based small communities fund the selection process involved publically disclosed rating criteria, which helped us select 56 projects out of almost 300 applicants. The successful projects addressed very immediate community needs such as boil water advisories and sewer problems. I will repeat that I look forward to the budget and capital plan, that will demonstrate our commitment to building much-needed . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Flood Mitigation on the Elbow River

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today's announcement of flood protection along the Bow and Elbow rivers is a first step, but I'm left with more questions than answers on the long-term impacts

these decisions will have. At the end of the day our province's flood mitigation plans must be made in the best interest of all Albertans and all communities. What consultation and discussion did the minister of environment have with the communities most affected and the municipality of Rocky View before making this decision?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. I am proud that our government is moving forward to provide strong protection to the city of Calgary and other communities, including in the MD of Rocky View, Bragg Creek, and Redwood Meadows. We're looking very much forward to working with them. We took these decisions today based on cost, based on environmental risk, and based on the very real risk of catastrophic failure during construction. These were concerns that folks in Bragg Creek and all along also shared and folks in the city of Calgary shared. We were glad to work with them, to go forward with essentially what amounts to a four-point plan for flood protection in Calgary.

Mrs. Aheer: So no consultations.

Mr. Speaker, the minister of environment spoke this morning about the emotional toll that the floods have taken on the province, and I couldn't agree more. At the same time I want to highlight the immense financial toll that a wrong decision could have on our province in the future. Can the minister assure Albertans that a thorough cost-benefit analysis has been conducted for both the Springbank and McLean Creek locations and that today's decision was cemented by fiscal and not emotional reasoning?

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can assure this House that it took our government five months to review the documents, to review all of the data presented before us. We commissioned independent reports as well to ensure that we were making the right decision for the city of Calgary and for all of the communities along the Elbow. Our conclusions were that the Springbank project was the most cost-effective, carried the least amount of environmental risk, the least amount of construction risk. We can get flood mitigation in place much quicker for the city of Calgary and much quicker for the people of Bragg Creek with the option that we have chosen. We are proud to have taken this decision today.

Mrs. Aheer: I hear a lot about the city of Calgary. The flood mitigation preparation is about Albertans and preparing for our province's future in a responsible manner. Part of flood mitigation preparation must include the consideration of land valuation in Springbank. This valuation must be clarified. At what point do land value discrepancies and potential court delays diminish the cost and time arguments made by the government in favour of Springbank?

Ms Phillips: Well, Mr. Speaker, the members opposite cannot be trusted to get it right on flood mitigation. They would cut \$9.3 billion from infrastructure over five years. That would mean that Calgary, the community of Bragg Creek, the community of Redwood Meadows would never see flood protection under their plan. Their approach is to make hasty decisions without complete information. Our approach is to take a clear-eyed view of the facts, change our minds even when necessary, and make the right decision for all of southern Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

2:40

Forest Industry Issues

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In this continued low-price environment the government needs to continue to build on the previous government's efforts to diversify the economy. For nine years we've had a softwood lumber agreement with the United States, which has ensured tariff-free lumber exports. This agreement expired this month, which has caused much worry in the industry that if a new agreement is not signed, the Alberta forest sector will suffer from levies imposed on exported lumber. To the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry: what are you doing to ensure that the new softwood lumber trade agreement is reached?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. While it is true that the Canada-U.S. softwood lumber agreement expired on October 12, we do know that forestry is a critical sector of our economy. Over 15,000 Albertans work in forestry, and the industry is a key economic driver in at least 70 Alberta communities, including many in my own constituency. There is a stall of one year from expiry. We're hoping to have the opportunity to talk to our federal counterparts to ensure that forestry remains a viable part of our economy in Alberta.

Thank you.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Premier: given that the government announced the Premier's Advisory Committee on the Economy to diversify Alberta's economy outside of the oil and gas industry and given that the membership of this committee includes members from the Alberta Federation of Labour, the Health Sciences Association of Alberta, the University of Alberta, GE, Suncor, and ATCO, why is there is there no representation whatsoever from anyone in the forest industry?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm quite honoured to have been named the Minister of Economic Development and Trade this week. The creation of this ministry shows to Albertans that job creation, diversification of our economy, and increased trades are a focus and a priority for our Premier and our government. I'm quite happy to be working with the Premier's advisory council in order to ensure that the plan that we move forward on is the best one, and we're going to act in the best interests of all Albertans.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry: given that pine beetle infestations are decreasing the Canadian timber supply and that this government's first course of action taken was to terminate the Spray Lake Sawmills agreement, how will this government ensure stable and continued timber allocations with forestry producers?

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We do recognize the importance to combat the pest of mountain pine beetle. I am proud to be a champion for Alberta forestry products, and I'm working hard every single day to support this industry and the hard-working families that depend on it.

Thank you.

Members' Statements

Habitat for Humanity

Mrs. Schreiner: Mr. Speaker and my friends here today, I am privileged to introduce Habitat for Humanity from Red Deer, an organization committed to providing dignified and inclusive housing and home ownership for all.

In the last 30 years, since its origin in 1985, Habitat for Humanity has built an impressive 2,712 homes in Canada. Working through 57 different affiliates, Habitat serves 300 Canadian communities. Six of them are located in Alberta. The Red Deer affiliate group, which has been in action since 1994, has built 25 homes, with four more under construction. Sixty-one low-income, working families have had the joy of owning a home thanks to Habitat Red Deer's efforts.

I am proud to share that one of Habitat's better known affiliates is located in Edmonton in the riding of Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood. Since 1991 427 homes were built in Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, making 1,000 low-income, working families proud homeowners. Habitat's Edmonton chapter says that by December 25, 2015, eighteen more families will engage in the festive season in their new homes.

The Red Deer affiliate of Habitat for Humanity hosted an elegant garden party to raise funds for future development, which Her Honour the Honourable Lois Mitchell, Lieutenant Governor, attended. The event marked the introduction of Habitat to the city of Lacombe. The organization, its partners, and volunteers in the community have helped to end the cycle of poverty. This has provided the benefits of stability to those who may never have left the poverty cycle. It is a pleasure to introduce them here today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Provincial Fiscal Policies

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been 173 days since the last election, on May 5, and both I along with my 21 Wildrose colleagues had hoped it would be the start of a new, moderate approach from our NDP government. We had hoped to see leadership that would put the ideology aside and focus on doing what is best for Alberta, leadership that would work for Albertans, not against them. Sadly, this hasn't been the case. In the face of massive private-sector job losses, about 40,000 this year, we have seen this government stubbornly implement policies that are inflaming the current situation – 20 per cent business tax increases, higher personal taxes, doubling the carbon tax, a royalty review – and it doesn't sound like the NDP are done yet. If not tomorrow, then sometime in the future, the message is clear. Albertans can expect even more tax increases to subsidize this government's record spending.

Alberta has been jolted into a cold reality. In my home town of Fort McMurray a 20 per cent vacancy rate exists while unemployment continues to rise. In August a new report was issued that shows that business confidence is nearing historic lows. What has the government done in response? They bulldoze ahead with their dramatic 50 per cent increase to the minimum wage, a move that would mean higher prices for consumers, fewer hours for workers, and would put the viability of hundreds of businesses at risk. This is not the moderate approach Albertans were hoping for.

In this session the Wildrose wants to let the government know that we are still here to help. Let's not intensify the problems our economy is facing. Let's put forward policies and ideas that tell the world that Alberta is a safe place to invest. Instead of calling

Alberta an embarrassing cousin, let's champion our accomplishments to the world. Wildrose remains here to help. I hope this government will listen.

Government Policies

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, this has been a summer of discontent made worse by NDP MLAs. Ideology has replaced common sense. They began with \$6 billion borrowed, with no details provided. Government delayed the budget almost six months after the election but found time to add job-killing corporate taxes. This created maximum uncertainty, worsening Albertans' ability to make a living in the energy industry, and made the situation worse by threatening a royalty review, a regulator overhaul, and musings of new taxes. The threat of a \$15 per hour minimum wage is putting the entire tourism and hospitality industry at risk while ignoring the reality that low-income Albertans will actually get hurt more than helped by the change. Promises of building seniors' homes have been delayed or perhaps even broken depending upon the budget.

The Premier has told unemployed Albertans to settle down and called Alberta an embarrassing cousin and given up on three of the four possible pipeline directions. Rather than working to save jobs and provide support and training to unemployed Albertans, the minister of jobs spent time trying to get jobs for her pals in the NDP in B.C. The government has sown seeds of discontent so deep that Albertans thrashed the NDP candidates in the federal election. The government has taken their eye off the ball on school construction and then tried to blame the previous government, only to spend an entire week explaining, backtracking, and hoping the issue would go away, distancing themselves from – wait for it – themselves.

Mr. Speaker, Albertans have not been properly consulted or paid attention to. Our PC caucus thanks the NDP for driving Albertans in our direction, but that will not stop us from opposing bad policies. We encourage Albertans to rise up rather than settle down. PCs are proud of Alberta; it's, rather, the NDP who are ashamed. Albertans can count on us to push the government away from one blind ideological mistake after another and towards policies that are good for Alberta and ones they counted on, at least until May 5.

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

2:50

Phil Bobawsky

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to stand here today to speak to this House for the first time about the tireless work of Phil Bobawsky. Phil was a constituent of Calgary-Shaw that I had the privilege of meeting just shortly after the spring election. Little did I know the first time I met Phil that he would educate me a lot about people suffering from vision loss. Phil first lost his vision, 10 years ago, due to complications related to diabetes, and it was then that he reached out to the Canadian National Institute for the Blind, that helped with his rehabilitation.

For the past several years Phil has volunteered with the CNIB and has become an advocate for all those suffering from vision loss. During the last provincial election Phil attended debates throughout the city and province and worked to make sure that vision loss was made the centre of attention during the election. Phil is a man who always has a lot to say, and this is a determination, advocacy work, and contribution that reflects his passion. Phil is a member of the city of Calgary's Advisory Committee on Accessibility and has continued to work with others through his work with the Canadian Diabetes Association, the Rick Hansen Foundation, and the Kidney Foundation of Canada.

This fall I had the honour to be present at an event where he was the recipient of the first annual Don Biberdorf award for his tireless advocacy. Phil would attest that his success today is directly due to the love and support of his family and the support of the CNIB. Phil, who's present in the gallery with his dog Finnegan and representative J.S. Ryu from the CNIB, is an outstanding example of the great work that the CNIB provides for those with vision loss. Their advocacy work across Alberta shows that no matter what your challenges are, everyone in this province can make a difference. I am proud to call Phil a constituent, a neighbour, a friend, and an advocate.

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

Fish Creek Library 30th Anniversary

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to extend warm wishes to the Calgary-Fish Creek area library, which is celebrating its 30th anniversary during Library Month. I personally am a big fan of the Calgary public library and of this branch in particular as it's the branch that serves the neighbourhood where I grew up, the neighbourhood where my family lives now as well as many of the communities in Calgary-Acadia and some surrounding ridings. Our library features programs for all ages, including storytimes for young children, computer coding for teens, ESL conversation club, computer technology coaching, and so much more. These programs offer valuable skills, from early literacy to computer literacy. They also offer a chance for members of our community to gather in a public space to get to know one another as neighbours and as friends.

Fish Creek library is so much more than a place to pick up books. It's a place to meet and to connect through a common interest. It is a hub in our community, a place to gather, to learn, and to play. Over its 30 years Fish Creek and the entire Calgary library system have evolved to meet the changing needs of our communities. Thirty years ago books, music cassettes, and magazines were the norm; today the library also offers newly released DVDs and an expanded collection of well over 2 million materials, with over a billion circulations per year. The library also offers online materials like the e-library, which contains academic resources for children, kindergarten through postsecondary, plus downloadable e-books, audiobooks, and magazines.

I'm confident that the Fish Creek library will continue to serve the communities of Calgary-Acadia and our surrounding ridings for many years to come. I offer a great big thank you to the staff and the volunteers at the library for everything that they do to contribute to our community and their tireless work to promote literacy and lifelong learning. I look forward to seeing what the next 30 years will bring.

Catriona, Jana, and Dara Bott

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, it is with a heavy heart that I rise to honour and remember three young Albertans that were lost in a tragic accident earlier this month at their home, near Withrow, Alberta, in my constituency. Catie, who recently turned 13, and 11-year-old twins Dara and Jana were taken from their family far too soon. In their short time on this earth these three sisters each brought joy and light to those around them, especially to their parents, Roger and Bonita, and their little brother, Caleb.

My heart weighed heavily this week as I heard their parents describe three girls who shared a common love for the farm, fishing, camping, quading, and animals, particularly their horses and cats. These girls were country and proud of it. Visiting Withrow shortly

after this tragedy, I was struck by how much these precious girls' caring hearts had touched and impacted their entire community. I offer our condolences though I know that there are no words that can be heard over the roaring silence left in their wake.

I understand the temptation, Mr. Speaker, to fill this silence with the drumbeat of our righteous anger, to seek someone or something to blame. To those who have already started down this path, let me say this: there is no justice to be found in this horrific accident. This is not about politics. However well-meaning our intention, blame will never make us whole. Instead, though words may fail us, let us offer our support and understanding to the Bott family and the community of Withrow. I can only pray that we can have hearts as big and faith as strong as the Bott family's. When asked how they were dealing with this horrific loss, they said: as far as not being able to ever see our kids again, that part is okay because we know we are going to see them again.

Mr. Speaker, let us sit up with them and see them through this night. This is where we are needed. [applause]

The Speaker: Hon. member, thank you for your kind remarks. I think the response you received was an indication of the importance of your words and how they struck today.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: I am pleased to table with the Assembly a report by Alberta's Chief Electoral Officer, as required by section 44(1) of the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act, and his accompanying letter to the Speaker dated October 5, 2015, concerning compliance with the election campaign financial reporting requirements.

Members, the period is to end at 3 o'clock. I've had a request to acknowledge some visitors. Calgary-Bow, please proceed.

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

Ms Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all the members of the Assembly my sister Jennifer Prosser. Jenn works for the re-elected member of Churchill-Keewatinook Aski, Niki Ashton. Jenn is one of the hardest working women I know, and she inspired me to be involved in a life of public service. She is a strong voice in feminist activism and will continue to be a role model in my life. I ask you to join me in providing her with the traditional warm welcome to this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two very special individuals in my life. The first is my mother, Mrs. Linda McLennan; the second is my husband's aunt Mrs. Carolynne Fardy. Both of these wonderful women have spent their careers helping others to learn. My mom spent her career as an elementary schoolteacher, often with a focus on special-needs education. Now she enjoys retirement as a yoga practitioner, Stollery children's hospital volunteer, and every so often, when her daughter calls, a very hard-working political campaigner.

Carolynne Fardy spent her career as an instructor in microbiology at Thompson Rivers University in Kamloops, B.C. Her work led to an interest in biosafety. She has devoted her efforts towards making people more aware of toxins in everyday products so that consumers can make more informed choices.

Both of these women are an inspiration to me. I would now ask them to stand so that they may receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

3:00

The Speaker: Are there any other members who have visitors to acknowledge? The Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a privilege to introduce through you and to you a few of my friends who came to Edmonton. They are here to give me support on my first day in the House. I thank them very much for being here on this special day: Venkatesh Jalubula, a PhD student at the University of Alberta, and Kanak Chamarty, a well-known social activist from Edmonton. They both come from my home state of Andhra Pradesh, southern India, where I was born. Also here are Goldy and Priyanka Mathur, a family active in the business community for many years in Edmonton. I ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills, I'm sure you will find that you have many more friends in the Assembly.

Orders of the Day

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 201

Assuring Alberta's Fiscal Future Act

[Debate adjourned June 22: Ms Babcock speaking]

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Stony Plain, I'm advised that you have some time left, six minutes, to speak to the original Bill 201.

Ms Babcock: I'm done speaking to that. Thank you. I'll give up the rest of my time.

The Speaker: Thank you.

There are, I'm advised, 28 minutes of debate left on this particular bill. Are there other members who would like to speak to Bill 201?

We'll call on the hon. Member for Calgary-South East to close debate.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to be back in the House and debate issues that are important to Albertans. You know, often when I go to grade 6 classes, I speak to the classes and ask them: what do you think is one of the most important, one of the most special inventions that ever was created? They put up a lot of hands, and they say things like "hockey" or "the Calgary Stampede" or "the Stampeders." A really interesting dialogue I have with those grade 6 classes. I suggest to them: what about the stone wheel? The stone wheel was a great invention, and the thing is that we never ran out of rock. There was lots of rock.

The reality is that with our resource revenue and our resources sooner or later somebody is going to come up with something better, and we need to be ahead of that curve. We need to make sure that we're planning for our future, planning for our children, and that was the whole idea of the heritage trust fund. Now, I don't want you to think in terms of parties or elections and everything that's gone on or even the history of this province. We know that the heritage trust fund was created so that we could plan for the future, put some money aside. It doesn't just affect the future, Mr. Speaker.

It's an investment that we have that also affects things like our credit rating and our standing in the global markets.

Mr. Speaker, I'm hoping that both sides, my friends on the right and my friends across the way, the government, will allow this debate to carry on. I welcome hearing what the plans from the government and the plans from my friends on the right are on how you can make this bill better. Let's have a fulsome debate. Really, it's not about Rick Fraser. It's not about any particular party. It's really about our children, right? It's about our future. That's why I brought this bill forward.

It's never too late to save. When you think about it, if you went to your financial adviser today, they would say: always make sure you put some money aside for yourself, even if it's just a little bit, because that will grow and that will help your standing fiscally, financially, to make sure that you can obtain things like loans, to make sure that you're always saving for yourself first, and then you have a plan to pay off everything else.

Mr. Speaker, I urge the House today to move this bill on to Committee of the Whole so that we can have a fulsome debate. Thank you for your time.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:06 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For:

Drysdale	Gotfried	Rodney
Ellis	Jansen	Starke
Fraser		

Against:

Aheer	Hoffman	Payne
Anderson, S.	Horne	Phillips
Anderson, W.	Hunter	Piquette
Babcock	Jabbour	Pitt
Barnes	Jean	Renaud
Bilous	Kazim	Rosendahl
Carlier	Kleinstauber	Sabir
Carson	Larivee	Schmidt
Ceci	Littlewood	Schneider
Coolahan	Loewen	Schreiner
Cooper	Loyola	Shepherd
Cortes-Vargas	Luff	Sigurdson
Cyr	MacIntyre	Smith
Dach	Malkinson	Stier
Dang	Mason	Strankman
Eggen	McKittrick	Sucha
Feehan	McLean	Sweet
Fildebrandt	McPherson	Taylor
Fitzpatrick	Miller	Turner
Ganley	Miranda	van Dijken
Goehring	Nielsen	Westhead
Gray	Nixon	Woollard
Hanson	Orr	Yao
Hinkley	Panda	

Totals: For – 7 Against – 71

[Motion for second reading of Bill 201 lost]

3:20

Bill 202
Alberta Local Food Act

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Cortes-Vargas: Mr. Speaker, thank you for allowing me to rise and speak about the Alberta Local Food Act, which was introduced here on June 18. I am grateful to the members of my constituency in Strathcona-Sherwood Park, whom I am privileged to represent in this Assembly. I am honoured to be here today to bring forward a conversation and to open up new dialogues about developing a sustainable, local food system in Alberta. This will allow our local producers to seek direct access to markets and our consumers to enjoy homegrown products.

Mr. Speaker, it has been over a decade since Albertans have been asking for a sustainable food supply chain from their own backyards. In 2004 alternative agriculture markets in Alberta were first studied. Then in 2008 and again in 2012 the intention was to see if there was any value in alternative market sectors for local agriculture products. The 2012 study showed that 95 per cent – 95 per cent – of Alberta households are using or want to purchase food grown or made in Alberta. This paralleled the responses and feedback that I received throughout the summer when engaging with constituents, with farmers, and with Albertans across the province. See, there is a very literal appetite for the increased support of local food systems.

Mr. Speaker, we have three different markets in our communities. There are international, there are domestic, and there are local markets. So why, then, did Albertans choose local markets? Well, the top five influences are freshness, quality, taste, safety, and also support for buying local from Alberta farm families.

This is where my constituents come in. I am so proud to represent them here. I come from Strathcona-Sherwood Park. Mr. Speaker, my constituency is home to farmers who would like to share their products, produce, and harvest with local markets in a sustainable manner. The farmers from my constituency, like several others, face huge challenges in connecting with the wider market. The consumers that would like to support these farmers also face these barriers.

This is an issue that intersects both rural and urban residents, and this bill has the potential of increasing awareness of how to overcome them. There are a variety of tools that producers use to sell their products: direct marketing, co-operatives, and farmers' markets. Previous work in local food systems has consistently noted an increase in co-operation in order to enhance viability of these tools.

So where do they sell their products? One example: a farmers' market. These have always supported Alberta's rural economy, typically serving as a test for small businesses. Many farm enterprises and new agriculture entrants start marketing their products in a local market, due to the lower costs, before expanding their business.

At present we have the Alberta approved farmers' market program, that has reviewed them for the past 40 years, but since 2010 the overall number of Alberta approved farmers' markets has grown by 27 per cent. As Albertans make, bake, and grow, the products have increased considerably. There is a robust market of 8,500 in all markets and at present 130 farmers' markets throughout 108 communities in Alberta. As local producers grow, the local market channels continue to grow in value and are a significant source of farm receipts. We must support the continuing diversification of market access.

According to a 2012 AF study \$878 million was the combined market value for farmers' markets and farm retail. This was up 64

per cent from 2008 at \$724 million. This increase emphasizes the importance Albertans place on where they get their food from.

When a consumer visits a farmers' market, they spend an average of \$55 per visit for everything from fresh fruits, vegetables, meat, eggs, honey, baking, preserves, processed foods, plants, and artisan craft products. That's putting a number on it. But when they visit farmers' markets, they also get the benefit of asking the farmers questions, asking the producers how they grew them.

Mr. Speaker, there's a huge market opportunity for connecting to local food producers with local consumers in Alberta. For example, Explore Local, a rural development division initiative, assists small-scale Albertan producers and processors in building skills to enhance their business. In 2014-15 the Explore Local initiative designed and delivered 27 extension events to increase producer awareness, understanding, access to local market channels. This initiative has resulted in producers and small processors investing in their business, through expansion or improvements, by 77 per cent. Positive growth in sales as a result of additional investment was 94 per cent. Increased profitability: 78 per cent. Gaining new customers due to business practices changes: 96 per cent.

The potential growth of our local food structures can be enhanced by the support provided by this bill. Very recently vertical farming indoor technology was developed in the fields of Strathcona-Sherwood Park. This is the kind of project that would enhance the variants of local food available to us year-round, so strengthening local food structures complements our drive to diversify our economy.

The procurement of local food puts regional identity and a trusting face on food. It also boosts local food economy, and we support agricultural job creators. Hence, Mr. Speaker, we need to explore and deeply evaluate the importance of how to legislate the Alberta Local Food Act, which has the potential of being a driver of the local economy by creating food security and improving a maximized return on local food infrastructure. It will also attract new generations into the farming profession by increasing awareness and opportunities. It will help local farmers grow, produce, process, and distribute locally and help buyers to opt for homegrown, ethically sourced foods.

What I know is that we are driven to grow agriculture, and I have seen that my community comes together in many ways in order to support this growth. It is my hope that with this bill the government becomes a stronger ally for local farmers. If we pass this bill, we would be the third province, after Ontario and Manitoba, to have our own local food act.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to listening to my colleagues.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's truly an honour to rise and speak in this new session, and it's an honour to speak to the Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park's bill. I did have the opportunity in the past session to speak to her in your lounge, sir, in regard to her bill. At that time I asked her what the member's goal was, and I've heard some of that going forward here, so I'd like to explain to the House and to the Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park some of my points of view on the member's legislation.

It's an important piece of legislation. With food, as one radio broadcaster from Drumheller liked to say, if you eat, you're involved in agriculture. Some members across, myself included, know that some of us are somewhat more attuned to that because our clothing shows that.

3:30

Mr. Cooper: Some of us eat more.

Mr. Strankman: More involved with agriculture, Mr. Speaker, I guess we'll say.

It's a topic that's near and dear to me because as a lifetime agrarian, if you will, I've travelled across fields both in Saskatchewan and Alberta in many different ways, so some would say that I do have some experience on this matter. To the Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park. I want to say that I have no malice in anything I say here; it's meant to be open information to the member's discussion and that of this House going forward, that we are trying to do this, as you said, Mr. Speaker, in your opening comments today, to be a collective and beneficial way of bringing forward something that will benefit all Albertans.

The concern that I have with the member's legislation is – and some assistants to my position entitled my presentation here Unintended Consequences. With all sorts of actions there are and can and could be unintended consequences. In this case I want to present to the House, Mr. Speaker, some of those consequences. This proposal is somewhat short on specifics and long on generalities. Again I would want to qualify by saying that I have no malice in what I say here.

Once this bill, which contains generalities, goes off to be effected, the regulators come into play. This bill in some cases does not have or state specific definitions for some of the things that are being brought forward, Mr. Speaker. There are troubling directions that this bill takes, and I have some of those concerns. One such example would be the intention to create a stable market, and I have trouble understanding what a stable market might be, in what arena that might be.

One of the comments talked about public-sector purchasing. I had the opportunity – the now Minister of Transportation made allusions to that, my experience in a facility in 2002. The initials were LCC, and they weren't Lethbridge community college. The minister made reference to that. At that facility, a public, provincial facility, Mr. Speaker, the members there, some of which I associated with quite freely, had been producing potatoes. That facility, that government institution, was completely self-sufficient, with milk, with potatoes, with all sorts of fruits and vegetables, and because of government-initiated regulation they were not allowed to do that. These people who were in there, such as myself, for some form of rehabilitation were not allowed to produce this food, and it was a valuable way that they could improve their character. The Minister of Transportation sometimes has questions about my rehabilitation.

The base of this concept, Mr. Speaker, is contrary to proven free-market values. Our agriculture industry has been calling for this for a long time, as long as I can remember. Is there a pressing need to create an artificially stable market? That's one of the questions that I have. To the member: I'd like to hear that. The member made comment that people have been consulted in regard to this. I know people in the Alberta beef industry, in the pork industry, at the farmers' markets, et cetera, and the grain commission, the Barley Commission, the barley growers, the Wheat Commission. These are commercial operators, and they haven't had any consultation with the member on that, and that's an important thing. You know, some of their questions – I've talked to them. They're asking: is it necessary to have government intervention?

The member has talked about wide and varied benefits to this, and the member has also quoted some financial numbers and everything. I'm cognizant of that, and I know that there can be developments in that regard. Alberta's agrifood markets, Mr.

Speaker, continue to grow. Former agriculture minister Shirley McClellan made comment that she was expecting and hoping for \$20 billion of export by 2010. It was a very enthusiastic number, but, you know, as an agrarian producer I'd like to see those numbers climb and grow to those kinds of amounts even though we've passed 2010.

There has never been before such a breadth and depth of products grown in Alberta as today, and the Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park talks about vertical farming and vertical things growing. There is a potential for some legislation even in urban areas where people would be allowed or legislated to have a certain amount of poultry, whether that be counted poultry of four chickens per household or whatever. There's talk of that, and there seems to be some small demand or some questions, some speaking of that.

There are also, Mr. Speaker, now – and the Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park talked about farmers' markets. These markets are strictly run and legislated. I'd like to know how these two acts could intertwine or interspace because there may be, as I've said, unintended consequences to bringing this legislation forward. Restaurants already source some of their ingredients from these producers. Why can't the public-sector organizations source from these markets? A fear that I have and a fear that they have is one of liability, of their ingestion of these foods. If there is something that's not of proper acceptance or quality or trace marketing, which is what's required in the beef industry – all beef that's produced and sold has to be market verifiable, producer verified back to its source. That's possibly a loophole for a safety situation here. One of these organizations that does this uses contracts between the producers and the marketers. They have their contracts privately designed, and they're going ahead with doing this. So I have a concern that this legislation may create some form of a subsection of agriculture. True or not, I'll leave that to the rest of the debate and to the rest of the House.

Would it not make more sense to expand the scope of farmers' markets, if needed, rather than starting again from scratch? The Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park is to be approved and complimented on the initiative, but there are some concerns about the demonstrative way that it's brought forward. The member again talked about farmers having difficulty to get their product to market. I'm, Mr. Speaker, a witness to that. I mean, sometimes there are commercial holdbacks and there are financial holdbacks. We are held back primarily by the conditions of what's called winter.

You know, we can't produce food the same. People in greenhouses know. For example, this summer at the Broxburn greenhouse at Coaldale – I think, Mr. Speaker, you may have been on that tour, where they are producing all of the green peppers for a good part of the Calgary Co-op. Outdoors they are producing all of the broccoli, if not the cauliflower – I'm not quite sure – for the Calgary Co-op. Irrigation in that area is a viable and financial form of wealth creation. They are doing it in a commercial fashion. In the case of commercial agriculture if you create over \$10,000 of agriculture value brought forward, you're subject to another regulation called the Alberta . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, you've served your time of 10 minutes.

I would now call upon the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak in favour of Bill 202, the Alberta Local Food Act. We've talked about urban and rural, and I am an urban MLA. One of the reasons why my urban Edmonton area is well represented by this bill is because the constituency members in Edmonton-Mill Woods care deeply about the food they set upon their table and share with their families.

3:40

One only needs to visit a commercial part of 34th Avenue in Mill Woods to see an array of independent grocery stores catering to a host of different cuisine preferences, and you get a sense of how deeply the people in my riding think about what they eat. The people in my riding care about local food, and we have two different farmers' markets in Mill Woods, the Millwoods Farmers' Market and the South Common Farmers' Market, both of which provide local Albertan food to my constituents.

In the absence of strong government action on this issue, local consumers have pressed ahead where they can to ensure that they're eating fresh, healthy, local foods not only for the nutritional benefits but because Albertans care about helping one another. Urban consumers want to ensure that Alberta's rural farmers are supported in their efforts, so when given the choice, Albertans prefer to buy local foods. Albertans also want to know that their food comes from the lowest carbon footprint possible, and eating locally produced foods helps to do just that.

As we try to engage people in the political process, we need to ensure that the legislation we pass in this House is reflective of the priorities of Albertans. While reviewing this bill, it came to my mind that the Edmonton Youth Council has recently been discussing food as an issue that's important to them in their efforts on Edmonton city council. Coincidentally, the sponsor of this bill is one of the more youthful members of our Assembly, so I know that this bill is not only something that a great majority of Albertans would support but is also an important demonstration of our Assembly's commitment to act on issues that matter to the younger voters in Alberta.

This bill also helps to further diversify our economy, something many Albertans want to see happen. If there is a strong, predictable market for locally grown foods in place, then we will see some Albertans deciding to enter career paths they would not have previously thought viable. We will see more small-scale producers, more local distributors, more restaurateurs catering to specific local cuisine. All of these are welcome spinoffs and things that have already begun to happen on a smaller scale as consumers clamour for these changes.

We are now in the enviable position of knowing that we can further the positive impacts that are happening around local food, absent much risk. We've seen Ontario and Manitoba each successfully pass their own local food acts, and we've seen consumers in Alberta race ahead of their own government on this issue. Now is the time for this government to do its part and to pass our local food act. Passing this bill is good for consumers, good for business, and good for Alberta. I hope all members will support this bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Under 29(2)(a).

The Speaker: I'm told there is no 29(2)(a).

The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the opportunity to speak to Bill 202. To be honest, this bill has me a little perplexed as to its true intent. As a farmer I have been in the production of local food for my entire life, and with my experience on the board of directors for Federated Co-operatives Limited I've been able to experience the retail and production chain coming together for the promotion of local food production. The question I ask is: what does this bill intend to accomplish that is not already

being addressed through the ways and means already in place? The hon. member has mentioned that 95 per cent of our consumers are already able to use local. She also mentioned that production and markets continue to grow through Explore Local. The previous member talked about how consumers are racing ahead of government in their attempt to buy local, and I would suggest that this is probably the most sustainable way to grow the local food economy. Existing departments within Alberta Agriculture are currently working with the local food production industry to continue sustainable growth.

So why is this bill necessary? When I read purpose 2(a), it's "to ensure a resilient, sustainable and strong local food economy and agricultural land base in Alberta." It makes me think that the bill is pertaining to food security or, possibly, that the bill is focused on a land-use framework.

Then when I go on to read purpose 2(b), "to improve and maximize economic return and food security by maintaining agricultural land for the purposes of farming and supporting the development of local food infrastructure for processing and distributing food," again, it looks like a bill about food security and land use but adds in an element of economic and infrastructure uncertainty.

Purpose 2(c), "to provide an increased and stable demand for local food through public sector organization purchasing." To provide economic certainty for local food producers and processors by mandating to the public-sector organizations who to purchase their food from; in other words, indirect subsidization of a certain segment of Alberta food production: is that the intent of the bill?

Purpose 2(d), "to increase public awareness of local food in Alberta, including the diversity of local food." Public education to bring awareness of local food production is occurring already through many different avenues. In fact, if any members wish to learn more, the Northlands Farmfair will be bringing public awareness to Edmonton from November 11 to 15.

Purpose 2(e), "to promote sustainable farming practices." Alberta Agriculture along with industry production units throughout the province have been doing this work for many years and are continuing to evolve and develop an industry that is sustainable for the long term.

Purpose 2(f), "to attract new generations into the farming profession." New producers, young and old, are being attracted into this way of life every day. They are attracted for many different reasons. Government interference in the natural attraction to the farm lifestyle sometimes encourages individuals to enter the profession for all the wrong reasons. This type of growth is often not sustainable.

Purpose 2(g), "to support indigenous food sources and systems." This bill gives no indication as to a definition of indigenous food sources and systems. I have no idea what is meant by this and would need more clarification. Also, what does the word "support" refer to? This could mean many things.

Purpose 2(h), "to promote diversity in scale and marketing in Alberta's agriculture and food system for adaptability and resilience." May I suggest that Alberta's agriculture and food systems are very resilient? These producers and the systems that we have in place with food processing and production have adapted over many years based on true demand. Real demand, not publicly engineered demand, is the surest way to sustainability in the local food economy.

Mr. Speaker, without clear intent of the purposes of Bill 202 it makes me very nervous to allow the Lieutenant Governor to choose an advisory committee and then to have this advisory committee that was chosen by the Lieutenant Governor in turn make

recommendations back to the Lieutenant Governor. I refer to section 8.

The Lieutenant Governor in Council may make regulations

- (a) prescribing limitations respecting the designation of local food under section 1(b)(ii);
- (b) prescribing organizations to be included within the definition of public sector organization;

in other words, deciding what a public-sector organization is;

- (c) concerning any additional matter or thing that is necessary or advisable in connection with the implementation of this Act.

This puts enormous weight in the hands of the Lieutenant Governor, and it appears to me that we are putting a lot of faith in the Lieutenant Governor in Council to understand the purposes of this bill.

Mr. Speaker, this bill has many areas of concern for me as a producer of local food. I am extremely concerned about the unintended consequences that this type of legislation may have. I believe that the bill's intent may be good but recognize the risks when government tries to manipulate the free-enterprise laws of supply and demand.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:50

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to rise today and speak in support of the Alberta Local Food Act. My family and I have spent many days at various farmers' markets making sure we supported local producers, and we've spent much time on the farm, so I see both sides of this. We've enjoyed the ability to pick out our own produce, our meats, and various products available. The goods we have always been lucky enough to acquire have been of the highest quality and seem to taste better, knowing where they came from and that the environmental cost of our food has been reduced. The impact that my family has had on their farming as well has been that my children have picked their own food out of the fields.

Let me share some of the reasons why farmers are going to get an economic boost as this support is translated into action, with more locally produced foods available. In 2012, Mr. Speaker, 95 per cent of Alberta households indicated a desire to purchase locally, and developing a sustainable local food system in Alberta, especially rural Alberta, is of prime importance to our local producers. Local economies allow direct access for producers to sell their products at reasonable prices, which supports a viable business model for producers both large and small. There is a huge market opportunity for connecting local producers with local consumers right here at home.

The Alberta Local Food Act supports a sustainable food supply chain from primary producers, secondary industry, and consumers alike. In the past the supply chain was not always guaranteed or viable for all involved. There are huge challenges to any producer who is trying to get products to market, so supporting the agriculture industry just makes sense.

When meeting with local interests such as the West-Central Forage Association, it was pointed out to me that insurance does not protect producers against cost increases. For example, because the price of feed is so high right now because some of the crops failed this year, some of the farmers will not be able to feed their animals this winter, so some are exiting the industry. Many feel that we will have fewer beef producers going forward because of this, which would also jeopardize the government's tax base coming from beef farmers.

We discussed the age gap in agriculture. The average age of a farmer is 55 years old, and due to the lack of capital available to younger people who don't have the assets already in place, entering the agricultural industry is prohibitive, to say the least. It is challenging to onboard young farmers who are purchasing farms or taking over family farms, ensuring that the expertise is being passed on and ensuring that business management skills are understood to be a very important skill and increasingly important to run a successful and efficient farm.

The agriculture industry is forward thinking and innovative. I believe that the Alberta Local Food Act is a forward-thinking way of supporting our farmers in the industry. Many producers do not have the capacity to do this very important work full time, so instead they supplement their income by working off the farm, which inhibits the growth of their production capabilities. Farmers are feeling pressure and concern for what the infrastructure is and will be to get their products to market.

There are many good things happening in this industry right now. The Explore Local initiative, brought forth in 2014-15, helped increase producer awareness and access to local market channels, which resulted in positive growth in sales, profitability, and increased business. Young people graduating with an agricultural sciences degree are being taught to approach farming and producing with a strong business model.

The Alberta Local Food Act allows and encourages local producers to grow the local market channels, which in turn increases the value of those channels. This equals a significant source of farm receipts for all producers in Alberta, encouraging stability and growth in the agriculture industry.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to stand today and discuss Bill 202, Alberta Local Food Act, brought forward by the member representing Strathcona-Sherwood Park. Wildrose supports enhancing a strong local food economy and agricultural land base; indeed, that is the foundation of our province. However, Wildrose does not support the gratuitous and vague legislation which leaves more questions and concerns than it answers.

The stated intention to create a stable market through public-sector purchasing is contrary to the free-market principles that Alberta's producers are looking for. Wildrose does not support government intervention in the economy, no matter how well intended. Will this legislation, in effect, be a kind of subsidy for certain local producers? Wildrose supports free and fair markets, unmitigated by government influence and control. If there are entities that find that it makes more sense to buy local, then great, but legislation is not the answer for such a solution.

I'm confused about the path that the government wants to follow with the proposed legislation. The member who proposed it, I know, is seeking some laudable goals, including diversifying and encouraging growth in the agriculture sector, providing opportunities for consultation with various stakeholders, promoting sustainable farming practices, increasing public awareness of local food in Alberta, including the diversity of local food. However, this bill is so vague that I'm not sure whether it will achieve these goals and whether there might not be a lot of unintended consequences.

In looking at the big picture, a few concerns become readily apparent. Establishing an advisory committee of 12 members provides some substantial challenges. For instance, how will these members be chosen? Is there some regional representation? Is there

a cross-section of large- and small-scale farming operators? It doesn't seem so. Who will guarantee the supply of produce? What happens if there is a poor yield? Will the onus, or responsibility, fall to the producer or the government to make up costs of potential shortfalls once government entities become dependent on local suppliers? Who will create the distribution system?

In addition to being extremely vague, there is a recognition of the associated costs. For instance, how much will this advisory committee cost taxpayers? The minister "may authorize, fix and provide for the payment of [remuneration] and expenses to any of the members of the Advisory Committee." Has this cost been budgeted? With limited dollars, are higher costs to purchase food going to take away from front-line services in places like schools, universities, and hospitals?

I also think that many pieces already are in place that could be used to reach some of the same goals without heavy-handed legislation leading to distorted markets and higher costs to taxpayers. For instance, the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation is a provincial Crown corporation with a private-sector board of directors that provides farmers, agribusinesses, and others with small-business loans, crop insurance, and farm income disaster assistance.

In a meeting with the agriculture minister on October 6 a business group from the community of Two Hills presented a concise business plan to diversify the agricultural economy in the region. They were willing to immediately put forward \$1 million of their own seed money and sweat equity to get the project going and were looking for a \$2 million loan, not a grant but a loan, to get the project up and running. They were referred to and turned down by AFSC. One of the reasons the group was turned down is that they had to come up with 50 per cent of the funding to qualify for the loan, unworkable for a lot of smaller operators. While they could apply for a small grant to hire a consultant to do market research, there appeared to be virtually no other support mechanisms available. Given that the group already had done their research as part of the proposal, the grant was not useful to them, and given that they did not have half of the loan amount, they were turned down for the loan.

Instead of going through with a massive piece of confusing and vague legislation, the minister of agriculture could work with branches such as AFSC to streamline processes and make lending more readily accessible for start-up ventures to support our local economy.

4:00

Another organization, by the name of Sunfresh Farms, brings locally grown vegetables from farm to local grocers. Sunfresh Farms is owned by Alberta farmers who grow high-quality vegetables. According to their website they believe in responsible industry practices while following the highest food safety programs. Sunfresh is audited every year and has earned a grade A in food safety. Even their company slogan promotes their interest in local food. As their famous saying goes, "At Sunfresh Farms produce is our passion."

The group of investors from Two Hills had worked with Sunfresh Farms and were assured a letter of intent to purchase every pound of produce that they could grow in their greenhouses, and still they were denied. Again, instead of pushing through this piece of legislation, why does the government not work with small and medium-sized businesses like Sunfresh and farmers' markets to support the diversification and growth of our local food economy? Instead, this legislation actually puts the government in direct competition with private businesses already established and promoting local producers.

What worries me the most about this legislation is the potential for unintended consequences that result from the vague and poorly thought-out elements. While I strongly support efforts to strengthen and diversify our local economies, I do not and cannot support this legislation.

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

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the opportunity to address Bill 202 this afternoon. As a practising veterinarian I had the great privilege for close to 30 years of working with what I'll call a very local food industry, and that was our producers in Alberta. I will tell you that I will stack our producers in Alberta up against any producers anywhere in terms of their ability to produce wholesome, sustainable, nutritious, quality, safe food.

The mover of this bill in her opening remarks certainly stated a number of areas in which there has been great success in the improvement and the enlargement, in some cases double-digit figures, of local food procurement and access, and I think that is very positive. You know, I think of initiatives like the 100-mile diet, which is one that has been embraced by people all around the world in terms of purchasing food that is produced closer to home. It does make sense.

As one who grew up in the city but then moved to a rural community and then had the tremendous privilege of working with agricultural producers who were tremendously proud of the food that they produced, I was able to procure a lot of the food directly from them. Anyone who has bought a 4-H steer at a 4-H sale will know all about that, and our clinic bought a 4-H steer every year. Some of them were former patients; nonetheless, we bought a 4-H steer every year and were happy to consume it because we knew who produced it, we knew we were supporting the club, and we knew quite often that we were making the dad of that 4-H child quite happy and that likely they would continue to be one of our customers. What goes around comes around.

I want to talk about a couple of other success stories that I'm personally familiar with. There is a farm south of Paradise Valley, Alberta. What a great-sounding place that is, Paradise Valley, Alberta. Well, Paradise Valley, Alberta, is in the constituency of Vermilion-Lloydminster, and I was privileged to do the veterinary work for one of the largest hog producers in that area. Now, they do something very interesting and really quite unusual in the pork industry, and that is that they finish their hogs outside. Once the hogs reach a size of 50 pounds, they turn them outside into shelters that are built out of round straw bales. They're out there year-round. When it's 40 below, they hunker down into the straw, and when it's warm and sunny, those pigs run around and play in the straw.

Because of this unique way of finishing hogs, this producer has been able to market his pork under a special label: Paradise Valley free-range pork. I'm very proud of that because those pigs were my patients, and the thing I know is that when I went out to see this farm – and I would do this on a regular basis – I'd be able to watch these pigs frolicking around in the straw, and these pigs were having a wonderful time.

Mr. Cooper: PC supporters.

Dr. Starke: Well, you know what? If members of the party to the right only want to buy and raise and eat pigs that are raised inside confinement facilities, they are welcome to do that, but I am quite happy to consume these happy pigs that were running about.

In any case, it's not just that, Mr. Speaker. Also in my constituency is an operation known as the Cheesiry. The Cheesiry is a very

dairy, and the cheese that is produced according to old-world techniques, that were learned by the owners in Italy, is used all around Alberta in some of the finest restaurants. In fact, not too long ago I happened to be at one of the finest restaurants in Edmonton, and there was the Cheesiry's pecorino cheese on one of their entrees. I'm proud of that.

You know, during another initiative, another opportunity that I had to visit, I visited a goat dairy near Morningside. I believe it's in the constituency of Lacombe-Ponoka. I visited the Rock Ridge Dairy there. The Rock Ridge Dairy milks over 300 dairy goats and produces some of the best goat milk yogurt and some of the best goat feta cheese you've ever tasted. Fantastic stuff. I was introduced to this through an initiative that was started a couple of years ago. It was a co-operative initiative between the department of agriculture and rural development and, at that time, the department of tourism, parks, and recreation, and Ag for Life and the Alberta Association of Agricultural Societies called Open Farm Days. I'd be really curious to know: how many members of this Legislature attended an Open Farm Days event this August? A few. Good.

This is an initiative, quite frankly, that I'm very, very proud of, and I think this is the kind of thing that promotes local food production. It promotes the skill and talent of our local chefs. It promotes an area of tourism that is going to be a burgeoning area, and that is culinary tourism. Tourists are different. Some like to go to museums, some like to go water skiing, some like to do other pursuits, but they all eat. Every last one of them eats. If you can add a culinary experience to their overall tourism, their tour and their time of holidaying in Alberta, I will tell you that that expands and adds to the experience, and that's through Open Farm Days.

Mr. Speaker, we've said nothing, for example, so far in this debate about the tremendous success of Alberta's small brewers. Craft breweries in Alberta are growing and burgeoning. This is an area of value-added for the producers of barley and hops in our area. I can tell you that all you have to do is talk once to the brewmaster of a small brewery here and listen to the pride in the product that they produce, and you'll know that this is an Alberta success story that we should all be proud of. So why do I tell you all this?

Mr. Eggen: To make us hungry.

Dr. Starke: That also is true, Mr. Minister, and especially thirsty.

Mr. Speaker, the reason I say all this is that all of this happened without specific government intervention from a local food act. Open Farm Days is a one-weekend initiative that is growing and flourishing and, I think, does a great deal to support and promote not just local food but the producers that make that food, that supports and promotes the diversity of the products, the wholeness of the products that we produce in the province of Alberta. But it does it without empowering the government to create regulations.

I'm particularly concerned about the regulations under section 8(c), "concerning any additional matter or thing that is necessary or advisable in connection with the implementation of this Act." That is unbelievably open ended. That places in the power of cabinet tremendous leeway – tremendous leeway – to do harm to our free-market economy and, indeed, the local producers that they're trying to help.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I have a great deal of trepidation about that. I would love to support local producers, and I will tell you that local food production is something that I am very passionate about. I will do anything to try and move it forward. If we can take this bill, for example, into committee and then amend it, because it needs amending, I am happy to support it in second reading because I am

in favour of local food and 95 per cent of Albertans are. But this bill needs amending.

4:10

For example, section 8(a), "prescribing limitations respecting the designation of local food under section 1(b)(ii)." Well, Mr. Speaker, what if, just hypothetically, one of those limitations is whether the farm where the food is produced has unionized workers or not? If it is the ideology of cabinet that only local food produced off premises where the workers are unionized should be designated as local food, this bill gives cabinet the power to designate any local food produced on a non-unionized shop to not qualify as local food. Is that really what you want in this piece of legislation? Is that really what you want? I suggest that it is not and that that particular clause needs to be removed from this piece of legislation.

Setting up a committee, having committee reports published on a regular basis: I don't have a problem with that. But, you know, I question whether that's really going to achieve the objectives and purposes that are stated in here. Quite frankly, I think our producers can be relied upon to do that. Our producers are already doing that. Our producers are showing tremendous resilience, tremendous ingenuity, tremendous creativity in moving their products to market and seeking new partnerships with local restaurants, with local stores and that sort of thing to sell their products. I see that happening all the time. I see that happening with the producers that I get to work with. These people are my friends, and I know the kind of work that they do. If I were to ask them, "Do we need the Local Food Act?" I think they would look at me and say: "What would that do? Why would that be of benefit to me?"

You know, I really think that a lot of this stuff can go ahead without it, Mr. Speaker. I will be in favour of the bill, but it requires significant amendments.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. I managed to forget whatever happened to my 4-H calf, but you reminded me, and a tear came to my eye again. I'm visualizing him playing in a big field with pigs.

Mr. Westhead: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take this opportunity to speak in support of Bill 202, the Alberta Local Food Act. In the big picture this bill will enhance the development of a sustainable food system in Alberta and give local producers direct access to local markets while also giving Alberta consumers better access to locally grown food, as was already mentioned. This is something that both producers and consumers alike have been asking for for quite some time.

Of course, local farmers' markets are one of the most common ways to source locally grown food. On the other hand, we can also look towards the value-added supply chain as a benefit to complementary industries such as the food and beverage and tourism sectors, that were mentioned by the member opposite. These sectors will benefit from the greater awareness of locally produced food.

To illustrate this point, Mr. Speaker, I have heard from Alberta-based craft brewers and distillers who have indicated that the Alberta-grown grains that they use in the production of beer and spirits are among the best quality in the world. This creates an incredible, mutually beneficial opportunity for Alberta brewers and distillers to open up new markets to Alberta farmers to showcase the world-class grains produced right here at home.

Mr. Speaker, there is more to the value-added chain for locally produced food that we can explore. For instance, we also know that where there are beverages, there's also usually food. I know that in

my constituency of Banff-Cochrane and across the province there are many culinary destinations that have gained a reputation for their high quality and commitment to customer satisfaction.

Mr. Speaker, imagine the potential for enhancing the dining experience if more of these restaurants were to serve a greater proportion of locally grown food complemented by locally sourced beer and spirits. Of course, this comes with an added benefit: an opportunity to enhance tourism right here in Alberta, which helps to move even further up the value-added chain.

Mr. Speaker, think of culinary destinations around the world that already set themselves apart by showcasing the use of local food and pairing that with local beer, wine, and spirits. Many jurisdictions here in Canada have already grown their tourism potential and diversified their economies with this simple formula. Take Prince Edward county in southern Ontario, for example, which has seen the rapid growth of wineries, restaurants, and overnight accommodation spaces over the last decade. And where there's wine, there's cheese, of course, made with locally sourced milk.

You see, Mr. Speaker, Bill 202 has the potential to promote and enhance not only local food production and agriculture but value-added sectors such as beer, spirits, and tourism. At this time, when Alberta is striving for a more diversified economy, Bill 202 will promote increased awareness and capacity for food grown right here at home and can help take us off the royalty revenue roller coaster.

I'd like to thank the Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park for introducing Bill 202 and urge this Assembly to support this important piece of legislation to enhance local food security and sustainability and the economic diversification that it will usher in.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to be able to rise today to speak to a bill that does affect a large number of Albertans, a bill that's very important. Now that we've heard the story of Three Little Pigs – I thought the original story was about not building your house out of straw – I trust that we won't build a bill out of straw here that leads to the same kind of problems. While I totally, totally support the idea of locally grown food and support local industry – and I'm glad to hear all of the support for and the benefits of Alberta products. The food actually is better. I totally agree. I am a little bit baffled, though – and I suppose this is the most important thing I want to say – that consumers so often choose a cheaper product. It just happens all too often.

I come from a riding that actually does produce much of its own food, and although Lacombe-Ponoka is not in what I call the big smoke of Edmonton, it is, in fact, still part of Alberta. Indeed, Lacombe-Ponoka is an area that has some of the most rich and productive farmland in all of Alberta and provides a lot of the food actually sold here in the cities, where, unfortunately, we have too much concrete and pavement. Many of the groceries that you will in fact buy here in your stores do come from the producers and the greenhouses of rural Alberta, and I would really encourage you to notice where the vegetables you buy in the grocery stores are actually grown. If they're not grown in Alberta and this matters to you, then why would you buy them if they come from some other place?

The most powerful voice you have, even greater than legislation, is where you choose to spend your money, and I would say: please support the local producers, who would love that you would buy more of their products. We don't have to set up legislation to create this; we just need to be willing to buy them. While I'm inspired by

the lofty thinking, I could save you a lot of work researching and consulting if urban people would just learn what rural people could teach them. I do think, quite frankly, that this is somewhat of an urban-rural challenge for us.

The reality is that, as has kind of been stated already, in recent years the local production of industrious farmers has increased a lot in Alberta; in fact, many multiple times over. It amazes me that industrious farmers have figured out how to grow vegetables year-round, through sunny summers and freezing winters, even in minus 40 degree temperatures, in greenhouses here in this province. The greenhouses have been growing immensely in number and in acreage that they're covering. These greenhouses are major economic contributors to our agri-economy. They supply a great deal of local Alberta food, and they do it in an economically sustainable manner.

My point is that rural Alberta is producing a lot of local food and, in fact, would willingly produce everything and more that urban city dwellers would actually buy. So the challenge here is not to research the production of local food but the buying habits and biases of city dwellers. The food could be made available if people would always choose to buy it. I guess I would say to a government of primarily urban MLAs that I really invite you – and I know that a couple of you have, but I would invite the rest of you to come out and actually tour the agriproduction that's going on in this province. There is a lot of it happening, and it is increasing; it is growing. So I add my voice to those who say: I don't see, quite frankly, how legislation is going to help it.

4:20

Rural Alberta would feed you if you were not so inclined to buy food that contradicts your values for local food consumption. The stores simply can't and won't sell what the buyer won't buy. The food is available. It's being grown in huge amounts. Some of it is even being exported. The farmers of Alberta actually have the answers to your urban questions, and I really hope that you will be consulting them in more than just a condescending kind of way. Such a conversation, I think, would really increase the needed conversation between urbanites and rural people and maybe resolve, actually, a lot of tensions in our province with regard to a lot of what happens in our different levels of government.

Here are some of the issues, though, that I know farmers, at least from my riding, would begin to raise. For instance, we've talked a couple of times – several of you have mentioned the importance of the brewing industry here in Alberta. Some of the best hops – not hops but . . .

An Hon. Member: Barley.

Mr. Orr: . . . barley. Thanks. A mental stop for a moment.

Some of the best barley production that happens in the world happens in central Alberta. In Alix there's a huge facility that was seeking to expand, and rather than being allowed to, they were prevented by Alberta sustainable development, I think it was. No. Oh, again I lost track of the word there.

An Hon. Member: Environment.

Mr. Orr: Environment. Thank you.

I think we need to solve some of these problems. There are opportunities. There are farmers willing to produce more. Rather than create legislation, we need to solve the problems. That would allow so much more to actually happen. And it can happen. If you mandate public bodies to buy locally – this would be another question – does it matter that those bodies pay more? Just because

they're public bodies, can we blindly believe that it doesn't matter what they pay?

Further, farmers ask: since this is an act to study the issue and not to actually grow food – only one of those two can you actually eat – I wonder how much this nonedible product is going to cost. Has it been budgeted for? How will it be funded? By heavier taxes on those who actually produce food?

A reeve in my riding, a reeve of one of our rural counties, recently said, and I quote him, that the thing that has changed farming the most is the Internet. Farmers today know the price of world markets up to the millisecond. They know all the regulatory issues, the animal health treatment plants, the increasing values of farmland in different areas, the newest technologies, the cost of financing. The reality is that farming is a very complex, scientific, technological, economic world, and except for hobbyists, the days of going out into the dirt with a hoe are so far gone that it's almost laughable. I truly hope that as you prepare for this bill, you will take into account the complexity of these factors, because without doing so, the results will be much less than desirable.

Farm production also is not entirely in our control. We are part of an international community. We are members of trade agreements. Any research into farm production must also take into consideration the realities of our international trade agreements, or we will be embroiled in years of international legal challenges. These are some of the complexities that this bill raises.

Although I support the intent, I do think that there is a need for a significant number of amendments to it and would be willing to see that it go to second reading so that some of these amendments could be suggested. I trust that the members across the floor here would be willing to accept some of them.

Thank you.

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

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for allowing me to rise in support of Bill 202, the Alberta Local Food Act. The Alberta Local Food Act will allow our local producers to seek direct access to markets and our consumers to enjoy homegrown products. I know my constituents from Edmonton-Manning feel passionate about this issue and would like me to rise to address it.

There is a huge market opportunity for connecting local food producers with local consumers in Alberta. Currently many of our farmers are selling directly to Albertans at Edmonton's local farmers' markets as well as through self-directed home delivery programs. These programs have continued to grow as the increased demand for local foods continues to rise. As the cost of imported foods continues to rise, local food becomes a better fiscal alternative.

Edmonton-Manning is home to many urban farmers. Our farmers share their products, produce, and harvest with our neighbours, our suppliers, and our surrounding markets. These farmers not only grow potatoes, vegetables, and berries; they also provide community engagement and education through their amazing outreach work, such initiatives as the great potato giveaway, at which we saw kilometres of Edmontonians going and picking their own potatoes. They also have a community food garden, which provides an open-farming educational opportunity for our nonprofits and allows people to come out and support our local food banks, and, of course, Open Farm Days, where many were able to come out and pick local berries with their children.

Hence, Mr. Speaker, not only is this a rural conversation, but it's an urban conversation. We need to explore how the legislation in the Alberta food act will impact not only urban farmers but rural farmers. There's a potential for there to be a driving force in all local food economies by creating food security and improving and

maximizing the return on local food and infrastructure in both rural and urban communities.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my absolute pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 202, the Local Food Act. I do have some serious concerns about the way this bill is currently being presented. The main concern, Mr. Speaker, is how it will affect Alberta families. The important question is this. If we are mandating that public bodies buy local, how will this affect farmers' markets and those families that already do buy local? The new demand placed on buying local will drive costs as large users – end-users, hospitals, seniors' homes – drive up demand. Will the small but growing section of organic and local produce start to disappear from our grocery stores as government entities buy it up, or will the option to buy local or organic simply become too expensive for the average family and be reserved only for those that can afford it?

While the breadth of product has never been as wide as it is today, we still need to rely on other products from other markets for the health and well-being of Albertans. I've never really seen a pineapple grow in this climate.

Mr. Speaker, this leads to another important question that this bill needs to answer, and that is whether this will affect the quality of care for our seniors. By forcing seniors' facilities to buy local, the cost of providing meals to seniors could increase. How would this bill be an advantage to Alberta seniors if we drive up their food costs and eat into their budgets?

What about school lunch programs? Already school boards struggle to pay for these programs. Will mandating where these organizations obtain their food impact the cost of delivering these important programs?

Mr. Speaker, the list goes on of the negative consequences this bill would bring to Albertans. I will end my time by talking about the group this bill intends to help. What is the evidence that any Alberta farmers are having any difficulty getting their products to market? Alberta's agrifood exports continue to grow, and local farmers' markets continue to thrive. It's entirely unclear what problem this bill is attempting to solve. There is already a vehicle developed for small producers, organic or otherwise, to sell and distribute their wares, and that is through the Alberta approved farmers' markets. It would be better to expand and improve the current farmers' market system rather than to create a new, competing system with a bloated bureaucracy that might put undue burden on limited tax dollars.

4:30

Mr. Speaker, Alberta does not need a 12-member advisory council to evaluate what foods can and should be grown locally. The free market has already done an excellent job ensuring we have a wide variety of healthy and locally grown food, and I've seen it start to get advertised right here in my local grocery store. It's fantastic.

I'm concerned that we need to ensure that all Albertans can make the choice to access this locally grown produce and not lose out when this government mandates that all locally grown food be distributed to its own facilities.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise on this. I think that many members of the House but perhaps not all may know that I spent 25 years in the food business before I was

elected. Unlike my colleague from Vermilion-Lloydminster, who dealt with livestock while they were still walking and making noises, I dealt with them in the meat business after they were done walking, after they went to camp. As such, I have a strong feeling for agricultural producers in Alberta since I spent a good part of my life actually getting what they produce to market and, I believe, helping them get a fair price for it and bringing rewards back to the farms in Alberta, that continue to support our economy and did back then, short term and long term.

Let me also say that I want to compliment the basic idea behind the hon. member that brought the bill forward. I think it's a great idea to encourage Albertans to buy food locally. It is, full stop. I wish it was just that simple, Mr. Speaker. I know we heard an hon. member here, that obviously has some roots in the farming business, say: why wouldn't you buy local? I agree with that. The problem is that the bill talks about putting undetermined rules in place that may restrict some element of local food production. It's a place we have to be careful of.

Albertans are industrious people, so industrious that in every major area of the economy Albertans produce way more product than Albertans can consume. It's true in the energy industry, it's true in the tourism industry, it's true in the forestry industry, and it's most certainly true in the agricultural industry, in the food industry, Mr. Speaker. So we have to be careful. As well intentioned as the rules that somebody might put in might be to encourage people to buy locally, if we restrict products coming into Alberta, then there's a very good chance that someone else will restrict products going out of Alberta, and of course if that happens, then we choke off the tremendously valuable agriculture industry, that this province has depended upon since before we were a province. These are concerns of mine.

My colleague from Vermilion-Lloydminster talked about some of the restrictions that may be put on producers, and while I agree with what my colleague said, I'm going to add another concern, Mr. Speaker, and that is on how much the legislation may open it up. Some decisions need to be made locally. I live in a city. In Alberta I know that there are some cities that allow, for example, chickens to be grown in the city. Myself, I think it's a bad idea. I do. A wise person once told me: "It took us a hundred years to get the livestock out of the city. Why would you let them back in?" It's not that we don't love livestock. You know, I have a confession to make: I'm addicted. Like many members of this House, I'm addicted to three meals a day, and those meals largely don't come from the city. They come from rural Alberta.

To the hon. member that talked about giving rural Alberta credit: I applaud that. He's bang on. I think that as part of this discussion it's worth a couple of minutes to just talk about that. When we go to some of the best restaurants – and I know my colleague talked about that – whatever you see that comes out on the plate generally speaking does not come from the city. Yeah, sure, there are some exceptions – I appreciate that – but it's an area where we need to appreciate one another. I think rural Alberta already appreciates the fact that their products get consumed in greater amounts where the population is bigger, and people in those bigger population centres actually need to have a genuine appreciation for those people that toil every day to prepare those foods at the beginning, whether it's livestock or whether it's crops of some sort.

But my concern, Mr. Speaker, with this legislation is indeed the rules that may be put into place. The devil, as they say, resides in the details. I think that at this point I will repeat, because I don't want anybody to get the wrong impression, that I applaud the member who brought this forward. Encouraging people to buy local is a great idea. It really is. Unfortunately, the words, the black-and-white words that Albertans will have to live with if this gets passed,

leave it open that some of the rules may be counterproductive to Albertans' better interests and even counterproductive to perhaps the better interests of Albertans that produce food within 50 or a hundred miles of where people live. So as it is, I can't support the bill for that reason even though it's well intended.

Let me say this. As my hon. colleague suggested, if there was a motion to send it to committee to iron out some of these things, I think I could support that, but in its current form – and I mean no disrespect – not a chance. And not a chance because I'm afraid of hurting the very thing that I believe the bill is intended to help. The words don't, in my opinion, match up with the intention as well as they could, and they're left too wide open, in a way that could be negative instead of positive.

So there it is, Mr. Speaker. With the right amendments or a referral to committee I could support it, but in its current form, even though I agree that it's well intended, I'm unable to support it.

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

Miranda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in support of the Alberta Local Food Act and echo as well the sentiments that have been expressed here about the great farmers we have in Alberta and about the great produce that makes our foods very, very good. As we have heard, the objective of this bill is to promote a resilient and sustainable local food economy and agriculture land base in Alberta.

The issues addressed by the bill are important to the constituents of Calgary-Cross and, more specifically, to the community of Vista Heights, the home of the Vista Heights container food garden, where children are learning about agriculture and, hopefully, attracting the next generation of farmers from the urban centres. The community garden is a project that seeks to address the issues of lack of access to affordable and healthy food as well as limited growing space, that is a reality of an urban community. This bill is great because it will develop a local food and agriculture strategy, which is very important to my constituents as well as all Albertans. It will create a new market opportunity to connect local food producers with local consumers in Alberta, and I would ask my colleagues to support it.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 202. Like many in the House, I commend the member for raising this important issue. You know, we've seen a number of things over the past 175 days or whatever it's been since the election on the 5th of May, and one thing that we've seen very little of from this government is a discussion, a conversation, a mere mention of the agriculture industry in Alberta. In fact, if we reflect back – and I know it's a while ago – to the throne speech, there wasn't even the word "agriculture" in the throne speech. I know the constituents of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills were disappointed in that lack of acknowledgement of the importance of rural Alberta. In fact, the throne speech I think said "farmer" once but didn't address that significant, significant role that agriculture plays in our province.

4:40

I'm super pleased to see the private member today bring this bill to the House so that we can have a discussion, so that we can have a conversation around agriculture and its importance. One thing is very clear, that when it comes to our province's economy, it all begins in rural Alberta. Whether it's the ag industry or the energy industry, basically all of the things that power our economy begin

in rural Alberta, and it is of utmost importance that we continue to have this discussion around the importance of agriculture.

I think another thing that we've seen today is a significant difference between the government side of the House and the opposition side of the House. We've seen many government members today rise on this private member's bill and express a desire to support Bill 202, and we've seen a number of folks on the opposition side rise today and express some significant concern, and at the heart of that concern in many respects is this chasm between the government and the opposition, where we see bills like this. While they may not be intended to provide expansion in the scope of government – government overreach, adding to the size of government, and, generally speaking, growing government and providing avenues for more government intervention into the economy – we see the government supporting a bill that really has the potential of doing that. We see many of the opposition members speaking about the strength of local producers, the strength of the free market, the strength of our agriculture industry, the strength of a government that's smaller, not larger.

It's interesting. Even when we're talking about the Alberta Local Food Act, this ideological divide between government members and opposition members can present itself. As you go through the bill, you can see so many potential risk factors and areas that really should provide pause. People on both sides of the House should look and say: what sort of doors, what sort of boxes are we opening that present serious risk and, particularly in a couple of cases, some really, really big, gaping holes? While I recognize that the intention is laudable and well meaning, the risks are way too great to support, particularly when we write into pieces of legislation – and I recognize that it's not the cabinet but that it is the Lieutenant Governor. I'll just briefly read from the bill, from the definitions. We have these catch-all statements like: "any other organization prescribed in the regulations." Well, we take out of the hands of the Assembly and put into the hands of the regulations this wide-sweeping power to then begin to add into or write into legislation. Even though it doesn't actually wind up in the bill and ends up in the regulations, this is some significant risk.

Another significant risk in the intention of the bill when it comes to definitions is that it speaks a lot about agricultural lands in the bill, but there's no definition of what agricultural lands mean in the definitions portion of the bill. So we have a significant risk or concern that we wind up getting bogged down around: well, is this agricultural land, or is it not?

I guess a couple of other questions really need to be asked. What exactly will another committee do or solve that's not already being done out there amongst the agricultural producers? We've seen so many times in previous governments and other forms of democracy where these well-intentioned committees wind up costing extreme amounts of money but never actually produce anything that's meaningful to the front-line producer.

As we continue through the bill, we ask the question: why do we need more government intervention? I guess the other real question that I have when it comes to this particular piece of legislation and certainly for the member is: what sort of discussion has actually taken place with producers? We have all sorts of committees right across the province, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to agricultural committees, whether it's hog producers' associations, beef producers, grazing lease folks, just all sorts of different committees who are already working diligently on issues of feeding not only the province but, in fact, our country. What sort of consultation has taken place? I think that we run the risk of passing a piece of legislation and then consulting after, and we've seen many of the detrimental effects of that in the past when we take this sort of government-knows-best approach.

I think some members from the third party have made a reasonable suggestion to send this to committee and allow expert testimony. I know it's something that we have spoken about a lot, the need to reform this Assembly and be able to utilize committees so that we can provide expert witnesses because not everyone – I know it's hard to believe – on that side of the House actually has all the answers, and not everyone on this side of the House actually has all the answers. But there are producers and experts out there that, if it was a committee, we would have that opportunity to receive information from and find out if this is, actually, really needed.

The other question that I'd like to know about – and some people have talked about it today – is a cost-benefit analysis. The cost that's going to be spent on the committee: is it, in fact, going to deliver any tangible results for Albertans? And not only just for Albertans but for producers of local food as well, because it's so critical that we don't get in the way of producers any more than is absolutely necessary. If the government can do one thing well, it should be to get out of the way of Albertans.

We see that every time the government expands their role, every time we see the government adding ministries like diversification and trade, we run this risk of providing more intervention. We run the risk of the government being in charge of picking winners and losers, the government providing more corporate welfare. While that may not be the discussion exactly around the Local Food Act, this divide between ideologies is so clear, where they want to expand the government and we want to shrink the government. The government ought to be doing what they can to get out of the way of local producers, not getting in the way. I love it when we talk about these ideological divides as well because it gets the government so excited about the ideas that the Official Opposition have to provide for them.

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

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I'm honoured as a retired, well, semiretired, I guess, restaurant manager to kind of clarify a lot of the things that I saw with my experience in the market. As it comes to buying local, we have started seeing that huge trend of it becoming something that's very big. The one thing that I want to say that's a little bit unfortunate that I see, to clarify for the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, is that while there is food tourism that does exist, there's a surprising amount of it that does exist out of province. So what I think that this bill – and I'm happy to stand here and support this bill – really looks at encouraging is finding ways for a lot of these local restaurants to get access to the local products that they need. This will really help us diversify our tourism sector and really help a lot of these markets grow as well.

4:50

Some of the things that we see the biggest challenges in are a couple of things. One is from local suppliers not being able to fully grasp what the demand is for products. I had an opportunity recently to speak with a local brewer, several actual local brewers, and they outlined that there is an issue seeking out local hops in Alberta. The problem is that they have difficulties connecting with the farmers and letting them know that there is an existing demand for local hops. So a lot of hops for microbrews, unfortunately, come from out of province, where this could be ultimately a more profitable margin for some of the local farmers to seek out. Ultimately I see that this bill has a good way of encouraging growth within local farms and also local businesses as well.

Some of the other challenges that we see for smaller restaurants that are looking to diversify is that they are actually one of the

biggest purchasers of local products. A lot of the larger chain restaurants use prepackaged, precooked foods, not all but some of them, which is buying outside of the province, buying products that are not manufactured here, locally. Now, the challenges that we see of these smaller restaurants is that because they are competing against larger players, they are having to buy local products, they are having to seek out the providers for them, and subsequently it's costing them a lot more than it would the larger businesses, and it's creating a difficulty for them to diversify and ultimately expand.

The biggest challenge that I saw as a local restaurant manager was the fact that these smaller players are having a lot of challenges getting access to the products, and some of the local farmers are having a challenge selling these products. Ultimately I think that we have an opportunity with this bill to bring it forward to a review panel that can identify some of these issues and then bring them forward and help us remedy these. We see a lot of successes out of other provinces. In Ontario, when it comes to some of their local farm products, you see tagging of this. As much as we see in this province that there's a huge amount of pride for things like Alberta beef, I would love to see that pride exist for Alberta potatoes or even Alberta greenhouse cucumbers, if you will. We've already seen some players embracing this concept. In Calgary the Calgary Co-op chain out there has really embraced the buy local model. Unfortunately, they are a large player, so they have the resources to do this, whereas the smaller players may not necessarily have those.

Mr. Speaker, just speaking in regard to this, I support this motion because I really believe it will help a lot of the smaller players excel and help us diversify this economy.

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

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank, too, the member for bringing this forward, for the opportunity for both sides of the House to discuss one of the most important things to us in such great length and to hear so many different viewpoints. Five thoughts have been running through my mind as I've been hearing the debate, and I would just like to briefly touch on those.

I'd like to tell you a little about the constituency that I'm very fortunate to represent, Cypress-Medicine Hat: about a hundred miles by a hundred miles, with ranches on one side of it often as big as a township. You say to the rancher, "How many cows does that section support on an annual basis?" and the answer is quite often: one, maybe two. You move west, and we have the irrigated land and the type of crops that the Member for Calgary-Shaw just talked about – because of irrigation we grow potatoes, we grow sugar beets, we grow beans, and we grow all kinds of alfalfa and wheat – turkey farms, all kinds of wheat farms, all kinds of strong, independent farmers.

Then I heard the word "greenhouses" used in this debate quite a bit. The town of Redcliff, with 6,500 people, right beside Medicine Hat in the constituency of Cypress-Medicine Hat, has 160 acres under glass, that produces an amazing \$40 million to \$50 million a year. At the opposite ends of this production a lot of greenhouse operators, when they're busy working somewhere on their facilities or when they're just away, leave the front door open with a little cash box that says: "Help yourself to a tomato or a cucumber or whatever you want. Leave me two bucks or three bucks or whatever you think." It's an absolutely vibrant local community, a local economy.

On the other end the producers have set up Red Hat Co-operative, with probably 300 or 400 employees, that packages and provides food for the entire province, for Canada, and for the northwestern United States. Such a good business now, a big business now, where in the winter, when things are a bit slow or when production gets

too good, they actually buy from California or Mexico and repackage. It's a strong, strong local business that has become almost an international business.

In three and a half years of being an MLA and asking many, many of these producers what they think government needs to do to support a strong local food economy, an agriculture land base, the answer is consistent, and it's: "Get out of the way. Stay out of the way." I think of the greenhouses going along great guns until the federal government changed the legislation on temporary farm workers. They are scrambling as to what the changes may mean.

I look at the Red Hat facility, that provides so much for the constituents of Cypress-Medicine Hat, for the recipients of tax dollars for Alberta. It's in the town limits of Redcliff. If it was a mile or even half a mile further away, totally different zoning rules would apply, totally different government rules would apply, and the temporary farm workers would be under agriculture, not under the work part, and the whole problem would go away. Colleagues, this is government regulation at its worst.

The second thing that I think about when I hear the debate, not so much in the last throne speech but certainly in the PC throne speeches before, the talk was always: "Let's do what we can to reduce interprovincial trade barriers. Let's reduce interprovincial trade barriers. Let's strengthen our trade with B.C., Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and the rest of Canada. Let's build trade like what's going on around the world so we can have more jobs, so we can have more value, so we can have more diversification with added value in food processing." This could be a huge step in the way of that. I absolutely believe and I absolutely hope that the one thing that your government does is go as far as you can to reduce interprovincial trade barriers so that there are more opportunities for all Canadians.

The third thing I thought of: let's look at a business that the government is not involved in, the food business. In Medicine Hat when I walk my dog at 10:30 at night, I see Safeway and Superstore and Co-op and Sobeys with trucks lined up and food being provided and the work going on all night. You go into the store the next day: all kinds of selection, all kinds of good prices, and on top of that we've got vibrant farmers' markets. We've got the greenhouses that I was talking about. We have a strong, vibrant business that works on its own, that has great prices, great selection, and provides great, great value for Albertans.

Let's look at a business that the government is involved in. Let's look at the opposite. Easily the number one concern, the number one complaint in my constituency office is Alberta Health Services. People call me that have just paid \$27,000 to go to Kalispell or Great Falls, Montana – yeah, those two booming economic metropolises – to get their knees or hips done because we couldn't do them in Alberta.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, particularly about Cypress-Medicine Hat. However, the time limit for consideration of the business has concluded.

5:00 Motions Other than Government Motions

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Child Care Facilities

502. Cortes-Vargas moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to consider the feasibility of including child care facilities in new government buildings where these facilities

are in short supply and urge the federal government to do the same.

Cortes-Vargas: Mr. Speaker, thank you for allowing me to rise again and speak about the need for child care facilities in our government buildings. It is my privilege to be here today to suggest the opportunity that our government buildings present in providing much-needed child care spaces. To provide some context, in March 2015 Alberta had just over 105,000 child care spaces, with approximately 86,000 enrolled. Provincial enrollment is at 82 per cent of space capacity, and I know that within my own rural constituency finding buildings with extra space to accommodate child care facilities is hard.

Large urban centres, in particular, are pressure points for child care spaces. In March 2015 Calgary enrolment was 95 per cent of the total space capacity, down slightly from March 2014, when enrolment was 98 per cent. By comparison, enrolment in the Edmonton region was 81 per cent of the total space capacity, closer to the provincial average of 82 per cent. In March 2015 there were just about 2,500 active child care programs, and approximately 50 per cent of those were for-profit programs, and 50 per cent were not for profit.

As of December 2014 825 child care programs, approximately 35 per cent, were located in schools and provided around 32,000 child care spaces. School spaces, however, are subject to the demands of educational needs; therefore, these programs must relocate if the school's need demands more space. This kind of disruption to programming creates uncertainty for many working parents that plan months in advance to co-ordinate their busy schedules. Preschools and out of school care programs linked to schools have several benefits. Preschools attract new children into school communities and provide an early learning opportunity for preschool children prior to entering kindergarten. Moreover, out of school care programs extend the hours of care for kindergarten and school-aged children for parents who are working or studying.

Mr. Speaker, access to child care space plays an important role in advancing women's equality by enabling more women to enter the paid workforce or pursue education. It is in this way that we can support both jobs and families in Alberta, by providing child care facilities. In the early 1990s the federal government helped establish workplace daycare centres in federal buildings across the country, providing full rent subsidies as long as 70 per cent of the spaces were used by parents working in the public service. One excellent local example of child care spaces is the Canada Place Child Care Society, which is a not-for-profit organization that operates a daycare program, giving priority to children of employees of the Canada Place federal building.

Currently, assistant deputy ministers of Human Services, Education, and Infrastructure have identified that further work is necessary to find workable solutions under the current legislation's framework, and longer term solutions may involve legislation changes to support government capital investments for child care programs in government buildings such as schools, civic centres, leisure centres, and museums. Mr. Speaker, we should not miss out on this opportunity to support Albertans' families through child care spaces in our government buildings.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, it's my pleasure to rise today as shadow minister for Human Services and the Status of Women. As a working mom I understand the pressures parents face when it comes to making child care choices for their families. I

would like to thank the Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park, the luckiest member in this House, I might add, for putting forward this motion. I know this motion is an attempt to make child care more affordable and accessible for families, and this is an admirable goal, as most parents here would agree. The motion we are debating today urges the government to consider the feasibility of building child care spaces in new government buildings.

Let me start off by saying that I agree with the spirit of the motion. Meeting the need to access child care for working families is a very noble goal, but I do have some concerns about the way this motion is worded. Maybe the wording is too vague, but I can only assume that any potential outcomes from this initiative would either be aimed towards provincial employees as primary clients or moving in the direction of making the provincial government the primary supplier of child care services.

Let me be clear. We highly value the work of our public-sector officials. They keep our government running and help deliver the services that Albertans rely on, whether it's in education, health care, or transportation. They deserve, just like any other Albertan, to have the best child care choices available to them, that are best for their families. The question is really not whether public servants deserve quality access to child care but whether, given the extraordinary financial circumstances our province is facing, it is a good way to spend limited resources on improving child care support for all Albertans.

The way this motion reads, it certainly gives the impression to most Albertans in the private sector that they would have a limited ability to use these new mandated child care spaces. For the thousands of parents who work in the private sector or who are self-employed it's hard to imagine a scenario where they would benefit from this. Let's remember the pain that Albertans are feeling right now. In the energy sector alone there have been 40,000 jobs lost. In several companies there have been wage reductions and hours cut. Many parents are working without the piece of mind of knowing that they'll have a job at the end of the month.

However, it's hard for us to understand whether or not this proposed study would focus just on new buildings for MLAs and government-sector employees here in Edmonton or apply to new schools and health care facilities as well. Would it apply to seniors' homes or just buildings like the new federal building? How beneficial would it be? What would the cost be? How would these facilities operate? Would the new government allow for choice and private operators, or would it be strictly government run? Would private operators pay rent to help cover the costs of construction? Would there be changes to the programs that currently exist, and how much choice would this take away from families who want freedom in choosing the type of child care that works best for their families? Ultimately, this could create massive new spending increases while producing limited benefits for the majority of Alberta families.

If the province is going to spend valuable taxpayer resources studying ways of improving child care in Alberta, I believe that there are better ways to do it. The Wildrose wants to see government child care grants become more flexible in the type of child care they can be used for. The Wildrose wants to maintain a child care approach that prioritizes support for parents with the highest financial need. This means supporting parental choice in child care and ensuring the province has resources available to support these decisions. With Alberta's birth rate among the highest in the country, we need to make sure that every parent who needs access to support can receive it.

I tend to think our Premier had it right when she said in opposition, "We still at the end of the day in this province need a child care strategy that actually addresses the growing child care

needs of Alberta's young families." This motion as it reads fails to achieve this goal. There would be no caps on potential costs, and it would leave tens of thousands of young Alberta families paying more in taxes to subsidize child care for MLAs and their government-sector counterparts.

For these reasons, while I applaud the member for the spirit of this motion, I cannot support it as it is written. There are just too many questions that can't be answered. I'm concerned the motion will mean the waste of valuable resources as we prepare for the province's largest deficit in provincial history. I want to look towards strategies that will benefit all families from Medicine Hat to Calgary to Edmonton to Airdrie to Grande Prairie and to Fort McMurray. At the end of the day this motion falls short in achieving that.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North West.

5:10

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wasn't going to stand up, but the Member for Airdrie has gotten me thinking about a couple of things, and I did want to speak now because I feel like I have to correct something that is just jarring me a little bit.

First of all, I want to say that I absolutely support this motion. Absolutely. I have to say that as a single mom with a child, who worked shift work for an entire 25-year broadcasting career, I really needed daycare. It was the first thing I thought about when I woke up in the morning; it was the last thing I thought about before I went to bed at night. Who's going to pick my daughter up in the morning? Is she going to be sick, and will I have to call in sick because of it? All of these stresses you have to face as a single mom.

When the Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park brought this forward, sure, there are a lot of questions. Frankly, these are things that – you know, motions are motions. They're an opportunity for us to sit and discuss things that are very important, and for that I say kudos. I think this is a fantastic opportunity to discuss something that is badly needed. Moreover, I think where I would like to see this discussion go is where it helps people like me when I was working shift work, moms who work shift work.

As associate minister of family and community safety a little over a year ago I had an opportunity to go to Yellowknife for a first ministers' meeting on women's issues. One of the things the ministers around the table talked about was the need in every single province in this country for not only affordable child care but child care at times when women needed those child care spaces so they could take the kinds of jobs that were available mostly to men, especially when you look at areas like the trades and you look at oil and gas jobs, et cetera.

I would say this. I am fully supportive of this motion. I think it's a fantastic opportunity to discuss something. The details, to me, are there to be worked out in the discussion, and I think that that is really not the most important part of it right now. To me the important part is: how do we make it accessible for women so that they can access the kinds of jobs so they have that equality, the equality of pay, to look forward to as well?

So kudos to you, Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park. I would look forward to discussing this in our committees and hopefully moving forward with it somewhere. I applaud you.

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

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to raise a few questions and concerns about the motion brought forward by the Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park. The motion says that all new government buildings should receive daycare facilities. Does

this mean daycare for schools, daycare for hospitals, daycare in seniors' centres? Now, I understand that the motion says: where feasible. The question I have relates to the meaning of the word "feasible." Where do we draw the line to determine what is feasible?

As the Member for Airdrie said, we do support the spirit of this bill. Increasing child care spaces in the province is something that we need to study and we need to take a look at very seriously. It is a noble goal. It's something that as Wildrosers we support. We believe that it should be supported by the government and by all members in order to be able to help all Albertans, not just one sector.

I do believe that this motion is vaguely phrased. An evaluation of child care programs in Alberta may be a good thing, but this motion focuses on spaces only and ignores other aspects of provincial child care. Since the motion is for government buildings, the government would need to perform an evaluation of the need and plan for the space. It does say: child care in new government buildings. We know that in Alberta we need more spaces, but we also desperately need other new infrastructure. We just heard about the need for major changes to the Royal Alexandra hospital in Edmonton, as an example. The motion says: where feasible and where in short supply. But, again, who decides what that means?

Allowing Albertans to have access to child care through this motion is, again, as I said earlier, a noble goal. But there are many ways to allow people to have more access to child care; for example, lower taxes, which we promote. A strong economy benefits everyone, including families and low-income families. We need to take a look at the big picture as well as the single issues to make sure that we've got the right solution.

If they follow the public model, then they may be paying caretakers close to minimum wage. I spoke with a daycare facility in Grande Prairie just recently. They pay their employees \$12 for minimum experience and \$17 an hour for a full-time degree in that industry. Not only that, but with the increase to minimum wage a person with a degree may not want a job that only pays \$2 an hour more than minimum wage. This daycare pays their graduate employees over 50 per cent more than minimum wage. The increase to minimum wage to \$15, which we will see shortly, will hugely increase the cost of daycare. Those people with a degree are still going to want a 50 per cent increase over the minimum wage, which will be closer to \$22.50 an hour.

Now, as a father of five children I'm concerned and interested when it comes to the options for child care in Alberta and look forward to future discussions in the House on this topic. I appreciate what the member is trying to achieve with this motion. I just believe that we need more details and a wider consideration of this issue at this time. One of the things that I believe is very important is to understand the consequences of other policies that this government is bringing forward – and I've talked about it a little bit – such as the \$15 minimum wage.

We have 50 per cent of the child care spaces provided by public and 50 per cent provided by private. The question that I've received as I've talked to different people in this industry throughout Alberta is: where is this government wanting to take the child care industry? Is it going to be all public, or are they going to keep the ratio at 50-50? In my opinion, this is something that a lot of people need to have discussion on, and I hope that the government will take this and look seriously at the implications before driving forward with this.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll just speak very, very briefly to this. I believe that members should support this motion. I think that it is actually very valuable.

It is not a comprehensive report or a comprehensive policy on child care. It merely says that when the government is opening new buildings, it should consider the feasibility of including child care. Now, somehow that has been transformed by our colleagues opposite in the Wildrose into a tremendous number of things that it doesn't say. It doesn't say that it has to be public child care or private child care or any kind of child care. It doesn't say that it's going to increase the deficit. It doesn't say that it's going to bring the end of civilization as we know it. It just says that we should consider the feasibility of including a child care centre when we build a new government building.

Now, it doesn't mean that that takes away from private child care. We believe that child care should be available on an affordable basis for all Albertans who are working. I as a father had a wonderful opportunity with our youngest son. My wife worked, and I worked. We had access to a city child care when he was very young, and we also used a private child care, and we were satisfied with both. But to read into it all of these things in order to create a pretext for voting against the motion – and that's all it is, Mr. Speaker – belies the Wildrose's claim that they actually support child care. I don't think they do. I think they are being a little bit disingenuous.

When the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner talks about the minimum wage adding to the costs of child care, he's simply underlining the low value which society places on child care workers. It's women's work, it's undervalued, and it's not needed: Mr. Speaker, that seems to be the implication that is being made here.

5:20

Mr. Cooper: Point of order.

The Speaker: A point of order has been noted.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to a point of order under Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j). The hon. minister knows it well. Language that

- (h) makes allegations against another Member;
- (i) imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member;
- (j) uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner never, ever once in his comments implied, discussed, or said anything of the nature that child care work was women's work. In fact, I'm quite insulted. This language is clearly creating disorder in the House, and I think it would be wise for the member to withdraw his comment.

Mr. Mason: Well, Mr. Speaker, I appear to have touched a nerve on the opposite side, and it's not unusual to create disorder on that side. In the event that I perhaps went too far in imputing that, I would apologize to the hon. member in the House for that comment.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker . . .

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Mason: Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. It was going so well that I thought we were going to get there before.

Please proceed. You were making another point.

Debate Continued

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Having said that, it does really speak to the fact that child care work is undervalued in our society, and the suggestion that it should be done for minimum wage is, I think, an unfortunate one. Our children are our most valuable assets, and they deserve to have very high-quality care and to have the people that provide that care properly compensated. That was the point I was trying to make.

The basic point that I'm trying to make is that it's a simple motion to say that we should review whether or not child care facilities are needed and warranted when we build new government buildings. I think the same thing applies and should apply across the board in the private sector as well. It's no reason to fear that this is the thin edge of a wedge of some sort of socialist master plan to enslave our children, Mr. Speaker.

I think we should support this motion. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hopefully, the words that I say aren't going to incite a riot or anything here. I don't think they will.

I rise today strongly in favour of this motion. You know, there are many parents in this room who can understand the difficulties in finding accessible and affordable child care. I live in Beaumont, but my constituency of Leduc-Beaumont was one of the seven fastest-growing in Canada for a number of years, and it's extremely hard to find child care. The opportunity to offer child care spaces in public buildings such as schools would be invaluable to a large number of Albertans, especially women looking to re-enter the workforce or further their education.

Preschool and out of school care linked to schools is incredibly helpful to many parents. I know this personally because having my youngest son in preschool at the same school as my older son was a godsend to us. My wife works shift work, and it's extremely hard to find child care for shift workers. We don't have any family here. Actually, truth be told, my brother-in-law lives in the city, but he's an urbanite and never comes out to Beaumont, so it's a little tough to get him out there. So having a shift worker in the family and myself working full-time was always very hard, but having the preschool in the school, the opportunity to work together and have out of school care after was fantastic for us and a lot of people that I know in my area.

I think that as has been said here, this motion is a positive step forward. It's a base for us to go from. We can have discussions about it. It's not talking about details or giving any, you know, specifics right now because we want to have this discussion. It's extremely important to have this discussion because Alberta is just a burgeoning province that people move to, and to have no child care spaces available is extremely difficult.

I'll keep mine short – the minister said his was brief, but mine will be sweet, I guess – and say that this is all because I think of what my wife had to go through working shift work a lot, and it was extremely difficult for us. I'm hopeful that this will make it a lot easier for a lot of Alberta families.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there any other members who would like to speak to Government Motion 502? Calgary-West.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much. Like my colleague from Calgary-North West, I was somewhat inspired by what many people had to

say here. I was a shift worker for many years. In fact, I knew nothing different. So I can tell you on behalf of emergency services such as the police and fire and, I'm sure, my colleague here to my right from the EMS that affordable child care is something that I would be in favour of. I can tell you that there are many, many police officers that have had to put their careers on hold, male and female.

For those of you that do not know – and why would you? – I was a single father for a number of years. My significant other had died in a tragic car accident. Like many of my teammates that I worked with downtown, we were on our way to the tactical team, but I had to sit back and reflect: do I really need to make my daughter have no parents? I can tell you that child care was an issue for me back then. I'm very fortunate that I had my mother and other family members to rely upon, but I can tell you that not all Albertans have that.

I was kind of not sure what this motion was. I give kudos where kudos are due. The hon. Infrastructure minister, you know, really explained that this is just a motion to sit there and say: "Hey, you know what? It's just something that we want to consider for new buildings that are being created." I don't have an issue with that. If it's something that's going to spark further discussion and it's going to help, as I say, single parents or any young family or women that are trying to re-enter the workforce or even men trying to re-enter the workforce, then I would be, of course, in favour of that.

Thank you very much for your time.

5:30

Ms McKittrick: Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to point out to the members opposite that one of the best examples of child care in a seniors' home is located in Strathmore-Brooks, where a seniors' home not only houses a child care facility and therefore provides a child care operator with good, permanent space at a reasonable rate, but it provides the children with the ability to interact with the older residents, and it's really been of mutual benefit. In the same riding there's a project going on where a child care facility is going to be located in a long-term care centre. I think it's really important for the members opposite to know that even in their own riding there are some very innovative projects that model what the motion is trying to do, and I really commend the Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park for bringing this forward.

I recently had the owner of a private child care come to my office because the landlord had raised her rent about 300 times. This is one of the best operated child cares in my riding and is facing a lot of uncertain time. By providing child care in provincial and federal government buildings, we are going to ensure that child care operators, be they private or nonprofit, have access to secure rents so that they can continue to provide the kind of child care we need in our communities.

I really would urge everyone to support this motion.

The Speaker: Are there any other members who would like to speak to Government Motion 502?

Ms Luff: Mr. Speaker, I'm honoured today to rise to speak to Motion 502. I also am a mother. I have two children under the age of three, so this motion particularly speaks to me and particularly as an MLA from Calgary. Calgary is one of the fastest growing cities in Alberta, and in Calgary enrolment in daycare is often 95 per cent of space capacity. In talking to people in Calgary, space is hugely an issue. I have a friend who runs a day home. She has a master's in education degree. She arrived here from the Philippines. She's really making a go of it, but a huge barrier to her expanding her daycare, which is in huge demand, is lack of available space. What we're really talking about here is space and making space

available. We're not talking about whether we're having public daycare or private daycare. We're just talking about looking at making more space available. I support that absolutely.

One type of opportunity I'm particularly interested in is the linking of child care centres to schools. Many of the schools that we're building are in these new communities that are growing. They have young families. These are communities that need daycare, and I can tell you that you really can't underestimate, as my colleagues have said, being able to drop all your children off at daycare and school in the same place. I have friends who drive across the city an hour – they add an hour of commute to their day every day – to drop their children off at a child care space that they feel comfortable with. To be able to have child care in your school so you can drop off all three of your children at the same place every day really can't be underestimated.

We actually have a really amazing example of school-based daycare, not quite in my riding. I believe it's in the hon. Minister of Finance's riding, but our ridings hug. It's a preschool program. It's at Jack James high school, and it's a really innovative program. It's unique. It provides quality, community-based preschool, and it also helps high school students study for a career in child care. It's a community-based preschool – anyone can go there – but it's also a training program. There are two qualified preschool teachers but also on any given day 10 to 16 grades 11 and 12 students who are practising to be child care providers. As a mom I can't imagine a better spot for my kids than somewhere where there are all of those people helping to create a positive educational experience. That's the kind of model that we could look at when we're thinking of school-based child care programs.

Really, I just feel that I wanted to speak to this bill because it really speaks to who we are as an NDP government. We're a government that's really striving to create a more equal society and one that celebrates parenting. Too often women, especially, get punished for having children because it means they're going to have to take time out of work, and the lack of child care spaces is a major issue.

An Hon. Member: Men, too.

Ms Luff: Yes, men too. My husband is a stay-at-home parent, so he's struggling right now. Absolutely men. I mean, that's a whole other subject. There are all sorts of things that we need to do to make it more okay for men to stay home and take care of children – oh, my goodness – but we won't get away on that.

Really, here I just feel that this motion speaks to our government. It speaks to what we want to do. We really want to make a more equal society, one that values children and honours them by providing spaces close to where their parents work. I think it's hugely important, and I really commend the Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park for putting this forward. I know that when I was her age, I was certainly not thinking about child care issues. I'm so proud to be part of a government that's brought this forward.

I just wanted to say that I speak in support of this motion. I think we should all support this motion. More options for child care are always better.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you. And my apologies for not identifying you by the correct constituency.

It's been pointed out to me in my preface to the last point that it is a motion other than a government motion, Motion 502.

Are there any other members who would like to speak? I recognize Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just to touch briefly on these mentions that were made about how fathers can stay at home as well, prior to my becoming an MLA, I was a stay-at-home dad. I was on parental leave with my baby daughter. As the father of three young children I stand here in support of this motion. There are a lot of things that worry me. The job market has changed. To kind of go on the theme that we've been seeing about the struggles that many of the parents who are in this Chamber have had, for my wife and I, prior to my having this position, one of the biggest struggles that we had was that in order for us to make ends meet, we both had to work. In many ways I had to hold myself back from a promotion, and it was simply from the fact that it would not have worked out well when we are transferring kids between each other. We would literally pack them up in the car, drive off to the next place, and pass them on. So I can really appreciate the challenges that many parents across this province have on the simple merits of child care as well.

Now, one of the biggest concerns that I have as the father of three young children is: what would happen if my wife or myself weren't around anymore? Where would my children go? Now, our government is working towards providing affordable, accessible, and good quality child care for all Albertans, but it is important to recognize that in this province space is at a premium. We are not asking to reinvent the wheel here. We are just asking for an assessment that would find some good alternatives for child care space.

We've already seen this with schools across the province converting classrooms, gymnasiums, and common spaces into noontime supervision space. We also have some schools that already have supervision programs in place, and it accounts for 35 per cent of the existing programs within this province as of this year. It seems quite wasteful to me to allow these spaces to go unused during certain parts of the day when they could normally be better suited to things like child care. As we continue to work towards economic recovery, many individuals in my riding are looking to go back to school and into university programs themselves, but one of the biggest concerns that they have is finding access to affordable child care and to child care currently.

Mr. Speaker, one of the biggest challenges that is occurring across areas like the city of Calgary is access to commercial space for the use of child care. As the Member for Calgary-East attested to, 95 per cent of child care spaces as of March of this year are at capacity, so there is very little room. It's not uncommon throughout this province to see government space that is unused, and many government buildings have already established this as well. At city hall in the city of Calgary we see child care space incorporated, and we also see it at the Canada Place federal building in Edmonton, as the member alluded to as well.

You know, at the end of the day, we're looking at something that can help individuals thrive, and this will help many individuals, from the father who's going back to school to the mother who's doing her apprenticeship to the single parent who's trying to keep a roof over their child's head as well. That is why, Mr. Speaker, and for the benefit of all families in this province I support this motion.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.
5:40

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park has brought forth an interesting motion that would allow parents to bring their children to work if you work in the public sector, possibly. While the motion pertains to new government buildings, how does the member opposite define government buildings? In my estimation, very few new government buildings are needed, but publicly owned schools and

hospitals are required. Would that also be in the definition of government buildings?

One of my concerns is also that once we start down the road of government involvement in starting to supply facilities for child care spaces, the natural extension of this is to go down the road of not only new buildings but retrofitting existing buildings. Where does the mandate stop? The mandate to include daycares in new government buildings is too broad for me. Is it for schools? Will this possibly delay the process of getting schools built? We are always behind on schools, and they are often at over capacity as soon as they are open. Forcing school boards to include daycares up front is not effective. On the other hand, allowing daycares to open up in schools with declining enrolment makes a lot of sense, and this is already happening across the province.

I appreciate that the member has said: where feasible. The question then becomes the element of feasibility. I heard from the Member for Sherwood Park the discussion about secure rent and that by allowing a facility to be available in government buildings, it allows the daycare operator to have secure rent without the fear of increasing rent. Is that the government's intention, to essentially provide subsidized spaces for the daycare operators?

I do believe that efforts to encourage more child care should help all families equally. The Wildrose wants to explore policies for child care that help to support families equally, and this means programs that help all Albertans. I'm a father of five and a grandfather of four. I love each child dearly. Government support for child care choices should and must be available to all families. It should respect their decisions, much like the federal government's universal child care benefit. A program such as the universal child care benefit provides child care support to all parents and gives them the choice as to how their children should be looked after. While I'm not advocating for the introduction of such a program at this time, it is this sentiment of inclusion, equality, fairness, and choice that the spirit of Motion 502 should adopt.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On October 5 my baby turned 39. This conversation was going on then. Like the hon. member across the floor, I was a single parent, and that was a pretty important discussion for me. I hate that we're still having this discussion. It is time to make something happen. I applaud the member for putting this motion forward, and I urge everybody to support it.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there any other members who would like to speak to this motion? I will call upon the Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, I'll be brief. It is, as was said, just a motion, but things that happen here sometimes have consequences down the road, so it's worthy of discussion. One of the things that's missing for me here is that it says: in new buildings. I think that probably the bigger opportunities for Albertans might be in old buildings. One of the members of the other party talked about that. There are many municipalities in Alberta that are short of schools, but there are other municipalities where the population is shrinking. There are inner-city communities where the population is shrinking. I think there could be opportunities to save the taxpayer some money, keep those inner-city schools open by taking a wing of the school that doesn't have classrooms full anymore and maybe look for other services that – actually, and respectfully, Mr. Speaker, it doesn't have to be a daycare. It could be any other publicly provided service.

At any rate, Mr. Speaker, I think it's worthy of discussion, hopefully at committee at some point where all these things – again, I think probably there are more opportunities in old buildings than new ones because presumably the government won't consider it feasible in a new government building where you're storing sand for the highways. I'm just making the assumption that the government's going to get that one right. I will say this with a warning, that we and particularly the government will be judged on the decisions they do make where they consider it feasible, and I caution them to get it right. But I will say that I think it's worthy of discussion.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park to close debate.

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think we had a very lengthy discussion about the pros and cons to the extent that this can go, but I think it is important to highlight, once again, that it is a consideration of feasibility of new government buildings. I think it has been explained multiple times that we are looking for alternative ways to have more child care space available to Albertans. It has been explained, through multiple experiences from the members of this Assembly, that it is needed.

So I urge you to support this motion and to continue the conversation that was started today. Thank you.

[The voice vote indicated that Motion Other than Government Motion 502 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:47 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, S.	Gotfried	Miranda
Babcock	Gray	Nielsen
Bilous	Hinkley	Payne
Carlier	Hoffman	Phillips
Carson	Horne	Piquette
Ceci	Jabbour	Renaud
Connolly	Jansen	Rodney
Coolahan	Kazim	Rosendahl
Cortes-Vargas	Kleinsteuber	Sabir
Dach	Littlewood	Schmidt
Dang	Loyola	Schreiner
Drever	Luff	Shepherd
Drysdale	Malkinson	Starke
Eggen	Mason	Sucha
Ellis	McIver	Sweet
Feehan	McKitrick	Turner
Fitzpatrick	McLean	Westhead
Ganley	McPherson	Woollard
Goehring	Miller	

Against the motion:

Aheer	Fildebrandt	Panda
Cooper	Hunter	Pitt
Cyr	Loewen	van Dijken

Totals: For – 56 Against – 9

[Motion Other than Government Motion 502 carried]

The Speaker: We stand adjourned until 1:30 p.m. tomorrow.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m. to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, October 27, 2015

Day 10

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

First Session

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Feehan, Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (ND), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Anderson, Shaye, Leduc-Beaumont (ND)
Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (W)
Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (ND)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (W)
Bhullar, Manmeet Singh, Calgary-Greenway (PC)
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Ceci, Hon. Joe, Calgary-Fort (ND)
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Fitzpatrick, Maria M., Lethbridge-East (ND)
Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (PC)
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Sigurdson, Hon. Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (ND)
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (W)
Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC),
Progressive Conservative Opposition House Leader
Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (W)
Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (W)
Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (ND)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (ND)
Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (W)
Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (ND)
van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND)
Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)

Party standings:

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Irfan Sabir	Minister of Human Services
Lori Sigurdson	Minister of Advanced Education, Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, October 27, 2015

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Let us reflect. As we contemplate the matters before us here today, it will be important that we appreciate the impact of our decisions on Albertans from all walks of life, from the most fortunate to the most vulnerable. Let us not allow the sometimes dramatic events of this place to overshadow the importance of our first responsibility, public service and the public good.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

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

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am honoured to introduce a fine constituent of Calgary-Lougheed, the former MLA for Calgary-Glenmore Linda Johnson. Linda has always worked very hard on behalf of her community in myriad realms, including literacy, and I expect that she always will. But Linda also has her hobbies, and she's pleased to advise this House that in recent months her golf game indeed has greatly improved. Linda is a proud, staunch supporter of the PC Party of Alberta and is looking forward to today's session as well as eagerly anticipating the province's ongoing commitment to the southwest Calgary ring road. At this time I would ask Linda to stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to introduce to you, of course, and through you to all members of this House two individuals. First of all, Mr. Nusrat Akhtar. Mr. Akhtar is a successful entrepreneur who is dedicated to community involvement in Edmonton. Mr. Akhtar is seated in the members' gallery.

I would also like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House a former colleague of mine, Mr. Sohail Quadri. Mr. Quadri served as MLA for Edmonton-Mill Woods from 2012 to 2015 and was Alberta's first MLA of Pakistani origin. Mr. Quadri is a local small-business owner, with deep roots in Edmonton. Mr. Quadri is seated in the Speaker's gallery.

I would ask both individuals to stand up and receive the traditional warm welcome from this Assembly. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to hon. members of this Assembly a man that I'm proud to call a friend. Steve Young, the former MLA for Edmonton-Riverview, served as our whip, served as an honourable Edmonton police officer. He is a dear friend, works hard in the community, and he is an even greater dad and husband. I'd like him to rise and have the House welcome him warmly, please.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you Mr. Trent Johnsen, who is a leader in Alberta's technology industry. Mr. Johnsen, if you could stand up and please accept the warm greeting of the Legislature.

Introduction of Guests

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

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly social studies teachers Pawel Romanowski and Don Segberg and his wife, Jessica. I'm not sure if they're in the House. They're here from St. John Paul II Catholic high school. JP II along with other Elk Island Catholic schools in Fort Saskatchewan brought their community together this summer with the refugee on the roof campaign, putting their principal on the roof of their high school for 24 hours. Instead of raising their goal of \$9,000 to bring a refugee family from Myanmar to live in the Fort, they raised \$16,000. They exemplify the spirit of community that is in everything Fort Saskatchewan does. Please join me in extending to them the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two guests. Val Cudmore is the executive director of the Candora Society in Abbotsfield. The Candora Society has been operating in Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview for over 25 years. Their mandate is people helping people make a difference, and Val has made a huge difference in the lives of many families in our constituency.

Deanna Fuhlendorf is the executive director of the Fort Road and Area Business Association. Her dedication to Fort Road is inspiring. She has been instrumental in the revitalization of the area, championing projects that celebrate the entrepreneurial spirit in Edmonton.

I would ask both of my guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly Natasha Semeniuk and Emily Bonnell. Natasha is my constituency assistant. She graduated with a social work diploma from Grant MacEwan University and proceeded to complete her bachelor of social work degree at the University of Calgary. Prior to becoming my constituency assistant, Natasha was a child protection caseworker with Human Services. She's doing an amazing job in my constituency office, helping many Edmonton-Riverview citizens get the services they need. With her today is Emily Bonnell. She's a student from the University of Calgary in the social work program, and she's carrying out her field placement in my office. She'll be with us till December 2015, and we are so pleased to have her. I'd ask them both to stand and ask the members here to give them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Mr. Cyr: Mr. Speaker, today I am especially pleased to introduce you to my wife, Megan, and my mother-in-law, Heather Forbes. Ladies, I thank you. Would you please rise and receive the traditional welcome from this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of the House a group of outstanding leaders, who are here today to represent their schools

and student unions and who advocate for fellow peers and work so very hard. I'd ask that you will all remain seated until I've introduced everyone. Seated in the members' gallery, representing the Alberta Students' Executive Council, we have chair Kristen George, VP external for the Grande Prairie Regional College Students' Association; Cameron Dykstra, advocacy co-ordinator; Teresa Currie, executive director.

Seated in the public gallery, representing the Council of Alberta University Students, we have Dylan Hanwell, vice-president external for the University of Alberta Students' Union; Danika McConnell, CAUS member and Students' Association of MacEwan University VP external; and Levi Nilson, CAUS member and president of the University of Calgary Students' Union. We would also like to recognize Brittany Pitruniak, CAUS vice-chair and president of the Students' Association of MacEwan University, who was not able to make it to the introductions but will be coming later for the budget.

1:40

Seated also in the public gallery are my sister and brother-in-law, Clive and Dorothy Switzer. They're both from Wainwright. Dorothy works with the Canadian Forces special operations, Wainwright Garrison, and Clive is a front-line caseworker for Falcon Enterprises.

Last but not least, I'd like to introduce my beautiful wife, Eileen. Thank you to Eileen for all her hard work in putting up with all these things that she's had to get me elected and all the stuff that's gone on during the election and now. Thank you.

I would like to ask you all to rise and receive the traditional welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm privileged today to have three guests. I would like to introduce to you and through you Shawnalee Shwetz and Julie Krahulec from the Anne Chorney public library in Waskatenau as well as Reeve Doris Splane from the county of Athabasca. Would you rise and receive the customary warm welcome of the House.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Mr. Speaker, I am so pleased to introduce to you and through you to the Members of the Legislative Assembly two guests seated in the gallery. The first is Mayor Chris Spearman, a truly engaged mayor, whom I am honoured to work with on many, many issues in our city and in my constituency. When one is in the bleachers at a ball game or in the audience at the Yates for a concert, Chris is the person who will speak up and provide a little history and make you feel that you're part of that history. Chris has been an advocate for change throughout his time in Lethbridge and spent a number of years as a school board trustee before being elected as the mayor two years ago. I have found him to be collaborative and forward-thinking and always – always – to have the best interests of the city at the forefront of everything that he does.

My second guest, Randy Smith, is the executive director at Nord-Bridge Seniors Centre. He has been in that role since 1998. He has been a driving force behind the redevelopment of the original Chinook Mall into this very modern and up-to-date activity centre for seniors and seniors' programs, located in north Lethbridge. Under his guidance and an elected volunteer board the centre has grown from 300 to 1,800-plus members today, and I am very happy to say that I'm a member. I can also attest to the achievement of the centre's goal to be the friendly centre, all thanks to the guidance and hard work provided by Randy and his team.

I would ask both Mayor Spearman and Mr. Smith to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly two important guests, Tracy McKinnon and Iris Kirschner. Tracy is the board chair of the Fort McMurray Catholic school district and has been a trustee since 2010. Iris is a past chairperson for the Health Advisory Council as well as a member of the Seniors Resource Committee in Wood Buffalo. She's also a senior adviser for the Golden Years Society. They're here today to listen to question period and to listen to the budget speech later today. I'd ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The newest member of our Legislature, Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, it's a privilege to introduce to you and through you a couple of fine Albertans. I'm very thankful to have had their help to get me here. Robert Such and his family are third-generation elk farmers, and they have freely given so much of their time and effort to the Wildrose Party over the years and to me personally. I'm so glad to see Robert's young son Riaan here as well to watch these proceedings today in the House. His life in politics has started at a young age. He was already the youngest volunteer on my campaign. I ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed. I think you have a second guest.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a great honour for me to introduce today an incredibly inspirational Albertan, Shelley Wegner. Shelley has displayed invaluable commitment to our province with her long-time dedication working with Alberta's First Nations and Métis communities. She's also participated in the development of the northern Alberta development strategies. But there's much more. Shelley's service to the community includes volunteer work with the Edmonton Police Service, Kids with Cancer, Nina Haggerty, and iHuman, and there's a much longer list. But for today I ask her to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you three fine, outstanding citizens from the outstanding constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. They come to us today in the form of Mayor Lance Colby of my hometown of Carstairs and the CEO of that same fair locale, Carl McDonnell.

Also joining us today is the vice-president of advancement of Olds College, Jordan Cleland, a gentleman who needs little introduction to the Assembly as he spent a lot of time running around the halls of this place a number of years ago.

If these three fine folks would rise and receive the traditional welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour and pleasure to introduce to you and through you today a friend, Mr. Len Wolstenholme, senior adviser, external relations, for the Calgary Zoo, one of Alberta's most visited tourism attractions, now featuring, of course, the rather spectacular IlluminAsia until November 1. I'm also honoured to have called the Wolstenholme family friends since 1967, when I met their family in Lagos,

Nigeria. It's a great pleasure for me to introduce you to them today. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-South East.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and introduce to you and through you another very good friend, the founder of Matrix Labour Leasing, Shannon Warren. Shannon is very involved in the community, and every dollar that he makes in his business, he shares with those less fortunate. He is a proud Albertan, and I'm proud to call him a friend. I'd like him to rise and receive the warm and traditional welcome of the House.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there any other guests that you wish to introduce? Proceed.

Mrs. Littlewood: It is my honour to introduce to you and through you to this House Mayor Myron Hayduk and Councillor Taneen Rudyk of Vegreville. I would invite them to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Are there any other guests to be introduced?

On behalf of the entire Assembly, welcome to all of the guests that are here today. I know I speak for all sides of the House that they really appreciate the people who are here.

1:50

Oral Question Period

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

Alberta Health Services Performance Measures

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, just last week Alberta Health Services released its performance report for the first quarter of the year, in October. It's clear why AHS is dragging its feet. Of the 17 performance measures given, AHS has achieved its target in just four. Four. AHS has missed on ER wait times, patient satisfaction, and access to cancer treatment. To the Health minister: how much longer are we going to tolerate waste, inefficiency, and poor performance from this organization?

The Speaker: The hon. Health minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. What the member doesn't point out is the fact that AHS saw growth in every single one of those categories, and I think that that is something to be commended, right? The other thing I want to point out is the fact that the member opposite's party is proposing to cut significant money from front-line services, which obviously would not . . .*

Mr. Cooper: Point of order.

The Speaker: The point of order is noted.

Mr. Barnes: AHS underperformance is nothing new, Mr. Speaker. In fact, members of our current government in the past had plenty of perfectly valid criticisms about its inefficiency, lack of accountability, and chronic poor performance. When AHS does not meet its targets, it's allowed to lower its standards. We went from 52 performance standards to just 17. Again to the Health minister: we all know about the mistakes of the past, but will this government

right now commit to restoring complete, transparent, and extensive quarterly reports for Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The report is public. It's on the website. That's how the member heard about it. What I want to point out as well is that on the 17 pillars that are there and that we're being benchmarked against – the point is to make progress, and I think that members opposite might want to create some chaos by cutting budgets and by pretending that they can blame certain individuals within the system. What we need to do is provide stability. That's what Albertans voted for, and that's what I'm proud to deliver.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, among the many targets gutted from previous Alberta Health Services public reports are surgical wait times, including hips, knees, and cataracts; the number of seniors waiting for continuing care; staff morale; and department costs. Given how badly AHS was failing, it's no wonder they'd rather not talk about it. Does the minister agree that these standards are crucial for the accountability, transparency, and oversight of our health care system and that Albertans deserve to know?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. I will take his recommendation that we expand the number of key pillars moving forward into consideration. What this government is committed to is making sure that we fulfill the commitments that we made in the election. I know that might be a surprise to some members opposite who think that we actually shouldn't be fulfilling our promises from the campaign, but this government is committed to doing that.

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

Linear Property Assessment and Taxation

Mr. Stier: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the spring session I had asked the then Municipal Affairs minister about municipal funding, which received no clear response. Subsequently, at the AUMA convention this August, when given the opportunity to clarify the government's position, that same Municipal Affairs minister would not commit to maintaining the current linear taxation formula that is critical for rural municipalities. To the new Minister of Economic Development and Trade: will you stand today in the House as the voice of economic reason and commit to maintaining the current formula on linear taxation?

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks for the question. As the new Minister of Municipal Affairs I think it most appropriate that I take this question. We are absolutely committed to supporting rural Alberta families with the services that they count on, and as our province grows, it is important to recognize that our communities transcend municipal boundaries. This is a complex question, and I'm really looking forward to discussing it with local municipal leaders as we examine whether the current assessment structure is working for rural Albertans.

Mr. Stier: Mr. Speaker, we need clarity here. Recently at a central Alberta AAMD and C zone meeting attended by local municipalities, the agriculture minister was asked about linear taxation. He said that while he is the voice of agriculture in rural communities, he could not commit to maintaining the current linear taxation formula and also would not speak against the Premier on this subject. To the ag minister: now that you've had the opportunity to

*See page 348, left column, paragraph 15

consult with the Premier, are you now able to commit to being the voice of agriculture and rural communities and stand against changes to linear taxation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, on the subject of linear taxation I'm happy to speak again. Having strong services in rural areas means having municipal taxation systems that work across entire regions. Once again, I am looking forward to discussions with our municipal leaders such as AAMD and C to talk about the current assessment structure and to figure out what will work best for the families in rural Alberta.

Mr. Stier: Okay. Well coached, Minister. Let's try this again, then, okay? To the new Minister of Municipal Affairs. With this past level of uncertainty that this government has been demonstrating with these vague comments and innuendo, rural municipalities deserve to know once and for all whether this government plans on changing the linear taxation formula. Will you commit to keeping our rural communities strong and sustainable and to maintaining the current formula in its current form? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I absolutely will commit to supporting rural Alberta families to have the services that they need.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Lake Aeration

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Alberta Conservation Association has suspended aeration on numerous lakes across the province this winter based on two legal opinions the organization obtained concerning liability. Concerns relate to section 263 of the Criminal Code and the potential risk of an individual being injured or killed by falling through the thin ice by the aeration. Aeration provides a crucial boost to oxygen levels to ensure the survival of fish through the winter. To the Minister of Environment and Parks: is the minister aware of this time-sensitive issue, and what is the government's plan?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. Our department is most certainly aware of this issue. We are examining it, and we will provide an update to the House when we can in the coming weeks.

Thank you.

Mr. Loewen: Again to the minister. I'm sure that this government shares my concern that there is a real possibility that many of our fisheries across Alberta may collapse without this much-needed aeration. Will the minister recognize the immense strain the Alberta Conservation Association is under and lobby the federal government to change the wording of section 263 to allow the due diligence defence and remove the liability threat to the Alberta Conservation Association?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. Of course, the Alberta Conservation Association is a delegated administrative authority of the Department of Environment and Parks. We're aware of the challenges right now

with respect to the federal government. Of course, we await our federal counterparts, and we will update this House once we have had those fulsome discussions with them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Loewen: Mr. Speaker, we simply cannot afford to take a gamble with our fisheries. Albertans will be significantly impacted by a serious loss of fish without aeration on the many lakes this winter. There is still time to find a working solution both for this winter and for the long-term. Will the minister and her colleagues work with the opposition and the Alberta Conservation Association to find an appropriate and immediate solution to protect these fragile lakes?

2:00

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the supplemental question. Yes, of course, the province of Alberta is working with a delegated administrative authority of the department on the strength of our fisheries throughout the province, and we will be working with the federal government and working with our own department on the health of fisheries going forward. One of the reasons why we protected the Castle earlier this fall was exactly this, the protection of fisheries in our sensitive headwaters.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North West.

Oil Sands Development

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's no denying that Alberta is facing some difficult economic times. In fact, for 2015 already we've seen more than 35,000 people laid off in this province related to the energy sector. Investors want to hear that we're a stable place to invest in. They are not hearing that right now from our government. To the Premier. When earlier this fall you insinuated that your government did not see the value in a long-term development of the oil sands, you risked damage to one of Alberta's strongest industries. Can the Premier tell us what the strategy is going forward: leave it in the ground or get it to market? Albertans want to know.

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm not really sure what the member is referring to because I've certainly never stated such a thing. In fact, earlier this fall what I have been doing is meeting with investors across the continent to talk about the fact that that's exactly what we want them to know about Alberta, that we are very committed to continuing to be a stable place to invest in terms of our infrastructure as well as our public services as well as our plan to balance. All of those things in concert with the industry, whom we are working with every day on a number of different files, mean that this will continue to be a good place for everybody to invest.

Ms Jansen: Mr. Speaker, yet during the recent federal campaign this government's federal NDP brothers and sisters suggested that oil sands oil may have to stay in the ground. When they said this, not a word of dispute was said by this government, who, in fact, campaigned for those same brothers and sisters against Alberta's energy sector. Again to the Premier: do you share this belief, or as you see our major oil and gas players put large transaction after large transaction on hold, will you back away from these beliefs and act to protect Alberta jobs?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, with the greatest of respect to the member opposite, I would think twice about attributing things that their federal cousins had said or done to people. Particularly, those more progressive members of that caucus probably don't want to be wearing that particular sign for very long.

That being said, let me make very clear that this government is committed to working as partners with our oil and gas industry to ensure that it is able to recover from the struggles that it's going through right now because of the international drop in the price of oil, and we've been working with them on a number of different files.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On a recent trip to China the Energy minister stated that Alberta needs a pipeline built right now and that they were looking at whatever gets us there the quickest. A great sentiment, but getting our oil to market requires boots to the ground. Industry still sees a government and Premier apologizing for our oil sands. To the Premier: when are you going to change the dial and start selling Alberta and its industries the way we desperately need you to now?

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In fact, I think that one of the things, one of the key things, that has impeded the ability of industry from this province to get a pipeline across is that former government, that caucus's record on the environment and their failure – their failure – to take real action so that investors and leaders in other jurisdictions understand that you can develop our oil sands responsibly and in line with larger economic concerns that all people are concerned about. That's what we're going to do because that's how we're going to get our product to market.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Corporate Tax Collection

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The issue of taxes took up much of the summer sitting as we watched this far-left government and the far-right opposition play out their ideological battle over taxes: more taxes, no taxes. Albertans are willing to pay taxes. They expect our system to be fair and their tax dollars to benefit all of Alberta. However, for the second year in a row the Auditor General has found that the government has failed to collect hundreds of millions of dollars in corporate taxes. To the Premier: how can you plan new revenue measures when you cannot collect the taxes already owed to Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, first of all, I think that the fact of the matter is that this issue was fully canvassed, again, in the election last spring. Albertans were asked: should those profitable corporations that are making a good profit contribute just a little bit more, when things get tough, from the profits that they make? Albertans said: yes, they should. They also said the same thing of wealthy Albertans, many of whom, themselves, were quite willing to step up and pay a little bit more because they had done so well. So that is the kind of fairness that we brought into play and that we will continue to bring into play.

In terms of recovering uncollected taxes, we are working on those measures and will have more to say . . .

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Dr. Swann: Well, given that Alberta is one of only two provinces that administer their own collection of corporate taxes and given that in other provinces the Canada Revenue Agency would have simply given Albertans the funds we are owed and used their experts to go after the corporations, will the Premier ensure that Albertans get their share, avoid the administrative cost of corporate tax collection, and return the administration to the CRA?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will acknowledge that in the absence of my Finance minister I'm not as briefed on this issue. I know that we are looking at that issue, but I also know that we have been given advice that for a number of other reasons we could actually suffer a loss in revenue if we went to that model. So we're exploring it right now, we're giving it due consideration because it's a good point, and once we have a fulsome understanding of what's best for Albertans, that is what we will do.

Dr. Swann: Well, Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that Alberta is an outlier in this area. We don't need an Alberta-made solution; there is one already.

The Auditor General found that the government "does not have comprehensive policies and processes to ensure corporations file their returns or to issue a default assessment." Given that returning the administration of our corporate taxes safeguards Alberta's finances and saves on costs, will the Premier commit in this House that she will work to return the administration of corporate tax collection to the CRA? If not, why not?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We take very seriously the recommendations and the advice that is given by the Auditor General because he typically knows what he's talking about, so what I can commit to on behalf of the Minister of Finance is that we are looking at how we can best improve our success at collecting corporate taxes. When we find the best way forward, that is what we will do. We don't want to prejudge one solution; we want the best solution. So we're looking for that answer, and we will provide direction on how we're going forward shortly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Support for Agriculture

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This year was especially hard for Alberta farmers and producers. In July of this year in my beautiful riding of Leduc-Beaumont a state of agricultural disaster was declared in Leduc county due to the incredibly low soil moisture rating and crop conditions. This was not an isolated case, and throughout the province we saw states of agricultural disaster declared. My question is to the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry. What has the government done to help farmers out in this tough year?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Our government is committed to supporting jobs that support families, and that's especially true when it comes to farming. This has been a challenging year for farmers. Through the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation's insurance programs we have paid out over \$297 million in direct support to farmers who have had a tough season. We have also identified some targeted, common-sense measures like making

better use of Crown lands for grazing and cutting fees to use our emergency water pumping program in half. We're continuing to monitor the situation to ensure that farmers are getting the support they need when they need it.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

2:10

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the challenges with drought this summer and the importance of farmers receiving support as quickly as possible during these difficult times, can the minister provide any information on how much time it took for producers to receive support from the government?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks for the most wonderful question. We know how important it is to provide support to farmers when they need it. That's why during the height of this summer's challenges AFSC reassigned administrative staff to go out in the field and conduct inspections. This meant that even with the high number of claims this summer, we were able to respond to farmers very quickly. As of August 21, which is the busiest time for claims, we were conducting field inspections on average 12 days after the claim was filed and approving those requests within another six days after inspection. Although it was taking less than three weeks from the time the farmer called us with their claim . . .

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the especially difficult year so far what is the minister doing to help and support Alberta's agriculture sector in the coming year?

Mr. Carlier: Mr. Speaker, once again thank you to the Member for Leduc-Beaumont for his questions as well as his commitment to his rural constituents. We're doing a number of things to support agriculture and rural economic development, including identifying opportunities for greater value-added activity in agriculture, going to bat for farmers by fighting country of origin labelling, and fighting to create and access new markets for Alberta's forest products and agriculture output. Our priority is always standing up for hard-working Alberta families by supporting good jobs, and that's why we'll be working hard to provide farmers with the tools and the support they need to succeed.

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

Job Creation

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Calgaryans are worried about the economy. The energy sector alone has lost 40,000 jobs this year. The total cost of NDP policies is nearly \$800 million on the industry, and this doesn't include the uncertainty that the current royalty review is bringing to the workers hoping to hold onto their jobs every day. To the new minister of economic development: why does the government insist on continuing to hurt Calgaryans while we are down?

Mr. Speaker, since this is my first-ever question, I'm hoping you'll help me get a straight answer, please.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I'm sure every member of this House would agree that I will make my best efforts to serve you.

The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the hon. member for his first question in the House. It's my pleasure to rise and respond to it. Albertans elected this government to make sure that our energy industry benefits all Albertans. We especially understand and recognize that the low international price for oil has hurt and continues to hurt Alberta families, which is why our Premier has taken the initiative to create this new ministry that's going to focus on working with our industry and business sector to enhance and improve the Alberta economy through the creation of jobs.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, the people of Calgary-Foothills sent a message loud and clear. They want their leaders to fight for their jobs. Given that the Premier and the Finance minister have already talked about the possibility of raising taxes even more, how does anyone in the government believe that less money in the pockets of Albertans will help create new jobs?

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, you know what? I'm quite excited to be appointed lead of this new ministry, and I encourage the member to listen to the budget today when the Finance minister tables it. There are quite a few initiatives that our government is going to be embarking on in order to not only support our existing sectors like energy but looking at enhancing other sectors through diversification and value-added.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, people in my riding have already lost their jobs, are seeing their wages cut. This is about keeping Alberta competitive so the people of my riding will stop having to bear the brunt of the NDP's poor economic policies. Will the minister commit to making sure no extra taxes, regulations, or added costs will be put on Alberta's energy industry?

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I find it a little rich coming from the party opposite, who would prefer to cut further by cutting front-line services . . .

Mr. Cooper: Point of order.

Mr. Bilous: . . . whether that's through health care or through education. Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, our government is committed toward working with job creators to enhance various sectors in our economy. We want to ensure that Albertans, first of all, have access to high-quality services but that we're also encouraging improving our economy and diversification through this ministry.

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

Minimum Wage

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past summer the new government rushed through a decision to increase the minimum wage in Alberta. By 2018 the government plans to increase the minimum wage by approximately 50 per cent, which will get us to the magical number of \$15 an hour. To the Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour: given that to absorb the minimum wage increase without affecting their customers, many members of the restaurant industry are considering moving to a no-tip policy, how does increasing minimum wage to \$15 per hour, minus taxes but eliminating tips, help restaurant staff?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. When we put forward our platform, we wanted to make sure that workers in Alberta made fair wages so

that when they went home to their families, they could support them and care for them, and that's what we've done. We've raised the minimum wage less than 10 per cent this year, and now people have more money in their pockets, that goes back into local businesses, and that's actually stimulating our economy.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: given that the minimum wage increase may end up affecting in negative ways those it's intended to assist such as being displaced by automated machines, which will eliminate 6,000 jobs in McDonald's across Alberta alone, will you halt your government's ill-conceived wage plan and review the real business evidence that is before you?

Thank you.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. We've already met with many stakeholders in this area back in June, and we absolutely want to work with industry when we move forward on that. We will be looking, certainly, at indicators like the youth unemployment rate, labour stats. We're absolutely going to be doing this in a planful way, evidence based.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you. I thought you might answer a question similar to that.

Mr. Speaker, given that stakeholders across this province, including Restaurants Canada, the Alberta Chambers of Commerce, and the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, are saying that this plan is a bad idea – and I will table their submissions this afternoon – will this government slow down, listen to the stakeholders? Minister, are all of these experts wrong, or are you?

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again to the member for the question. All those stakeholders that he identified: we've met with every one of them, and we've met with many more. I want you to know that some are saying not to raise it; others are saying to go to \$15 right now. Our government has chosen a moderate path forward by only increasing it one dollar this year.

Thank you.

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

2:20 Landowner Property Rights

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 36 continues to be an infringement on property rights, giving the government complete control over lease agreements and landowner rights. This is a new government, and Albertans are hoping for the best. Will the Premier commit to repealing all of the offensive sections of Bill 36, that tramples over the rights of all Albertans?

Mr. Mason: Thank you for the question, hon. member. Certainly, when our party was in opposition and before the Wildrose Party had seats in the Legislature, we led the fight on behalf of the rights of property owners in this province against the draconian legislation of the previous government, for which we received great accolades from your former leader, who then was one of their – anyway, I want to assure the hon. member that we are committed to . . .

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Cooper: Well, all that being equal, then, Mr. Speaker, they will know that centralized planning hasn't worked in eastern Europe, and it won't work here. If the Premier doesn't repeal these sections

of bills 24 and 36, which now give this NDP cabinet complete control of land use in the province, limit the rights to compensation for landowners, and block access to courts for citizens, does she actually expect landowners to be satisfied with no action, just like the no answer in the last question?

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much for that question, hon. member. I want to assure the hon. member opposite that our party has always believed in due process, in proper notification, rights of appeal. All of the fundamental rights of property owners are things that we support, and we're going to make sure that in the fullness of time those continue to be protected.

Mr. Cooper: Well, that is good news, Mr. Speaker, but I want to be very clear and allow the minister the opportunity to reiterate his position from 2010, when he stated: you shouldn't have your land impacted by a government decision without the right to challenge it. Now, we've all been elected for over 170 days, sir, and this side of the House is looking for action. Does that statement that the minister made still stand, or will this be another NDP flip-flop and another NDP broken promise?

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I don't even know what to say to that. I'll remind the hon. member that this legislation was introduced and passed by the previous government over the objections of our party, and I'm quite sure that you'll find that we'll continue to stand up for the rights of landowners in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Energy Industry Layoffs

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm sad to report that many people in my riding of Bonnyville-Cold Lake have lost their jobs. As those in the Chamber are aware, jobs in the energy sector are down 15 per cent since last September. This hits home for me as many of my constituents in the riding make a living in this industry. Here in our province 40,000 have lost their jobs in this last year alone. To the minister of jobs: is there a plan to aid the people affected by these mass layoffs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Believe me, our sympathies do go out to all of those, in both the energy sector and other sectors, who have been affected by this economic downturn. I can tell you that this is exactly the reason why the Premier has chosen to create this new ministry at this point in time, which industry and business have been asking for for many, many years, that they get a one-stop shop where they can work with government as a partner working with industry in order to create more jobs. I can assure the hon. member that that is a priority of mine, of the Premier, and of this government, and we will do just that.

Mr. Cyr: We hear all the time from the government about protection of the front-line workers, but we've heard no specific plan to protect the hard-working families in my riding and across the province who work in the energy sector. These workers may not be politically important to this government, but I know and my colleagues know that they are critical to the vitality of this province. What will the government do to assure Albertans once again that Alberta is the best place to live in this country?

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, this government cares about every single Albertan no matter what sector they are in: public sector, private sector. Every job is important to our government, which is why we

are partnering with the different sectors, including working with energy. We're going to continue to work with the energy sector and look at diversifying our economy, so looking at ways that our government can partner with the private sector to create more jobs, to look for value-added jobs to improve the chain, and, of course, looking for markets to increase our exports to.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you. We need jobs now, not value-added later.

To the same minister: will the minister take responsibility for the spike of unemployment plaguing the province and look for meaningful solutions to stop the bleeding in our economy?

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, I think it needs to be clarified that the Alberta NDP isn't responsible for the price of oil internationally. This is where it's unfortunate that Alberta is a price taker, not a price maker, which is, again, why we will do what we can to work with the different sectors across the province to diversify the economy. There are initiatives and a plan already in place. I ask the hon. member and his colleagues to be patient for the budget, that the Finance minister will table, which speaks to this directly.

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

Aboriginal Relations

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier has recently staged a number of photo ops in an attempt to build the perception that her government is working towards building a positive relationship with all indigenous peoples in Alberta. Another attempt was made on October 14, when the Premier held another photo op, this time to announce the Premier's Advisory Committee on the Economy. To the Premier: given that this committee is indeed to focus on diversification, sustainability, and resiliency of the Alberta economy, why did you not appoint any members of Alberta's aboriginal communities to this particular advisory committee?

Ms Notley: I want to thank the member for that question, and he certainly raises a very, very good point. A lot of the reason is because we were doing two things at the same time. We'd begun some very substantive consultation processes with indigenous leaders and First Nations leaders across the province while at the same time focusing on our plan to do economic diversification, stimulation, and job creation. But it's absolutely true that once we've had a chance to meet a bit more with First Nations leaders, there should be a role for them on that committee, and I'm taking it under advisement because it's a very good point.

Mr. Rodney: To the Premier again: given that you've publicly stated your support for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report and the UN charter on the rights of indigenous peoples and given that all advisory committees that will provide influential advice to your government have fulsome representation, I thank you in advance for correcting the oversight on this committee. But I'm wondering: in the future on a go-forward basis will you appoint at least one of the many talented aboriginal leaders to other committees?

Ms Notley: Well, indeed, Mr. Speaker, that's again a very good point. One of the things we did once we were talking about the implementation of the United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples was that I asked our minister of aboriginal affairs, this minister right here, to work with every other ministry to figure out where we can engage more effectively and substantively with

indigenous leaders across the province. So that will be happening. The recently announced health board by the Ministry of Health has also allowed for additional appointments from First Nations, and we will continue to do that.

2:30

Mr. Rodney: Given that I asked the Premier and the minister in charge this question in the spring session – you know, we have seen the photo ops, the questionable progress. I ask again: what specific timelines will your government commit to for evaluating and implementing the TRC report recommendations, and what specific mechanisms and benchmarks will you make available for all Albertans to hold the government accountable for implementing the recommendations? If the answer is, as we've heard, next year, how could it possibly take that long, and should we expect no tangible action in the meantime?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can start by saying that it won't take 44 years. It is correct that my ministers have been tasked to report back to the minister of aboriginal affairs in the new year, in January, to talk about what we need to do to go forward on both the TRC recommendations as well as UNDRIP. At the same time meetings have begun, led by the minister of aboriginal affairs, with the representatives from all of the treaties and other indigenous representatives to talk about how they want to . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Child Care Supports

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Approximately 70 per cent of Alberta parents with children under the age of six work outside the home. For many Alberta families child care providers play a critical role in their young children's lives. Research has shown that children thrive in healthy, safe, and caring environments, and early childhood development improves their opportunity for success. The problem is that quality child care can often be hard to come by in rural areas due to a lack of child care facilities close to people's homes in these areas. My question today is for the Minister of Human Services. Can the minister explain if there are plans to improve access to approved day homes in . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for your question on this important issue. We know that it's particularly difficult for families in rural areas to find quality child care. Our government made a commitment during the election that we will work towards more accessible, affordable, and quality child care, and that's what we plan to do. We intend to keep this promise as well.

Mr. Piquette: Mr. Speaker, given that affordability is one of the biggest barriers when it comes to accessing child care, again to the Minister of Human Services: does the minister have any plans for improving the affordability of child care?

Mr. Sabir: Thank you again for the important question. Mr. Speaker, our government ran on a commitment to help make child care more affordable as resources permit. For too many Alberta families child care is not affordable, and if they can't find child care, they can't go back to work, and they can't go back to studies. We will be investing in quality child care, as resources permit, to make it affordable for all Albertans.

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister, for the answer. One more question to the Minister of Human Services: given that access to child care is so limited, especially in rural constituencies like my home one of Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater, how does your ministry plan to increase the number of spaces and improve families' access to child care across Alberta?

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Member, and thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said, our government is committed to achieving better access to child care for all Albertans, and that certainly means that we need to create more spaces. But I was very disappointed and shocked to see opposition members vote against Motion 502, which essentially was asking the government to look into the feasibility of creating more spaces in government buildings. That motion was voted against by the opposition. I want to assure Albertans that we will be looking at . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Municipal Tax Collection

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A resident of Smoky Lake county called me recently with a serious concern about his taxation assessment for this year. He found a new tax category had been added, that he along with other residents of Smoky Lake county must pay, called uncollected tax. Apparently, this levy is to cover taxes that are not collected from other people and businesses that do not or cannot pay their taxes. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs: is this a common practice in other municipalities, or is this something specific to Smoky Lake?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. It certainly is an interesting premise. I am actually not familiar with that issue at this point. As you know, I am new to the ministry, less than a week. I'm not up to speed with a hundred per cent of the files that we have, so it wouldn't be responsible for me to comment right now. However, I really do look forward to meeting with you and hearing more details about that so that we can try to identify a solution.

Thank you so much.

Mr. Hanson: Again to the Minister of Municipal Affairs – and I realize you are new. This situation may set a disturbing precedent across the province as municipalities are forced to find new ways of meeting revenue shortfalls. Will the government consider helping municipalities collect outstanding taxes instead of standing by while they are forced to raise taxes on already overtaxed Alberta families?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I previously said, I'm not necessarily up to speed on that particular issue. However, overall our government is absolutely committed to supporting municipal governments in being able to provide what they need to the people of their communities and to those rural families. Absolutely, on these issues we are quite committed to talking to municipal leaders, and we'll be happy to talk to them about any concerns or questions that they may have.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you. Unfortunately, this is a three-part question.

In our current economic climate many companies are going out of business, and this situation has the potential to get much worse,

especially with our current government. Does this government have a plan to ensure that residential taxpayers won't be on the hook for these uncollected taxes from bankrupted businesses?

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the member who asked the question: absolutely, Alberta is altogether struggling with the fact that oil has gone down, and together we will come up with our own Alberta-made solution to work together – provinces, municipalities, and all the people of Alberta – to find a solution so that we can together move forward.

Resource Industry Policies

Mr. Fraser: Mr. Speaker, we all know about the economic downturn in Alberta and, in fact, across the country. Falling oil prices and thousands of job losses have made it especially hard in Alberta, so there's even a greater urgency to ensure that we diversify our economy, ensure that our partnerships will serve Albertans and their interests. This summer the environment minister made an announcement to terminate forestry contracts and other industry operations in the Castle area. These agreements have a direct impact on Alberta families. To the environment minister: how much will these contract terminations cost Alberta families, and will you outline it in the budget?

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. I am pleased to update the House on our activities in the Castle area. After 40 years of clear-cutting our government made a commitment to protect the Castle area. That's exactly what we are doing. We are doing it to protect the headwaters for the drinking water in my city and all through the South Saskatchewan River basin. This was a historic first step for Alberta, and I am proud of what we were able to accomplish.

Mr. Fraser: Alberta has a stable plan to phase out coal-fired generation facilities by 2030. Under the former PC government we shut down one plant in 2011 and planned to shut down two more by 2019. In fact, the Keephills 3 plant burns as clean as gas. To the same minister. You've been hinting and creating uncertainty with our industry partners by wanting to phase out coal-fired generation plants at an even faster rate. Again, how much will this cost Alberta families, and will you have it in your budget?

2:40

Ms Phillips: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, I am so pleased to finally rise in this House and discuss climate change seeing as none of the opposition have wanted to discuss that topic so far. We made a commitment to phase out coal-fired electricity. We will honour our commitment to Albertans. We are working with industry on this matter. This is why we appointed our panel of experts to examine the matter and report back to us with their best advice. Our approach will be measured. It will take into account the communities and the companies that will be affected. I note that the previous government had no plan for what would happen once those coal-fired units were to shut down.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Might I remind the minister that Alberta is a leader in environmental policies, particularly our industry? We're the only people that pay tonnage on CO₂.

To the Premier: given that we have partners already invested in greener energy not just in Alberta but across the country and given that the industry has put up to \$14 billion to meet the requirements of the 2030 phase-out, why are you not promoting our industry

partners and what they do well but, rather, calling their investments and hard work embarrassing? Shouldn't you be promoting Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, we will be receiving the climate change panel's advice on electricity generation very soon. We have been very clear with Albertans on this matter. Albertans have asked us to ensure that we have more renewables on the grid, that we are greening our economy while we do it. We are ensuring a just transition for those communities who might be affected by this. We are taking very careful steps, and we will receive the climate change panel's advice very soon.

Thank you.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-St. Albert.

Orange Shirt Day

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. September 30 is Orange Shirt Day. As we are gathered today on Treaty 6 territory, it is important for us to acknowledge the history of First Nations and the government's relationship with them. That is what Orange Shirt Day is intended to do.

Now in its third year, Orange Shirt Day began when one woman shared her experience in a residential school. Her shiny orange shirt was taken away from her and with it her identity. I need not remind this Assembly of the atrocities committed at these schools or the poor conditions many indigenous people face today. Orange Shirt Day is a day to come together against bullying and racism. Most importantly, it is a day for First Nations, local government, schools, and communities to come together in the spirit of reconciliation and hope for future generations.

On that note, I am honoured to serve with our government as we work toward following the recommendations from the UN declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples as well as the federal Truth and Reconciliation Commission. This will not be an easy task, nor will it be a short one. We have also added our voice in calling on the federal government to investigate the epidemic of missing and murdered indigenous women. I take pride in the fact that our government is working to grow the relationship with Alberta's First Nations.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mental Health Services for Postsecondary Students

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today to discuss the importance and continued need for mental health funding for our postsecondary students in Alberta. It has come to my attention that there is a huge discrepancy in what individual students receive for mental health funding. The funds received are solely dependent upon the institution which the students attend.

According to one of the student representatives, students that attend SAIT receive \$3.91 per student in funding for mental health initiatives while students attending the University of Lethbridge receive \$146.94 per student. Why should funding for mental health for one group of students be more important than for another group of students? I brought this matter up with the Minister of Advanced Education in a meeting we held earlier this month, and I'm hoping that the minister will take my advice to heart and balance out this obvious discrepancy.

The current mental health framework used to support students at all postsecondary institutions was mandated for three years and is coming to an end in 2016. I hope that this government will agree that it is of the utmost importance that students have a venue where they can turn for help, support in a safe and inclusive environment.

Mr. Speaker, it is clear that changes need to be made to the current mental health framework in order to provide fair, equal services to all postsecondary students across the province. It is my hope that all members of this Chamber will work together to come up with a fair and equitable framework for all students.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Energy Policies

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, the city of Lloydminster offers a unique perspective of how government decisions can promote or hinder economic process. For years we watched as the Alberta side prospered while the Saskatchewan side lagged behind. But since May the tables have turned. Businesses that service the heavy oil industry drive the Lloydminster economy. Earlier this year falling oil prices were forcing difficult decisions: layoffs, decreased work schedules, and cancelled contracts. What has been discouraging is how those decisions are being made. Businesses that once did 60 per cent of their business on the Alberta side and 40 per cent in Saskatchewan have now shifted to a ratio that is now 90-10 in favour of Saskatchewan. When I ask why, I'm told: "Uncertainty. We don't know what this government is going to do next to hurt us, but we're sure it won't be good. At least in Saskatchewan we know the rules, we know the rules aren't changing, and we know the government actually wants us there to do business."

Now, last time I checked, the world oil price is the same in Saskatchewan as it is in Alberta. Governments can't change the oil price, but their policy decisions can certainly make challenging economic situations much worse, and Lloydminster proves that.

Alberta is not a test lab, and Albertans did not consent to be the guinea pigs in this government's reckless experiments and socialist fiscal intervention. These theories have been tried elsewhere and have always failed. Many Albertans came here to escape the chaos caused by NDP regimes in other provinces, and now they're wondering if they should move back. Capital investment is drying up as investors look elsewhere to find jurisdictions offering the certainty and consistency that used to be Alberta's hallmark. The economic advantage built by past governments working with Albertans instead of against them is being dismantled by this government at a breathtaking pace.

Nearly every day I am asked: How much damage can they do in four years? Well, Mr. Speaker, we're about to find out.

Team Lethbridge

Ms Fitzpatrick: Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to be here today to share with you some important information about a very special entity in Lethbridge. I will start by saying that I love Lethbridge, my city, and I hope that you will love it, too. We have a wonderful, forward-thinking people who want you to know and grow with Lethbridge. Some of these people got together and formed a coalition representing 18 different organizations in our city and called themselves Team Lethbridge.

Team Lethbridge collaborates to offer support to the government of Alberta in building solutions for the future and in showcasing how our city can contribute to provincial priorities. Proactively they communicate with government decision-makers. The city and the province can benefit through these interactions. Team Lethbridge includes groups like the Allied Arts Council, the school boards,

Economic Development Lethbridge, the university, the college, city council, family services, and so on.

On the evening of November 25 here in Edmonton all MLAs are invited to a party, a meet and greet hosted by Team Lethbridge. You will learn about the many strengths and opportunities, including a diversified economy, rich arts and cultural heritage, strong public-sector leadership, and industry strength. The team will highlight the progressive work being done and undertaken in our city, express appreciation for the province's commitments in Lethbridge, and offer our support in building solutions for the future.

I hope I have piqued your interest and that you will accept the invitation that you will receive within the next week. Go Team Lethbridge.

The Speaker: The Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

2:50 Anne Chorney Public Library Renovation

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As MLA Payne mentioned yesterday, October is library month. This gives me a great opportunity to recognize the hard work done by . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I believe it's not in order that you identified a name rather than a member. I'd appreciate you referring to the constituency rather than the name.

Mr. Piquette: Oh, jeez. Okay. This was even vetted, Mr. Speaker. All right.

As the Member for Calgary-Acadia mentioned yesterday, October is national library month. This gives me a great opportunity to recognize the hard work done by two very special community activists, who I'm hoping will be coming back into the gallery here: Shawnalee Shwetz and Julie Krahulec. These two remarkable women spearheaded the efforts to relocate and revitalize the Anne Chorney public library in beautiful Waskatenau. They secured funds, organized community efforts, and found a new home for their library.

The Anne Chorney public library first opened in 1973 and was housed in a classroom in the local school. After a year with its books in storage the library reopened in a one-room schoolhouse that hadn't been in operation for 15 years. This presented both an opportunity and a challenge for the library. The library had found its new home, but after being vacant for 15 years, that schoolhouse needed a lot of work. It speaks to the power of volunteers and community spirit that the renovations needed to house the library were performed by the four members of the library board with the help of local volunteers. As a matter of fact, this afternoon they informed me that they also used their own money to be able to finish this library.

I would like to recognize the importance of libraries across the province but especially in rural areas, where they serve as community hubs and, in cases like the Anne Chorney public library, are also projects where communities can come together. Not only do libraries serve to increase literacy and education, but they also allow for more well-rounded individuals and communities. Librarians and volunteers, your efforts are greatly appreciated.

The Speaker: The Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Official Opposition

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As late as yesterday our colleagues from across the floor said that Wildrose couldn't be trusted to get it right. I couldn't disagree with that more. Wildrose was given the strong mandate to serve as the Official Opposition in

this House, with 22 MLAs from every corner of this province. We value that mandate. They sent us here to focus on the economy, jobs, and restoring the Alberta advantage. Albertans' trust is based on the principles Wildrose stands for: a smaller, more efficient bureaucracy, less government, lower waste, lower taxes, and reasonable policies.

Mr. Speaker, while our political system is an adversarial one, Albertans trust us to work together to take up common-sense suggestions and alternatives from the opposition. We are here to help the government help Albertans. We are here to represent the people that elected us. I hope this government will listen and work alongside us to cut inefficiencies, protect their pocketbooks, all without sacrificing front-line staff. We want a business-friendly Alberta that encourages investment and ensures sustainability of core government services for decades to come.

Trust is something that is earned. Alberta voters placed that trust amongst their most important values. Albertans trust us to make things better for them as a whole. While across party lines we come from different points of view, we do share a common desire to serve. All members are entrusted by those that elected us. Let us strive not to mock those who entrusted us to this Chamber.

Presenting Petitions

Ms McPherson: Mr. Speaker, as chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills I request leave to present the following petitions, that have been received for private bills under Standing Order 98(2).

One, the petition of Dr. Melanie Humphreys, president of the King's University, and Mr. Bill Diepeveen, chair of the board of governors of the King's University, for the King's University College Amendment Act, 2015.

Two, the petition of Pastor Ron Steinbrenner, president of Bethesda Bible College, for the Bethesda Bible College Amendment Act, 2015.

Three, the petition of Kunal Nand, solicitor for Rosary Hall, Edmonton, for the Rosary Hall, Edmonton Repeal Act.

Four, the petition of Mark Haynal, president of the Canadian University College, for the Canadian University College Amendment Act, 2015.

Five, the petition of Geoffrey Hope, solicitor for Concordia University College of Alberta, for the Concordia University College of Alberta Amendment Act, 2015.

Six, the petition of Audra Reinhardt, member of the board of directors of Covenant Bible College, for the Covenant Bible College Amendment Act, 2015.

Finally, seven, the petition of Pastor Paul Reich, president of the Living Faith Bible College, for the Living Faith Bible College Amendment Act, 2015.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 4

An Act to Implement Various Tax Measures and to Enact the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce Bill 4, an Act to Implement Various Tax Measures and to Enact the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act. This being a money bill, Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to this Assembly.

There are two components to the bill. The first component repeals the Fiscal Management Act and creates a new set of fiscal rules better suited to these challenging economic times while maintaining our commitment to keep debt under control and to present the government's finances in a clear format. This bill will set legislated definitions for government's reporting on the province's fiscal and financial position and prospects. The bill will also amend the personal and corporate income taxes and implement the technical and administrative changes that clarify our tax statutes, correct technical errors in the legislation, repeal expired provisions, and standardize administrative policies across Alberta's tax statutes. More details will be available when I present Budget 2015.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 4 read a first time]

Mr. Mason: I don't imagine we have very much more business to complete in the Routine, and I would seek unanimous consent to waive Standing Order 7(7) in order to complete the rest of the Routine with the exception of any points of order, which I assume could be dealt with tomorrow.

[Unanimous consent denied]

The Speaker: We do not have a unanimous vote.

We will now move to points of order. This was raised in response to Mr. Cooper's point of order that the Wildrose was proposing. I would call upon the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills to speak to the matter.

Point of Order Allegations Against a Member

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to the point of order that happened in question period at approximately 2:07 or something like that. I'm rising today and quoting from the Standing Orders in section 23(h) and (i): "makes allegations against another Member" or imputes false motives against another member.

3:00

Mr. Speaker, what we have been seeing over the last couple of days is a deterioration in the House when it comes to decorum. [interjections] While the government might think it's funny, they play a very important role in the decorum in this House, sir. What we see is the Minister of Health, in this case . . .

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, citation please.

Mr. Cooper: I already gave it, sir. You should pay attention. It's 23(h), "makes allegations against another Member."

We're getting to the fact that the government has chosen to play very fast and loose with the truth. They make some accusations about our party and our caucus. Today we saw them say that the Wildrose would cut front-line workers, which is at best fast and loose with the truth. Some would say that that was a lie. I wouldn't say that, sir, because it would be wildly inappropriate, but some would say that that was a lie. I would go as far as to say that they're playing with words that do not accurately reflect what is the truth. The Wildrose campaigned at length, and not a single proposal that we campaigned on, went around this province on, ever suggested that we would touch front-line services, sir.

So we have a government that is making accusations in this House. No worker under our plan would have been fired. In fact, we campaigned extensively on the things that we would do to support front-line workers, which is the exact opposite. And some

would say that they are making allegations that we would do something that we wouldn't, sir.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I very much regret that the Wildrose caucus has decided that they are going to play out this little point of order to defend their reputation, in their own minds, instead of getting on with the important business of the day, which is the budget speech, which the entire province is waiting to hear. I would think that the hon. members opposite ought to be ready, be wanting to hear it as well. Instead, we are playing games.

Now, I would suggest to you that it is the opinion of many on this side of the House and among the general public that a proposal to cut \$2 billion from the provincial budget in one year will result in significant job losses, including losses of front-line workers. That is our view, Mr. Speaker. In any event, it comes down to a disagreement between members over the facts, and that is not a point of order. For us to suggest that that party and that caucus have certain policies is not the same as a member. No one suggested that an individual member otherwise had false or unavowed motives. We can certainly suggest that about the Wildrose Party and not be in contravention of the rules of this House.

So I would suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, that there is absolutely no point of order here. It is merely an opportunity for the Wildrose to try and delay the budget speech.

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

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As reluctant as I am to be accused of delaying the budget speech, I do want to weigh into this debate because it is in some ways a continuation of a debate that occurred during the last Legislature, and it caused us a great deal of loss of time. Consistently we had situations where statements were made by ministers answering questions that in some way offended the Official Opposition, and they immediately leapt to their feet and, you know, went to points of order. In some cases we had three, four, five points of order after every single question period, and this chewed up a lot of time.

Mr. Speaker, the rulings on this by Speaker Zwozdesky were very clear, and they follow *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, on page 510, which states:

The Speaker . . . is not responsible for the quality or content of replies to questions. In most instances, when a point of order or a question of privilege has been raised in regard to a response to an oral question, the Speaker has ruled that the matter is a disagreement among Members over the facts surrounding the issue. As such, these matters are more a question of debate and do not constitute a breach of the rules or of privilege.

Mr. Speaker, this is not a point of order. In question period there will always be disagreements in the case of the facts that are being stated, and there will be disagreements in the positions between various parties. I know that the members of the Official Opposition are particularly aggrieved by the very suggestion that was made by the ministers of the government, but the fact of the matter is that this is not a point of order. This is a disagreement of the facts, and therefore this should be ruled out of order.

The Speaker: Members of the Legislature, from the arguments I've heard, it would be my ruling that there is no point of order on this matter.

In order to allow adequate time to prepare for the budget process by the hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance this afternoon, the House is recessed until 3:15.

[The Assembly adjourned from 3:06 p.m. to 3:15 p.m.]

The Speaker: Members, please take your seats.

Orders of the Day Transmittal of Estimates

Mr. Ceci: Mr. Speaker, I have received certain messages from Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, which I now transmit to you.

The Sergeant-at-Arms: Order! Rise in the gallery.

The Speaker: The Lieutenant Governor transmits estimates of certain sums required by the offices of the Legislative Assembly for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2016, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

The Lieutenant Governor transmits the estimates of certain sums required by the government for the service of the province for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2016, and recommends the same to the Legislative Assembly.

Please be seated.

Mr. Ceci: Mr. Speaker, I wish to table the 2015-16 offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates as well as the 2015-16 government estimates. Further, I also wish to table the Budget 2015-18 strategic plan and the Budget 2015 ministry business plans.

Government Motions

Mr. Ceci: I now wish to table the government's Budget 2015 fiscal plan. Mr. Speaker, earlier today I introduced Bill 4, An Act to Implement Various Tax Measures and to Enact the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act, which will set legislative definitions for government reporting on the province's fiscal and financial positions and prospects. The form and contents of the government's fiscal plan anticipate this new legislation.

Budget Address

13. Mr. Ceci moved:
Be it resolved that the Assembly approve in general the business plans and fiscal policies of the government.

Mr. Ceci: Mr. Speaker, let me begin by thanking the thousands of Albertans who have spoken to me about their priorities and ideas for this first budget presented by Alberta's new government, led by Alberta's new Premier. The values of the people of Alberta came through loud and clear during our consultations. We're a hopeful and optimistic people. We're entrepreneurial and enterprising. We're community minded. We care about our neighbours. What we desire for ourselves, we wish for all. That is the Alberta way, and those are the values that drive this budget.

This government is working towards a vision of a province that is more prosperous and whose prosperity is much more widely and fairly shared. We're working towards a vision of a province with Canada's healthiest and best educated people, and we're working towards a vision of a province that is the world's most environmentally progressive energy producer, a sustainable, diversified engine of the Canadian economy that all Canadians will be proud to support as well as to benefit from, as we've all done for many years.

3:20

Mr. Speaker, this summer Albertans told us they want their families' health care and education to be protected while ensuring that every public dollar is well spent and that the rate of growth in

budgets is brought under control. Albertans told us that they want to see a plan to return to balanced budgets. Albertans know that lower oil prices mean deficits for the government of Alberta since we are currently so dependent on oil revenues to pay for public services. The citizens of this province want to see a plan to balance the budget within a reasonable amount of time without reckless cutbacks, that will only have to be repaired later.

Albertans told us that they want us to look for ways to diversify. Energy is going to be Alberta's business and the heart of our economy and our economic development for many decades to come, but jobs and diversification must also be at the top of our agenda this year and every year from now on. Albertans are well aware that the recent drop in the price of oil is presenting our province with a serious challenge.

Albertans also know that by making better decisions, we can and we will get through our current challenges to better days. We'll do it the Alberta way, by encouraging a vigorous and successful private sector, by building on our strengths and gifts, and by making better decisions about our future together. We will do it by looking after each other, while looking after our seniors, while looking after our children, while giving those who have been hit hard a hand up, just as neighbours have always done for each other in this province.

Mr. Speaker, this Legislature is going to lead by example. Our government will propose that members of this House agree to freeze the salaries of the members of cabinet, MLAs, and political staff positions for the entire term of this Legislature; in other words, until after the next election, in four years.

Further, the Premier has asked me to lead a comprehensive review of Alberta's agencies, boards, and commissions. I want to emphasize that many good people have and continue to contribute long hours of excellent public service on these boards, often for very modest compensation. But it is time to take a look at this sector. We are looking to reduce the number of these entities. We will set clear objectives and accountability for results for the entities that remain, and we will rationalize and standardize the compensation of the people appointed to sit on them.

Finally, our government will take a careful, responsible approach to implementing its platform of commitments. Our plans will be phased in as finances permit, just as we said they would be during the election and just as responsible stewards of Alberta's treasury should.

Mr. Speaker, our province is facing yet another downturn in the international price of oil. It's not like Alberta hasn't seen this before, and it's not like we don't know what to do. Alberta needs to reduce our vulnerability to price shocks over which we have no control. We must do this by saving for a rainy day, by diversifying our economy, and by getting the maximum possible value out of the development of our energy resources, resources that belong to the people of Alberta.

That was the right strategy in 1971, and it is the right strategy now. Unfortunately, Premier Lougheed's successors lost their way. For far too many years they squandered our resource revenues instead of saving them. They failed to diversify our economy, and they focused on a model of development for our energy resources that led us, exactly as you would expect, to where we are today.

Norway studied the Alberta way, adopted it, and has built up \$1.1 trillion in that country's investment fund. The government of Alberta set up the Alberta way and then threw it away. Our province has the third-largest oil reserves in the world. Between 1971 and 2015 Albertan companies exported \$1.3 trillion in oil and gas resources around the world. Our predecessors in office saved only a tiny fraction of this incredible bounty. We must do better.

Mr. Speaker, we won't solve all of the challenges in one budget. Getting back to that original vision will take more than one term of

this Legislature. But it is time to begin, and to begin, we need to make better decisions and set better priorities. This is what we are going to do in this budget.

Mr. Speaker, the government of Alberta is pursuing three priorities in this budget. First, we will stabilize public services. We will reverse a number of bad decisions made in recent years, and we will continue to implement the commitments we made to the people of Alberta in the recent election.

Second, we will set out a plan to balance the budget, a balanced budget plan that will reflect the values and priorities of the people of Alberta and will strike the right balance between Alberta's fiscal priorities and our economic and social ones.

Third, we will act on jobs and diversification. We will act within our means and as resources permit to be good partners with the private sector as it creates jobs. We will do what we reasonably can to help diversify our economy.

Let me begin with the cleanup work we have had to address and the commitments we are getting to work on to stabilize key public services. For a generation now Alberta has been conducting a unique and failed experiment with regressive, flat income taxes. Rich, middle income, or poor, in Alberta under Conservative government you paid a 10 per cent income tax rate. No jurisdiction in Canada at any level and under any party, including the recently defeated Conservative government in Ottawa, followed this income tax model because it is wrong-headed, grossly regressive, and unfair. As we detailed in Bill 2 in the spring sitting of this Legislature and we confirm today, we're abolishing this flat income tax model. We're replacing flat taxes with a normal, fair, progressive income tax system.

Alberta has also been conducting a failed experiment in undercharging our largest and most profitable corporations. Our predecessors believed that ordinary Alberta families should pay ever-increasing fees, levies as well as regressive income taxes while the largest, most profitable corporations needed tax breaks even in their best years. In this budget we confirm that we will do our part to end the race to the bottom on corporate taxes in Canada.

As detailed in Bill 2, we are implementing a 12 per cent corporate tax rate, in the mid-range of rates across Canada. A great deal of nonsense has been said about this measure. Corporate income taxes are only paid when companies are profitable. In tough years corporate taxes go down, not up, including at this new rate. In the years to come, as profits recover, our largest companies will make a normal, fair contribution to balancing the budget and to building our province. Mr. Speaker, we're not faulting the companies. They were only paying the taxes the government required them to pay. What we are doing is making better decisions by asking those who can afford to contribute a little more to do so.

3:30

Then with the benefit of these tax reforms we will act to restore stability to our schools and hospitals. Proposals were put before this House by the previous government to cut funding to Alberta's elementary, secondary, and postsecondary school systems even though education is the single most important investment our province can make in the welfare of our children and the success of our future economy. In this budget we confirm we are restoring funding to the Education and Advanced Education budgets that were cut by the former government. This reinvestment means a great deal to the education system at every level. It means that school boards right across this province do not have to make significant cuts to services this year, next year, or the one after that. It means that the new students who showed up for class this fall have teachers in their classrooms, and it means that university and college students are able to resume their studies benefiting from a

two-year tuition freeze, a big relief from the planned increases that would have made postsecondary education even harder for ordinary families to afford.

Mr. Speaker, last March proposals were also put before this House to deeply cut Alberta's health care system. These cuts were proposed without any plan to implement them. They were simply targets, in truth a formula for chaos and the layoff of thousands of health care workers. In this budget we are restoring Health funding so we won't have chaos in our health care system and we won't be losing thousands of front-line health care providers. Instead, we will continue to build a universal public health care system that is one of this country's rights of citizenship and one of this country's great contributions to the world.

Mr. Speaker, for far too long those who needed the most help have been last in line for the support they need. That is also going to change under this government. Let me highlight some of the initiatives that will set better priorities for the most vulnerable among us. First, as I know all too well, the call for increased family and community support services funding, FCSS, was ignored by previous governments. We will invest \$101 million in FCSS this year, a \$25 million increase. These funds give a helping hand to children and families most in need of help.

Our government will also act on its commitment to address the issue of family violence. Those seeking escape from violence must have a safe place to go. Therefore, as we committed to do in the election, we will enhance supports available to women and children affected by family violence. This year we will invest \$15 million in new annual funding to support women's shelters.

Mr. Speaker, with these repairs and reforms done, we need to address the fiscal consequences of the current drop in oil prices. This year we are projecting a \$6.1 billion deficit. As Albertans know, this is primarily the consequence of lower royalty, corporate, and other tax revenues caused by the drop in the price of oil. Last year the government of Alberta collected \$8.9 billion from resource royalties. This year we are expecting to collect \$2.8 billion, a \$6.1 billion drop in resource revenues in one year.

To make matters worse, we had a hot and dry summer. We will not leave our farmers and rural communities without support. We therefore funded an additional \$525 million beyond what was budgeted to provide \$725 million to manage drought and wildfires. This was an early warning to all of us of the direct price we'll end up paying if we and our trading partners around the world don't get our collective act together on environmental issues.

Albertans expect a prudent, careful plan to get this budget back into balance. The plan that we are presenting today will do exactly that.

Now, Mr. Speaker, there are those who believe that when the price of oil comes down, it's time to fire teachers and nurses. They believe that the answer to job losses in the private sector is to make things even worse for our economy by firing thousands more in communities right across this province. They would respond to the market behaviour of other major oil producers by targeting people in our communities whose calling it is to teach our children, look after the sick, and care for our elderly. Proposals for reckless cutbacks to front-line public services to balance the budget immediately are out of touch with the people of Alberta. Those are the priorities that the people of Alberta have rejected. Albertans told us during our budget consultations that they fundamentally disagree with this talk about multibillion-dollar cuts to their health care and their children's education. You don't answer an economic challenge by making it worse.

Albertans also told us that they want to see a plan to steadily phase out the deficit and they want us to stick to that plan until it's done. That is what we are going to do, Mr. Speaker. In this budget

we set out a plan to return to a balanced budget within the term of this Legislature. We are projecting a \$6.1 billion deficit in 2015-16. The deficit projection is \$5.4 billion in 2016-17. This will drop to \$4.4 billion in 2017-18, to \$2.1 billion in 2018-19, and we will balance the budget in 2019-2020.

Mr. Speaker, a number of tough decisions are required to get there. To begin, we will get Alberta's budget back into balance by getting the rate of increase in our Health budget under control. Over the past 10 years the Health budget has increased by an average of 6 per cent each and every year. We need to manage that rate of growth. In 2016-17 we plan to manage the Health budget within a 4 per cent increase and in 2017-18 within a 3 per cent increase. Thereafter, we aim to hold the Health budget to 2 per cent growth. In other words, we intend to stabilize the Health budget and then bend the curve of its growth in steps over three years.

Some will argue that these are modest goals, and they will try to persuade Albertans that we can save billions of dollars overnight by cutting the salaries of a handful of administrators. The reality is that we need to manage a far more complex challenge. We need to better manage significant annual spending pressures from the cost of compensating our province's world-class and dedicated doctors, from the rising costs of pharmaceuticals, from the rising costs of operating a very large network of hospitals and other facilities, and from the rising costs of having gotten it so tragically wrong on long-term care and mental health care, driving people into our hospitals who would be better helped in more appropriate facilities or through community services.

In the face of these issues abruptly cutting these budgets would simply cause chaos and run up costs we'd have to pay later. We need to phase in reform with a steady hand, system-wide, in a way that preserves a universal public health care system funded through a sustainable Health budget. That's what we're going to do. My colleague the Minister of Health will be working in close cooperation with all of the dedicated Albertans involved in our health system to plan and manage it more effectively and to get better health outcomes within what will remain the second-largest per capita investment in health care of any province in Canada.

Mr. Speaker, there is more we need to do to get to a balanced budget during the term of this Legislature. We need to manage the rate of growth in this budget overall with the same creative, determined approach we will bring to health care. The plan we are tabling today holds overall spending growth in government to an average of 2 per cent per year.

3:40

Finally, we'll be raising some levies, which will benefit the health and well-being of Albertans. In this budget we'll increase provincial taxes on tobacco by \$5 per carton, and we'll increase the alcohol markup by 5 per cent. These measures will contribute \$122 million to the revenue.

Mr. Speaker, this plan is based on the best private-sector estimates of commodity prices, but as every Albertan knows, oil prices are hard to predict even two months in advance. If oil prices recover more quickly, we will use the additional revenues to get to a balanced budget more quickly. If oil prices recover more slowly, then we will have to revisit all these issues in future budgets. One way or another, once the budget is in balance, we will present a debt repayment plan as part of an overall reassessment of our fiscal priorities.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta has an economic shock to manage. The provincial government plays an important role as a shock absorber, but we need to ensure we don't overplay that role. On average, Canadian governments are managing debt equivalent to 30 per cent of their GDP in pursuit of their objectives. Today our government

introduced a new Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act that will set the tightest limits on borrowing anywhere in Canada. This act will limit Alberta government borrowing to 15 per cent of GDP, half the average of other provinces. That will provide enough room to allow our government to play its economic role without tipping into overdependence on debt. As I said a moment ago, debt reduction will be one of our province's fiscal priorities once we are back in balance.

Let me now outline some important first steps we will take to promote jobs and economic recovery. A Canadian provincial government does not directly create jobs in the private sector. That is the work of our entrepreneurs, visionaries, and job creators. What we can do is time our work as government to be as helpful as possible. We can be good partners. We can create the right conditions, and we can open the right doors. Throughout the summer I travelled across Alberta listening to Albertans and consulting with industry and businesses of all sizes. I met amazing, creative individuals with bright ideas who, if given the right tools and the right opportunities to connect and collaborate, will create successful new enterprises. They told me about the challenges of working with government, about limited capital availability and the lack of trade support. There is so much opportunity in Alberta, but diversification and business development has been on the back burner for too long.

We have incredible value-added petrochemical industries, agriculture and agrifood, tourism, software and technology, light and heavy manufacturing, creative industries, and small business. They are all important latent strengths of our province and should be pillars of the much more diversified, shock-resistant, and prosperous economy we need to build.

To this end, we will take the following first steps. First, we will increase access to capital for small and medium-sized businesses in every community in Alberta. We will increase the capital available to ATB Financial by \$1.5 billion, with the goal of steadily increasing capital available to loan on commercial terms but with a clear commitment to building Alberta to help our province's entrepreneurs and job creators across the province. ATB is an important institution that our province equipped itself with to build prosperity and to help handle economic challenges. It is and will remain independently and professionally governed and operated. Lending decisions will be made and administered on the basis of sound banking practice by professionals, not by politicians. We are equipping ATB Financial with more resources to renew and reinvigorate its mission, helping to support and capitalize small and medium-sized businesses in every community in this province.

Second, we'll take steps to promote greater access to venture capital. Supporting small and medium-sized businesses isn't just about making it easier for them to borrow. Entrepreneurs and job creators need access to equity capital on reasonable commercial terms to get start-ups launched, to become bankable, and to finance growth and innovation. As a first step to address this gap, the government of Alberta is today announcing that we will invest \$50 million over the next two years into the Alberta Enterprise Corporation. This will help support the development of a vibrant venture capital market as well as innovation and entrepreneurship across our province.

Mr. Speaker, our heritage fund is unique and special to Albertans. It was created to support future generations and to invest in our future. While continuing the mandate of the fund to maximize returns for future generations of Albertans, we are announcing today that we have mandated the Alberta Investment Management Corporation to focus a prudent but significant portion of our province's heritage fund to directly invest in Alberta's growth.

Three per cent of the heritage fund, \$540 million, will be targeted to growth-oriented companies in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, these measures, mobilizing almost \$2.1 billion through ATB, AEC, and AIMCo to support job creation and diversification in this province, are important steps to help make Alberta Canada's best place to launch and grow a business. Professionals with expertise in business development and investment, not politicians, will make decisions in the best interest of Albertans, with a focus on growth, diversification, and jobs. By taking these steps, we can be Canada's best jurisdiction for entrepreneurs, job creators, innovators, and new ideas in every part of the economy.

With our world-class universities, manufacturing base, smart, young population, and an obvious need to diversify our economy, we have what it takes. With access to a little more capital there are remarkable opportunities for growth and diversification right across this province. There are opportunities in the towers in Calgary and Edmonton and in our great universities and colleges and in mid-size and rural communities, north and south, and among the rising generation of bright, eager, and entrepreneurial young aboriginal people on and off reserve right across Alberta. If you are a young person or just a plain energetic person with good ideas, you want to be in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, as we committed to do in the spring election campaign, we will invest \$178 million to introduce a new job creation incentive, that will reward eligible job creators with grants of up to \$5,000 for each new job created. This is a measure specifically designed to encourage job creators to lean on the side of hiring when planning their businesses during the current downturn. This grant will be available to eligible Alberta employers, nonprofits, and charities. It will support up to 27,000 new jobs each year through 2017.

3:50

Next, acting on the advice of former Bank of Canada governor David Dodge, we will accelerate the province of Alberta's capital construction plan. Overall, we will increase investment in capital spending by 15 per cent compared to the previous plan, an additional \$4.5 billion in new investments over five years. We will increase capital investment by \$500 million in the current fiscal year, by \$1.3 billion in 2016-17, by \$1.7 billion in 2017-18, by \$600 million in 2018-19, and \$400 million in 2019-20. Over the next three years this supplementary capital spending will increase employment by 8,000 to 10,000 jobs and real GDP by about .5 per cent.

Our capital plan provides for construction of a new cancer hospital in Calgary, a flood control solution in Calgary, significant improvements to health facilities in Edmonton, significant improvements to public transit in both Calgary and Edmonton, expansion of Red Deer's obstetric facilities, replacing the High River government building damaged by the 2013 flood, expanding the Lethbridge College trades and technology renewal and innovation project, and a major increase in water and roads projects in communities across Alberta, detailed in Alberta's new capital plan.

Mr. Speaker, earlier this fall my colleague the Minister of Education was obliged to report to the public that half of the schools slated to open across Alberta would miss their announced completion dates because of poor planning and rushed announcements by the previous government. That is a serious mistake that we are not going to repeat. We will therefore carefully review proposals and plans for additional infrastructure projects on the basis of more transparent and accountable criteria before we issue any press releases. We will have a number of important additional announcements to make in the coming months addressing roads and transit,

water projects, long-term care facilities, educational institutions, and a number of other priority areas when plans for these investments are ready.

Last week the Premier announced the creation of the new Alberta Ministry of Economic Development and Trade, to focus our business and trade support programs and services. Always with the goal of being a better partner for entrepreneurs and job creators, we have reorganized several departments to create this one-stop shop for all job creation and promotion work in the government of Alberta. Services that were scattered among four departments have been put under the leadership of this new department, with the aim to be a world-class economic development agency: lean, smart, user-friendly, and fast.

The Minister of Economic Development and Trade will focus on enhancing Alberta's trade development and promotion in markets all around the world. As a trading province we need to aggressively build and diversify our markets. Through this department we will reinforce and build our network of trade missions, and we will enhance our promotion and marketing efforts to help Albertan exporters expand their markets overseas, with a particular emphasis on the Asia Pacific. Next we will partner with economic development agencies, business improvement zones, revitalization districts, and local associations to enhance opportunities for businesses throughout Alberta. We will invest \$10 million in community economic development initiatives to support local economic development associations and help them make their full contribution to job creation and economic renewal in Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, we will make some important strategic decisions about the foundation of our economy, our energy industry. Our government will soon present a set of reforms to Alberta's energy royalty structure. We are pursuing three aims in this review.

First, this package of reforms will modernize and update our royalty regime to stay up to date with the developments in the industry and to provide the necessary certainty about our royalty system for investors and all Albertans until it is next appropriate to review it.

Second, we are considering whether the royalty system can be rebalanced to encourage and reward value-added processing and diversification.

Third, Alberta's royalty system will provide that as prices for our energy resources recover, the people of Alberta will share appropriately in better times.

Last but far from least, Mr. Speaker, we are going to work to recover our good name among our key energy markets by doing our part to address climate change. Our government will soon present a set of reforms to Alberta's environmental policies. Getting control of pollution is good for the health of every Albertan. Reducing carbon emissions is the right thing to do as our contribution to one of the world's biggest problems. Systematically modernizing our electricity supply to phase out coal will create a significant opportunity for new investment. Promoting energy efficiency will pay off in lower costs and greater competitiveness in our energy sector and throughout our economy. Promoting the use of renewable energy will diversify our supply and cut down on our carbon emissions, and acting on these issues will restore our international reputation, the necessary prerequisite to getting access to more markets for our energy products.

Getting our environmental policies right will create jobs and promote economic efficiency, competitiveness, and growth, which, as you can see, Mr. Speaker, is what this government will be working on, on many fronts.

Mr. Speaker, with this budget we are achieving three important things. First, we are getting it right on health care, education, and human services. Stabilizing public services by providing long-term,

sustainable, and predictable funding is what Albertans asked of us and what we will deliver to them. To do this, we are repairing some serious mistakes and misjudgments in our province's tax system and in its investments in key public services. Second, we are setting out a balanced-budget plan. Our plan balances our budget in a reasonable time frame without radical cuts or front-line service layoffs. Third, we are getting to work on a plan to diversify our economy and to create jobs.

We have set out some important steps to ensure the government of Alberta is a good partner in our province with our province's entrepreneurs and job creators, the keys to diversifying our economy, and we have given the Legislature notice that our government will shortly be tabling the results of its royalty and climate change reviews, further adding to the building blocks of a modern, diversified, energy-efficient, and growing Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, with this budget we will support jobs and we will support families the Alberta way.

The Speaker: The House leader for Her Majesty's Official Opposition.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll move that we adjourn for the day.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4 p.m. to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, October 28, 2015

Day 11

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

First Session

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Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Mr. Coolahan
Deputy Chair: Mr. Schneider

Anderson, S.	Jansen
Carson	Larivee
Fitzpatrick	McKitrick
Gotfried	Schreiner
Hanson	Sucha
Horne	Taylor
Hunter	

Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee

Chair: Ms Gray
Deputy Chair: Ms Payne

Anderson, W.	Miranda
Clark	Nielsen
Cortes-Vargas	Nixon
Cyr	Renaud
Jansen	Starke
Loyola	Swann
McLean	van Dijken
Miller	

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Sweet
Deputy Chair: Mr. Smith

Goehring	Pitt
Hinkley	Rodney
Jansen	Shepherd
Littlewood	Swann
Luff	Westhead
Orr	Yao
Payne	

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Ms Woollard
Deputy Chair: Mr. Dach

Bhullar	Nixon
Connolly	Shepherd
Cooper	Sweet
Cortes-Vargas	van Dijken
Kleinsteuber	

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Wanner
Deputy Chair: Mr. Schmidt

Cooper	McLean
Fildebrandt	Nielsen
Goehring	Nixon
Luff	Piquette
McIver	

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Ms McPherson
Deputy Chair: Mr. Kleinsteuber

Anderson, W.	Hinkley
Babcock	Littlewood
Connolly	McKitrick
Dang	Rosendahl
Drever	Stier
Drysdale	Strankman
Fraser	

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Dr. Turner
Deputy Chair: Ms Fitzpatrick

Carson	Loyola
Coolahan	McPherson
Cooper	Schneider
Ellis	Starke
Hanson	van Dijken
Kazim	Woollard
Larivee	

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. Fildebrandt
Deputy Chair: Ms Gray

Barnes	Malkinson
Bhullar	Miller
Cyr	Payne
Dach	Renaud
Gotfried	Turner
Hunter	Westhead
Loyola	

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Ms Kazim
Deputy Chair: Mr. Loewen

Aheer	MacIntyre
Anderson, S.	Rosendahl
Babcock	Schreiner
Clark	Stier
Drysdale	Sucha
Horne	Woollard
Kleinsteuber	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, October 28, 2015

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Let us reflect. As we begin this sitting, let us reflect on our good fortune as a province and as a nation, our good fortune of having such a well and diverse world, rich with people of different faiths and different cultures, people who make us stronger by sharing their celebrations with all of us, celebrations such as the Hindu Diwali, the festival of lights. For it is light that allows us to see more clearly, and it is light that allows us to make decisions that bind us together, not divide us.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

Ms McKittrick: Mr. Speaker, it's my delight today to introduce to you and through you a wonderful group of students from St. Theresa school, a grade 6 class. They are sitting up there in the members' gallery with their teachers Ms Stefanie Kaiser and Mr. Sam Marino. I just wanted to point out that I'm so delighted that St. Theresa school is here because this school had forums for both the provincial and the federal elections, and grade 7 students took some of the lead in asking questions and moderating. I'm glad that the students here in grade 6 have a chance to observe the Legislative Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. I will not ask the students how the vote turned out.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have three groups to introduce quickly here today. First of all, 21 students from NorQuest College with their teachers Armando Bavaro and Ellen Robb.

I also have some students here from the Cultural Connections Institute – the Learning Exchange with their teacher, Ellen Joanne Campbell. We have Nina Voloshyn, Daniela Lopes, Pablo Lizzarago Lamas, Olivier Tanguy, and Enjuli Zemerak.

I also have four representatives here today from the Central McDougall parents' group and the heroes of 107th project: Kristina de Guzman, Mohamed Wali, Daryn Baddour, and Jermaine Curtis.

I would ask all those that I've named to stand and receive the warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Welcome.
Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly two groups of guests today. The first is a young family who lives in my riding of Edmonton-McClung. Mr. Eric August, Mrs. Dagmar Skamlova, and their daughter Madeleine are here today. They recently moved into the riding. This family is keenly interested in social justice, in being involved with their community, and they are deeply interested in how the Alberta government is working for families like their own.

Mr. Speaker, I'm further honoured to introduce to you and through you Mr. Elmer Brattberg, owner of the Academy of Learning; Mr. Charles Jarvis, general manager of the Academy of Learning; and Mrs. Coryne Yacucha, operations manager of the Academy of Learning, whom I have met and connected with

through their fantastic work at the Academy of Learning institute in my constituency. I would ask all of them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

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

Ms Luff: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to introduce to you and through you today a wonderful group of community leaders from the Ethno-Cultural Council of Calgary and the United Ethnic Leaders Council. I had the pleasure of meeting with many of these along with the Member for Calgary-Cross to discuss their concerns and dreams for their communities. These people work on a myriad of issues, from family violence to addressing class size, and they're all doing just a wonderful job. I am going to read all of their names. I will do it as quickly as possible and strive not to mispronounce them. They are Linh Bui, Lovella Penaranda, Mandy Zhu, Qiao Lin, Fobete Dingha, Ernestine Bissou, Feruza Abajobir, Ameera Abbo, Khor Top, Basem Snjar, Amir Ahmed, Ekhlis Elibaid, Biftu Mohammed, Amartii Warri, Urga Adunga, Makana Dug, Amtul Khan, Arzouma Kalsongui, Zaheer Chaudhri, Patricia Chaudhri, Lieu Nguyen, Jenny Vu, Aliya Shahzad, Sukhwant Parmar, Tazim Esmail, Nizar Bhaloo, Connie Genilo, Essie Roxas, Allyn Abanes, Tabitha David, Yasmin Pradhan, Yvonne Thai, Olufemi Ojo, Shahid Parvez, and Asjad Bukhari. I would like to thank all of them for the work they do as community leaders. They make such a difference to our communities. I would ask that they rise and all receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Ms Miller: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to introduce to you and through you my friend Jennifer Vanderschaeghe. Jennifer is the executive director of the Central Alberta AIDS Network Society. CAANS is a central Alberta community-based organization which works to prevent sexually transmitted infections and hepatitis C as well as support a range of people, including people living with HIV; gay, bisexual, transgendered people; sex workers; people who use drugs; and people who are street involved. Jennifer has worked in HIV and harm reduction work for 23 years in Alberta. Jennifer, would you rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly members of the Alberta bioenergy producers group. The group met with members of the government caucus today to discuss opportunities for economic development and innovation in the bioenergy sector. They are seated today in the public gallery. I ask them to rise as I call their names and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly: Bridgette Duniece, Doug Hooper, Brent Rabik, and Len Sanche.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise today and introduce you to two heroes from St. Albert. Steve Murdoch is a firefighter, paramedic, and a son of St. Albert. He's been working with St. Albert fire and EMS since 2011. Adam Colameco is now with the St. Albert fire department and is also an EMS worker and previously worked in Fort McMurray with the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. Please rise, Steven and Adam, and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks and Minister Responsible for the Status of Women.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two guests. Lisa Lambert is one of my constituency managers, and she is also a sessional instructor at the University of Lethbridge as she completes her PhD in political science at the University of Calgary. It is not easy to be a member 500 kilometres away from the capital with two small children, and it requires good staff to make sure that all the wheels stay on all the buses at all the right times. That is what Lisa Lambert does for me, and I thank her for it every day. I would not be here without her.

With Lisa is a key volunteer from my campaign, Gabe Cassie. Gabe is a third-year student at the University of Lethbridge, and while we have tried to persuade him that political science is the best degree, he seems to have been convinced to study philosophy instead. He also contributes to his students' union council and is an active member of the community, Mr. Speaker.

I'd ask them both to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

Mr. Horne: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Mr. Rob Boulet. Mr. Boulet contacted my office because he wanted to be here to witness question period the day after the budget was tabled, which he characterized as a historic event. I was pleased to be able to facilitate his visit, and I ask Mr. Boulet to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly my good friend Mr. Dave Kirschner, a truly great Albertan. Mr. Kirschner has done tremendous work advancing the interests of northern Alberta both as a past member of the Northern Alberta Development Council and as a now retired member of the regional municipality of Wood Buffalo council. Mr. Kirschner has made a huge impact both within this region and across the province, and his hard work on a long list of boards, advocacy groups, and committees goes to show it. I ask that we please show the warm welcome of this Assembly to my friend Dave Kirschner.

The Speaker: Does any other member have any more guests to present? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Ms McLean: Thank you, sir. I would like to introduce to you and through you a somewhat unexpected guest who is prone to dropping in on me without notice, my mother, Margaret McGinn. Accordingly, her introduction will be short as there is far too much to say about my fantastic mother. I ask her to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Provincial Budget

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Everyone in Alberta is now poorer as a result of this budget. Families sitting around the kitchen table watching their bottom line are seeing the government raise taxes. Bringing in record deficits will put the province \$47 billion

in debt. There is no doubt about it: higher debt will mean less money in the pockets of all Albertans, who will be forced to pay for escalating interest payments.

And what about Albertans hoping to hold on to their jobs in the energy sector, who are worried about the dangerous economic policies of the NDP? They received no good news from this budget, that is jam-packed with risky economic ideas. Yesterday's budget speech all but predetermined the work of the royalty panel. There's no doubt about it: the NDP want royalties up and soon. There seems to be zero consideration about the damage being done to the economy or the massive job losses for those who are relying on the energy sector for their livelihood.

Despite Alberta having one of the best environmental regimes in the world, the NDP signal clearly more taxes, more regulations, more damage to the viability of our businesses. The NDP seems completely clueless about what life is like for Albertans in the private sector right now. For every high-paid consultant, bloated bureaucrat salary they want to protect, there are thousands of Albertans who are looking for work.

Jobs don't just create themselves. Our energy producers need a market that's competitive, but the NDP continues to cut them off at the knees. The Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers recently estimated that 42 per cent of the provincial economy is tied to the energy sector. Yes, let's diversify the economy. Let's have more good jobs that can withstand the pressure of low-priced oil. But let's stop knocking the industry that has created such prosperity in our province, and let's stand as proud Albertans.

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

Heroes of 107th Avenue Project

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Spanning three Edmonton communities, 107th Avenue from 95th to 116th Street is known as the Avenue of Nations. Offering low rents and easy access to government, community, and transit services in neighbourhoods around this avenue has provided a new start for thousands of refugees and immigrants from Italy, China, Cambodia, Vietnam, and, more recently, Somalia, Somaliland, Ethiopia, and Eritrea as well as indigenous Albertans from rural areas or reserves. These men and women have invested in this community, opening businesses and cultural centres where they celebrate and share the rich cultures of their homelands and offer each other a taste of the familiar in an unfamiliar place.

Yet some miss 107th Avenue's rich culture and community, the residents' hard work and courage and see only preconceptions of poverty, danger, and crime. Heroes of 107th Avenue project was founded to combat this prejudice by sharing stories from the lives of the residents of our community. Through story circles, photo sessions, and one-on-one interviews Kristina de Guzman, Daryn Baddour, Jermaine Curtis, Suraj Khatiwada, and Kristy Lee are working to create a graphic novel that celebrates the lives and experiences of the men, women, and families who call 107th Avenue home. This collaborative work will give voice to new Canadians, allowing them to share their stories of hope, struggle, and the journeys that brought them here. Its visual format will transcend language and literacy barriers and make the stories more accessible to youth.

I thank these community leaders for their work and the timely reminder that Alberta draws strength from the richness and diversity of our cultural communities, communities that will greatly benefit from the proposals put forward in yesterday's budget.

Thank you.

Progressive Conservative Opposition

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, I'm happy to stand today in support of the thousands of Albertans who continue to believe that the Progressive Conservative Party best represents their values. It is a myth that the PC Party is down and out. We are alive and kicking.

We were the government for 44 years because we worked with Albertans to build this great province. Although we may look a little different today, that is what we continue to do. It is not by chance that we were elected for decades. One loss in 44 years does not mean that we are done. People thought the federal Liberals were done after the last election, and they just formed a majority government. We are still standing. We are rebuilding. We have three years to rebuild, and we'll be back stronger than ever. We have the strongest constituency associations, stronger than any other party. We will take direction from the constituencies across Alberta made up of all kinds of people, not just the unions of Alberta.

We do not wish to see a failing government because that's not what's best for Albertans. We will work with this government to make Alberta stronger, and we will hold them accountable for their policies and their budgets. We will advocate for the future of this province, for our children and our grandchildren. We will continue to criticize government spending that we can't afford and that our children will have to pay for because this government did not spend Albertans' money responsibly. Our caucus has the best experience in this House. We will use our knowledge to critique government policies and help develop policies that are best for Alberta.

The opposition pundits and media say that we are dead. This is not true. They don't speak for Albertans. I have spoken with Albertans, and we have great support for this party and what it stands for. It is far from over. You don't have to believe me, Mr. Speaker. Ask the people of Alberta.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Government Revenue Forecasts

Mr. Jean: My first-ever question to this Premier was about a provincial sales tax. I was trying to be helpful and let her kill that rumour right off the bat. She said the right thing, but when I look at this budget and its fantasy revenue projections for fiscal 2018-2019, I cannot figure out where all the government revenue is going to come from. The dean of Alberta's political journalists says that a sales tax is in our future. Does the Premier still commit that she won't introduce a PST, an HST, or a sales tax of any kind whatsoever on Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member opposite for the opportunity to talk about yesterday's fabulous budget. We introduced a budget which has three pillars. The budget will protect the public services that Albertans rely on for their families and their communities. The budget will map out and does map out a plan to balance. The budget will focus on the very job creation that members opposite were talking about.

Also, that budget or any other budget in the term of this government does not and will not include a PST.

Mr. Jean: I notice there was no reference to any other type of sales tax, so not quite helpful.

But it leads to a much, much harder question. You see, no one that I can find has a credible explanation for how this government is going to bring in \$55 billion in revenue in fiscal 2019. In our best-ever boom years we never got anywhere near that number. It would take a boom of outrageous proportions to bring in that much revenue for Alberta. Is the Premier banking on another boom, and if not, where is all this money going to come from?

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Let me begin, of course, because I did run out of time: PST, HST, or any other sales tax will not be happening.

In terms of the revenue projections in this budget we took a very cautious and conservative approach. National Bank Financial has noted that our government's energy price projection is more conservative than the consensus forecast. They've also noted that our projections for the difference between the different kinds of oil are higher than the consensus forecast and, therefore, are much more conservative. Overall we are using conservative revenue forecasts. That's what Albertans count on us to do.

Mr. Jean: No conservative budget I've ever seen looks like that.

Mr. Speaker, when you look at the budget, it appears that this Premier is clearly planning for a superboom starting in 2018 and carrying through the election year. Revenues are projected to be at all-time records, but so will spending. Even with the Premier's projected superboom, she will just barely balance the books and she will still be borrowing for infrastructure. To the Premier, through you, Mr. Speaker: does she ever plan on paying down any debt?

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Indeed we do, and that plan is included very clearly in the budget, a plan that includes capital spending and operational spending that was endorsed by a former governor of the Bank of Canada, who identified something that these folks over there seem to have missed. We have had a massive drop in revenue in this province, and what we need and what Albertans have told us they want is a government who will act as a shock absorber. We have a boom-and-bust economy. We do not need a boom-and-bust government.

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Jean: Well, she dodged that question.

Provincial Debt

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, this may come as a shock to the NDP, but paying back your debt is very important. Albertans have to do it. When you borrow to pay back debts, creditors start to actually charge you more interest; they lower your credit rating. That makes everything the government does far more expensive. That leaves less money for Albertans and the Alberta services that we need. This budget has too much debt and no plan at all to pay it back. That puts our triple-A credit rating at risk. Why is the Premier risking the future well-being of Albertans with this budget?

Ms Notley: Well, very much contrary to what the member opposite is saying, this budget is investing in the future well-being of Albertans. The drop in the price of a barrel of oil should not be something that every teacher looks at every morning to find out if they have a job that day. Our kids, our seniors, our young people need to know that they have universities and schools and hospitals there for them when they need them. We need a government that will ensure that those important services are kept in place and will walk a stable path through tough times and won't get hysterical and react in here. [some applause]

Mr. Jean: Thank you for the applause.

This morning Moody's rating agency warned on Alberta's big-spending, big-borrowing budget. They call it "credit negative". They note that the projected debt burden surpasses Moody's previous expectations. They've said that if Alberta's debt exceeds 60 per cent of revenues, our credit rating may drop. This budget has debt exceeding 80 per cent of revenues. Does the Premier worry that our credit will be downgraded just as the NDP is taking us towards \$50 billion in debt?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, these guys are always looking for an angle to find something to criticize. Fair enough; that's their job. Two days ago they said: you know, what we need is to make sure that we maintain and protect our 15 per cent debt-to-GDP ratio. So yesterday my government introduced a bill which legislated a 15 per cent debt-to-GDP cap. That, Mr. Speaker, puts us at one-half the average debt level of all the provinces in the rest of the country, so that is an exceptionally responsible, careful way forward. It's what these guys asked for a mere two days ago, but apparently it's not good enough.

Mr. Jean: Three years from now, your own projections suggest, you're going to blow that cap and violate your own legislation. This budget is a shamble. We are borrowing money to pay for government salaries for the first time in a generation. Think about that. If the NDP killed every dollar of infrastructure spending, they would still need to borrow to balance the books. The budget's energy revenue projections are even crazier. Moody's says that the government may be overprojecting oil prices by as much as \$20 a barrel. Is the Premier not worried that the credit rating agency thinks she got the spending, the revenue, and the borrowing in this budget all wrong?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. What we did responsibly in putting together this budget is that we went to the experts on energy price projections. Those experts gave us a conservative estimate, and that's what we adopted.

Let me talk about something else, Mr. Speaker. You know, these guys are all about cut, cut, cut, and critique, critique, critique. The solution that they would propose would be to slash teachers, slash nurses, and the cancer centre that I announced the construction of today would not be happening.

The Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Official Opposition, please proceed.

Infrastructure Project Funding

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, let's go to the Dodge report. This NDP government paid him \$64,000 for a report on infrastructure spending. Not surprisingly, he said: go for it; spend on infrastructure. He laid out various scenarios for spending. This NDP government decided to spend even more than his upgraded capital plan. Why is the Premier spending even more on infrastructure than is recommended in the Dodge report?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, in fact, Mr. Dodge actually proposed that we increase what was previously planned by 15 per cent, which is what this government did. One of the things that was very exciting about that was that I was then able to go to Calgary today and meet with patients and their families and talk about a hospital that they have been begging this government

for in Calgary and southern Alberta for 15 years. This government was the first government to actually say: we will build it. That's because of the capital budget that we have introduced and will move forward on. I think Albertans are in favour of that.

2:00

Mr. Jean: The Dodge report says that the capital plan should be pulled back a little in a low-priced environment because there's too much debt but then increased if oil bounces back, yet the NDP's plan is for record spending over the next three years and then pulling back on capital in 2019, when they project things will pick up again, exactly contrary to his report. Why is the Premier ignoring this high-priced advice? Is it because waiting on the lower priority projects until we can afford them means she won't get to cut enough ribbons before the next election?

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to respond to the hon. member's question about the Dodge report. Now, we had a lot of discussions with Mr. Dodge during the development of his report and subsequently, and if the member is not aware, Mr. Dodge did support and endorse the approach we're taking. Overall, over the five-year period we're actually spending less on capital than Mr. Dodge recommended, a little more at the front end and a little less at the back end, but that was something that was discussed with Mr. Dodge and something that he supported just yesterday.

Mr. Jean: When you pay \$64,000 for a report that's an edited report from another province, I'm not surprised he would endorse your position.

This budget was delayed for political reasons, but even with the delay, the government isn't giving Albertans a detailed list of the projects we are going into debt for. It would be helpful for Albertans to know what infrastructure projects this NDP government is taking on debt for; \$4 billion worth of projects are just listed as other projects. Wildrose has always called for a public list of infrastructure priorities. That's not in this budget. To the Premier: why is her government borrowing billions for projects . . .

The Speaker: I would acknowledge the leader of the third party. Excuse me. The Premier. Sorry.

Ms Notley: That's okay. If he would like to answer it. I don't know.

Well, you know, that's certainly a very good question. In the election we talked about the fact that – because we actually had some similar points as the opposition across the way on the issue of clarity of infrastructure priorities and infrastructure criteria. So there was a tremendous amount of backed up infrastructure projects that we needed to go forward with right away, but we also knew that we had the time to do the good due diligence, to do our homework, to consult with Albertans, and to come up with those clear criteria, that we collectively have called for in the past, and to share those with Albertans before we announced the remaining . . .

The Speaker: Now the leader of the third party.

Provincial Debt (continued)

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, in the tax, spend, and borrow budget introduced yesterday, Albertans heard that the deficit is projected to be \$6.1 billion and that for the first time since 1993 the province will borrow for operating expenses. This NDP government cannot even pay for the groceries or keep the lights on without imposing a mortgage on Alberta's children, and the NDP has no plan to pay it back either. The minister spoke about supporting families in this

budget and then in the next breath saddled those families and children with a burden of debt. To the Premier: how will creating \$50 billion worth of debt with no plan to repay it support Alberta families?

Ms Notley: Well, I have to say that I am very proud that our budget is not the budget those folks over there introduced in March. Let me be very clear. Not only did that budget take a billion dollars out of health care this year with no single idea about how to do it, but then in following years the way they were going to balance the budget was by taking extra billions and billions of dollars out of health, out of education with no plan for how to make it happen. What that would have done is that it would've created absolute chaos, and the fundamental health and security and safety of Albertans would have been jeopardized. So I'm very glad that our budget does what it does.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, the NDP say that they'll limit borrowing to 15 per cent of GDP. It sounds okay except that the current rules limit it to about 4 per cent of GDP – 4 per cent – and this government will increase it to 15. This is a tax, spend, and borrow government at a time when Albertans need their government to provide solutions for the many Albertans that have lost their jobs since May 5. For the thousands of Albertans who have lost their jobs and others at risk due to this government's policies, tax increases, and minimum wage changes, how will making Alberta less competitive help them get jobs and create new jobs?

Ms Notley: Well, I'm not quite sure what the question was there. Nonetheless, here's the thing. For years this government thought capital investment meant cutting ribbons and putting out press releases. For instance, at the Baker centre, where I was today, we were on about the 10th announcement without a single shovel hitting the ground over about 12 or 13 years. That kind of approach to capital investment is what creates the kind of infrastructure debt that Albertans are struggling with today, which in itself is impeding and interfering with investment. So that's what we're trying to change, and that's what we will change.

Mr. McIver: Still the Premier avoids the question. I'll try it again. The NDP government yesterday put in black and white, their words, that it would not even develop a plan to pay back the nearly \$50 billion of debt until it has a surplus. In black and white they said that they wouldn't have a surplus till 2020 and that it would only be \$1 billion. Again to the Premier. Give Albertans a break here. What kind of magic do you have to fill a \$50 billion hole with a \$1 billion surplus five years from now? Please tell Albertans.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, as I said before, what our plan outlines is that we will remain below 15 per cent of a debt-to-GDP ratio, which is half the national average, and that's what it will be five years from now as the economy is recovering. That is in contrast to what this party over there, the former government, had planned, which was to take billions and billions and billions of dollars out of the budget without giving Albertans any idea of how they were going to have to pay for that. That's not what we're going to do. Our plan allows for a plan back to balance, and that's what we'll have.

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

Infrastructure Capital Planning

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday's budget left us with more questions than answers. Now, fortunately,

I have some answers for you here in the Alberta Party alternative budget, which balances in three years' time. This government announced tens of billions in new infrastructure spending but is still not clear exactly where these dollars will be spent. To the Premier. In the past you've called for transparency, and in your own campaign platform you promised an infrastructure sunshine list. Where is the list, and don't you think you should have created one before you committed to spending billions in infrastructure?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think I've already answered this question once, but I'm certainly happy to do it again. When we talked about infrastructure spending and clarity and transparency in the election, we were talking exactly about coming up with clear, accountable criteria that Albertans could evaluate and see and weigh, and that's what we're in the process of doing. So it was not necessary to go through all of that in the space of three and a half months because we had so much pent-up infrastructure that needed to start getting approved and moving ahead in this year that it gives us time to do exactly what the member opposite has asked about, and that is what we will do.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: will you release a detailed analysis of the economic impact and exactly how many jobs will be created by each project so Albertans know they're getting good value for their money?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think that the budget did in fact include an estimate of the overall number of jobs that would be created through the infrastructure investment, so that's what we'll go on. I think that information is already there. I think the other thing, of course, to remember is the benefit to Albertans that comes from that infrastructure being built. I can tell you today again, as I was saying earlier, that the patients and their families who I met with today are very pleased that after over a decade someone is finally moving forward on building the cancer centre for Calgary and southern Alberta.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While I'm certainly pleased that the Calgary cancer centre is moving ahead, I can't help but note it will be nearly a decade before it's completed.

To the Premier: will you commit here and now that any of the construction jobs created directly by Alberta tax dollars will not be eligible for the ill-conceived \$5,000 job-creation grant program so that companies cannot double-dip with Albertans' money?

Ms Sigurdson: Mr. Speaker, I'd be happy to speak about that as it has to do with my ministry. Certainly, we are supporting Albertan entrepreneurs, innovators, and job creators to have an environment where they can create jobs here in Alberta. We're very proud to bring that forward. Up to 27,000 jobs will be created by this project.

2:10

Human Services

Ms Sweet: Mr. Speaker, as a social worker I know first-hand how important it is to ensure good social programs, especially during these economic times. These programs support the well-being and success of individuals, families, and communities. To the Minister of Human Services: what is the government doing to support and maintain prevention and early intervention programs across the province?

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It makes sense that government should invest in key social programs during tough economic times. What we have done in terms of prevention is that we have increased FCSS, family and community supports, program money by \$25 million, which has never increased since 2009. We have increased funding by \$15 million for women's shelters. We have restored the cuts made to family and community supports programs. All these prevention efforts together will help make Alberta a better place.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what is the government doing to ensure the funding for critical social programs keeps up with the population increase in communities across Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member. As I said, for instance, the family and community support services program, FCSS, money has never increased since 2009. Due to that increase and in response to the population growth, Airdrie received \$1 million more in this budget just to meet the needs of the growing population.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that many of Alberta's hard-working front-line staff are already overwhelmed due to declining budgets in the past, again to the Minister of Human Services: what is your ministry doing to ensure that front-line workers are getting the supports that they need?

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. Let me begin by saying that at the heart of the success of Human Services lies the hard work and professionalism of our front-line staff. We are absolutely committed to providing all needed supports to our front line so that Albertans can get the quality services that they need and they deserve.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Infrastructure Capital Planning

(continued)

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It appears that there's quite a bit of concern about a certain list that was to be passed out here at some point, and with no apology I intend to ask about it, too. During the campaign the NDP promised to take the politics out of infrastructure and finally do what the Wildrose has been asking for for years: end the backroom deals and publish a prioritized infrastructure sunshine list. But an Infrastructure budget with \$34 billion of debt financing over five years has come and gone with no indication. To the minister: where is the prioritized sunshine list that we were promised?

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. The member is absolutely correct that this was a commitment of our government. The work is almost complete, and we expect that this infrastructure list will be introduced during this session of our Legislature.

Mr. Schneider: Mr. Speaker, this government is planning on spending a record amount of money on infrastructure. The question is: will we actually get the infrastructure value for all the money we are going to spend, all of it borrowed money, money future generations will have to pay back with interest? Alberta Infrastructure

has a poor track record overseeing capital projects. Just look at the school builds we've had to delay. Does the Premier really believe that her government has the capacity to manage more capital spending than B.C. and Saskatchewan combined?

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much for the question, hon. member. The difficulty that we've seen in terms of the management of capital projects stems largely from the habit of the previous government of making political announcements, including price tags, before any work in terms of analysis and design had been done; for example, not asking the question: can we build all those schools at once? This is a critical question. Announcing hospitals without assessing what the need is and actually planning it carefully before making a political announcement, forcing the department to then design to the political announcement, resulting in projects that are either too big or . . .

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Schneider: Mr. Speaker, the minister is going to spend \$34 billion of borrowed money over the next five years, but can taxpayers trust that he's making decisions free from political influence? We have no list, we have no timelines, we have no priorities, and the minister clearly doesn't feel any need to be accountable for the spending. To the minister. We've heard all the rhetoric. Now Alberta wants to know. Was there ever any intention to publicize the prioritized sunshine list that was promised?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much for that question, Mr. Speaker, but I believe I answered it in the first response to the hon. member. There is going to be a sunshine list. The work has been under way for several months. The work is almost complete, and we'll be introducing this sunshine list in this session of the Legislature.

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

Public Service Compensation

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. For the first time in about 22 years the government is going to be borrowing for operating expenses, and at the same time public-sector wages are going up by approximately \$1 billion, as noted on page 22 of the budget. To the Premier or the Minister of Finance: do you not see how increasing total operational expenses when you don't have the money to pay for it will push Alberta further into a structural deficit?

Mr. Ceci: The situation with salaries: we did not negotiate those contracts; those contracts were negotiated by the previous government. When they come open, we will negotiate fairly with our unions across the government of Alberta, and we will make sure that we are achieving our targets in this budget.

Mr. Bhullar: Well, then, Mr. Speaker, I will ask this. There was a contract that was negotiated in September where folks at the University of Calgary were getting 2.25 per cent increases followed by 2 per cent increases. It's a three-year contract. How, sir, do you account for that? I asked questions in this Assembly in the spring about your strategy for negotiations. How do account for that raise that was just given? How do you plan on paying for all of this?

Mr. Ceci: Postsecondary education has a budget. We give that envelope to those universities. They negotiate their own salaries.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, they do have budgets, but the budgets are set by you, sir.

My question, quite frankly, is this. You have an allocated amount of nearly \$25 billion for salaries. Is that going for new wages, for new employees, or is that going to pay for the wage increases for existing employees?

Mr. Ceci: There are a number of things in that question. What I will say is that the labour costs in this budget are the most significant, largest cost, of course. We have a number of contracts that are coming open for negotiation. We have to meet our 2 per cent growth overall, year over year over year, and we have to look at our wages as being a part of that. We have to hit the 2 per cent to achieve our targets.

2:20

Mr. Fildebrandt: Mr. Speaker, this government's budget saddles Albertans and Alberta businesses with \$2.7 billion in new taxes. The budget tabled yesterday proposes to increase the cost of the pay and benefits to the government sector by \$2.2 billion. That means that 80 per cent of every new tax dollar will go straight into higher government salaries and benefits. In a time when private-sector workers and taxpayers are losing their jobs, does the minister feel that this is reasonable?

Mr. Ceci: Mr. Speaker, I must confess. I got lost in the Fildemath. When contracts are open for negotiation, we will be very much looking at making sure that those contracts fit our budget. We have a plan, we'll stick to the plan, and that's what we'll do.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Mr. Speaker, it's our platform that wasn't off by \$6 billion.

We believe that it is unreasonable that 80 per cent of this budget's tax hikes will go directly to higher government pay and benefits when the private sector is bleeding jobs and wages. Will the government commit to freezing government-sector pay and benefits across the board until we finally get back to a balanced budget?

Mr. Ceci: You know, contracts are there to be respected. We're not going to break contracts because the member opposite wants us to break them. We will stabilize important services, front-line services for citizens in this province. We will get back to balance in 2019-2020, and if the economy picks up, we'll get there sooner.

Mr. Fildebrandt: So 2017, 2018, 2019, 2029: they don't know.

Given that we have already run eight consecutive consolidated deficits as a province, wasted the sustainability fund, and are on track for \$50 billion of debt, will the minister commit, without laying off any front-line workers, to showing solidarity with hurting Albertans and freeze government-sector compensation?

Mr. Ceci: No. I will not break contracts, and I will not do illegal things with labour in this province.

The Speaker: I've been reminded and I would advise the House that as you desire, all of you collectively, to use this time efficiently so that many questions can be asked, I want to remind you again to be cautious about the preambles that are consuming time.

The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Government Policies

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday was a historic day or, as the members across the House like to call it, an Orange Crush

day. And they are absolutely right. The day was absolutely crushing for millions of concerned Albertans. Where there was once pensive hope, there is only the stark reality of what we must face for the next three and a half years under an NDP government. To the jobs minister. Australia tried a massive minimum wage hike and, as a direct result, has a 14 per cent unemployment rate amongst the young. Is a 14 per cent unemployment rate amongst our young acceptable to you?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Our government in our platform made a commitment to raise the minimum wage to make work for low-income Albertans more fair, and that's what we've done. It was a modest increase this year, just a little bit less than 10 per cent. We're moving forward on that, and that will help everyone because low-income folks will put money back into the economy and support stimulus.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Minister, given that minimum wage was never intended to be a living wage but instead was supposed to be a starting or a training wage and that a large percentage of young people will not get a chance to receive this necessary training due to these massive minimum wage hikes, where do you suppose they will get this training in life from?

The Speaker: Madam minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, and thank you again to the member for the question. Of course, we're moving ahead with evidence-based research regarding this, looking at indicators as we make prudent steps forward. This is going to help many vulnerable people in Alberta, and we're very pleased to be able to support them.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Monday the Minister of Infrastructure stood in this House and told us not to light our hair on fire due to some covert socialist agenda. Well, Mr. Minister, if yesterday's expanded government, expanded taxes, and expanded debt is not a socialist agenda, then I don't know what is. My question is to the Minister of Infrastructure. Now that the covertness has been put aside – in this budget you've given us basically the full Monty, as it were – do you still maintain that there is no socialist agenda?

Mr. Mason: I don't even know how to respond, Mr. Speaker. I think sometimes people opposite think that public education is a socialist option. I just don't know.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North West.

Addiction and Mental Health Capital Funding

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was encouraged to read in Budget 2015 that one of the priority initiatives in Human Services was to partner with Health to improve mental health and addictions supports for children and youth. In a province where one drug alone, fentanyl, has claimed the lives of close to 170 Albertans, it is a crucial priority for this government. That's why I was shocked to see in the government's capital plan that they intend to reduce funding for addiction and detox centres by \$13 million over the next

five years. This seems counterintuitive to me. To the Minister of Infrastructure: can you tell me what that thought process is?

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much for that question, hon. member. Yes, Mr. Speaker, there is a view in our government that we need to evaluate the projects carefully and make sure that they are justified, first of all; secondly, that they are meeting the needs precisely that are out there, that they're in the right place, that they're at the right prices, all of those things, which the previous government didn't do very well in many instances. So there's a view to take a look at capital projects, a bit longer view, and make sure that we're getting it right the first time so that we don't have problems like the school delays that we've seen . . .

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, getting it right is building the beds. We don't have enough addiction and detox beds in Alberta. Families are forced to send their kids out of the province for treatment. Can the Minister of Human Services now tell me why we seem to be offering supports to families with one hand and taking them away with the other?

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government is doing what Albertans asked us to do. We are stabilizing the services, and the example I will give is the FCSS program, which helps Albertans to focus on prevention efforts, which were never increased by the members opposite when they were in government. We increased those dollars. Women's shelters, which provide emergency shelter for women fleeing from violence, were never increased since 2004. We increased that by \$15 million. Family and community . . .

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We actually did increase that in our government.

But on to the question at hand, which is addiction and detox beds. We need the facilities in order to help families in this province. Again to the Infrastructure minister: will you commit to providing the capital funding so that we can get those addiction and detox beds now, when we need them?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the hon. member for the question. As I indicated earlier, we want to make sure that we get it right. Simply because some projects no longer appear in the capital plan does not mean that there will not be similar projects coming forward. Once we've had a chance to evaluate it and based on what we hear from the public and what I hear from the ministers, we will develop a very strong capital plan that we can justify and will meet the needs of Albertans in all areas.

2:30 Queen Elizabeth II Highway Congestion

Mrs. Schreiner: Mr. Speaker, Alberta's economic diversification needs infrastructure. The QE II artery of transport between Calgary and Edmonton continues to experience a huge increase in traffic. Congestion is an issue. This is a concern for many of us. Many Albertans constantly have to drive the QE II for work from their homes in Calgary, Edmonton, and Red Deer. It can be a scary experience, driving the QE II. To the Minister of Transportation: what are you doing to address the future need for improvement on the QE II highway?

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much for the question, hon. member. Mr. Speaker, we have issued a request for proposal to undertake the planning and implementation of a study to determine the future needs of the QE II. Given that the current volumes on the corridor far exceed average annual daily traffic guidelines, this is an important step to take, and we're undertaking this study to determine cost estimates for upgrades now so that we can begin to address congestion on this economically vital corridor.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for the update. Given that the thousands of people who use this highway will be pleased that the government is moving forward with studying improvements, can the minister please inform the Chamber on how the future needs of the QE II will be determined?

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much for that question. There have been a number of various planning and design studies on different portions of the highway over the last 10 years. The latest study will consolidate that data and will provide an implementation plan that will include cost estimates for various projects to improve the flow and capacity of that highway. It will also consider municipal development plans and future growth projections for our province, and that will enable us to consider sustainable traffic solutions as we go forward.

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Aside from six-laning and eight-laning the highway, can the minister please inform the Chamber what other methods of congestion management this study will be considering?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, one of the things that we need to do is to consider it as a transportation corridor rather than merely a highway. The objective of that corridor is to move people and goods, not necessarily vehicles, so we have to look at different alternatives. The high-speed train between Edmonton and Calgary is something that we're beginning to ask about. There's potential for public transit, additional lanes around congested areas. A variety of things will be considered in order to make sure that we have the best answer, not necessarily just perpetually widening the highway.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Job Creation Grant Program

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government is inviting Alberta's employers to apply for a grant that awards up to \$5,000 for each full-time job they create. However, even David Dodge, this government's own expert, says that it sounds great on paper, and it's a great idea in theory, but it's very hard to manage to be sure you're getting much incremental employment. To the jobs minister. The Peace Country is losing jobs because your government keeps experimenting with these risky ideas. What evidence do you have to suggest that this new experiment will work when even your own expert has his doubts?

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much to the member for the question. Mr. Speaker, we appreciate the advice given to us by Mr. Dodge, but we made a commitment to Albertans to ensure that we would create a jobs plan to create jobs for Albertans. We are up to the challenge, we have that plan, and we'll be rolling it out shortly. Thank you.

Mr. Loewen: Small business is the lifeblood of the Peace region, but entrepreneurs in the Peace region are being forced to raise prices, cut hours, and trim staff because of this government's risky economic ideas. The minister is trying to offset her government's bad economic policies by creating a new bureaucratic job-creation scheme that will only serve to create new jobs in government. To the minister again. The Peace Country is losing jobs because of your government's risky ideas. Why do you think another dubious idea is the solution?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you again to the member for the question. Really, the people who make jobs happen in Alberta are the entrepreneurs, the innovators, and the job creators. We as a government are working with them to create an environment that's conducive to that. We're happy to do that, and that's what we're going to do.

Mr. Loewen: It's evident all through the Peace region that businesses are finding ways to cut costs. Unemployment is on the rise, and our population is shrinking. To the minister: why do you think fantasy job-creation schemes that will only create more bloat and more bureaucracy are the answer?

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and again thank you to the member for the question. This job-creation package is about supporting businesses, small businesses from Peace River to southern Alberta, all across the province, and we're very happy to roll it out. It's about supporting people in the communities to create those jobs, those good, mortgage-paying jobs, for Albertans.

Affordable Supportive Living Initiative

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, as of today 2,600 Alberta seniors continue to be at risk due to continued NDP funding delays. Given that yesterday proponents of previously approved ASLI projects found out through the media that their projects have now been put on hold indefinitely after having been left hanging for months pending a review by this government and that funding is conspicuously absent from yesterday's budget, a full construction season is now lost. This morning the Seniors minister told reporters that an announcement would be made in the near future. To the minister: when will you tell Alberta seniors, not the media . . .

The Speaker: Madam Minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. I can't give you an update today about each individual project, not because I don't want to but because we think the right thing to do is to have due diligence, connect with the actual proponents, and I want to make sure that we have an opportunity to do that outreach. But we have wrapped up the review. Our staff worked diligently through the summer, and I'm really grateful for that and also to the proponents for being patient with us. What they want is to make sure that there are 2,000 beds built, long-term care beds. That's what we committed to, and we are moving forward with that commitment.

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, given that the minister has continually said that her department needs to do a review and given the fact that the same staff who advised us when we were in government that these spaces were needed are advising the current minister, I hope this delay in the review is not politically or ideologically motivated because it doesn't seem to be in the best interests of Alberta seniors,

whom government is supposed to represent. To the Minister of Seniors: what do you still need to do to move these projects ahead?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Seniors helped build this province, and they will get long-term care beds, like we committed to in our platform. In terms of the ASLI promises that were made in the months leading up to the election by the government that was thrown out, it did exactly what the Minister of Infrastructure referred to, at least I suspect it did, which was to make many announcements, cut many ribbons, and pretend that it was going to be moving projects forward. We need to make sure that they're evidence-based, that we know there's actually demand in the various communities, and that these are the right proponents before we throw money at these individual contractors.

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, we believe in shovels in the ground. This government seems to pride itself on the consultation process, yet we are hearing that the review process is a monologue, not a dialogue. To the minister again: when are you going to release the review criteria and actually start talking with these people, who are desperately trying to provide much-needed care spaces to Alberta seniors?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our staff have been meeting with the different proponents throughout the summer months and leading into the fall, and I'm really grateful that they've taken the time to have that conversation, because what's important is that seniors get the right care when they need it. The other thing that's important is that we're able to fulfill the 2,000 bed commitment that we made. We were elected to do that. Other parties maybe campaigned on cuts and delays. The Official Opposition wants to cut billions of dollars, which would create chaos and refuse to allow seniors to live with respect and dignity. Our party is fulfilling our campaign commitments, and I look forward to updating this House very soon.

Mr. Cooper: Point of order.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

2:40 UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2007 the United Nations introduced the declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples to protect the collective rights of indigenous peoples that may not be addressed in other human rights charters around the world. This summer my constituency of Stony Plain was home to one of the largest celebrations taking place on National Aboriginal Day, and I heard from countless constituents that day and in meetings since how important adopting UNDRIP was. To the Minister of Aboriginal Relations: how has the government been working on that priority?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to the member for the question. I was very excited recently to engage in introductory meetings between treaty leaders and the Premier. We've also had some focus meetings in terms of working on implementing the UN declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples. We'll be working

with First Nations and Métis groups going forward to fulfill that commitment that was in our platform.

Thank you.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that ministers have been meeting with First Nations and Métis to find direction and set priorities on implementing UNDRIP, to the Minister of Aboriginal Relations again: how will the government take their input into account as it moves forward?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to the member for the question. We will be working with First Nations, moving forward as true partners. We are working on setting up some relationship agreements so that we can set some common goals together so that we both have input into the process, and in that process we will be working with them and listening to them.

Ms Babcock: Thank you. I'm so glad to hear that.

Given that the Premier has asked all ministers to consider the articles of UNDRIP and how they impact their own ministries, to the Minister of Aboriginal Relations again: how will you ensure that ministers continually work on implementing UNDRIP?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to the member for the question. Well, as outlined in the Premier's letter, all ministers are currently working on this project. We have been receiving initial submissions from ministries already, and we have been working through Aboriginal Relations with them. We do intend to move forward in February with that cabinet report to identify some key areas. We think it's critical that we work with First Nations as true partners, so we will be working with them to set some common goals.

The Speaker: Hon. members, as we end Oral Question Period today, the hon. Minister of Health would like to supplement an answer given in Oral Question Period yesterday in response to a question posed by the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat. To the members of the House, this is, as I understand it, a process that may occasionally happen in the future. The hon. minister will get an opportunity to make that point, and then the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat may respond if he chooses.

Ms Hoffman: Just to clarify, Mr. Speaker, he asks a question that I can also address: is that correct? I correct the record, a question can be asked, and then I respond to the question?

The Speaker: Yes.

Alberta Health Services Performance Measures

Ms Hoffman: Okay. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for this opportunity to correct the record regarding AHS performance measures, as asked by the member yesterday. I misspoke when I said that AHS is seeing growth in every single one of the performance measures. The outcome is that AHS is seeing positive trends in the majority of the performance measures, which is good news, but we know that there's still more work to do. Our government is committed to working with AHS and investing in our health care system to make the much-needed improvements in terms of the other outcomes as well.*

Thank you.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I'd like to thank the Health minister for her service to Albertans and her clarification of this question. Just briefly, I'd like to ask what personal oversight she is going to put on ensuring that these matrixes move forward in a positive way so hard-earned tax dollars get full value?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. I did meet this morning with the CEO and official administrator for Alberta Health Services to touch on this as well as with department officials. The member yesterday talked about a desire to have more than 17 measures. One of the areas that may not need to be in a quarterly report but that I think is better actually as a more timely measure on the website for the capital region for Edmonton and zone: you can check on current emergency room wait times immediately rather than having to wait several months down the road. I think that's something that's serving Edmontonians very well. I know that I've checked the website before I've gone to a hospital to find out where I'd have the shortest wait time. We might be able to expand that to other areas of the province.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Members' Statements

(continued)

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

First Responders

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First responders are the men and women who run towards dangerous situations that we would flee from. As a part of their job they frequently witness traumatic events well beyond our normal experience. They are everyday heroes.

On August 11 I was able to join a St. Albert EMS crew for their shift. St. Albert emergency services are unique in that all of the EMS crew members are also firefighters. I joined the crew of Adam Colameco and Steve Murdoch, who are here today. There was no easing into the day. Minutes after starting their shift, they were called out to administer life-saving medical intervention to a St. Albert resident. The next call was picked up immediately following the first, and the shift continued that way. As I rode along with them, I was overwhelmed by the compassion, skills, professionalism, and camaraderie that they shared with each other and every single person they encountered.

The last call of the day was one that demonstrated to me the enormity of the skills that these first responders have. When we arrived on scene, we found a person who had died by suicide. Adam and Steve immediately began securing the site for the RCMP while supporting family members of the deceased person. There are no words to describe the compassion and the support Adam and Steve shared with the people they encountered on that call. During the worst moment of someone's life they were present and present in every way a person can be.

All of the firefighters and the EMS workers I spoke to on that day expressed their gratitude for being able to serve their communities. That spoke volumes to me. I would like to express my gratitude for all of the men and women who every day give so much of themselves to keep us safe and well.

Thank you.

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

*See page 323, left column, paragraph 15

Academy of Learning College Edmonton West Campus

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today and especially note that all members are sporting their poppies once again on this day, when you, sir, presided over the first poppy presentation ceremony earlier today to begin our week of remembrance here at the Legislature and throughout the province and the country. It's nice to see us in common remembering our fallen soldiers.

I rise also today, Mr. Speaker, to say that on September 29 I had the pleasure of cutting the ribbon for the grand opening of the Academy of Learning College Edmonton west campus in Callingwood in my riding of Edmonton-McClung. It was an exciting day for the Academy of Learning. Their new campus, serving students in west Edmonton, expands their scope and accessibility as community leaders in postsecondary education. With this, their eighth campus location in Alberta, Academy of Learning has certainly grown from its days in Thornhill, Ontario, in 1987. Now reaching tens of thousands of adult learners across Canada, the Academy of Learning offers more than 35 diploma programs for prosperous new careers in health care, office administration, hospitality management, business, technology, and much more.

With consistently high rates of graduation and programs that run for less than a year, it's no wonder the Academy of Learning has prospered. The quality of their services has been recognized by the consumer choice awards for northern Alberta for over 15 consecutive years.

Beyond being a popular choice for postsecondary studies, the Academy of Learning is also very active in the community. Their efforts include fundraising for the juvenile diabetes research foundation, taking donations for Edmonton's Food Bank, and hosting various drives to help those experiencing homelessness.

It is with great honour that I was able to share in the grand opening of this new local institution. In today's business world, where quality training is essential to career success, the Academy of Learning stands out as an affordable, convenient, and well-established option for Edmontonians to get their postsecondary education.

A warm congratulations to Elmer Brattberg, the owner of the west Edmonton Academy of Learning, to Charles Jarvis, general manager, and to Coryne Yacucha, operations manager.

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

2:50

Elizabeth Fry Society

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am honoured to be speaking once again in this Chamber. I am proud to represent the riding of Calgary-Currie, home to parents and their children, retired couples, single people, immigrants in the process of setting up roots in Alberta, and to organizations that serve the ever-growing population of Calgary. One such organization is the Elizabeth Fry Society, where I recently visited to mark their 50th anniversary.

The Elizabeth Fry Society provides a number of programs for women, including aboriginal cultural supports, court programs, community awareness programs for immigrants as well as legal and prison community outreach.

I was most impressed with their work helping women transitioning out of prison, working to get them integrated into the communities upon their release, as these women often come from our most vulnerable populations.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the Elizabeth Fry Society of Calgary on their 50 years of compassionate service to women and the community, helping people navigate the justice

system, improving their communities, and for improving the social conditions through dedicated advocacy in the interest of promoting a higher standard of citizenship.

It is a privilege to have dedicated organizations like the Elizabeth Fry Society blazing a trail towards a fairer Alberta for all. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

Ms McPherson: Mr. Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 99 the Standing Committee on Private Bills has reviewed the petitions that were presented on Tuesday, October 27, 2015. As chair of the committee I can advise the House that the petitions comply with standing orders 90 to 94.

Mr. Speaker, this is my report.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, please proceed.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to give notice pursuant to section 15(2) of the standing orders that at the appropriate time I will be rising on a point of privilege regarding the obstruction of the work of this Assembly and also the independent Members' Services Committee by actions of the Minister of Finance and members of his department. I have the appropriate number of copies of the letter that was provided to your office by the required time this morning.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Bill 203

Election (Restrictions on Government Advertising) Amendment Act, 2015

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to request leave to introduce Bill 203, the Election (Restrictions on Government Advertising) Amendment Act, 2015.

During my campaign I made a promise to my constituents that I would do my best to improve the quality of debate and restore ethical conduct back into this Legislature. I am humbled to have the opportunity to sponsor this private member's bill, which I believe holds true to my promise. This bill will ensure that the government does not use its resources to aid in partisan campaigning in an election period. The bill is modelled almost word for word on Manitoban legislation passed nearly a decade ago. It prohibits the government from publishing announcements during a writ period.

The impetus for this bill was the inappropriate use of government resources we saw during the by-elections held last fall. The need for this bill has been recognized by both opposition and government, and it is high time we acted. While this bill isn't trying to split the atom, I believe it is critically important if we wish to lay the groundwork for meaningful change in the culture surrounding politics in this province.

I look forward to fulsome debate on this critically important bill.

[Motion carried; Bill 203 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

Mr. Mason: I would like to table, please, the regular required number of copies of the fall 2015 budget main estimates schedule.

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

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite number of copies of the Alberta Party Caucus 2015-2016 Alternative Budget. It contains detailed calculations of how we would arrive at a balanced budget within three years, and I would sincerely hope my colleagues in the other opposition parties would table the same in the coming days.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Ceci: Mr. Speaker, be it resolved that the Assembly approve in general the business plans and fiscal policies of the government.

The Speaker: I'm advised, hon. minister, that that's after Orders of the Day. There are some other matters that we need to address first.

Point of Order Allegations against a Member

The Speaker: Hon. members, yesterday I only briefly spoke to one of the points of order raised by the Official Opposition House Leader. I concluded that there was no point of order. I want to be clear that both points of order raised yesterday afternoon were raised in response to very similar statements; therefore, consistent with yesterday's ruling neither of these statements constitutes a point of order. Members routinely comment on the policies of other caucuses. Sometimes you may even do that more often than once in this House. Undoubtedly, there is no disagreement on the interpretation of these policies. This is a matter of debate, not a point of order.

I would also recognize the House leader for the Official Opposition concerning a point of order from this afternoon. Please proceed.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on a point of order arising out of question period. Section 23(j) states, "language of a nature likely to create disorder." Mr. Speaker, while I appreciate your ruling, some have said that if you repeat something untrue enough times, people will begin to think it's the truth. We have set the record straight on a number of issues that the government likes to continue to raise, making statements like we heard today, that we would be cutting billions of dollars in infrastructure, when, in fact, it is just not true. The continued use of that language, language of a nature likely to create disorder: we saw today that that's exactly what happened. The Minister of Health continues to choose to make statements that do not accurately reflect the truth and, in fact, are the opposite of many things that the Official Opposition campaigned on.

3:00

Yesterday we also heard the Government House Leader talk about the fact that they're not picking one member on which to make accusations about, but in fact they make accusations about all members on this side of the House when it comes to Wildrose cutting front-line services or massive cuts to infrastructure spending, both of which are categorically untrue.

Now, while I appreciate the fact you have said that you believe that yesterday that was a matter of debate, we continue to see the government make statements that are not true, that do not reflect the truth and, as such, will continue to create disorder in this House should they do that.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would argue, consistent with my argument yesterday and consistent with your ruling yesterday and today on this matter, that this is a question of debate; this is a disagreement as to the facts between members.

We know that the Wildrose has urged significant budget cuts in order to balance the budget. We know that they're against all tax increases. We know they're against royalty increases. We know that they're against borrowing. We also know that we're down \$6 billion this year in revenue due to the international price of oil. So the Wildrose can't have it both ways. They can't say, "We're absolutely going to do nothing to increase revenues, and we're not going to borrow money" and at the same time argue that they're not going to support very large cuts in expenditures.

Now, Mr. Speaker, it is our view that these large decreases in expenditures that the Wildrose is proposing or at least willing to accept mean substantial cuts to programs and probably substantial reductions in investment in infrastructure. It is our view that the Wildrose is either mistaken in how it sees its policies affecting the economy of the province and the government of Alberta or they're being somewhat disingenuous. So I'll be generous and suggest that they're just simply mistaken about the impact of \$6 billion worth of expenditure reductions and that they don't think that that's going to affect front-line workers, don't think that that's going to affect the capital budget but, of course, obviously, will have a very large impact on those things.

I know that the hon. Opposition House Leader is convinced that the repetition of those views on the part of our government and our members will create disorder, but I would urge them, Mr. Speaker, just to control themselves a little bit and not get so disordered with the normal cut and thrust of debate. You know, I will note that the Wildrose opposition has hurled many allegations at our government and our government's budget, blaming us for everything from the increase of unemployment in the oil and gas sector or, you know, the collapse of western civilization as we know it, but we don't stand up here and make points of order over and over again because of the normal cut and thrust of debate in this House.

I'm finding these particular points of order to be a little bit repetitive and not a good use of the House's time, and I would strongly submit to you, Mr. Speaker, that there is no point of order. There is just a disagreement as to the impact of the Wildrose's policies, economic policies and financial policies, on the operation of the government of Alberta and on the people of Alberta.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, to ensure that I understand the point that you were making, essentially, as I understand it, it's that the repetition of the comment and that it applied to the whole party was seen from your perspective as disharmony to the House. Have I understood that correctly?

Mr. Cooper: Yes, Mr. Speaker. That's exactly correct. I don't think that it's a matter of debate because the record has been corrected. We have stated clearly the position, and we have never said any of those things. So to continue to say that we would make those cuts and lay off front-line workers is in fact not the truth and, as a result, is not only misleading this House but misleading the general public as well.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I have determined that, in fact, again, I haven't heard substantially different from the point that I ruled upon and the comments made yesterday, so I would rule at this point, unless there's something that I've missed in your comments, that this, in fact, is not a point of order.

I'm seeking guidance again from the table. Apparently, I was maybe not as clear as I intended. I would rule that this is not a point of order. Thus, my ruling on your second point of order today.

Now, hon. members, let me go to points of privilege.

I believe, hon. member, that you have another matter that you would like to speak to. I'd recognize the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Privilege Obstructing a Member in Performance of Duty

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today pursuant to Standing Order 15 to raise a point of privilege due to the action of the government interfering with the independence of the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services to set pay for cabinet and MLAs.

I'd like to start, first, with preliminary matters. Points of privilege must be raised at the earliest opportunity. The relevant remarks were made yesterday afternoon, and our notice went to the Speaker's office this morning. As such, it is our view that the point of privilege was raised in a timely manner and is in accordance with Standing Order 15(2).

With that settled, Mr. Speaker, the facts of this case are quite straightforward. Yesterday afternoon, while the Minister of Finance was delivering his budget, his department officials issued a press release wherein they claimed that Budget 2015 will be responsible for freezing the pay for cabinet ministers, MLAs, and political staff "for the entire term of this Legislature." I stress the use of the words "entire term of this Legislature."

Now, even in the remarks the minister said, "Our government will propose that Members of this House agree to freeze the salaries of the members of Cabinet, MLAs and political . . . positions for the entire term of this Legislature – in other words, until after the next election in four years."

"Our government," not our caucus, not our members on the Members' Services Committee but "our government."

3:10

Now, members may not be aware, but only members of Executive Council are considered to be part of the government. Speaker Kowalski stated on May 1, 1997, that "in the province of Alberta the executive is composed of the members of the Executive Council, all of whom have taken and subscribed to the oath for cabinet ministers." So here yesterday we had a member of Executive Council, who is not on the Members' Services Committee, anticipating a decision of that committee. He did such both in his speech to the Assembly and in a press release to the public. Not only is he making an assumption that one of the members of the Standing Committee on Members' Services will likely introduce a motion to that committee that would include such an action to freeze MLA pay, but he, in fact, is assuming that you, Mr. Speaker, as the chair of that committee will be calling a meeting of the Standing Committee on Members' Services.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I would never want to assume that you are going to be doing something that you have not yet said or decided that you would do. That would be wildly unfair and totally inappropriate and, in fact, a breach of privilege. It would in fact go against every tradition of this House and our entire Westminster system, which brings me to *Beauchesne*, sixth edition, page 25, where it has this to say about privilege. "It is generally accepted that any threat, or attempt to influence the vote of, or actions of a Member, is breach of privilege." This can be found on page 25 of the sixth edition in section 93. I encourage all members to brush up on their *Beauchesne*.

Now, Mr. Speaker, it would be careless in discussing this point of privilege if I didn't go back to November 27, 2013, when a very similar point of privilege was successfully argued in this very Chamber by none other than the member for Edmonton-Strathcona, our current Premier. On that day the now Premier, the then House leader of the third or fourth party – I can't remember which one it was – said these things.

Erskine May describes privilege as "the sum of the peculiar rights enjoyed by each House collectively . . . and by Members of each House individually, without which they could not discharge their functions.

You can find that, if you're so inclined, in *Erskine May*, 24th edition, on page 203, for those of you who are following along in your program.

I'll proceed with the comments from that day of the then House leader of the NDP caucus.

As you are aware, Mr. Speaker, at the commencement of the First Session of each Legislature a number of committees are established, including the Members' Services Committee, as per Standing Order 52(2). This committee is empowered under the Legislative Assembly Act to make on its own important decisions on issues such as the amount MLAs are paid. I would refer you in particular to sections 33(1), 36, and 39 of the act.

. . . the precedent in this House has been to recognize a so-called tradition of this Legislature . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I note that the Minister of Finance is not present. Many of the comments you're making are with respect to the statements that he made.

To the Government House Leader: do you wish to proceed without the Minister of Finance present?

Mr. Mason: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Please proceed.

Mr. Cooper: Just for clarification purposes, I'm currently quoting from *Hansard*: the Premier, the leader of the . . .

An Hon. Member: Former. Start the quote again.

Mr. Cooper: Yes. Perhaps I could start again from the beginning if you'd like. [interjections] I won't start again.

. . . which is to assume that committees are to be treated as though they are populated by private members who toil on these committees on behalf of the Legislature as a whole. Accordingly, the Members' Services Committee is often described as an "independent committee of the Legislative Assembly." I would refer you to the Speaker's ruling on April 17, 2007. As such, it is understood that members are free to consult with anyone, including their fellow caucus members, but are also free from partisanship or influence from Executive Council. The principle and general understanding that these committees are independent has been established by numerous rulings made by the Speaker of the Alberta Legislature as well, quite frankly, as statements to this effect by various Premiers and cabinet ministers.

Now, perhaps the government of the day is going to stand up and claim that it said that Budget 2015 is freezing salaries for MLAs and cabinet ministers because of a previous Members' Services Committee vote in 2013. At that committee meeting they voted to freeze the pay until March 2017. What they did not vote on, sir, is to freeze the pay for the entire term of the Legislature, which is exactly the comments that we heard and read yesterday on the government's website.

This is where the minister and his department, a department that he is ultimately responsible for, have breached the privilege of

every member on the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services. They are presupposing a decision of the committee, a decision that is not currently on the committee's agenda, a decision that is not for the government or Executive Council itself to make but a decision of that committee.

Now, as a member of that committee, I may and do in fact believe that freezing the pay for all members of the Assembly is a noble goal, and at an appropriate time, when the committee has the opportunity to, hopefully, address this issue, I as a member of that committee hope to offer some additional suggestions that can provide some leadership on this file. But what we had yesterday was the Executive Council presupposing that I would want to make that decision, and in fact, sir, that is a clear breach of my privilege as a member of that committee.

3:20

I refer you to the successful point of privilege from November 27 by the current Premier, when she stated:

However, the fact of the matter is that the committee has so far only deliberated upon a one-year wage freeze. So by talking about a multiyear wage freeze, it is clear that this brochure is anticipating a decision of the Members' Services Committee which has not yet been made, and that, Mr. Speaker, is a clear breach of privilege.

I couldn't agree with the member more today. We have seen this exact same thing yesterday in the House, and we have significant – significant – precedent to indicate that this is wildly inappropriate.

It is clear that the press release and the comments made by the minister from yesterday anticipate the decision of the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services, which not only has yet to make a decision but doesn't even have its first meeting scheduled. I go back again, Mr. Speaker, to my earlier point that as the chair of the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services you have yet to call a meeting of the committee, and it is not the responsibility or the realm of the Minister of Finance, it is not the realm or responsibility of the government to determine what the decision of the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services will be or even if that should be an item for discussion at the next meeting. That privilege, if you will, belongs solely to you and the members of that committee.

I mentioned that the point of privilege that the Premier brought forward on November 27 was successful. What I mean is that on December 2, 2013, former Speaker Zwozdesky found a prima facie breach of privilege, and he said:

It is clear to your chair that the advertising in the brochure I referenced earlier did presume that a decision had been made by the Members' Services Committee, to which the Assembly has delegated the ability to make decisions about members' pay and benefits. That decision had not been made, in fact. That decision had not been made until the following Friday. Let me make sure I said that correctly: I am of the opinion that the advertising in the brochure presumed a decision that had not yet been made by the Members' Services Committee.

I would argue, Mr. Speaker, that that is the same thing that has occurred here – the government has presumed a decision that as of today has not yet been made – and that this, in fact, has been found to be a prima facie breach of privilege. I believe that I have outlined numerous reasons why the minister's actions yesterday, including his speech and the press release from his department, were a breach of privilege for all members of the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services, including myself.

In terms of other precedents there are numerous examples whereby the Speaker has ruled that the proceedings of the committee cannot be directed or represented by the government. One example of this is from May 14, 1992, when the Speaker ruled out of order a

question proposed by Ray Martin pertaining to whether or not the Premier would agree to direct the proceedings of the Members' Services Committee in a certain decision. In his ruling the Speaker at that time stated, "the government cannot answer on behalf of the whole committee . . . the government certainly cannot direct what happens to all the committee." That's *Hansard*, May 14, 1992.

Interestingly, Mr. Speaker, members of Executive Council in this House have relied heavily on this principle. On October 23, 2012, the then Premier described in detail how she understands that it is not her place to direct the proceedings of the Members' Services Committee. With reference to that issue she stated in *Hansard* on October 23, 2012:

My understanding is that the work of that committee was to review the recommendations of the Major report. I understand that that's what they did, and I don't understand that it's my role to direct the members of the committee to do anything.

She went on to say:

Mr. Speaker, as you have so rightly said . . . this is not a committee of the government. This is a committee of the Legislature that at some point will make a decision that we as MLAs will consider . . . That's why we have a Members' Services Committee. It is the job of MLAs, not the government.

Interestingly, on October 31, 2012, the then Minister of Human Services, speaking on the issue of MLA pay, said, "There is not a government policy with respect to MLA pay. That's the purview of the members, and that's a debate that's held at the Members' Services Committee."

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that we once again have a government who doesn't understand the importance of the role of individual MLAs and seems to show those individual MLAs the same contempt that has been the trademark of parliamentary democracies in Alberta for some years, as we have laid out. Once again we seem to have a government who feels the need to dictate to members of the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services what they should be doing and how they should be doing it.

Now, I know that when the Premier was on this side of the House, she believed strongly that all MLAs, including those that belong to the government caucus, should have the independence granted to them in our great parliamentary tradition. I have no doubt in my mind that the Government House Leader also believes that all government backbenchers that are on the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services should have the independence to make decisions on important issues of the day, and I trust that, just like when he was in the opposition, he will recognize this as a prima facie case of a breach of privilege that has occurred.

Mr. Speaker, since I believe there is a breach of privilege – and we have laid out that here for you today – and since we have seen a systematic abuse of the Members' Services Committee by Executive Council year over year over year, one can only begin to question whether, in fact, this is actually an issue of the mechanisms of government and the bureaucracies of the days, that also don't have the respect for the independent members and all MLAs that are not part of Executive Council makeup.

So it's with that in mind that I would be prepared to move this matter to be referred to the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing for study, to allow the opportunity to report back to the Assembly. It is important because the committee should explore why there appears to be this systematic issue within the government, presupposing decisions of the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services. That's exactly what seems to be happening time and time again.

It's my hope that it was a mere oversight by the Minister of Finance, perhaps the Premier, the House leader while they were reviewing the documents or the brochure of the day. But the

challenge is that we have seen a very consistent behaviour brought forward into this Assembly that breaches the privilege of all members that don't make up Executive Council. When we see Executive Council trying to run roughshod over the committee, it creates a lack of respect in the House for all members that have been duly elected. It's certainly a breach of privilege, as we've seen in the past in very similar cases for the members of the Members' Services Committee. So I hope that we can ensure that this sort of thing doesn't happen again.

3:30

With that, Mr. Speaker, I trust that you will find this a breach of privilege for exactly what it is and that this will be the last time that something of this nature happens. I trust that the government will take notice of this, learn from their mistakes, and that the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing will study this issue with the due diligence that it deserves. We saw the previous Speaker find a breach of privilege on December 2, 2013, and unfortunately the issue was not referred to the committee. Merely an apology was asked for and granted and then subsequently given by the minister.

But, good sir, we need to set the course for this Assembly in the future, one that doesn't merely look back at past mistakes and say: well, this is exactly how we did it in the past. We've begun to see some of those things from the government. But I digress, and I will stay with the matter. Sir, this is exactly why we need to ensure that this issue is referred to the standing committee: so that it can debate this issue, report back to the House, and so that appropriate actions be taken.

The Speaker: Before I recognize other hon. members who may wish to speak to this matter, I want to ensure, if I might, hon. member – and I'll just clarify – that I understood some of the points that you had raised. As I understand it, one of the first points that you were saying was that the statements made by the Finance minister yesterday were, in fact, a direction to the committee. Did I understand that correctly? That would be my first one.

Mr. Cooper: Well, Mr. Speaker, the statements that were made by the Finance minister certainly presuppose the decision that the committee would or might make. I would be more than happy to provide my speaking notes today or suggest that there is a discussion with Parliamentary Counsel. I encourage you to take some significant time to rule on this important matter.

The Speaker: Hon. member, that I will do.

Are there other members that would like to speak to the matter of privilege raised by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills? The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, the Official Opposition House Leader, for his rather exhaustive point of privilege.

I want to begin by recognizing that the rights of committees are a very serious matter, something that we have raised on a number of occasions with varying degrees of success in the past. Privilege is a very important matter, a very serious thing that can be brought before the House. As the Opposition House Leader has said, *Erskine May's Treatise on The Law, Privileges, Proceedings and Usage of Parliament* defines parliamentary privilege as "the sum of the peculiar rights enjoyed by each House collectively . . . and by Members of each House individually, without which they could not discharge their functions."

House of Commons Procedure and Practice, the 2009 edition, edited by O'Brien and Bosc, goes further to lay out categories of rights and immunities enjoyed individually by members. It lists:

- freedom of speech;
- freedom from arrest in civil actions;
- exemption from jury duty;
- exemption from being subpoenaed to attend court as a witness; and
- freedom from obstruction, interference, intimidation and molestation.

Mr. Speaker, the principle and general understanding that our committees, in particular this committee, are independent is something that we take seriously. It's a principle that's been established and reconfirmed by numerous rulings made by Speakers throughout the years. However, in this particular case it's very clear that the independence of the committee and the rights of its members are not in question.

The hon. Official Opposition House Leader has quoted an interesting case, indeed. We received the ruling of the Speaker on December 2, 2013, and it was, as he indicated, a response on a question of privilege raised by the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, at that time the NDP caucus House leader. The House leader opposite has talked quite a bit about the role of the Finance minister and his speech with respect to this. What the Speaker at that time talked about was that the government had issued advertising, in this case a brochure, that had "created the impression that legislation was in effect concerning public service salaries, when, in fact, the bills had not been introduced." He also said that advertising the brochure that he referenced earlier did presume that the decision had been made by the Members' Services Committee. The word that the Speaker used was not "anticipation" or anything; it was that the government had presumed that a decision had been made when, in fact, it had not.

I will submit, Mr. Speaker – and I'll keep this very short and to the point – that what has occurred is that the Finance minister has signalled an intent to request a decision from the committee, not presuming that the committee has already made such a decision or that it must make that decision but that it will be requested.

If we look, for example, Mr. Speaker, at the excerpt from the release that the hon. House leader referred to in his letter to you, it says:

Budget 2015 takes a careful and responsible approach to managing government finances, steadily phasing out the deficit without reckless cuts to the frontline services Albertans rely on. This includes:

- Prudent management of expense . . .
- A salary freeze for Cabinet ministers, MLAs and political staff for the entire term of this Legislature.
- A comprehensive review of Alberta's Agencies, Boards and Commissions.
- Hiring restraint . . .

and so on. Now, does that presume that this committee is going to follow the government direction? Does it presume that the decision has already been made? I would submit that it does not.

I will go now to the excerpt from the speech by the Finance minister yesterday, his budget speech. This is a very key quote, and I notice that it was passed over a little bit in the presentation from the Opposition House Leader. It says:

Mr. Speaker, this Legislature is going to lead by example. Our government will propose that members of this House agree to freeze the salaries of the members of cabinet, MLAs, and political staff positions for the entire term of this Legislature; in other words, until after the next election, in four years.

That's very critical, Mr. Speaker, in my view. The government intends to propose to members of this House, represented in this

case on this committee, that we agree to freeze the salaries. That is entirely, in my view, within the purview of the government, but it is up to the committee to determine the actual decision with respect to that. I would submit that there has been no intent to interfere with the rights of members of that committee or of this House to make that decision freely.

But it is also an important matter of policy with respect to the government that restraint needs to be shown and that we should lead by example. We are hopeful, I am sure, that members opposite will see the wisdom of that approach when the committee meets. However, in my view, this does not in any way constitute a question of privilege. It does not interfere with the rights of members to do their duty, and I would submit to you, Mr. Speaker, that there is, in fact, no breach of the privileges of members by the Finance minister in suggesting that they will propose this to the committee.

Thank you.

3:40

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

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, thank you. I'm going to perhaps fail to come up with the bravado of my colleague to the right here and replace it with some brevity. While his comments and his research are certainly all correct and were certainly in terms of the definition of privilege and the requirements in terms of the timing of the submission of this particular motion for consideration of a point of privilege all correct, the comments by my colleague the hon. Government House Leader are absolutely correct. This is a proposal. In fact, the entirety of the budget is a proposal.

Now, we could say and we can certainly presuppose that because of the majority situation that the government finds itself in not only in this Assembly but also in the committees as a whole, this is perhaps a foregone conclusion. Nonetheless, the Assembly committees are indeed independent. They must remain so, and that is a critical element and one that I certainly agree with the hon. Opposition House Leader on.

Nonetheless, in this particular case, it is clear from the Finance minister's remarks in the House that this is a proposal and not a foregone conclusion, which was, in fact, the case in 2013 and was, in fact, the reason why Speaker Zwodzesky ruled, and I believe correctly, that there was a breach of privilege. That was a different situation, and it was a situation whereby there was, in fact, a statement and, in fact, not just a statement but a release in a pamphlet that was mailed out in large numbers across the province.

What I do certainly agree on, though, with the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills is that it is absolutely critical that our Assembly committees remain resolutely independent. I have had some experience with what it feels like when there is some feeling that those committees are not as independent as they should be, and I will tell you that that is problematic. If the Assembly should decide, perhaps not specifically on this issue, that the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing should meet in order to discuss the perceived decrease in privilege that the hon. member describes, I would as a member of that committee certainly welcome that discussion.

As I've stated in this Chamber before, I've been somewhat of a student of parliament in the past and find these questions actually rather interesting rather than somewhat boring, and I do think that it's critically important for the maintenance of our parliamentary tradition that we do that. But from my standpoint and from the arguments that I've heard and from my examination of the question here, the point that is raised by the hon. Government House Leader is a critical point, and that is that this is indeed a proposal and not a

foregone conclusion. Therefore, I do not believe that the decision of the committee has been presupposed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members.

Are there any other members who would like to speak to the point of privilege raised by the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills? I understand from standing orders that a particular member does not get an opportunity again.

Are there other members who would like to speak to this? The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. Please proceed.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, am rising as a member of the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services, which the Premier is not a member of, and I'm pleased to speak in support of my colleague from Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills on this point of privilege. Let me be clear. There is no question that we need to take action on entitlements for politicians. This is not at all what the issue that we are debating here today is about. What's happening here is a continuation of the disrespect for this Assembly that started with the previous government, now the third party. I had great hope that things would be done differently under our new Premier, but clearly this is not the case.

Mr. Speaker, it's only been six months since the last election, and this government has fallen into the same disturbing habits as its predecessor. This, in my view, is arrogant and is certainly disrespectful, and it directly interferes with our work as private members. It is shocking to me that it has taken only six months for the Premier to epitomize everything she once said that she despised while she was in opposition. What type of message does this send to Albertans, who were looking forward to a Legislature that would work differently, that actually respected democracy? All of the new Albertans who engaged in the democratic process for the first time wanted to see what an actually functioning Legislature might look like not gripped with the same skeptical politics of power.

Alberta committees are already in an embarrassing state of disrepair, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure the NDP knows, based on all of the important staffers they've taken from Ottawa, that this is not how real democracy functions. Committees should be independent. They should contribute to legislation. They should allow for open consultation with the Alberta public.

Yesterday, Mr. Speaker, when speaking in this Assembly and then later in a press release, the Minister of Finance indicated very clearly that Executive Council would freeze salaries for all cabinet ministers and MLAs. Now, I assure you that I would love to vote for such a motion as a member of the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services. My party has long been fighting for measures such as these. However, the government is attempting to predetermine the outcome of this decision and completely undermine the very purpose of this independent committee of the Legislature.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the reason I'm so shocked and why I had so much hope that things would be different under our new Premier is that when she was a member of the opposition caucus in the previous Legislature, the hon. Premier raised a very similar point of privilege to the one that is being raised today by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. She clearly indicated in her speech at the time, just a couple of years ago, that she did not think it was appropriate for the government to order a wage freeze ahead of a Members' Services Committee even having a chance to consider the proposition. Now, that leads me to question: is this government doing the very same thing that our Premier once spoke so strongly against?

In this scenario the former Speaker ruled, and I might say rightly so, that by issuing such statements, the rights of members of the committee had in fact been infringed upon, and the Speaker at the time ruled that there was indeed a valid point of privilege. Mr. Speaker, I ask that you please review the previous point of privilege, that the now Premier passionately argued in favour of, and protect the integrity of the Legislature from the Premier's office. We want to help the Premier take action on overly generous entitlements for politicians, but we simply must insist that we follow the proper procedures of this Assembly and ensure that our independent committees of this Legislature remain truly independent and not disturbed by the heavy-handedness of the Premier's office.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there any other members who would be prepared to bring new points with respect to – hon. member, while I'm speaking, if you wouldn't mind . . .

Mr. Fildebrandt: Pardon me?

The Speaker: Wait until I'm finished speaking, hon. member.

Is there new information that would assist me in ruling on this matter that has not yet been heard?

I will give the hon. member an opportunity. I wish to underline to him, though, that you have not been in the House, so you may not have heard all of the points that have been raised. I want to underline to you that I'm looking for new evidence or information that would assist me in making this decision.

Please proceed, hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

3:50

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was certainly listening to this debate. I, too, am rising as a member of the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services, and I am pleased to speak in support of my colleague's point of privilege. Let me be clear that there is no question that we do need to take action on entitlements for politicians. This is not at all what is at issue here today, though. What's happening here is a continuation of the disrespect for this Assembly that has been long standing. I had great hope that things would be different under a new government, a new Premier, but this is not the case.

Mr. Speaker, it has only been six months since the election, and the government has fallen into the same disturbing habits as the last one. This is arrogant, this is disrespectful, and it directly interferes with the work of private members. It's shocking that it has taken only six months for the Premier to become what she once would attack in opposition.

What kind of message does this send to Albertans, who were looking forward to a Legislature that worked differently, that actually respected democracy? All new Albertans who are engaged in the democratic process for the first time are wanting to see what an actually functioning Legislature might look like not gripped with the same skeptical politics of power.

Alberta committees are already in an embarrassing state of disrepair. I'm sure that the NDP knows, based on all of their imported staffers from Ottawa and Winnipeg, that this is not how a real democracy should function.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, please.

The Speaker: Point of order noted.

Point of Order Repetition

Mr. Mason: The hon. member is giving almost verbatim the same rhetorical speech that was just given. He's not speaking to the points contained in the point of privilege. He's not quoting any citations. It's just a rhetorical smear job, and it's not appropriate.

The Speaker: The hon. member raises a point in which I would ask, as I indicated in recognizing you before, hon. member: is there new evidence or factual information? Could you please address that more quickly than you have rather than a generic statement? I'm prepared to listen; however, I want to hear some additional evidence that will assist in the decision-making.

Debate Continued

Mr. Fildebrandt: Very well, Mr. Speaker. As the chairman of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts I have a particular appreciation for the independence of committees in this Legislature. As the Standing Committee on Public Accounts is the only committee of this Legislature that is chaired by a member of the Official Opposition, I consider this a special matter of importance. It is critical to our job as parliamentarians, as members respecting our constituencies. Inasmuch as we were eager to see the government's budget, we know that it is presumptive for them to assume that we would do exactly what they expect us to do.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there any other members that would like to speak to this matter? Again I underline. The Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock. Please proceed.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are debating and considering a very important matter. I feel that this is a very important matter for this House to recognize, for the Assembly to recognize. All independent members of this Assembly need to recognize their role in holding government, Executive Council, to account.

Mr. Speaker, I witnessed a little over a month ago in committee how things can just continue to be pushed through and appear to be pushed through by people being dictated to, of not recognizing the role of individual members in their committees. I truly do believe that we need to be careful that we are not abusing the powers and the responsibility of each and every committee.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I urge again. I think I've heard that several times, as the House has. Could you assist me in terms of making that with any new evidence that you would suggest is a major influence on the decision that needs to be made?

Mr. van Dijken: I think it's very important, Mr. Speaker, that we recognize and that the whole House recognizes and that the Speaker also recognizes that we have to be careful in how we proceed.

The Speaker: Hon. member, let me say to the entire House that as far as I'm concerned in this capacity as Speaker, there can be no other more important aspect that we may rule upon than with respect to privilege. It's that principle that the members of the House have the privilege of representing their constituency.

I do not hear anything else with respect to comments than that I've heard with respect to the last two speakers and, therefore, would rule, at least for the time being, that I would like to take the comments under advisement. I will return to the House in due course.

Orders of the Day
Government Motions

Amendments to Standing Orders

19. Mr. Mason moved:
- A. Be it resolved that the standing orders of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta effective November 18, 2014, be amended as follows:
1. Standing Order 3(1) is struck out and the following is substituted:
Sitting times and sessional calendar
3(1) Subject to suborder (1.1) and unless otherwise ordered, the sitting hours of the Assembly shall be as follows:
Monday: 1:30 – 6:00 p.m.
Tuesday: 9:00 a.m. – noon, 1:30 – 6:00 p.m.
Wednesday: 9:00 a.m. – noon, 1:30 – 6:00 p.m.
Thursday: 9:00 a.m. – noon, 1:30 – 4:30 p.m.
(1.1) From the first day of main estimates consideration by the legislative policy committees until the day for the vote on the main estimates in Committee of Supply, the Assembly shall not meet in the morning from 9:00 a.m. – noon.
 2. Standing Order 4 is amended
 - (a) by adding the following after suborder (2):
(2.1) When there is a morning sitting, at noon the Speaker adjourns the Assembly until 1:30 p.m.
 - (b) in suborder (3) by adding “or (2.1)” after “suborder (2)”.
 3. Standing Order 7 is amended in suborder (1) by adding “shall commence at 1:30 p.m. and” after “Assembly”.
 4. Standing Order 8(2) is amended by adding “During morning sittings and” before “On Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday afternoons”.
 5. Standing Order 15(2) is amended by adding “afternoon” before “sitting”.
 6. Standing Order 30(1) is amended by adding “afternoon” before “sitting”.
 7. Standing Order 32 is amended
 - (a) in suborder (2) by striking out “10 minute” and substituting “15 minute”;
 - (b) by striking out suborder (3) and substituting the following:
 - (3) Subject to suborder (3.01) and (3.1), a Member may, after at least one division has been called in Committee of the Whole or Committee of Supply, request unanimous consent for the interval between division bells on any subsequent division during that morning, afternoon or evening sitting, as the case may be, to be reduced to one minute.
 - (3.01) After the first division is called in Committee of the Whole during consideration of a Bill, the interval between division bells on all subsequent divisions relating to that Bill shall be reduced to one minute for the remainder of Committee of the Whole consideration for that morning, afternoon or evening sitting, as the case may be.
 8. Standing Order 52.01(1) is amended
 - (a) in clause (a)
 - (i) by striking out “Culture and Tourism.”;
 - (ii) by striking out “and Service Alberta” and substituting “, Service Alberta and Status of Women”;
 - (b) in clause (b)
 - (i) by striking out “Agriculture and Rural Development” and substituting “Agriculture and Forestry”;
 - (ii) by striking out “International and Intergovernmental Relations, , Innovation and”;
 - (iii) by striking out “and Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour” and substituting “Economic Development and Trade, Culture and Tourism and Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour”;
 - (c) in clause (c) by striking out “Environment and Sustainable Resource Development” and substituting “Environment and Parks”.
 9. Standing Order 59.01 is amended
 - (a) by adding the following after suborder (3):
(3.1) During consultation with the Government House Leader under suborder (3), the Official Opposition may designate 4 ministries for which estimates shall be considered for a maximum of 6 hours per ministry provided that the Official Opposition also designates 3 ministries, not including the Executive Council, for which estimates consideration shall be set at 2 hours.
 - (b) in suborder (5)
 - (i) in clause (a)(ii), (iii) and (iv) by striking out “noon” and substituting “12:15 p.m.”;
 - (ii) in clause (d) by adding “subject to suborder (3.1),” before “the estimates”;
 - (c) in suborder (6) by striking out clause (d);
 - (d) by striking out suborder (7) and substituting the following:
 - (7) If a ministry’s estimates are scheduled to be considered for 2 hours, the speaking times shall be as follows:
 - (a) the Minister, or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister’s behalf, may make opening comments not to exceed 10 minutes,
 - (b) for the next 50 minutes, members of the Official Opposition and the Minister, or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister’s behalf, may speak,
 - (c) for the next 20 minutes, the members of the third party, if any, and the Minister or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister’s behalf, may speak,
 - (d) for the next 20 minutes, the members of any other party represented in the Assembly or any independent Members and the Minister, or the

- member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, may speak,
- (e) for the next 20 minutes, private members of the Government caucus and the Minister or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister's behalf, may speak, and
 - (f) if there is any time remaining, to the extent possible, the rotation outlined in clauses (b) to (e) shall apply with the speaking times set at 5 minutes as provided in Standing Order 59.02(1)(c).

10. Standing Order 59.02(1)(b) is amended by adding "and 59.01(7)(a) to (e)" after "59.01(6)(a) to (e)".

- B. And be it further resolved that the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing shall meet to review and assess the operation of the morning sittings of the Assembly brought into force by part A of this motion and report to the Assembly with its recommendations by October 27, 2016, and the committee may without leave of the Assembly meet during a period when the Assembly is adjourned or prorogued.
- C. And be it further resolved that the amendments to Standing Order 3 in section 1 of part A of this motion shall take effect on November 24, 2015, and the remaining amendments in this motion shall come into force on passage.

The Speaker: I am clarifying with the Clerk that all members have been provided with the verbatim details of this motion. They have.

Speaking to the motion, are there any members who would like to speak? The hon. Official Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Mason: I moved it, Mr. Speaker, so I may as well go first. I just want to . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I am calling upon the Official Opposition House Leader to speak. I need clarification from the table.

I am advised that we would not require the Government House Leader to read it verbatim, that all of the members have been provided it, too. Unless the minister has some details that he'd like to add to the motion. We have time to speak to that.

Did I misunderstand? Hon. minister, do you wish to use your time? You, in fact, have 20 minutes to speak. I understood when you sat down that you didn't need any. Were there no additional comments that you wished to make?

Mr. Mason: No. I moved the motion, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Good.

The hon. Official Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Just let me be clear, Mr. Speaker. As the mover of the motion, I move the motion. I wait to be recognized to speak to the motion. I speak to the motion. Then the opposition speaks.

The Speaker: That's my understanding. Go ahead. I understand you wish to speak.

4:00

Mr. Mason: I do. The amendments to the standing orders that we are proposing do a number of things. First of all, they institute morning sittings of the Assembly. This is something we've had quite a bit of discussion on. It was originally proposed to us by the Official Opposition, and we have undertaken to try and reduce the number of sittings that take place in the evenings in order to be more friendly towards people with families, with children, and so on.

That's been a direction that we've been pursuing, and we've had conversations with the House leaders of the opposition caucuses. At the request of the PC caucus we have dispensed with sittings on Monday mornings because members travel often on Monday mornings, so we want to be able to accommodate that. We've extended the proposed morning sittings, from 9 a.m. to noon. Routine, including question period, will take place at the same time it does now, that is at 1:30. It is our hope that on most days we can dispense with evening sittings.

There are some other changes, I think, that are very important here, that have to do with the bells. As members know, opposition members and a significant number of government caucus members are now housed in the federal building instead of the Annex. Recommendations we've received from the Speaker's staff in terms of time needed to travel indicate that more time between the ringing of the bells until the calling of a vote will be required for members to actually get to the Assembly. What we're proposing is to extend the time for the bells from 10 minutes to 15 minutes.

In order that we don't use too much time in committee, where there are often multiple amendments and debates, motions, and so on, we're proposing that the first bell in a given afternoon or given morning or given evening, if that occurs, will be 15 minutes, but once the members are here, the subsequent bells, for that afternoon only or that morning only, will be one minute.

We've also indicated that the Official Opposition has the ability to designate four ministries for additional time during estimates, not the usual three hours but six hours, and we've also agreed that there will be three ministries designated for two hours instead of three. We have received the suggestions from the Opposition House Leader as to what those ministries will be.

I think, Mr. Speaker, that those are the main pieces. We are proposing that the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing meet to review and assess the operation of morning sittings of the Assembly and report to the Assembly on October 27, 2016, and that the committee can meet in between sessions in order to accomplish that review.

Those are the main aspects of the standing orders, Mr. Speaker, that we are proposing. I'm happy to have any debate that there might be.

The Speaker: The Official Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the chance to debate this motion today. We all come here to work hard on behalf of our constituents and all Albertans, and we don't take that responsibility lightly. However, the Government House Leader knows quite well that a lot of the work that takes place to make all of this happen actually takes place outside of this Chamber. There's no doubt that the Official Opposition certainly opened the door, if you will, or the avenue to having morning sittings. I'll table a document tomorrow at the appropriate time because I'll refer to it a little bit today. We think that in conjunction with a number of other proposals that we made, it could do many things to make the House work much better.

The Government House Leader specifically referred to some discussion amongst the House leaders, be it the third party or himself or myself. In fact, we had come to an arrangement to have a start time of 10 a.m. We agreed to this, and we were marching forward in the name of co-operation and joint agreement. Then much to my surprise, we received notification, after agreeing that we would sit at 10 a.m., of a notice on the Order Paper for 9 a.m. We had never, certainly to the best of my recollection, and I think the third-party House leader will concur – the agreement that was struck was for us to meet at 10.

Now we see meeting at 9 o'clock, and obviously that presents some significant challenges to smaller caucuses and to the members on this side of the House but not, importantly, just to members. We have many people who are committed to this Assembly. Many of their waking hours are for making this all happen, for democracy to happen. When we begin to move time into the early morning, we wind up downloading the additional hours onto our staff, who make it happen. So I was quite shocked, dismayed – disappointed perhaps would be an understatement – when I received word that the agreement that the House leaders had come to wasn't going to be honoured.

You know, the Government House Leader, who I have a great deal of admiration for – and some day, when I grow up, I hope to be as learned in this Assembly as he is – is the longest serving member of the Assembly. It's my hope that it was an oversight on behalf of the Government House Leader because we certainly didn't have an agreement. There's a long-standing tradition in the Alberta Assembly that we move forward based upon these agreements, so I'm hoping that this isn't the new way of doing things on behalf of the government.

I recognize – and he alluded to it – that he made some adjustments in the schedule for members of the third party because they had some concerns about meeting on Monday mornings and wanted that ability to spend extra time with their families. I fully recognize why he made the change, but it doesn't change the fact, Mr. Speaker, that the agreement that we had made was for 10 a.m., and now we are looking at a motion that says 9 a.m.

Our staff do a tremendous amount of work to make this happen. When I talk about staff, I don't just mean our colleagues in the Official Opposition caucus, but I'm talking about the staff that do work for the government, for the third party, for the three independent members of the Assembly, the staff that work for the Legislative Assembly Office, whether they're in *Hansard* or communications, HR, the Clerk's office, committee departments. The list goes on and on. They all work hard for us each and every day to ensure that this functions properly.

4:10

Beginning the proceedings of this Assembly at 9 a.m. would be unfair to many of these staff. I have no doubt that they would likely be able to complete their jobs as they are highly competent, but it would mean more time away from their families, certainly in our situation, because the requirement to be at work would likely be in the neighbourhood of 6:30 a.m. I think of the parents that would like to drop their children off at school or daycare on their way to the office. You see, Mr. Speaker, proceedings starting at 9 a.m. mean many more hours of preparation before we even set foot in this Chamber. Now, we were willing to make those adjustments based upon a 10 a.m. start time so that we could allow at least two and a half hours prior to arrival for our team to be prepared for us to come into the Assembly.

I believe in the importance of the work that we do here in the Assembly, and in order for us to do meaningful work with meaningful outcomes, there are countless hours that both we and our staff put together to make sure that we are as prepared as possible. I think my colleagues can agree with me that the research that goes into speeches, members' statements, even questions of privilege, sir, is extensive. We're here to represent our constituents and to be at our best to do that. I have serious concerns that this ability will be diminished or that the strain on our staff on all sides will be extreme if we move to 9 a.m. sittings. For a government that keeps talking about the Assembly working better for families and

for all members and staff, I think that this is a step in the wrong direction, particularly when it comes to working together.

It was my understanding that we had an agreement in place, and now we have a very different statement of facts based upon that agreement. The fact is, sir, that no other Legislature in Canada sits at 9 a.m. every day. When they do meet in the morning, the proceedings begin at 10 a.m. It's funny and interesting to me that it's 10 a.m., the time that we agreed to. Unfortunately, others chose to not keep this agreement. I am concerned that the government actually isn't interested in making the Assembly work better but, instead, in making things better for the government caucus.

Immediately after the election my Wildrose Official Opposition colleagues and I put together a proposal, which we shared with the Government House Leader. For his colleagues' sake, it was entitled Restoring Trust, restoring trust and strengthening democracy. What we have here today is not a restoration in trust but a breakdown in that trust. After 44 years of rule by the now third party Albertans expect the Legislature to be cleaned up, to work better in the interests of all Albertans. We shouldn't be rushing through legislation. We shouldn't allow the government to play games with things like the introduction of the budget and MLAs being back and forth to the constituency. We need to ensure that we are taking steps to strengthen our democracy. The recommendations that we made were intended in that exact spirit, strengthening democracy.

We made a recommendation for 10 a.m. sittings, but the reason why that recommendation was made was in conjunction with a large group of recommendations. Often the government will criticize the opposition for not proposing ideas, but we proposed ideas, and one of them was a 10 a.m. sitting. The reason why, sir, was so that we could expand the role of committees, so that we could be utilizing committees to receive expert testimony. When a difficult Justice bill came across the table, we would be able to bring witnesses from the department and legal experts to provide guidance and advice to committees. We didn't recommend opening the House at 9 a.m. so that the government could just spend more time ramming through legislation, just like we've seen over the last number of years.

A perfect example of that, sir, is in the estimates process. The third party would have never only offered seven days to debate estimates, but that's exactly what we saw earlier today. When the House leader introduced the estimates schedule, it was a schedule of seven days of debate of estimates. We are debating significant amounts of debt and spending, and we're going to do that in seven days.

The point, Mr. Speaker, is that one of the proposals when it comes to restoring trust is that we would have this opportunity to expand the role of committees, not shrink the role of committees by having the House sit every waking moment of the day and night, because we have done nothing to actually prevent the ability of government to have night sittings. In fact, we have opened all sorts of potential risks. I know that my hon. colleague from Strathmore-Brooks will speak about the fact that the PAC will be sitting, if this continues, at the exact same time that the House is also sitting, the point being that we had a real opportunity to make significant reforms to the Assembly, and what we have here is, unfortunately, a broken deal and a broken agreement that we had agreed to, which was 10 a.m.

So, Mr. Speaker, it is my intention to move an amendment to the motion. I will do that, but I will wait while it is distributed.

The Speaker: The amendment has been distributed?

Mr. Cooper: I think they're working on it. I can proceed if you wish, sir.

The Speaker: Yes. Let's proceed in the interests of time, which is so valuable.

Mr. Cooper: I move that Government Motion 19 be amended in part A, section 1, in Standing Order 3 as follows: in the proposed suborder (1) by striking out "9:00 a.m." wherever it appears and substituting "10:00 a.m." and in the proposed suborder (1.1) by striking out "9:00 a.m." and substituting "10:00 a.m."

Mr. Speaker, we have opportunity today to honour the agreement that was arrived at. We have the opportunity to go down that road of restoring trust, the trust that, unfortunately, is being taxed. I don't want to say that the trust is totally broken between the Government House Leader and me because that certainly wouldn't be an accurate reflection of where things are at, but of course that will be up to the Government House Leader. I am more than happy to continue to try and work with the Government House Leader, and I think a great opportunity to do that would be to accept our amendment, pass the amendment, and move forward with the original agreed-to time.

The Speaker: Clarification: you're now voting on an amendment to Government Motion 19. We're dealing with the amendment now, correct? I won't read it. I believe everybody has been provided a copy of that.

I would recognize the Member for Strathmore-Brooks, who would like to speak to the amendment.

4:20

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise to speak to this amendment on changing the hours proposed from 9 a.m. to 10 a.m. It has always been the case that the government has recognized that the daily routine of members, depending on which side of the House they sit, is different and that opposition members are incredibly busy and incredibly committed in the mornings before Orders of the Day or question rotation begin.

That's just the way it is. That is the rotation of the day. They fully understand what it looks like for us. They fully understand our availability in the mornings . . . it can't be interpreted as anything but a very intentional decision to try and constrain the ability of the opposition to do its job, Mr. Speaker. That's all it can be seen as.

Those words are not mine. Those are the very words spoken by the Premier on March 5, 2013, when she was a member of the opposition.

I find it interesting and concerning, even alarming that the Premier has so quickly allowed herself to change her views on democracy in this institution. In opposition she fought vehemently for respect for opposition from the government, and she fought for the ability of her caucus and her staff and her team to be able to do the work that they had been hired by Albertans to do. How quickly things can change, or perhaps how much they can stay the same.

On May 5 the Premier stated: "Friends, I believe that change has finally come to Alberta." Mr. Speaker, clearly, some things don't seem to ever change. This is a reasoned and a reasonable amendment that will ensure that all Albertans in every constituency are served, regardless of which side of the House their MLA happens to sit on. This amendment will enable the opposition to fulfill its mandate and work effectively, which is something that several members, including the Premier and House leader, fought for every day. In the interest of Albertans and in the interest of a fair, accountable, and effective government I urge members to support this amendment.

Mr. Speaker, I think it would be a useful exercise to go through the start times of other jurisdictions in our country. In British Columbia, to our west, the time for ordinary meetings: the House

shall have two distinct sittings per day with the exception of Wednesdays. On Mondays they sit from 10 till noon and then from 1:30 to 6:30. On Tuesdays they sit from 10 a.m. till noon and then from 1:30 to 6:30. On Wednesdays they sit from 1:30 to 7 p.m. On Thursdays they sit from 10 a.m. until noon and then from 1:30 to 6 p.m.

Our neighbours to the east in Saskatchewan have ordinary sitting times as follows. On Mondays they sit from 1:30 p.m. to 10:30 p.m. with a recess between 5 and 7. On Tuesday they sit from 1:30 to 10:30 with a recess between 5 and 7. On Wednesdays they sit from 1:30 to 5. On Thursdays Saskatchewan's Legislature sits from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. On designated holidays the Assembly meets between 10 a.m. and 1 p.m. Mr. Speaker, I hope that this insight into our two neighbours' sitting times will help us to contribute to our discussion on this topic.

Closer to here at home I serve as the new chairman of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. That committee meets weekly on Tuesday mornings. This is a vital committee of this Legislature, that meets regularly to go through the Auditor General's reports, Measuring Up reports, and other documents that are vital to ensuring that Albertans get value for their hard-earned tax dollars. It is an all-party committee chaired by the Official Opposition, that has one of the most important tasks that we have here – and I enjoy it greatly – working collaboratively with members of all sides. So far we have worked as a team that as much as possible does not recognize party: the opposition, the government, and the third party, working the way Albertans want them to work, together.

[Mr. Feehan in the chair]

But also I happen to moonlight as the shadow minister of Finance for the Wildrose Party and caucus. That job requires me to be in the Legislature for all critical Finance debates. For me to do that job properly, I must be free in the mornings. I must not be called before the Public Accounts Committee to do the important work that they are doing there when I have equally important work to be done here.

Nobody is recommending that MLAs should not be working at 9 a.m. Most of us start long before then. Instead, we are asking that this amendment recognize that the important work of committees, private members on the government side, and opposition members on this side requires time beforehand. Ten a.m. is a reasonable compromise that will make this place more family-friendly for men and women and especially for parents but does not unduly harm the functioning of our standing committees and of opposition members. I am of the firm belief that 10 a.m. is the best time for our esteemed Legislature to begin the proceedings of the day as it will allow us to balance the many facets of our jobs as Members of the Legislative Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Does anyone wish to speak for five minutes? I recognize the leader of the third party.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm interested in the amendment that the House leader of the party with the third-most votes in the last election brought forward here, and I will say that it seems reasonable. I'm entertained by some of the previous commentary, particularly the comments around being available. I think people in this House from all sides work pretty hard and probably put in 12, 14 hours a day. So, for me, we're always available, and we have to plan our lives around the work. If there's any consideration, I think that what we need to remember is – and I'm in this category, so you can . . .

The Acting Speaker: My apologies. I just need to clarify with you whether you're responding to the previous speaker or you're speaking on your own terms.

Mr. McIver: Speaking on my own.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. McIver: May I continue?

The Acting Speaker: Yes, please.

Mr. McIver: All right. As I was saying, I think the big consideration – you know, I'm one of those people that does travel, and there are people from all sides of the House that do. But I would think that even those members that live in Edmonton would agree that a major consideration schedulewise is accommodating our colleagues from out of town. While I appreciate the concern for the local members to be home with their family or their kids or whatever, I find myself more concerned with those of us that are completely away from our family and our kids for three, four days at a time while we're here. No disrespect to those of us from Edmonton. I just think that that's a bigger consideration because many members of the House don't have that choice. The local members: bless your hearts. When you can get home to be with your family, good for you.

Having said that, whether we're in the House in the morning and preparing at the end of the day for the next day or, for me, in the House in the afternoon and preparing that morning for the House work that afternoon is kind of potayto, potahito. I'm going to be working all day, every day anyway, and I think most if not all members of this House are in the same position. At least, that's what I believe. I think we all work hard. We don't all agree, but I believe we all work hard.

I think this is reasonable, the change in start time from 9 to 10, so I may well support that. But I must also say that I don't intend to support the overall changes to the Standing Orders because I think they're actually pretty good the way they are, and they were developed over a number of years.

Having said that, I think this fairly minor amendment is a reasonable one. I heard the member that made the amendment, his explanation, and for the most part it sounded reasonable to me, so I'll support this. Again, not to give false hope to my colleagues over here, I think the current standing orders are pretty darn good.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

4:30

The Acting Speaker: Under Section 29(2)(a) does anyone wish to respond to the speaker? Five minutes.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I listened with great interest to what the Member for Calgary-Hays had to say about the proposed amendment before the House, and I had a few questions for him. I was just wondering if he could go into rather lengthy detail about the impacts that the changes to the standing orders, the amendment that has been proposed by the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, would have on his morning routine.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Mr. McIver: Extensive detail. Okay. Well, I'm not sure I can go into extensive detail. There are some things that we don't need to know about each other's morning routine. I think, hon. member, we can all agree on that.

You know what? It's a matter of, again, either getting up and preparing for the day's proceedings in the House or preparing the night before. That's not extensive. I apologize for that. That's what

you asked for, but I don't think there's an extensive explanation needed. I just think that we all have to adjust our schedules. I think we all work hard, and that's my extensive explanation.

The Speaker: I believe we're still on the amendment, which we will refer to as A1. I'm trying to catch up.

The Member for Lacombe-Ponoka. Excuse me. The Official Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Cooper: It's okay. You're a great person.

The Speaker: You, too.

Mr. Cooper: You can call me whatever you want.

I'm just wondering if the member would be willing to comment. Given that there's no ability to limit a night sitting and given that it's possible that we might now sit at 9 a.m., then at 1:30, and then the House could still sit till 2, 3 a.m. – you know, you've experienced times in the House where you've basically been here all night. How would that affect your morning routine given that now you have to be at the Assembly by, say, 7 a.m. so you can prepare for a 9 a.m. start?

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. McIver: Okay. Mr. Speaker, well, you know, it's a good question. It's a great question, hon. member, and I think at the heart of it, it comes down to democracy. It's inconvenient for me and our party, and I would suggest that it's probably inconvenient for your party because neither one of us is in government.

Those with the most seats in here get to make the decisions at the end of the day. I recognize that. I've been on that side. I'm on this side. I do support democracy. One of the tools, weapons, if you will, mechanisms that you have in opposition to hold the government to account is to make it inconvenient for them when they're doing things you don't like. One of those methods, of course, is to keep them up all night. We have the ability to do that, and that ability will be there whether we start at 9 in the morning or 10 in the morning.

Actually, I recognize both sides of it. If the government actually believe they have important work to do, they need to get it done, and if the opposition takes a run at them and keeps them up all night, then I guess the government can respond in a number of different ways. They can fold to the opposition pressure, or they can stay up all night and get their agenda done.

You know, at the end of the day, if push comes to shove – one thing about it is that it's a little bit self-regulating, only because the human body is designed to sleep about a third of the time. So when those all-night events happen, of course, it will be inconvenient, perhaps, to get up at 7 to be ready for House sittings at 9. If we're up all night, getting up at 8 for 10 might not be all that dissimilar, at least for me, if I haven't had any sleep. For those that think I'm grumpy when I've had sleep, it doesn't get better when I haven't.

That's the best I can do for you.

The Speaker: Under 29(2)(a) are there any further comments, questions?

Then I believe we proceed back to the discussion on the amendment, which I will refer to . . .

Ms Payne: Sorry. Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: Please proceed.

Ms Payne: My question would be particularly around: if the amendment is successful and we move to a 10 a.m., how would the

member expect that we would get through all of the business of the day? I think it's important to recognize that the business of the House in this Assembly does take a certain amount of time and that by allowing ourselves to begin at 9 a.m., that provides time for this important business.

The Speaker: It's my understanding, hon. member, that, in fact, under 29(2)(a) it's a total of five minutes, thus the reason I was moving to further debate on the amendment.

Mr. Orr: I really do support the intent, the goal of limiting the night sittings. I think it will contribute to the effectiveness of the House. But I suppose I would also like to speak on behalf of all of us on both sides of the House that our newbies – the planning and preparation before we come into this House truly is equally as important as what actually happens in this House. We do, all of us, I believe, need time. At least I know I do.

While I recognize the value of trying to move away from some of the night sittings, sometimes we swing the pendulum from one extreme to the other; therefore, I would speak in favour of the motion that 10 o'clock is probably the right solution; 9 o'clock might be a little bit too much of a swing.

I do want to see the House work productively, and we will not do our best work if we don't have adequate time to prepare for it. Of course, as has already been said, none of us arrive here just at 10 o'clock when we start now, and we won't arrive just at 9 when we start then or 10 if that's what it is. But I do fear that we might overreact and then find ourselves meeting for preparations and ending up, alternatively, having to shove committee meetings into the night, which would be totally counterproductive. We'd be right back where we were.

I really do think that 10 o'clock is probably the better median solution. If we need to meet on Mondays as well in order to get to that point between us, then personally I think that would be the right solution for us. We all have work to do, and part of our day is doing that other work, communicating, meeting with other people. Giving ourselves at least an hour in the morning to do a lot more of that work I think will make us much more effective as MLAs.

Thank you, sir.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I know it doesn't show, but I, too, am a newbie here.

The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On a couple of, I would say, practical . . .

The Speaker: My apologies again. Under 29(2)(a) are there questions? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I noticed that the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka had referred to possibly working through Mondays to get the business of the House through. I notice that we don't have any amendments to the times that we are sitting on Mondays in the amendment that's been presented to the House. I was just wondering if the member agrees with the times that have been proposed in the amendment or if he's suggesting a further amendment to additional time that the House would be sitting on Mondays. I would appreciate some clarification on that point.

4:40

Mr. Orr: Good question. I think we should do one motion at a time, so I will retract that aspect of it, rather than muddy the waters, and leave it as it is for now.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Any other questions? The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actually, I'd like to address the hon. member. Why is it that you think that every other province meets at 10 a.m.? Short of Nova Scotia, I think they meet on Fridays at 9 a.m. Why do you think that – I mean, in all the other provinces that seems to work. It's a good function of those other Legislatures. Perhaps you could expand on why you think that that would be a good time. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I wish I had been in some of those Assemblies, but I have not been, so it might be a bit of a stretch, but I suspect it's for some of the reasons I've already said. I believe there is other important work to be done, and being well prepared for when we actually get there is probably one of the primary reasons.

The Speaker: Any other questions under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Connolly: I would actually just like to clarify for the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View that Ontario sits at 9 a.m. on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, and on Mondays they meet at 10:30 a.m.

The Speaker: Any more questions under 29(2)(a)?

I would now again recognize the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In regard to this timing of 9 a.m. or 10 a.m. I would like to bring up a purely technical issue here, one that I've experienced myself, that might help us in the decision-making here. I have had a number of technical problems with the computer, phone, and printer early in the morning during preparation for the work that we do here. If we are going to move our time to start to 9 in the morning, I'm going to be here at about 6 to 6:30 to start my day. If I have a technical problem, you all know IT isn't going to be there to give me a hand, and I am technologically illiterate. I'm not going to be able to fix my computer, my printer, or whatever else in the world has managed to collapse on me in time for me to get my work done to scoot on over here and be ready for 9 o'clock. So from a purely and, I'll say, selfish motive, since I'm not 12 years old and I don't know how to run much of this stuff, I need time. I have had three technological failures in the morning so far, and we've only been here just a few months. I would be very concerned if we had to start at 9 o'clock and I have a problem and IT isn't really ready to get going until 8:30 in the morning. They are extremely good at what they do, but they are not superman and superwoman either.

The second technical issue is that every single one of us in this Assembly have things going on in our constituencies, and the things that happen in our constituencies don't stop just because we are here in session. Morning time is our time to talk to our constituency staff and catch up on whatever fires may be burning out of control, whatever major issues may have arisen in the night. We have had some major issues that have happened in the night: serious accidents, fires, things that we need to be prepared for, that the media is after us for a comment for their morning news show. There is much more that each and every one of us in this House does than just sit here and listen to great, long oratories and vote on things. We have stuff going on back home in our constituencies. Oftentimes that one hour or hour and a half in the morning is when

I talk to my constituency assistant so that I am brought up to speed on what's going on back home.

If we're going to be starting at 9 o'clock now, that just shoves everything back earlier in the day, giving us less time to do our job. I do not believe it is in our best interest as legislators nor as representatives of the people that we start any earlier than 10 o'clock. We need time to prepare, we need time to recover from technological failures – and they're going to happen to me – and we are going to need time to talk to our constituency assistants and get things sorted out down there that need sorting out. So please take these things into consideration before we start moving things to a 9 o'clock start time.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there any questions or comments with respect to 29(2)(a)? Please proceed.

Mr. Cyr: To my colleague: when are you going to be able to get back to your constituents when you're in the House all day?

Mr. MacIntyre: Heaven only knows, Mr. Speaker, but it isn't going to be in a timely fashion. We have had in my constituency, in just the short time that we have been elected, three emergencies, two of which were in the morning, one of which concerned my own family, and I would not have liked to have been in this House when those things occurred. We dealt with them in a timely, quick fashion in the morning. I don't know about the rest of you, but I shut my phone off when I'm in this Chamber. I need that time in the morning – and I'm sure all the rest of you do, too – to take care of things back home. I hope I answered your question.

The Speaker: Any other questions or comments under 29(2)(a)? Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, did you wish to speak to the amendment? Please proceed.

Mr. Cyr: For myself, I guess one of my concerns in all of this is the fact that we're going to be putting more of a load on our staff. The fact is that we've got contracts with all the staff. I'm wondering: with these changes that we're going to be doing as well as going to 9 o'clock in the morning and possibly to regular evening sittings, what are we doing to compensate these staff? Has it been worked into the budgets? This is something that we need to be addressing. As a father I know that I miss my family. These staff need to be recognized for the time that they're giving up.

Now, time in lieu of, obviously, is a wonderful avenue that many staff use, and this is something that has to be used within three months. So during the wonderful time right now, if they are doing time in lieu of, our staff need to use this time probably around January. For me, I would say that taking extra time off in January may not be the best thing for me and my family as my daughters are in school. What we need to be looking at is: exactly what are the impacts going to be to our staff, what are the impacts going to be to my colleagues, and what impacts are we looking at for the rest of Alberta? The question here that we need to be asking is: have the contracts been looked into to make sure that we are not going to be creating a whole lot more cost on the government? Are we looking at how we can mitigate some of these costs without impacting the family life of our wonderful staff and the MLAs? What we need to be working towards is limiting the night sittings and bringing up a consistent schedule that our staff can expect to go through.

4:50

Now, I would like to also mention on these changes we are making that we haven't consulted the stakeholders here, which would be the staff. Have we gone to the staff and asked them if this

is something that they're going to be willing to take? The fact is that these contracts are now written. The government stated earlier that they weren't willing to breach contracts. Well, that's fine. So now we've got contracts that we're going to need to alter. Has the government considered the fact that we may need to alter contracts that are coming up?

Now, I don't know about you, but whenever somebody starts telling me to alter contracts, I always get a little nervous.

An Hon. Member: What about public-sector workers?

Mr. Cyr: Public-sector workers, absolutely. The fact is that our legislative staff are public-sector workers, and they need to be thought of in this process. The fact is that when we're looking at who and what we need to do, we need to be looking at how it will impact them. What is it that's going to change?

When the Wildrose brought this forward, we were asking for two extra hours, and now we're looking at night sittings and three extra hours. This is significant. This is very significant. If we haven't gone to the legislative staff and gotten their opinions on exactly what they feel is appropriate, then this could end up having a lot of consequences that we are not actually looking into. Instead of being proactive, we're being reactive in all of this. In summary here, I would like to just ask: in the end, have we done the work that is needed to see if we are going to be impacting our staff?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Questions to the hon. member under 29(2)(a)? The Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake. The member seems to be suggesting that for the hours during which he is on the Legislature Grounds, his staff is here whenever he is. That seems to suggest that perhaps their current contracts have them here along with him until the early morning hours. Perhaps he can speak to whether or not this is something he already requires of his staff and provide further clarification as to whether or not this is going to be as onerous as he is potentially suggesting?

Mr. Cyr: Well, again, when we're looking at staff contracts, we all have to look into our own contracts as well as the government. The fact is that when we're sitting, we want to limit the impact to our staff. That is just a fact. We do have a few staff that are here with us, but most evenings we don't have staff. The fact is that when we are going through this, they're going to need to spend more hours, taken away from the hours that they've lost in the morning and the evening, and spend them working on our specific portfolios or questions.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to suggest to the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake to contact the IT department. They have a very strong training program, and you can avail yourself of the training there.

Also, to the Member for Drumheller-Stettler: the average age is well above 12. It is around 45 within our caucus.

Thank you.

Mr. Nixon: Point of order.

The Speaker: The point of order is noted. I agree with the member. When you are under 29(2)(a), you can only speak to, in this case,

the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, and you included another member's question. I would rule that your question is out of order.

We're still dealing with the member. Under 29(2)(a) are there any other comments with respect to that member's presentation? The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question is to the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake. I understand the desires around when we might want to be at work, but there are realities around when we do need to be at work. I know from my experience in public education that all of our elementary schools start between 8 and 8:40, and families found it very feasible to be there. Teachers were often there hours before that preparing. These are some of the realities that we face as working people in Alberta. I'm proud for us to have the reputation of being working people in this Legislature, and I think 9 o'clock is not an unrealistic work time to start. I guess my question to the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake is: what time does the member think is most appropriate for us to be emulating to members of the public? Most of them are at work far before the beginning time. The question to the member is around: what exactly is it that he thinks is unrealistic around a 9 a.m. start time for the formal beginning?

Mr. Cyr: Thank you for the question. We're always at work – it's just a fact – and expecting our staff to always be at work is a problem. Thank you.

The Speaker: Any other questions to the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake under 29(2)(a)? Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you. Something that I hadn't thought of before, when I was talking about my constituency assistant, is that I have an employment contract with that person to start at a particular time of the day. If we're going to start at 9 o'clock, I can't alter that contract now, and I'm toast. What time does your constituency assistant's contract start?

Mr. Cyr: My constituency staff starts at 8:30. I'm fortunate.

An Hon. Member: Perfect.

Mr. Cyr: It is a wonderful situation. But the fact is that it's not my constituency staff or myself that I'm looking out for. There are other MLAs out there with satellite offices, and we need to be concerned about being able to get to those as well. Thank you for the question. That is a concern.

The Speaker: I'll recognize the Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will rise to speak in favour of this amendment, and I do so to highlight some of the challenges those of us in smaller parties face.

Now, I concur with the opposition House leaders and other members who have raised the concern for their staff. I signed up for this. We all signed up for this. As we were reminded on the very first day, being an MLA in this Assembly and being an MLA is a 24-hour-a-day, 365-day job – we know that – and I say, in all sincerity, that my observation of every single member that I've interacted with in this Assembly, on both sides of the House, shows that to be true. We all work tremendously hard. This is not about what time we come to work because, as my hon. colleague has said, we're always at work.

However, I have an objection to the 9 a.m. sitting for the sake of my staff. I do believe that it actually impairs our ability to adequately represent Albertans and to do our job. It is already a challenge to come to this House adequately prepared. There is a

tremendous volume of information to read through, and there is simply a minimum amount of time required to do research, to be briefed, and to digest this information as we do that important work on behalf of Albertans here in this House. While I recognize the tremendous work that every member of this House does, it is especially true for those of us at this end of the House, who perhaps do not have colleagues that we can rely on to trade off work.

As it stands, owing to the late start of this session, the schedule for estimates has been compressed. What is usually undertaken in four weeks has been compressed to two, which is a direct result of the choice the government made to delay the sitting of this House and the presentation of the budget. Now, I don't know why they did that, but it is a fact that we are here starting later.

An Hon. Member: The election.

Mr. Clark: There is some suggestion that it may have had something to do with the federal election. But be that as it may, we are now required to have that compressed schedule.

5:00

Now, as a result, there are times when members will be in committee in the evening, have to sit at 9 a.m., attend Orders of the Day at 1:30, and then attend another committee meeting again later that afternoon or that evening. Again, I can handle that. That's what I signed up for. I think it's what we all signed up for. But for our staff, who need to be briefing us for estimates and briefing us for question period and bill debates, that's a tremendous burden. The extra hour from 9 to 10 will make a significant difference. In the end, it's about our ability to do the job that we've been elected to do, to represent Albertans properly, which is why I will vote in favour of this amendment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Any questions of the member under 29(2)(a)? I would recognize the Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my turn. Thank you. I'm pleased to speak to the proposed amendment. I know that in the past the third party was pretty loose and fast with the rules, but it would be nice to see some accountability in this system. We have a real opportunity here today. We had hoped that this new government would bring a new perspective, having previously served in the opposition role – you know very well – the difference being, you know, that “new” and “blue” is getting a little bit murky these days.

The Government House Leader previously told us that we would be sitting at 10 a.m., not 9 a.m. Now, I know it seems like an hour is not really a lot, but an extra hour can go a long way for our staff in preparing the day's activities. Meetings are often booked in the morning, before the start of the afternoon sitting, and now that we're sitting all morning, afternoon, and all evening, we have very little time to meet with stakeholders or concerned constituents.

Another concern that I have with the morning sitting as it is proposed is the committee meetings. Session is the ideal time to meet as the out-of-town MLAs are all present in Edmonton. By moving to all-morning sittings, this essentially eliminates any time to meet. Important committee work will be crammed into what limited time is available in this busy schedule. What? When – 6 a.m., 5 a.m. – are we going to do this important work?

Mr. Speaker, committees are meant to be a vital part of our democratic system. I did have sincere hopes that under this new government we would have seen a change, as did the rest of Alberta, and a move to more respect for the independence and importance of committees.

I touched on it earlier, Mr. Speaker, and I would like to return to the matter of staffing. An extra hour in the morning of sitting would give us in the opposition as well as the hard-working staffers on all sides of the Legislature just a little more time to prepare for the day, including whatever other morning routines we don't need to hear about.

The Premier said as an opposition MLA, "It is particularly necessary to respect the rights of the minority . . . when you have a small opposition, and they cannot simply be here for 18 hours a day." Mr. Speaker, we all know that burnout is a real thing. We want the best and the brightest to be coming to this Legislature to debate matters of vital importance in our province. As the Premier herself once suggested, 18 hours a day is not the way to do that.

A move to 9 a.m. start times could have the potential to be the start of a slippery slope. Votes in this Chamber are something that I take very seriously. I have a responsibility to the people of Airdrie to be the best representative possible. That includes making informed votes on legislation that appears before this House. With morning, noon, and night sittings it would greatly diminish the time to prepare and to make informed votes for all Members of this Legislative Assembly.

If there is one thing I know we need in this Legislature, it is to work on ways to improve our democratic system, not diminish it. I know we have a larger caucus than the NDP had when you were in opposition. However, the workload is still the same. Staff will have virtually no time to prepare for the upcoming session – as I hope you know, this is what they do in the morning – especially if we still have an evening sitting. With this proposal we will still be sitting 12-plus hours a day. There is no way our staff will be able to keep up with the crushing workload.

It's all well and good for the government to sit for 12-plus hours. You drive the agenda. You have the ability to plan ahead. Plus, you have an army of bureaucrats to call on for help. We in opposition: we're often reacting. Our staff help research bills and help draft speaking notes. With this constant sitting they will burn out.

An amendment like this was not even passed by the most malicious third-party government. As I had previously stated, I really had hoped that this session would be the start of a new way of looking at legislating and a collaborative approach, where we can all come together as Members of this Legislative Assembly regardless of our political stripe and make our system work better.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I hope you will consider my proposal.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I would urge you to think about using words like "malicious" based on other examples of that discussion in this room.

The hon. Member for Calgary-North West under 29(2)(a).

Ms Jansen: Absolutely. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I want to thank the Member for Airdrie for referring to us as "loose and fast." It's not that I get called that very often, and I hope it improves my street cred.

I want to bring up a couple of things. First of all, the member stated that we shouldn't be here 18 hours a day, yet I think I remember back three years that filibustering by this party kept us here till 5 or 6 in the morning, so perhaps you ought not be mudslinging.

Then to the comment about the crushing workload of your staff: you know, having your bum in a seat for an extra hour a day does not constitute any workload for your staff. It means you've got your bum in a seat for an extra hour. So I will say this. It is a far worse use of our time to be frittering away the afternoon when we could

be doing responsible government business. This is the kind of behaviour that will ensure that you're never the government.

The Speaker: Under 29(2)(a) are there any other questions with respect to the Member for Airdrie?

I would recognize the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's been a lot said about the time, whether we go at 9 o'clock or 10 o'clock, and I think that it's been an excellent debate. I guess the point that I want to make is that in this House we have gentlemen's agreements between House leaders. Three different caucuses are represented, from what I understand – and I am new here, so I'm not sure if there are other people involved. But an agreement has been made, a gentlemen's agreement, and it was broken. I think that that's important to state. Because it was broken, it's caused problems with the House.

We have people throughout Alberta that are looking to us for leadership, and one of the things that they look to us for is being honourable. One of the honourable points is being able to make sure that when we make an agreement, we keep it. That's how things work in business, that's how things work in families, and that's how things should work here in the House. I think that it's important for us to remember that the problem started because this agreement was broken. I don't think that that should be downplayed. We need to be able to set a high standard for the people whom we represent. They expect it of us, and they expect us to be able to act in a way that is honourable.

That's all I had to say about this. Thank you.

5:10

The Speaker: Under 29(2)(a) are there any questions for the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner?

I believe I would be now calling upon the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When I managed to be elected to this Assembly, somehow, I knew that there would be a lot of learning that would be entailed in coming to this establishment, in trying to figure out how government actually works, and I knew that I would get opportunities to come before this Legislature and to speak and to debate and to try to convince and to listen to each other and then to respond to each other, so I find it a privilege to be here and to be able to be involved in this discussion that we're having today.

I believe that it's important that as MLAs we have the time to work into the issues that we face every day. I know that as a teacher that didn't happen while I was actively trying to teach in front of the kids, that there was a necessary period of time – I was very interested when the hon. Minister of Health talked about the profession of teaching. You were absolutely correct when you were saying, you know, that there is an element of time that's necessary for teachers to build in to be able to be effective in the classroom. I know that as a teacher I always appreciated and I respected those administrations and those superintendents that built in days for teachers to be able to meet with other teachers, to be able to engage in discussion, to be able to plan together, to be able to work together, to be able to help engage the students in my classroom.

Every institution has its own rhythms. In teaching, there's absolutely a rhythm to the teaching profession, to the classroom. For those of you that have ever been in there, you know that much of the work that we do as teachers happens outside of that classroom. I know that when, five years ago, I made the commitment to coach a basketball team and at the same time would have new courses in my class, it meant that I had to take the time in my summer holidays to come into the school. They trusted me with

a key; sometimes I wondered why. They allowed me into that school, where I could then sit down and plan my curriculum for that coming year. I know that I came in every day for three or four hours during the summer just to ensure that I had my 20-2 curriculum under control so that when I was in front of my kids and I was also trying to coach basketball, I would have the ability to do my job.

I guess the concern that I've got when it comes to the 9 o'clock start is this. I know it's been said by many people, probably far more eloquently than myself. It's just that as new Members of the Legislative Assembly we all have a learning curve that goes straight up. That's fair. That's honest. That goes on both sides. We need to consider just what the pressures are that we face as MLAs that will allow us to enhance democracy. That's what this is really supposed to be all about. This conversation is supposed to be about enhancing the ability of this House to be democratic.

I would speak to this amendment and to a 10 o'clock start because I believe that it will help me, personally, be a better MLA, and as I become a better MLA, I then can be a better democratic politician. I know that for many of you there are going to be times when you're coming into this Legislature having travelled long distances to get here. That 9 o'clock start is going to be an issue. That's just a reality. You all have talked about the fact that you've got kids, that you've got a life outside of this Legislature and this Legislative Assembly, so a 10 o'clock sitting: yeah, I think it's reasonable. I don't think that we're stretching the boundaries by saying: oh, you know, this Legislature is going to be significantly better if we start at 9 o'clock. As a matter of fact, I would argue that it's probably going to be just a little bit better if we're starting at 10.

So I would speak to this amendment. When I look at the committee workload that I have, the constituency work that I have to do, the travel distance at times coming from Drayton Valley-Devon, the fact that I've got to have time to study the issues and to consider the bills that are being brought before this House, that I have to be able to work with the LAO and my outreach officer, I believe that a 10 o'clock time would allow this Legislature to function a little more efficiently and effectively.

I know that we often had the discussion in my real life, when I was a teacher, about whether or not we should change the school year, whether we should change the semester system. I wish the Minister of Education was here because I really, honestly believe, after 30 years of teaching, that if we changed our semester system so that it ended before Christmas, it would be better for the students. I use that as an analogy to suggest that maybe a 10 o'clock start would be better for this House. It would make it run a little more efficiently and a little more effectively.

I believe that in a democracy we have to look for those things in this House that will allow for both a strong government and a strong opposition. Democracy works best when the government of the day and the opposition are both doing their roles, doing them effectively, and doing them efficiently. So if a 10 a.m. start allows us to do that – and I would argue that it does allow us just a little bit better to do our jobs both as a government and as an opposition – then that's good for democracy, and I would speak in support of this amendment.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, is your question with respect to the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon? Or you'll speak to the amendment?

Are there any questions or comments under 29(2)(a) with respect to the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon?

Then I will recognize the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn debate on this amendment.

The Speaker: So as I understand it, you're asking for an adjournment of the debate on the amendment. Is that correct?

[The voice vote indicated that the motion to adjourn debate on amendment A1 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:19 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

The Speaker: I'd like to remind the members that if they leave or enter the room, they must do so prior to the bell terminating.

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, S.	Horne	Miranda
Bilous	Jabbour	Nielsen
Carlier	Jansen	Payne
Connolly	Kazim	Piquette
Cortes-Vargas	Kleinsteuber	Renaud
Dach	Larivee	Rosendahl
Dang	Littlewood	Sabir
Drever	Loyola	Schmidt
Feehan	Luff	Schreiner
Fitzpatrick	Malkinson	Shepherd
Ganley	Mason	Sucha
Goehring	McKitrick	Sweet
Gray	McLean	Turner
Hinkley	McPherson	Westhead
Hoffman	Miller	Woollard

5:30

Against the motion:

Aheer	Gotfried	Pitt
Anderson, W.	Hanson	Rodney
Barnes	Hunter	Schneider
Bhullar	Jean	Smith
Clark	Loewen	Starke
Cooper	MacIntyre	Stier
Cyr	McIver	Strankman
Drysdale	Nixon	Taylor
Ellis	Orr	van Dijken
Fildebrandt	Panda	Yao
Fraser		

Totals: For – 45 Against – 31

[Motion to adjourn debate on amendment A1 carried]

The Speaker: I would recognize the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar on the adjournment.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn debate on the main motion.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Constituency Week

- Mr. Mason moved:
Be it resolved that, notwithstanding Standing Order 3(6), the only constituency week for the 2015 fall sitting shall be held

the week of November 9, 2015, with the Assembly reconvening on Monday, November 16, 2015.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Did you wish to speak to the motion?

Mr. Mason: Well, Madam Speaker, this simply moves the week to the week that includes Remembrance Day, and this is with a view to the fact that I'm sure all of us have important events to attend to on that Wednesday in our constituencies, so we feel that it is a more appropriate week to take the constituency break. I hope that members will support that.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wish to speak to the motion? The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's been quite the afternoon here in the House, and I'm sure folks have had a fair fill of hearing from me this afternoon.

An Hon. Member: It's never enough.

Mr. Cooper: Never enough.

I will be relatively brief. In fact, if we can make this very similar to the budget speech, where every time I stop they clap, that'd be great. Let's try.

Madam Speaker, I rise this evening just because I want to quickly highlight a couple of things. Members on this side of the House will certainly be supporting this motion as we fully agree with the importance of being in the constituency during that critical period of time for Remembrance Day. The first poppy ceremony was a great reminder this morning of the important sacrifice that's been made by so many before us. In some respects, you know, what we do here in the House, hopefully, will honour those who have gone before us in defending some of those freedoms and our ability to have such robust debate and discussion.

I do just want to raise a quick point with you, something that I know the table officers and other staff of this place have identified as one of the things that could be very helpful to them. I'm sure that the Government House Leader will be aware of this as he has also received, I would guess, notifications from the Speaker's office in the past around producing a sessional calendar immediately following an election. One of the big reasons why we're here and needing to move stuff around is because the government of today chose not to or was unable to or, whatever the case may be, didn't do that.

5:40

There are a number of things – and we spent a lot of time today talking about making the House work better – and I think that this is one of them, producing a sessional calendar. One of the recommendations that we made, that I spoke about earlier today, in the Restoring Trust document, that I will be happy to table tomorrow at the appropriate time, is just that, producing a sessional calendar so that all members of this Assembly, both on the government and the opposition side, all members of your staff in the Speaker's office, all of the table officers can schedule the efficiencies of this House right around that calendar. Not only producing the calendar: we've seen in years past times where there has been very little desire on behalf of the government to stay committed to that schedule.

I just wanted to highlight that very briefly today. This sessional calendar would have been very helpful. We even could have fixed this challenge in the previous session so that all of the members of the Assembly could have already been planning as if they would be in the constituency. I just wanted to highlight that for you tonight, and we will be supporting this move.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wish to speak to the motion?

Seeing none, the Government House Leader to close debate.

Mr. Mason: No.

The Deputy Speaker: No? Then I will call the question on that.

[Government Motion 15 carried]

Evening Sittings

16. Mr. Mason moved:
Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 4(1) commencing November 23, 2015, the Assembly shall meet on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday evenings for consideration of government business for the duration of the 2015 fall sitting unless on motion by the Government House Leader made before 6 p.m., which may be made orally and without notice, the Assembly is adjourned to the following sitting day.

[Government Motion 16 carried]

Address in Reply to Speech from the Throne

17. Mr. Mason moved:
Be it resolved that Standing Order 19(1)(c) be waived and that the Speaker put every question necessary to dispose of the motion for an address in reply to the Lieutenant Governor's speech of June 15, 2015, on December 2, 2015, at 5:45 p.m. unless the debate on the motion is previously concluded.

[Government Motion 17 carried]

Provincial Fiscal Policies

13. Mr. Ceci moved:
Be it resolved that the Assembly approve in general the business plans and fiscal policies of the government.

[Adjourned debate October 27: Mr. Cooper]

The Deputy Speaker: Does any other member wish to speak?

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I move that we adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Mr. Cooper: I think we've made some good progress today.

Mr. Mason: Madam Speaker, with that in view and in view of the limited progress on a number of items that we've made today, I move that we call it 6 o'clock and adjourn until tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:46 p.m. to Thursday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday afternoon, October 29, 2015

Day 12

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

First Session

Wanner, Hon. Robert E., Medicine Hat (ND), Speaker
Jabbour, Deborah C., Peace River (ND), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Feehan, Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (ND), Deputy Chair of Committees

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Rocky View (W)
Anderson, Shaye, Leduc-Beaumont (ND)
Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (W)
Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (ND)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (W)
Bhullar, Manmeet Singh, Calgary-Greenway (PC)
Bilous, Hon. Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (ND),
Deputy Government House Leader
Carlier, Hon. Oneil, Whitecourt-St. Anne (ND)
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-Meadowlark (ND)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, Calgary-Fort (ND)
Clark, Greg, Calgary-Elbow (AP)
Connolly, Michael R.D., Calgary-Hawkwood (ND)
Coolahan, Craig, Calgary-Klein (ND)
Cooper, Nathan, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (W),
Official Opposition House Leader
Cortes-Vargas, Estefania, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (ND)
Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake (W),
Official Opposition Deputy Whip
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (ND)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South West (ND)
Drever, Deborah, Calgary-Bow (Ind)
Drysdale, Wayne, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (PC),
Progressive Conservative Opposition Whip
Eggen, Hon. David, Edmonton-Calder (ND)
Ellis, Mike, Calgary-West (PC)
Fildebrandt, Derek Gerhard, Strathmore-Brooks (W)
Fitzpatrick, Maria M., Lethbridge-East (ND)
Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (PC)
Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., Calgary-Buffalo (ND)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (ND)
Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (PC)
Gray, Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (ND)
Hanson, David B., Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills (W),
Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
Hinkley, Bruce, Wetaskiwin-Camrose (ND)
Hoffman, Hon. Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (ND)
Horne, Trevor A.R., Spruce Grove-St. Albert (ND)
Hunter, Grant R., Cardston-Taber-Warner (W)
Jansen, Sandra, Calgary-North West (PC)
Jean, Brian Michael, QC, Fort McMurray-Conklin (W),
Leader of the Official Opposition
Kazim, Anam, Calgary-Glenmore (ND)
Kleinstauber, Jamie, Calgary-Northern Hills (ND)
Larivee, Hon. Danielle, Lesser Slave Lake (ND)
Littlewood, Jessica, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (ND)
Loewen, Todd, Grande Prairie-Smoky (W)
Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (ND)
Luff, Robyn, Calgary-East (ND)
MacIntyre, Donald, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (W)
Malkinson, Brian, Calgary-Currie (ND)
Mason, Hon. Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (ND),
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McCuaig-Boyd, Hon. Margaret,
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Miller, Barb, Red Deer-South (ND)
Miranda, Ricardo, Calgary-Cross (ND)
Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (ND)
Nixon, Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (W),
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Orr, Ronald, Lacombe-Ponoka (W)
Panda, Prasad, Calgary-Foothills (W)
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Phillips, Hon. Shannon, Lethbridge-West (ND),
Deputy Government House Leader
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Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie (W)
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (ND)
Rodney, Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC)
Rosendahl, Eric, West Yellowhead (ND)
Sabir, Hon. Irfan, Calgary-McCall (ND)
Schmidt, Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (ND),
Government Whip
Schneider, David A., Little Bow (W)
Schreiner, Kim, Red Deer-North (ND)
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-Centre (ND)
Sigurdson, Hon. Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (ND)
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (W)
Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC),
Progressive Conservative Opposition House Leader
Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (W)
Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (W)
Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (ND)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (ND)
Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (W)
Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (ND)
van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND)
Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)

Party standings:

New Democrat: 53 Wildrose: 22 Progressive Conservative: 9 Alberta Liberal: 1 Alberta Party: 1 Independent: 1

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Kathleen T. Ganley	Minister of Justice and Solicitor General, Minister of Aboriginal Relations
Sarah Hoffman	Minister of Health, Minister of Seniors
Danielle Larivee	Minister of Municipal Affairs, Minister of Service Alberta
Brian Mason	Minister of Transportation, Minister of Infrastructure
Margaret McCuaig-Boyd	Minister of Energy
Shannon Phillips	Minister of Environment and Parks, Minister Responsible for the Status of Women
Irfan Sabir	Minister of Human Services
Lori Sigurdson	Minister of Advanced Education, Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour

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Coolahan	Piquette
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Dang	Stier
Drysdale	Sucha
Horne	Woollard
Kazim	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, October 29, 2015

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Deputy Speaker: Let us reflect. As we conclude for the week our work in this Assembly, we renew our energies with thanks so that we may continue our work with the people in our constituencies, that we represent.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Deputy Speaker: I understand we have some school groups today. Welcome.

The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the grade 6 class of Neerlandia public Christian school. I'm proud to say that Neerlandia public Christian school was the school I attended for the first nine years of my education. As well, all five of my children attended there. With them today is their teacher, whom I consider a personal friend, Mr. Jim Bosma, and chaperones Dr. Egbert de Waal, Mrs. Mistie Renfert, Mr. Keith Wiart, Mr. Wesley Vold, and my niece-in-law Mrs. Sherri Hiemstra. I would invite the class, their teacher, and the chaperones to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is my great pleasure today to introduce to you and through you a distinct group of students who are leaders in our community today and will continue to be leaders in our community tomorrow. I had the pleasure of visiting this class from George P. Nicholson school a few weeks ago. Their teacher, Lorelei Campbell, joins them today with parents Coral Haggett, Darina Alyward, Tracey Kalke, Lisa Ladd, and Lingyun Huang, who are no small part of helping them become leaders of tomorrow. If they would please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly 46 students from the Centre for Learning@Home, located in my constituency of Edmonton-Meadowlark. They are a fully accredited, publicly funded Christian school offering distance learning, summer programs, and home-schooling services. With the students is their recreational co-ordinator, Samantha Quantz, and some of their parents. I would like to invite them to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other school groups today?

I'd like to, then, call on the Minister of Advanced Education and Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour today to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly a

valued group of employees from apprenticeship and industry training within the Ministry of Advanced Education. They are here today as part of a team building and recognition day. These fine people are to be commended for their hard work and dedication. They are seated in the members' gallery this afternoon. I ask that they rise as I call their names: Terry Grunsell, who organized the visit today, Elaine Cope, Kevin Martin, Jenna Sarty, Richelle Waters, Ashley Brightnose, Anne Rothery, Emily Nhan, Digna Ferrer, and Julia Nhan. Please join me in giving them all the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Minister of Transportation and Minister of Infrastructure, you have a guest today?

Mr. Mason: Yes. Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's a wonderful opportunity for me and a great honour to introduce to you first of all my lovely wife, Karin Olson, who is here with her sister Denise Nord and her husband, Larry Nord, who are visiting us from Duluth, Minnesota, where my wife is originally from. It's wonderful to have a great visit with them. I would ask that they please rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: The Minister of Environment and Parks and Minister Responsible for the Status of Women.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my delight today to introduce to you and through you staff from across five ministries who join us here today. These dedicated staff are participating in the government of Alberta leadership program and are here on a team building exercise. They will be touring our Legislature, seeing the House in session, and later meeting with me. I'd like to read their names now as they stand: Kata Jhukoutaiy, professional services and health benefits, Department of Health; Emily Sambhudyal, project manager, Service Alberta; Ryan Eberhardt, unit supervisor, Justice and Solicitor General, young offender centre; Alexandra Bykowski, policy analyst in my own Department of Environment and Parks; and Adele Powell, contract administration engineer, Transportation.

I am proud of the incredible work of our public servants across Alberta. It is my honour to have them here today. I ask that they receive the warm welcome from our Assembly.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise to introduce to you and through you two employees of Edmonton Meals on Wheels. Caitlin Fleming serves as their engagement and fund development manager, and Ashleigh Pardy serves as their fund development and communications co-ordinator. I'm sure that all members are familiar with the good work that Meals on Wheels does, providing healthy, nutritious food to those who are mobility impaired. I'd like to ask Caitlin and Ashleigh to rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Ms Miller: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you Mr. Don Crisall. I have known Don for about eight years, and I'm proud to call him a friend. Don is a strong activist and very socially conscious. Don is well known to many in this House, and they can attest to his dedication to the cause. He is also my mentor. He has supported and encouraged me to accept the opportunities that have come my way and has always believed that I can accomplish anything I put my mind to even when I have

doubts. Don, could you please rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Well, every day it looks better and better for Liberals in Alberta, and it's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you three members of the Alberta Liberal Party, stalwarts, in fact, in Edmonton: Dr. Donna Wilson, Mrs. Irene Hunter, and Harpreet Gill. All three individuals are driven by the cause of making this province a better place to live through their public service. This past spring Harpreet and Donna both stood for election in the ridings of Edmonton-Mill Creek and Edmonton-Riverview, with Irene serving brilliantly as Donna's campaign manager. All were concerned that the budget leaves Edmonton on hold with respect to its hospital infrastructure and are here to remind this government particularly that Edmonton and infrastructure for hospitals and health care has to be a priority. We're all sitting in this place because of the diligent work of volunteers like Donna, Irene, and Harpreet, and I'll ask them to rise and receive the warm greetings of the Legislature.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It is my honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to the Legislative Assembly a constituent and leader in Alberta's postsecondary community, Dr. David Docherty. He is the president of Mount Royal University, and Mount Royal University adds a tremendous amount of vitality to the already vital constituency of Calgary-Elbow. No stranger to Legislatures, as a political science professor Dr. Docherty wrote a comprehensive but very accessible book outlining the role of Canadian Legislatures and our role as legislators. I encourage everyone to pick up a copy if you haven't already. David, please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms Drever: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all the members of the Assembly three people who work tirelessly both inside and outside my constituency. Pathways Community Services Association is an aboriginal not-for-profit which engages with communities with a focus on meeting the needs of children, youth, and families. I'd like to introduce Ronni Abraham, associate director; Michelle Jones, communications and advocacy lead; Jennifer Fox, team leader of the mentor home program. I welcome them, and I ask that they receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein.

Affordable Housing in Calgary

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am a strong proponent of affordable housing in this province and for my constituency. In fact, the people of Calgary's greatest constituency, Calgary-Klein, are also strong advocates for affordable housing. The work of the Thorncliffe Greenview and the Highland Park community associations comes to mind. While we share this common

goal, we also share the knowledge that ending homelessness must be done using a housing first model rather than a readiness first approach.

Madam Speaker, the people of Calgary-Klein have endured several years of uncertainty in regard to what type of housing will be built in a hotel located at Edmonton Trail and McKnight Boulevard that was purchased by the Calgary drop-in centre. Without going into detail, the consultation process between the proponents of the impacted communities regarding the use of this building was neither robust nor clear on direction. As a result, the Calgary city Planning Commission recently rejected the application that would allow the plans to move forward. Again, without going into detail, this building was purchased in part using a provincial government grant issued by the previous government. The previous government then attempted to retract the money due to the fact that what was proposed in the grant and the reality of the project did not align.

Madam Speaker, I'm asking our government today to consider the alternate possibilities for affordable housing that this project presents. This land may prove to be a worthwhile site for affordable housing, including seniors' housing, particularly if a project can be developed in partnership between the Calgary drop-in centre and a proven expert in the housing first model such as the Calgary Homeless Foundation. I would ask the government to encourage such a partnership, with the community's full support. Doing this is in the best interests of everyone, including the communities, the drop-in centre as well as those struggling to attain affordable housing.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Diwali

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Right now Indo-Canadians across the country are getting ready to celebrate Diwali, the festival of lights. This five-day celebration celebrates victory over defeat, good over evil, and triumph over despair. For Hindus everywhere the act of lighting the diya reminds us that no matter how dark the night may be, light will always prevail.

Diwali is a reminder that in order to reach a brighter future for all of us, we must first dedicate ourselves to service and kindness to others. This message and this meaning reach beyond the Hindu community and into the hearts of all well-meaning people. Diwali is now celebrated all over the world and in important institutions like the Canadian House of Commons and the White House. Indeed, at the end of the day, we all want peace and prosperity for our families and for our communities, and Diwali is a time to reflect on how best we can achieve those goals.

This year is a very special Diwali for me because I'm here among all of you, celebrating the cultural diversity and embracing the pluralism, in the temple of democracy, freedom, and peace. By celebrating Diwali in the Alberta Legislature, we embrace Alberta's rich cultural diversity and pluralism.

I want to close by wishing good health, wealth, peace, and prosperity upon all of you, my new peers, and all Albertans. Though we may disagree, at the end of the day we are working towards the same goals for Alberta, our great province, which is down but not out. Let us use this Diwali to reflect on the privileges we enjoy as Albertans and how we can best use those gifts to help others. Saal Mubarak. Namaste.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Ashura

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Today I would like to talk about the day of Ashura, meaning the day of remembrance, which was on October 24 this year. Ashura is on the 10th day of Muharram, and Muharram is the first month in the Islamic lunar calendar. According to Muslims Ashura is the most tragic, painful, and mournful day in the history of Islam and in this world. On the day of Ashura Muslims, particularly Shiites, also known as Shias, commemorate the martyrdom of Prophet Muhammad's grandson Hussain. Shiites mourn this melancholy occasion by wearing black clothes, reciting poems and prose, slapping their chests, and parading through the streets to remember the struggles Hussain, his family, and companions shouldered to save the religion of Islam and spread the message of peace in the world.

It was the day when the army of Yazid, consisting of approximately 30,000 people, killed 72 companions of Hussain, even his six-month-old son. Not only that, but they blocked water for Hussain's family and comrades on the 4th of Muharram, massacred Hussain, and ruthlessly imprisoned the mothers, sisters, daughters, wives, and children who accompanied Hussain, in 680 AD, on the plains of Karbala in Iraq. The defence of Hussain against Yazid's attack in Karbala was the fight against injustice, oppression, and tyranny. It was the fight where Hussain was victorious not because he killed Yazid but because he sacrificed his family and his life for the sake of freedom, justice, and peace. Thereafter, the religion of Islam was preserved as a true example of freedom, honour, dignity, justice, and peace for his successors.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Cross.

STARS Air Ambulance

Miranda: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Last month I had the opportunity to visit the Shock Trauma Air Rescue Society for their 30th anniversary celebrations.

In 1985 a young mother died en route from her rural home to a faraway hospital. Dr. Gregory Powell became deeply moved and touched by what happened. He had a vision to change this reality for all Albertans, and he based his experience on having worked in a MASH hospital during the Vietnam War. He saw how helicopters could actually make an impact on reducing the time to get patients needing immediate care to the hospitals that could provide that care.

Madam Speaker, yesterday's vision is today's reality. STARS is an integral partner in Alberta's health care system. While most of us are aware of STARS' red helicopters, one of the other things that I learned in my visit was that they have 24 dedicated staff and actually cover workers working in Alberta's north in the oil industry, providing 24/7 care. As we all know here, we can all feel very safe about the fact that they are there to provide the service. I, of course, wish that none of us will ever have to rely on that service, but I think all of us can breathe a little easier knowing that they are there and provide that service for all of us and for all Albertans. So today I want them to know how much this Chamber, this government appreciates the work that they do.

Thank you very much.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Job Creation and Protection

Mr. Jean: At job sites and offices across Alberta human resources staff are making the rounds, delivering the news: you don't have a job anymore. Families across Alberta wake up to the awful anxiety of not knowing if today is the day mom or dad loses their job. Yesterday Devon Energy had to cut 200 good-paying Alberta jobs. Gone. Vanished. This NDP budget does nothing to help them: higher taxes and more uncertainty. How will this Premier's budget do anything to stop the job losses in Alberta?

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, which is a lovely thing to say, by the way. Let me just say at the outset that our government is and has been, right from the very beginning, very concerned about the strain and the stress and the anxiety that job losses mean for families, for their neighbours, and for the communities in which those people live. That's, of course, why we put so much focus on that in our budget this time. But I wanted to say as well – the member opposite is talking about insecurity and instability – that, quite frankly, if we had moved forward on a fraction of the cuts that those folks over there had proposed in the last election, we would be blinded by the level of instability and insecurity faced by Albertans.

Mr. Jean: You're right. It is a fraction; 2 per cent of the total budget was our proposal in the last election.

This NDP government seems determined to make Alberta's industries less competitive. While businesses are being hammered, the NDP is plowing ahead with risky economic experiments, and their so-called \$5,000 jobs grant is a laughingstock among the business community in Alberta. No one believes it will create one single job. To the Premier: how will her \$5,000 jobs grant help any of the people who lost their jobs at Devon or elsewhere in Alberta or any other company that is laying off workers?

Ms Notley: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The idea with the jobs incentive program is that it will incent roughly 25,000 jobs in Alberta, some of whom may be the folks that the member opposite talks about. I find it very fascinating that this is his approach because this is actually a plan that was modelled on one that was adopted by the former Conservative government that this member was a part of, that he voted for.

Mr. Jean: Madam Speaker, the town of Peace River is reeling today after 1,400 jobs were lost with the cancellation of the Carmon Creek project. The Alberta branch of the Canadian manufacturers' association said today that this budget does little to, and I quote, improve industry's competitiveness and to help stem the loss of jobs in the manufacturing sector, end quote. How can the Premier be so oblivious to the impact her policies are having on jobs all across Alberta?

Ms Notley: Well, Madam Speaker, I would suggest that one thing that doesn't help the state of the economy in Alberta is groundless fearmongering. To suggest for one moment that the announcement of the Shell project cancellation had anything to do with our budget or our policies is ridiculous, and the member over there knows that. I have here a letter and a memo from Shell apologizing for the fact that it happened to happen on that day, because there was no connection.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition for your second question.

Legislative Procedures

Mr. Jean: Madam Speaker, when the Premier won the last election, I was very concerned for our economy, but there was one reason for me to be pleased. I took the Premier at her word that she would make positive changes to improve democracy in this Legislature. As a result, in May Wildrose sent the Premier 12 legitimate proposals to improve this Assembly. Six months later: zero progress. Why did the Premier change her mind on democratic reform once she got elected to the Premier's office?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. We've haven't changed our mind. We have a committee that is chaired by the very, very capable Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, and that committee is doing its work right now. There are a number of complicated issues that have to be addressed. It is an all-party committee that we created for the sole purpose of addressing the kinds of recommendations that that member opposite put forth, and we look forward to working together with you on them because I think we actually have a lot in common that we can work on to improve.

Mr. Jean: Madam Speaker, I was privileged to work under Stephen Harper in Ottawa. Now, left-wingers call him controlling and all sorts of names, but while he was Prime Minister, the opposition had powers and privileges that we could only dream of here in Alberta. In Ottawa committees do real, meaningful work. In Ottawa opposition parties have opposition days. Here we have none of that whatsoever. Is the Premier proud that democracy in this Assembly under her rule is a joke compared to what the NDP opposition has and had in Ottawa?

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Well, we know what the Official Opposition is interested in when they actually have a chance to debate changes. We want to have morning sittings of this Assembly so that we're family-friendly and people don't have to work late at night. But they don't want to work at 9 o'clock in the morning, so they're filibustering. Most Albertans go to work before 9 o'clock in the morning, but the Wildrose can't be bothered.

Mr. Jean: Madam Speaker, you may have noticed yesterday that the opposition was very deliberate in its actions. Under a majority government the opposition can be steamrolled by the government. The only tools we have available to us are parliamentary debate, parliamentary privileges, and, of course, the protection of the standing order that this government wants to change. We will use all of these tools for the benefit of Albertans. But the Premier could change her mind. She could allow democracy and keep her promise to do things differently. To the Premier: will she live up to her seven years of promises?

Ms Notley: Yes, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition. Third main set of questions.

Budget Debate Process

Mr. Jean: We have now learned that the government wants to push this budget through estimates in just seven days. The NDP's schedule will have as many as five different ministries having their detailed budget analysis done on the very same day. In opposition this Premier called over and over again for one ministry to be examined per day so that Albertans could follow what we did here, but now as Premier she gives us just parts of seven days to analyze

17 ministries and over \$50 billion of Albertans' money. Does the Premier think this is democratic or appropriate given her promises?

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much for the question, hon. member. The schedule for the estimates was negotiated with opposition House leaders, including the Opposition House Leader just sitting to your right, hon. member. We actually offered to the opposition additional time for selected ministries. This was a government suggestion, not an opposition suggestion. We actually suggested that you take more time on the larger ministries and the larger budgets, and that's been accepted. If we can pass the standing order today, we will put that into force, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Jean: Breaking promises to Albertans and to the opposition has consequences. Madam Speaker, I don't think it's appropriate, what they're doing, and I'm not the only one. Let me quote a former MLA from this place.

When you consider the vast operations of the Alberta government today, I frankly don't think that it is out of line at all for us to spend more time in legislative session rather than less, and I just don't follow the argument for the need to reduce the time [for estimates].

That was the former MLA from Fairview in this Assembly. To the Premier: why is she breaking her promise and pushing through over \$50 billion in Alberta taxpayer spending money . . .

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

2:00

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much for the question. Madam Speaker, you know, the member opposite is attempting to suggest that we actually restricted the amount of time. We actually suggested that it be expanded so that additional ministries and additional questions – so I don't know what the hon. leader is talking about. He's so vague about broken promises and so on, but his own record, I think, in the House of Commons is something that he is breaking.

Mr. Jean: Let me stick with the former member from Fairview.

We should take whatever time is required. If that means we have to sit an extra two or three weeks or a month . . . so be it. Let us do that rather than attempt to save time and in the process possibly limit debate, possibly limit the full discussion of the departmental estimates.

To the Premier: why are we going to do multiple estimates at once? Why are you being so undemocratic on this after so many years of promises to do things differently?

Mr. Mason: Madam Speaker, a question to the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition: why are you now saying that . . . [interjections] I'd like some silence so I can resume.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member has the floor, please.

Mr. Mason: Why is the Leader of the Official Opposition now attacking an agreement about the handling of estimates that his own House leader agreed to? Why?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Provincial Budget

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Speaker. This tax, spend, and borrow budget takes away the Alberta advantage with a massive increase on railroad diesel fuel, and it was done without the minister consulting the railways. Railways are the Alberta pathway to the ports of the world. It is now more expensive to send forestry, energy,

and agricultural products to world markets. Jobs will be lost, and consumer goods will cost more. To the Premier: after you're finished making almost every industry in Alberta less competitive and taking away even more jobs from hard-working families, who will be left to pay taxes for your unrestrained spending and out-of-control debt?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It is true that some taxes did go up in this budget – there's no question – but here's the thing. We continue to be the lowest taxed jurisdiction in the country. There's no question that every time you raise a tax on someone, they may well complain. It's lovely that those folks over there are going to raise that, but at the same time the fact of the matter is that we are dealing with the results of having an unnecessarily strong reliance on one particular price because one government in the past . . .

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. McIver: Well, it's good to hear the Premier backing the previous government again.

The NDP government has widely criticized almost everything previously done. They have promised full-scale change, and they were elected promising full-scale change. Since then the government has publicly promised to hang on to every public-sector job in place at the time of the election, which is in the neighbourhood of 215,000 publicly funded positions. That's a lot of nonchange, Madam Speaker. It can't be both; either the government wants change or they liked how it was. To the Premier: is this change of heart a result of the so-called budget consultations, and if so, why aren't the details on the website?

The Deputy Speaker: Madam Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Madam Speaker. What this government proposed to do, on the basis of the conversations that we had with Albertans during the election, both during the consultations on the previous government's budget as well as consultations on ours, was that we were not going to move ahead with the billions of dollars of unallocated, undefined cuts that the former government over there planned to impose on Albertans. That was not what we were going to do. We're going to take a measured approach to restraining spending. We're going to do it carefully so we understand the consequences of the changes that are made. That's what's laid out in our budget over the course of the next four years, and I know it's a change, but . . .

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. McIver: Thank you. They haven't restrained any spending. At \$5,000 per job in the new job creation program, this actually only supports 17,800 jobs and not the 27,000 advertised. At 27,000 jobs the annual grant available is only \$3,300 and not \$5,000. Madam Speaker, the government is only supporting these jobs, and at \$3,300 per grant at 10 per cent it supports jobs worth \$33,000, which according to Action To End Poverty in Alberta is below the poverty line for a family of four.

Ms Notley: Well, Madam Speaker, I do find it incredibly rich that this member over there thinks that a job that pays \$33,000 a year is not good enough when they insisted on having the lowest minimum wage in the country for year after year after year. It's outrageous. That being said, those estimates are based on a maximum of \$50,000.

Some salaries will be lower than that, and some salaries will be part-time. That's the way that number was reached.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Job Creation and Protection (continued)

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Well, at the risk of being redundant, Alberta has lost 35,000 to 40,000 jobs this year, with each loss affecting a family and sending shock waves throughout our economy. Albertans are looking for real leadership to create an environment of job creation rather than a convoluted tax scheme that Edmonton Economic Development and the Calgary Chamber of Commerce have said won't work. I'll table some documents today to that. My question to the Premier: why subsidize companies to create low-wage jobs when you can more effectively reduce or eliminate small-business tax and sustain the job incentive?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Well, as the member rightly points out, you know, we are concerned about the fact that people are losing their jobs in Alberta. That is absolutely a critical issue, and that is why we've appointed a minister in charge of economic development and job creation. That is why we introduced a multifaceted plan to attempt to incent job growth: capital spending, access to capital, and the job incentive program. It's a large package. The difficulty that we have right now is that what we need to do is diversify the economy away from a single price, and we haven't done that yet because . . .

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The government prides itself on its extensive consultations and deservedly so. Well, when you have Jack Mintz, David Dodge, Calgary Chamber of Commerce, Edmonton Economic Development, Canadian Federation of Independent Business all questioning the value of the tax credit scheme, the government would do well to listen. To the Premier: whose advice did you follow in adopting this scheme?

Ms Notley: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Well, you know, overall, I think we've gotten a fair amount of positive feedback. The president and CEO of the Alberta Chambers of Commerce says, and I quote: most importantly, this budget signals we have a government willing to listen and capable of taking a measured approach to managing the province's finances; this is what Albertans and businesses need right now.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Small-business confidence in Alberta is at its lowest level since the great recession of 2008. Surveys by CFIB indicate that as many as 1 in 5 small businesses are considering cutting staff. The report also noted that tax and regulatory costs are a major concern for small-business owners. Again to the Premier: rather than adopting a complicated tax credit scheme that will create more work for accountants, would you consider eliminating or at least reducing small-business tax and let small business do what it does best, create jobs and diversify the economy?

2:10

Ms Notley: You know, as I've said, one of the things we did hear from small and medium enterprises is that they were struggling to get access to capital in order to grow their businesses and to capitalize on the good ideas and the hard work that they want to contribute to our economy. That is why we worked with ATB and AIMCo and AEC to come up with a plan to allow for more access to capital for those good, hard-working small businesses. I've heard good, positive feedback from that, and we'll look to see how well that works, and if it doesn't, then we'll look at other strategies.

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

Cancer Services

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Madam Speaker. For more than 38 years I've been an oncologist in one of Canada's strongest provincial cancer programs. I can speak first-hand to the burdens that cancer places on Albertans. I can also relate to the pressures on treatment centres as well as their staff across this province. Albertans know just how important it is that we preserve and strengthen these vital cancer services. To the Health minister: what is your department doing to ensure that all Albertans have access to the best possible cancer care?

Ms Hoffman: I'd like to thank the hon. member for his question and for the fact that he and many others served both of my parents, actually, through treatments at the Cross Cancer Institute, so as a family member of someone who's gone through that and as an Edmontonian, I want to say thank you. As the Minister of Health I also want to say how proud I am that we're investing in the Calgary cancer centre. The Grande Prairie cancer centre, when it's complete, will complete the Alberta north-south radiation corridor. We're also investing in Lethbridge and Red Deer as well.

Thank you.

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Given that Calgarians were subjected to years of delay in the construction of a cancer centre at the Foothills medical centre by the previous government, to the same minister: what assurance can you give that this vital piece of infrastructure will be built as soon as possible?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I hear some heckling from members of the third party, who announced many projects without budgets and timelines that were at all accurate or even cautioned in any way. I know that the people of Calgary deserve a cancer centre. It's been 12 years since they initially received the first announcement. We have a plan that's going to be building the cancer centre on the Foothills site, where Calgarians have said they need it. We also are going to be working towards that being open by 2024, and I'm really excited about . . .

An Hon. Member: Four years after we promised.

Ms Hoffman: Yeah, it is four years after the other party promised, which was not realistic at all.

Dr. Turner: Madam Speaker, given that Alberta is facing some very tough economic times, can the same minister assure Albertans that our public health care system, including critical projects like the Calgary cancer centre, won't be subject to the reckless cutbacks that we saw under the previous government?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I want to assure the member and all Albertans that this government is committed to

providing stable health care funding and bending the cost curve. That's why we're doing our due diligence in building a comprehensive cancer centre on the Foothills campus but also why we're talking about, instead of what the previous government proposed around having a 6 per cent cut in the very first year, phasing the reduction in a very gradual way, making sure that we have 4 and a half per cent this year, 4 per cent the next year, 3 per cent the year after, and 2 in the out-years after that, as opposed to what the Official Opposition is proposing, which is cutting billions of dollars from essential front-line services.

Mr. Cooper: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: A point of order has been noted.
The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Capital Plan

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Yesterday the Infrastructure minister assured me that the prioritized sunshine list he promised during the election is still coming, but he also released a budget with \$4.4 billion in new projects and program spending with no details. This money leaves the back door open to the same kinds of dirty, backroom politics we saw with the previous government. To the minister. You've committed to spend this money. When exactly will Albertans know what projects will benefit from this mystery spending and what projects won't?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. I take exception to the hon. member's assertion that we are willing to do dirty political spending like the previous government. It's our intention to look carefully at the projects that might be needed across the board, to make sure that we use due diligence to do business cases, to run economic models to make sure that all of the work is done before we announce the projects. We've seen the example of the schools, where political announcements were made before an election about a whole bunch of extra schools, and there wasn't the capacity . . .

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Someone somewhere must have the list of projects that was used in order to come up with the 4.4 billion dollar number for the new projects and programs line item. Minister, surely you're not committing to spending billions of dollars of taxpayer money with no real plan. Are you shooting in the dark, or will you commit to tabling the list you used to create the capital plan today?

Mr. Mason: Madam Speaker, if we had the list of projects, we would have included it in the capital budget. What I've told the member over and over again is that we want to do an appropriate assessment of what the needs are. We want to make sure that when we announce something, it's the right facility in the right place, that it's going to be on time and on budget. When we have those facts, we will share them with the Assembly and with Albertans.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I've relied on the website projects.alberta.ca, which is meant to help Albertans stay up to date on school projects. Unfortunately, in the last week this website was pulled and replaced with a link to a list of delayed schools. Again to the minister. This doesn't help anybody. If you're

not going to release a prioritized sunshine list for all to see and soon, why are you standing in the way of Albertans getting up-to-date information from your department?

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Our government is committed to an open and transparent approach with respect to all of the capital projects that we will consider, and when we have made decisions based on good evidence, we'll make that information available. It's unfortunate that the opposition won't support that approach. Their plan is to cut \$9.4 billion out of investments in schools and hospitals and roads in this province, and that's not something Albertans support.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

Environmental Protection

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Alberta has a rich history of developing its natural resources: Turner Valley, Leduc, and all the way to the oil sands in Fort McMurray. From day one Albertans have been leaders through innovation and technology. Our natural resource industry has been the leader in environmental stewardship, monitoring, and reporting. In addition, we're the only jurisdiction that produces heavy oil that voluntarily agreed to put a price on our carbon. To the environment minister: if we're already number one in industry-led environmental policies and initiatives, what announcements are you planning to make in Paris that would improve our status on the world stage, what's the cost, and what will be the impact on Albertans?

Ms Phillips: I'm pleased, Madam Speaker, to rise to update the House on these matters of climate change. I note that we're in the last day of session before Halloween, so we all wore our black and orange, I think, in homage to the fairly scary Wildrose policies on the environment. You know, the hon. member from the third party is quite right that Albertans want to get serious about climate change. So does industry. We know that it is a serious challenge. We need to work together to come up with a made-in-Alberta solution.

2:20

The Deputy Speaker: Your time ran out, hon. minister.
Point of order noted at 2:20.

Mr. Fraser: Well, that's interesting, Madam Speaker. Given that the minister is using all the Progressive Conservative environmental policies but simply elevating the timelines in those policies, that has put industry and investment at risk because you can't control your spending, Minister, do you have any environmental policies of your own, and can you admit right here, right now that hard-working Albertans in industry have been leading in environmental stewardship since day one?

Ms Phillips: Well, you know, one of the reasons why we've had to undertake this work is because the previous government failed so miserably, Madam Speaker, at ensuring that we could get our product to market, at ensuring that we could go with our heads held high to international conferences. That's why we have appointed this panel of experts to provide us with advice on transitioning to renewables, an appropriate way to price carbon, an appropriate efficiency strategy, and that investment in technology that he talks about so that we can take the previous government's approach, which was to tilt at windmills after a technology unicorn, and make it into real intellectual horsepower.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Premier recently said: I have to go to Paris in the fall, and it won't be any fun if no one's talking to me. Respectfully, Premier, I'm guessing that the thousands of Albertans that have lost their jobs are not worried about whether you'll have fun or not. But, Premier, instead of focusing on fun, shouldn't you be sharing with this House and all Albertans what your strategy and agenda will be for Paris, how it will protect our jobs, and how it will protect our economy?

Ms Phillips: Madam Speaker, I'm pleased to report that the panel is examining exactly these matters, how we can grow our economy on the backbone of the energy economy that we already have and build that economy for tomorrow, ensuring that our green economy, that we are building and diversifying on top of our energy resources now, includes everyone. That's why we've done so much work with indigenous communities and others to make sure that we are sharing the benefits of a new economy, that we'll build for all Albertans.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Long-term Care Facility Survey

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Health Quality Council of Alberta has released its annual report on long-term care facilities within our province. It's disappointing that little has improved in the province over the last five years, since the last study was conducted. We all know that seniors within our province deserve the utmost respect and the highest quality service in their later years. To the Minister of Seniors: what will this government do to immediately improve on the serious concerns raised by the Health Quality Council and families at our long-term care facilities?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Seniors.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Of course, making sure that our seniors are well cared for is a priority for us. They helped build this province, and we need to make sure that we continue to help support them.

I'll tell you that one thing that's really important is making sure that we fulfill our campaign commitment of building 2,000 beds, long-term care beds, for this province. I know that not everybody thinks that keeping your promise is the best thing to do. Members of the Official Opposition have actually criticized us for doing that, but that's what we were voted in to do, and that's what we're going to do in this term. Also, I want to say that investing and making sure that we continue . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, your first supplemental.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Madam Speaker. In the Health Quality Council survey the results show staffing levels as the most highly recommended area for improvement. The simple fact is that the bureaucratic ranks of AHS are swelling when front-line workers are clearly needed. Will the minister acknowledge that while the AHS bureaucracy is bloating to record levels, they continue to bungle providing basic care for our seniors?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much for the question. What family members did say is that they really do value the care that is being provided by the workers in these facilities, and that's why they've elected a government that's going to continue to invest in those

front-line service providers. Members of the Official Opposition campaigned on cutting billions of dollars from operations, which would impact those front-line service workers, which would impact significantly the staffing ratios. We're going to make sure that we continue to move forward in fulfilling our campaign commitments and investing in long-term care.

The Deputy Speaker: Final supplemental.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Madam Speaker. One instance of elder abuse at our long-term health care facilities is one too many. In the Health Quality Council survey Carewest Garrison Green scored last for Calgary's facilities. As the minister is aware, just last week three care workers from the facility were sentenced to jail after assaulting a 92-year-old patient. It is of the utmost importance that we learn from this terrible incident and make sure that it never happens again. What is the minister doing to ensure that our caregivers are trained properly to give our seniors the respect and protection that they deserve?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. The facility that was lowest ranked in the survey: the department immediately was working in consultation with them, and we've made significant strides there.

In terms of the incident that the hon. member mentioned, absolutely, I couldn't agree with him more about how that was absolutely wrong. I'm glad that the officials have acted swiftly to make sure that the individuals are held to account, and we're going to make sure that through awareness campaigns, including elder abuse, which we've invested a million dollars in, there continues to be more awareness so that we can act to ensure that all of our seniors are safe.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Energy Industry

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Madam Speaker. On page 18 of his budget speech the Minister of Finance suggested that we need to phase out coal, promote energy-efficient technology, and promote the use of renewables to cut down on carbon and that these are a "necessary prerequisite" for getting our energy products to market. Are we to understand from this statement that unless these three necessary prerequisites are met, this government will not push our energy products to market?

Mr. Ceci: Madam Speaker, oil and gas are going to be the keystone of our province for many decades to come. No, I'm not suggesting that if those things don't happen, we can't get energy to markets, but we need to be a better partner with the rest of the world. We need to cut our carbon. We need to ensure that we're a good neighbour to all of Canada so that we can get our pipelines across this country.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Finance minister did use the word "prerequisite."

However, along with being embarrassed about Alberta, our Premier recently made comments giving another province a near veto over our energy industry's access to markets. Well, we over here are proud to be Albertans, and the Wildrose doesn't think Alberta needs to be taking environmental lessons from a province that right now is dumping 8 billion litres of raw sewage into major

waterways. So why does the NDP insist on giving this environmentally irresponsible province a veto over our most important job sector?

Ms Notley: Well, if the introduction was correct, I guess there would be a problem, but in fact I've never, ever suggested that we give a veto to any province with respect to our pipelines. I think there's a difference between – anyway, I think you can torque something beyond a point at which it is credible, and I think that may be what's going on over there. What I have said, though, is that along with another Premier, that I met with today, from New Brunswick, who also very much wants the Energy East pipeline. . .

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Wildrose knows Albertans can work towards lowering emissions, but we don't need to give environmental vetoes to provinces that prefer raw sewage over pipelines. Let's be clear on that.

Given that we know that in the least populous state in the United States, Wyoming, electricity generation alone emits about as much CO₂ as our oil sands production, is this government planning to tell the Americans to clean up their environmental act before we import any of their energy products?

Ms Notley: You know, here's the actual record, Madam Speaker. Under this Official Opposition's federal cousins' approach to the environment not one single pipeline has been built, and it is because the rest of . . . [interjections]

2:30

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Premier has the floor. [interjections]
Hon. members, the hon. Premier has the floor.

Ms Notley: Not one single pipeline has been built while there have been people in charge who have taken the head-in-the-ground approach to whether or not markets internationally are concerned about greenhouse gas emissions, and we're going to change that.

The Deputy Speaker: I just wanted to acknowledge the point of order in the previous set of questions by the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Moving on, the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Madam Speaker. We can all see that the energy sector is struggling. However, with a budget that has increased spending to just about every other department of government, this ought to be good news: more money for resource development and management, more money for innovative projects that would make a real difference in the function of the industry. However, you thought wrong. To the minister of environment: why have you not increased funding above what was planned in March for resource development and management, and why are you reducing the funding for carbon capture and storage by \$24 million despite your promise in the summer to follow through on the carbon trunk line and the Quest project?

Ms Phillips: Well, Madam Speaker, Alberta has made its fair share of investments in CCS, and as those investments wind down, we'll see that reflected in the budget papers. The other piece of this is, of course, on the overall Environment budget, and the fact of the matter is that outside of the large departments most of us are taking zero or 2 per cent, and that's because we need to ensure that we are working within the existing budgets, that we have right now, in a fair way and a balanced way.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, your first supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Given that about 30,000 jobs and counting have been lost in the energy sector alone this year, which does not even begin to include contract workers, who do not show up on the job-loss radar, and given that Devon Canada just announced yesterday the layoff of another 200 staff, which represents about 15 per cent of their workforce, and Cenovus is cutting another 700 positions in the second half of this year, to the minister of economic development: what is being put forward in this budget that is going to boost jobs and investment in the energy industry, and if it's there, why is it hidden so deeply in the numbers?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I don't think it's hidden deeply in the budget. The Finance minister outlined the various initiatives that our government is taking on: first of all, the job creation grant that we're rolling out, and more details will be coming in the following days. As well, our government is working with ATB, with AIMCo, and with AEC in order to provide capital to small and medium-sized enterprises so that they can grow and expand their business, which will, in turn, create jobs. The key point is that we are working with the private sector, who are the job creators.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, your second supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Given that Royal Dutch Shell has just quit its Carmon Creek oil sands project, citing "the lack of infrastructure to move Canadian crude . . . to global commodity markets," and given that pipelines are statistically the safest method to transport raw crude, to the minister of environment: do you share the enthusiasm for immediate pipeline development, as stated by the Energy minister in Beijing, or would you prefer that these goods be shipped by rail, which has recently incurred a massive increase in fuel taxes?

Ms Phillips: Well, you know, Madam Speaker, a large part of this pipeline debate centres around us getting it right on climate change. The previous government's efforts in this regard were not satisfactory for our trading partners and, in fact, not satisfactory to the majority of Albertans and Canadians. That's why we've appointed the panel that we have, so that we can get it right on that conversation about pipelines, so we can be proud and hold our heads high and ensure that the energy development is proceeding in a way that is environmentally responsible, that involves indigenous peoples appropriately, and that all of the benefits are shared by all Albertans.

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

School Infrastructure Funding

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Madam Speaker. We know that our existing schools were neglected by the previous government. We needed repairs, and we needed equipment upgrades. Unfortunately, those did not happen. We are experiencing phenomenal growth in this province. I see that every day in my riding of Edmonton-South West, and our riding continues to grow every day. We hear about crises arising every day due to the absence of adequate school infrastructure. Now, in hopes of not repeating the mistakes of the past, to the Minister of Education: what is the government doing to

ensure that important public services are preserved by providing the best for our schools?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you for the question. Certainly, it's important that all Alberta students have a place where they can learn and that we're building the schools to meet the increased enrolment across this province. We see rapid growth in all areas of the province, and we intend to build the schools that we need. To that end, we moved \$350 million forward to ensure that we start the infrastructure projects that we need, and we also brought in the Auditor General to look for a way to increase efficiencies in the systems so that we'd get the schools built where we need them.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Again to the Minister of Education: given that the ministry is planning this significant infrastructure revamp, what additional funding is being provided for infrastructure maintenance in Budget 2015?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Certainly, this is an important addition to the budget for Education this year, an increase to the infrastructure maintenance and renewal program. I met with all 61 school boards over the last few weeks, and I heard it time and time again, that we not just build the schools but that we make sure that we invest in the maintenance so that the schools last the full length that they should. To that end, we have put \$180 million into this program, an increase of 50 per cent over last year. Of course, we're also providing \$483 million through plant operations and maintenance to ensure that we not just build the schools we need but that we actually look after our investments.

Mr. Dang: Madam Speaker, to the same minister: just how many modernization projects are in progress in this province, and can you provide some details on this important work?

Mr. Eggen: Thank you. It's very important to know that we're not just building new schools, but we have 93 modernization and replacement projects across the province. A couple of examples: in High Level we're building the existing space for career and technology studies; an example in Calgary is a replacement facility for special-needs students at Christine Meikle school as well. It's important that these sorts of projects are done as well. Just as a little help to the Member for Little Bow, check infrastructure.alberta.ca and click on the PDF, and there are those schools and when they're going to be built.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Affordable Supportive Living Project Approval

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. In our June session I asked the Minister of Health about the status of the ASLI grant for the Bassano project in my constituency. I'm pleased to hear that this project was approved just a few hours ago. However, there are dozens of other communities that are still waiting for word of their projects. Will the minister help Albertans who are waiting for answers understand which have been approved and which have not?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to address this question. I really enjoy having an opportunity to talk about the great news of what this government is doing. Of course, if we had elected a different government, one that was campaigning on significant cuts, that would have been very difficult.

In terms of the projects that aren't going forward, there are only six projects that we've decided don't meet the criteria. I've reached out to each of the individual MLAs who are impacted and the ridings that are impacted, and the proponents have been contacted directly. The other 25: good news. So if you didn't hear from me, the project met the criteria. We're confident that it's going to be financially viable and that it's going to meet the needs of the community.

2:40

Mr. Fildebrandt: The secrecy behind this announcement is concerning. The minister announced that of the 31 projects on the list, 25 were approved, meaning that six were not. If they're following the Fildemath, maybe they can know what's going on. The minister seems unwilling to tell us what the criteria were. Maybe she has good reason for cutting these projects; maybe she doesn't. Would she tell us why these projects were not approved?

Ms Hoffman: Absolutely, Madam Speaker. Thank you for the question. You might notice that a lot of us are wearing orange today. It's because it's our last sitting day before Halloween, and Halloween can be a scary time of year. There are some scary things, and one of them is the proposal for significant cuts from the members opposite.

In terms of the criteria that were used, we wanted to make sure that there were evidence-based decisions, that they were actually going to meet the needs of the community, that there were actually citizens who needed to be in long-term care that were either in hospital or at home. We want to make sure that we're investing capital dollars and fulfilling those highest level needs first.

Mr. Fildebrandt: We've seen no evidence given today, Madam Speaker.

The Newell Foundation has told me just this morning that even with the ASLI grant the Bassano project cannot go forward until they have confirmation from the minister that it will be integrated with the local hospital. Will the minister commit to my constituents to integrate that Bassano project with the hospital so that we can get this critical project started now?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Madam Speaker. We did actually call each of the individual proponents. The ministry staff called yesterday the ones that weren't moving forward and today the ones that were moving forward, and they're going to be having follow-up conversations. We want to invest that capital money in the highest levels of care, so long-term care and dementia beds. They're absolutely having follow-up meetings with each of those proponents. Individual questions asked about individual sites can be raised at that time. Within the next couple of weeks I'd be happy to table the numbers of each of the individual sites if you'd like that.

Members' Statements

(continued)

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

Health Link 811 Phone Line Dementia Support

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and speak today regarding this government's commitment to supporting the health of all Albertans, including rural Albertans. This summer our Health minister implemented the new Health Link 811 phone number, that gives every Albertan easy access to the advice of a registered nurse. This service was made even more valuable as of October, when specialized dementia support services were added. Now Albertans living with dementia and their caregivers have 24/7 access to a specialized dementia nurse with extensive training and experience in seniors' health. This specialized dementia nurse can perform an in-depth assessment to gain an understanding of each individual's situation. This project was started in rural Alberta, with expansion to Edmonton and Calgary coming later in the spring, because rural Alberta is where the greatest need for these supports is.

I have seen how rural and remote areas do not always have access to the same level of services as urban centres. Alberta Health Services identified a gap, and our government has invested \$1.1 million to help 40,000 Albertans living with dementia. These numbers are expected to double. By 2038 it is estimated that about 1 out of every 10 Albertans over the age of 65 and nearly half of those over 90 will be living with dementia.

My family has been touched by dementia, and I know that many if not all families here have been affected as well. I know how overwhelming it can be when you start asking yourself: "Is this happening to my family? Worse, is this happening to me?" This gives Albertans the ability to privately take that next step and make a simple phone call.

I applaud this government's continued commitment to the mental health of all Albertans and look forward along with the rest of the House to the steps we will take as we move forward with the mental health review.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Pathways Community Services Association

Ms Drever: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I would like to start off by recognizing that we are currently on Treaty 6 territory and that my riding falls on Treaty 7 territory. I'm honoured today to rise and speak to an invaluable organization that operates in my riding and works with families in need from all over Alberta. Pathways Community Services Association works on the pillars of community dignity, unity, and wellness, drawing on the intersections of traditional aboriginal culture and Western evidence-based practices. Tapisahotiwin is the act of connecting, which lies at the heart of Pathways as it engages with communities.

With the focus on meeting the needs of aboriginal children, youth, and families through a continuum of resources and support services, one of the programs they are proud to offer is their mentor homes program, where they work with aboriginal youth in care and match them with a sensitive and culturally aware family as an alternative to group care. In this program the focus is put on family building and cultural supports and cultivating a respect for oneself and one's community.

Pathways also offers nehiyaw kihokewin, aboriginal families visiting with the spirit of the grandmothers, a healthy families program for aboriginal families with newborns up to the age of three that builds off family strengths and fosters parenting skills.

Pathways builds stronger communities both inside and outside my constituency, and to them I say hai hai, thank you, for all the hard work that you do to strengthen families and communities.

Thank you.

Introduction of Bills

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Bill Pr. 1

The King's University College Amendment Act, 2015

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being Bill Pr. 1, the King's University College Amendment Act, 2015.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 1 read a first time]

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

Bill Pr. 2

Bethesda Bible College Amendment Act, 2015

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being Bill Pr. 2, Bethesda College Amendment Act, 2015.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 2 read a first time]

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

Bill Pr. 3

Rosary Hall, Edmonton Repeal Act

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being Bill Pr. 3, Rosary Hall, Edmonton Repeal Act.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 3 read a first time]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Bill Pr. 4

Canadian University College Amendment Act, 2015

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being Bill Pr. 4, Canadian University College Amendment Act, 2015.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 4 read a first time]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

2:50

Bill Pr. 5

Concordia University College of Alberta Amendment Act, 2015

Ms McLean: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being Bill Pr. 5, Concordia University College of Alberta Amendment Act, 2015.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 5 read a first time]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Bill Pr. 6

Covenant Bible College Amendment Act, 2015

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being Bill Pr. 6, Covenant Bible College Amendment Act, 2015.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 6 read a first time]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Bill Pr. 7

Living Faith Bible College Amendment Act, 2015

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being Bill Pr. 7, Living Faith Bible College Amendment Act, 2015.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 7 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm rising to table an alternative budget estimates schedule to take effect if the standing orders have not been approved by the end of today.

The Deputy Speaker: Sorry. Hon. member, did you have a tabling?

Mr. McIver: Two, Madam Speaker, with your permission. The first one is the correct number of copies of a printout from the Action to End Poverty in Alberta website, showing that the government's job plan is, actually, to support jobs below the poverty line.

The second one is the Alberta short-term employment forecast 2014-2016. I hope it is a gentle reminder to the labour minister that this year's report is about three months late in being released to this House.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other tablings? The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Madam Speaker, I just rise to table the appropriate number of copies of a document I referred to at length yesterday in the House, Restoring Trust: Wildrose Proposals to Strengthen Alberta's Legislature and Democracy.

I have an additional one as well, a document that I referenced at length yesterday during a point of privilege. It's an Alberta government press release that clearly states that the budget says, when speaking about reducing costs, that this includes "a salary freeze for Cabinet ministers, MLAs and political staff for the entire term of this Legislature," as we talked about yesterday, presupposing a decision of Members' Services Committee.

The Deputy Speaker: Any further tablings?

Hon. members, that brings us to the points of order. We had three today. The first point of order, I believe, was from the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Mason: Madam Speaker, if I may. At least two of those points of order are very similar, and they're also similar to the ones that the Speaker has ruled upon in the last couple of days. I wonder if we could take them together instead of dealing with them separately.

Mr. Hanson: That's acceptable.

The Deputy Speaker: That's acceptable?

Mr. Hanson: Yes.

The Deputy Speaker: All right. Go ahead, hon. member.

Point of Order

Allegations against a Member

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I called a point of order today under section 23(h) and (i), actually two of them, and if it pleases the House, I will deal with both of them at the same time. I realize that this point of order has been raised and defeated a couple of times this week already; however, I take personal offence to the suggestions made by the hon. Health minister at approximately 2:10 and 2:25 this afternoon.

I personally campaigned very strongly in defence and protection of front-line health workers and the promise to take care of their jobs. I realize that the general stabs have been made directly to this side of the House as a whole. I sat quietly listening to these misrepresentations in the past but will no longer do so. I have a daughter working as a permanent RN, and my son will be graduating from med school in the spring of 2016. The accusation that I would be anti front-line health care workers is absurd, and I do take it personally.

I would appreciate that these comments be retracted, and in the interests of keeping the flow of business going in the future in the House, I would ask that members cease and desist from this particular line of derogatory comment.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Well, this is now the fourth and fifth times that we are dealing with exactly the same point of order, which has been dealt with by the chair on three previous occasions. In each case the chair ruled that there was no point of order, yet the Wildrose opposition persists in making these points of order and pretends to be personally offended by the arguments that are being made on this side of the House that the program of the Wildrose of cutting substantially into the budget \$2 billion a year is in fact going to produce a loss of front-line jobs. Whether the hon. member is personally offended by that or not, the fact is that it will impact front-line services in this province, and it will result in the layoff of front-line workers. There's not enough bureaucracy in the entire province to pay for the depth of cuts that this opposition party wants.

Madam Speaker, I would ask that we rule again in the same manner with respect to this question. These are legitimate comments from government members in response to questions. It is, at best, a difference of opinion between members over the facts and not a point of order. Quite frankly, I think this is part of the ongoing campaign of the Wildrose opposition during this session to waste the Assembly's time.

The Deputy Speaker: Go ahead, hon. member.

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Hesitant though I am to wade into the debate, as the hon. Government House Leader said, I have to say that based on some of the exchanges we had earlier this afternoon, the Official Opposition rather reminds me of the chippy hockey player that hacks and slashes in the corner and then, as soon

as something similar happens back to them, goes running to the referee.

Earlier this afternoon we heard the Member for Little Bow talk about past practices within the government that I was part of as being dirty. Now, I didn't raise a point of order at the time, but as the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills has appealed for a greater degree of respect for all members of the House, that has to flow both ways, sir. I would strongly suggest – and I think that we've reached Thursday of this first week, and there's always a little bit of a rising of the temperature – that it'll be good for us to go home and just relax a little bit and, you know, maybe put our feet up and enjoy a cool beverage, beer, that is now cheaper thanks to the Minister of Finance.

3:00

Madam Speaker, Mr. Speaker has ruled on this before. The argument really is no different. These are questions of fact. They are disagreements. I know that they are strongly held, but they are not points of order, and I would ask that you rule accordingly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does any other hon. member wish to speak on this point of order?

Seeing none, I would like to acknowledge that, as the Government House Leader has pointed out, this has been raised a number of times now, and a previous ruling was that it's kind of part of that essential disagreement that has been going on. However, I would like to remind the members that in *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, page 634, it says:

A Member may not direct remarks to the House or engage in debate by raising a matter under the guise of a point of order.

It's just something to be aware of as we go forward here, to perhaps be a little more cautious of the type of language that we are using and to not use points of order as a way to continually disrupt the business of this House.

So I will rule that this was not a point of order.

Let's move on, then, to the next one, which was raised by the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Madam Speaker, in light of your gentle reminder, I'll withdraw the point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: That concludes the Routine.

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

Committee Membership Changes

20. Mr. Mason moved:

Be it resolved that the membership for the following committees of the Assembly be replaced as follows:

- (1) Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund: Ms Miller, chair; Mr. Nielsen, deputy chair; Mr. Cyr; Mr. Ellis; Ms McKittrick; Ms Renaud; Mr. Sucha; Mr. Taylor; and Dr. Turner.
- (2) Standing Committee on Legislative Offices: Cortes-Vargas, chair; Ms Sweet, deputy chair; Mr. Bhullar; Mr. Connolly; Mr. Cooper; Mr. Horne; Mr. Kleinsteuber; Mr. Nixon; Mr. Shepherd; Mr. van Dijken; and Ms Woollard.
- (3) Standing Committee on Private Bills: Ms McPherson, chair; Mr. Connolly, deputy chair; Mr. S. Anderson; Mr. W. Anderson; Ms Babcock; Ms Drever; Mr. Drysdale; Mr. Fraser; Mr. Hinkley; Mr. Kleinsteuber; Mrs. Littlewood;

Ms McKittrick; Mr. Rosendahl; Mr. Stier; and Mr. Strankman.

- (4) Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing: Mrs. Littlewood, chair; Ms Fitzpatrick, deputy chair; Mr. Carson; Mr. Coolahan; Mr. Cooper; Mr. Ellis; Mr. Hanson; Ms Kazim; Mr. Loyola; Ms McPherson; Mr. Nielsen; Mr. Schneider; Dr. Starke; Mr. van Dijken; and Ms Woollard.
- (5) Special Standing Committee on Members' Services: Mr. Wanner, chair; Mr. Schmidt, deputy chair; Mr. Cooper; Mr. Fildebrandt; Ms Luff; Mr. McIver; Ms McLean; Mr. Nielsen; Mr. Nixon; Mr. Piquette; and Mrs. Schreiner.
- (6) Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future: Miranda, chair; Mr. Schneider, deputy chair; Mr. S. Anderson; Mr. Carson; Mr. Connolly; Mr. Coolahan; Mr. Dach; Ms Fitzpatrick; Mr. Gotfried; Mr. Hanson; Mr. Hunter; Ms Jansen; Mr. Piquette; Mrs. Schreiner; and Mr. Taylor.
- (7) Standing Committee on Families and Communities: Ms Sweet, chair; Mr. Smith, deputy chair; Mr. Hinkley; Ms Jansen; Mrs. Littlewood; Ms Luff; Ms McPherson; Mr. Orr; Ms Payne; Mrs. Pitt; Mr. Rodney; Mr. Shepherd; Dr. Swann; Mr. Westhead; and Mr. Yao.
- (8) Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship: Ms Goehring, chair; Mr. Loewen, deputy chair; Mrs. Aheer; Ms Babcock; Mr. Clark; Mr. Dang; Mr. Drysdale; Mr. Horne; Ms Kazim; Mr. Kleinsteuber; Mr. MacIntyre; Mr. Rosendahl; Mr. Stier; Mr. Sucha; and Ms Woollard.

The Deputy Speaker: Does any hon. member wish to speak to this motion?

Seeing none, the hon. Government House Leader to close debate.

Mr. Mason: I don't need to do that, Madam Speaker.

[Government Motion 20 carried]

Alberta Property Rights Advocate

21. Mr. Mason moved:
Be it resolved that:

1. The 2014 annual report of the Alberta Property Rights Advocate office be referred to the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship for the purpose of conducting a review of the recommendations outlined in the report;
2. The committee may, without leave of the Assembly, sit during a period when the Assembly is adjourned or prorogued;
3. In accordance with section 5(5) of the Property Rights Advocate Act the committee shall report back to the Assembly within 60 days of the report being referred to it if the Assembly is then sitting or, if it is not then sitting, within 15 days after the commencement of the next sitting.

The Deputy Speaker: Does any hon. member wish to speak to this motion?

I see none.

[Government Motion 21 carried]

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 4

An Act to Implement Various Tax Measures and to Enact the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act

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

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Madam Speaker. To all members of the House: I'm pleased to present Bill 4 to you today, An Act to Implement Various Tax Measures and to Enact the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act.

Bill 4 proposes two important streams of legislation changes. The first relates to fiscal rules and budget format. The second relates to tax changes. I'll focus my comments first on the new fiscal planning and transparency act. This act is the foundation of our responsible fiscal planning. It formalizes a commitment to transparent reporting using nationally accepted public accounting standards. Finally, it sets firm limits on borrowing and spending growth. This is a key part of our overall fiscal plan and, coupled with the budget and strategic plan presented earlier this week, represents the principles upon which our government will operate.

The Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act. The changes in the proposed bill that relate to the fiscal rules and budget format reflect our government's desire to present Alberta's finances in a clear format that follows generally accepted public-sector accounting standards. The changes also reflect our government's commitment to ensure that Alberta remains in a strong financial position as we work to implement our platform. Bill 4 will repeal and replace the Fiscal Management Act of former Finance Minister Horner.

While this act will reflect many changes, some parts are already familiar to you. Alberta's finances will be presented in a three-year fiscal plan. The budget will be presented on the same scope and basis as the consolidated financial statements in the annual report. This means that the financial impact of the SUCH sector, which includes school boards, universities, colleges, and health entities, will be reflected in the budget on a line-by-line basis. Other entities included fully are the Alberta Innovates corporations and the Alberta Environmental Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting Agency. The fiscal plan will also include annual noncash changes in pension liabilities.

Moving on to the next item. Bill 4 requires the government to introduce a strategic plan and ministry business plans as well as the requirement for government ministry annual reports to be released by June 30. Quarterly fiscal updates will provide Albertans with regular updates on the state of the province's finances. Unlike the previous government, that introduced amendments to move to semiannual reporting, our government will provide open and transparent reports four times each year. The contingency account will also remain open, with its defined purpose to provide funding for those years in which actual expenses of the government exceed actual revenue.

So what's new in this? Madam Speaker, our government takes seriously our role as stewards of Alberta's treasury. That means managing debt in a prudent manner. To that end, Bill 4 proposes a legislative debt cap based on a nominal debt-to-GDP ratio of 15 per cent. For the purposes of this bill debt means borrowing for the capital plan, P3s, the pre-1992 teachers' pension plan, and operating deficits when required. It does not include borrowing for the purpose of on-lending to provincial corporations and agencies where we have offsetting financial assets.

3:10

The debt cap provides sufficient flexibility to the government as it implements its financial plan while maintaining a manageable limit on the amount of debt government can take on. Comparatively speaking, the proposed limit of 15 per cent is one-half of the average debt-to-GDP levels weighted by each province's nominal GDP. For your information, Madam Speaker, two out of three credit-rating agencies that rate the province report net debt to GDP as a measure of their credit reports. Dominion Bond Rating Service states that a triple-A rated province should have debt-to-GDP ratio of less than 15 per cent.

I should point out that each credit-rating agency includes different items when calculating a province's net debt. Although agencies use debt to GDP as a measure of credit worthiness, they have other criteria as well such as debt to revenue. The bottom line, Madam Speaker, is that a 15 per cent debt to GDP is a prudent benchmark for limiting government debt. With this cap in place, Albertans can be assured that the government's borrowing will not get out of hand.

The next item I wish to draw your attention to is related to savings. Under the proposed act we will continue to inflation-proof the heritage fund through the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Act. We still think that it's important to set aside a larger portion of Alberta's resource revenue for future generations. Right now, however, our focus is on the extraordinary economic and fiscal challenges we face as a result of oil prices. Our government will take another look at growing our savings once we are back in balance. In the meantime we will protect the value of the heritage fund against inflation so that it can continue supporting the priorities of Albertans now and in the future.

Moving on to the next item. There are times, Madam Speaker, when government might have to adjust its spending plan partway through the fiscal year due to emerging cost pressures that cannot be ignored. At the same time Albertans expect the government to stick to their budget as close as it can. The proposed legislation will retain what is known as the 1 per cent rule. The rule limits in-year increases in operating expenses to no more than 1 per cent of the budgeted total. The 1 per cent rule balances the need to control spending with the need to maintain some built-in flexibility to address emerging issues.

For your information the 1 per cent rule will not apply to an increase in spending to respond to disasters, an increase in the amount authorized under a supply vote or an increase in any other expense offset by additional revenue received for a specific purpose of that expense, commitments made in collective bargaining or other negotiated settlements or remuneration, commitments made in the fiscal year for the cost of settlement with a First Nation, and in the case of a SUCH sector entity an increase in operating expense from an unbudgeted drawdown of reserves or accumulated surpluses from unbudgeted revenue. In that last scenario I mentioned, the SUCH sector would need to obtain the approval of the Treasury Board before any spending happens beyond the current exemptions. Future budgets will include the use of reserves within a total approved budget for the SUCH sector.

There are some tax changes in Bill 4. With respect to tax changes Bill 4 does three things: it implements Budget 2015 initiatives, it gives legislative authority to the fuel and tobacco tax changes made on March 27, 2015, and it proposes a number of other technical and administrative changes to the provincial tax statutes. To do so, the proposed legislation will amend our personal and corporate income tax acts as well as the Fuel Tax Act, the Tobacco Tax Act, and the Tourism Levy Act. These changes are separate from those that were made to the personal and corporate income tax acts in June 2015

with Bill 2. I'll briefly provide some details now on the most significant proposed changes, starting with the personal and corporate income tax acts.

Alberta Corporate Tax Act. This legislation will implement the Budget 2015 decision to increase the current insurance premium tax rates by 1 percentage point. It will also move Alberta's tax on qualifying environmental trusts, or QETs, from the Alberta Corporate Tax Act to the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act. This change is required so that the Canada Revenue Agency can administer our QET tax under the Alberta federal tax collection agreement.

This bill also proposes a monetary penalty for taxpayers who manufacture, distribute, possess, or use software devices to suppress sales data to avoid paying taxes, often called zappers. This change parallels federal legislation and is another measure to help combat tax avoidance.

With respect to Alberta's Personal Income Tax Act, Bill 4 will implement Budget 2015's plan to introduce a new Alberta child benefit program and increase the benefit under the Alberta family employment tax credit program.

The proposed bill will also update the dividend tax credit rates for dividends paid by small businesses to individual shareholders. This amendment is necessary to ensure Alberta's current policy is maintained and to avoid an inadvertent tax increase on these shareholders.

With regard to the Fuel Tax Act, moving on to that, the legislation will implement the Budget 2015 decision to increase the tax rate for locomotive fuel by 4 cents. This is effective November 1, 2015. In addition, the act will give legislative authority to the fuel tax increase that took effect on March 27, 2015. It will also cap the benefits under the tax-exempt fuel user and the Alberta farm fuel benefit programs to 9 cents per litre, another change that took effect on March 27, 2015.

Bill 4 also proposes to protect officers from prosecution when they contravene the Fuel Tax Act as part of their duty; for example, during undercover operations or investigations to sting people breaking the law. This amendment parallels protection provisions under the Tobacco Tax Act.

Further, the bill proposes to give the minister authority to garnishee tax debtors' portion of a joint payment between a debtor and another person by a third party. This is consistent with other Alberta tax acts.

With regard to the Tobacco Tax Act this act will give legislative authority to the tobacco tax rate increase that took effect March 27, 2015. It will also implement the Budget 2015 decision to further increase the tobacco tax rate by \$5 per carton of cigarettes. Comparable changes will also be made to the tax rates applicable to other tobacco products to maintain parity. This tobacco tax increase came into effect on October 28, 2015.

Technical and administrative changes. Lastly, the act proposes technical and administrative changes to a number of Alberta's tax statutes. These are changes that ensure continued consistency between Alberta and the federal tax regimes, clarify or correct technical deficiencies in the legislation, repeal expired provisions, and standardize administrative policies across Alberta's tax statutes.

In conclusion, to summarize, Bill 4 will allow government to produce a fiscal plan that aligns with the audited year-end consolidated financial statements and the annual report on a line-by-line basis. The Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act, which Bill 4 will enact, strikes a balance between maintaining legislative fiscal controls while providing the necessary flexibility to respond to the current fiscal and economic challenges we are facing. Further, Bill 4 proposes important legislative changes required to implement or give authority to several tax changes that have already been made and are proposed in Budget 2015.

Bill 4 will implement the Budget 2015 decisions to introduce a new Alberta child benefit program, enhance the Alberta family employment tax credit program, and raise taxes on tobacco, locomotive fuel, and insurance premiums. Bill 4 will also give legislative authority to the tobacco and fuel tax rates, changes that came into effect on March 27, 2015; enable the Canada Revenue Agency to administer Alberta's QET tax under the Alberta federal tax collection agreement; implement the technical and administrative changes that clarify our tax statutes; correct technical errors in the legislation; repeal expired provisions; and standardize administrative policies across Alberta's tax statutes.

Together these changes will help enable government to manage current economic challenges and provide a path to balance as we work to create jobs, diversify our economy, and support programs that are important to Albertans and their families. I ask that all members of the Assembly support this bill.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I now move to adjourn debate on Bill 4.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Government Motions

(continued)

Provincial Fiscal Policies

13. Mr. Ceci moved:

Be it resolved that the Assembly approve in general the business plans and fiscal policies of the government.

[Adjourned debate October 28: Mr. Schmidt]

Mr. Schmidt: I yield my time, Madam Speaker.

3:20

The Deputy Speaker: Does any other hon. member wish to speak? We are on Government Motions, Motion 13. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak to the first budget of our first new government in 44 years. Congratulations. I would like to say that it's a pleasure to be here and to speak to this, but in many ways it's not a pleasure to rise to speak to this budget.

Alberta is in economic crisis. Albertans are looking for leadership, but they are not finding it in either the previous government or in this one. Albertans voted for change in the last election, and in many ways they voted for hope. Albertans remain hopeful, and I would suggest, after six months of travelling this great province, that everywhere they remain hopeful, but they are getting concerned. I truly believe they were hopeful with this government, as I was hopeful for this government. As I mentioned in question period, I was hopeful especially for the ability for democracy and accountability and transparency to return or to come for the first time ever to this place in real, meaningful ways. I saw it in Ottawa, where there was democracy. There was good debate. There were opposition parties that had the opportunity to keep me in my seat for a full 24 hours to vote.

There were opportunities for committees to study bills, for you all in this place, Madam Speaker, to have an opportunity to speak about particular bills that may interest their constituents. I truly believe that that opportunity remains with us, that we, each and every one of us, can have the ability to represent the constituents who put us here. We are not here for ourselves; we are here for the people of Alberta. That means Albertans, whether they come from Fort McMurray or Medicine Hat or Calgary or Edmonton, should have the opportunity to speak through their elected officials. Their

elected officials should have the opportunity to debate motions and to examine budgets, \$50 billion in budgets, the most ever spent by the government of Alberta, and we are going to have the least amount of time ever given to an opposition party to study it.

This NDP government claims, Madam Speaker, to represent democracy and that it's the same as it's always been. Well, I myself would not ever lay claim to fame to be like the previous government, especially not when it comes to democracy and the ability for opposition parties to have their say.

I think Albertans wanted a balanced and measured budget. Certainly, I have said openly outside of this House that I respect and approve of some of this budget, especially in the realm of mental health and in the elimination of mandatory school fees. Of course, the elimination of mandatory school fees: during the campaign the Wildrose actually asked for a complete elimination, and this government has only come forward with 50 per cent of that elimination. But I know Albertans want a balanced and measured budget. I know that Albertans wanted a budget that would reassure the job creators. We heard it from the minister of economic development that the private sector are the job creators, yet the only jobs this government is intending to create with this budget are jobs for the public service. I'll get into that later in my speech.

I was hoping to reassure the private sector with my communications. In particular, I was hopeful that I would be able to say: business community, this budget will bring economic confidence. We spoke about confidence. We spoke about how important confidence was during the campaign and later on, yet we saw three particular announcements that brought a tremendous amount of uncertainty into our economy. I truly believe that the NDP, the government, the 13 people that control \$50 billion of taxpayers' money, don't get it. They certainly don't get it because they haven't changed anything. They continue with business as usual. Business as usual: sending shock tremors through our economy to the private sector, to the oil and gas industry, that employs hundreds of thousands of Albertans directly or indirectly. What do we see? Almost daily announcements of layoffs.

What Albertans received is what they did not expect, what I did not expect given some past governments across this country. We've seen other examples of NDP governments that were not ideological in every single thing they did, but here we have an ideological budget, a budget that is not based on common sense or what the business community is saying, a budget based on NDP ideology that has failed and consistently failed right across the country. This is a budget without any focused efficiencies whatsoever, a budget completely out of step with what Albertans expect. It's completely out of step with Alberta's values.

This budget has record spending and a plan for even more record spending than ever before in our province's history. This is, right here in Alberta, the most expensive government in Canada by far. Before the NDP took power just six months ago, it was already the most expensive government in Canada by far. Yet what do we have in this budget? Seven hundred more spaces, more employees, at Alberta Health Services, the fourth-largest employer in the country, and the government is adding more employees.

This budget has record borrowing, and for the first time in a generation we are borrowing for government operations. We're borrowing money to keep the lights on. We're borrowing monies to employ Albertans, to give services to Albertans. This is not acceptable. This is not what a good government does, what a government does when it is accountable to the people. We are borrowing money for employees' salaries, and we are borrowing money for programs. Borrowing is not an answer. In fact, if you look at the status currently of borrowing in North America, it is at record highs.

I saw this before. Many of you in this place are much younger than me, but I was in Fort McMurray during the '80s, and I saw what bad policy can do to a town, where I saw every single business go bankrupt except for two. One was a government lottery, an outlet to sell tickets. The other was my parents' business, which had no debt, and they barely survived the national energy program of the Liberals. It was a terrible policy, and there were tens of thousands of Albertans out of work. It is troubling, but be clear: your policies will have a tremendous effect on Albertans' lives, not just on the social sphere but on the economic one, which will affect everything.

If the NDP were to cancel every single dollar of infrastructure spending – and I'm a big fan of infrastructure spending, I can promise you, being in Fort McMurray. We have the best infrastructure in Fort McMurray for 5,000 people. Unfortunately, we have about 85,000 to 90,000 people living there. It's been atrocious. So I like infrastructure. But let's say, for example here, that if the NDP government were to cancel every single dollar of infrastructure spending – every hospital cancelled, every school, every road cancelled, every building cancelled, every single infrastructure project – if this government were to cancel it and not spend that money, we would still need to borrow to pay for it, to pay for the operations.

This budget also has wildly out of whack revenue projections, and that's what troubles me the most. How do you increase revenues by that much with what we've had in the past few years with record oil prices? We know for sure, based upon expert evidence, including CAPP and other industry organizations, that we are not going to see those types of prices. If it all, we will probably see them in five or six years, but we are not going to see those prices at all during this term. In fact, they suggest that these prices will remain where they are or slightly above where they are for the next three years. Even industry organizations, even Moody's has said that your price projections on revenue of oil is \$20 off per barrel. Twenty dollars off per barrel.

3:30

How do you get revenue projections at \$20 off a barrel when you're only at \$40 a barrel right now? I see the Minister of Finance say \$45. Well, I say \$33 because you have to take into consideration the differential. You have take into consideration that this government is not going to build pipelines for a long time, which means we will not get access to tidewater, which means that we will not during your entire mandate ever have the opportunity to receive fair market value for our products.

Why do we not receive fair market value? Because we do not have access. We do not have access to tidewater. We have a customer, one customer, who holds us ransom, who decides when they take our product and when they don't, how much they're going to pay for our product based on what they need. That is not a good relationship to encourage. That's a relationship to build pipelines to the west coast, to the east coast, to the north, and to the south, wherever we can get capacity. That's what that relationship should tell us. We need pipeline capacity, yet this government says: Energy East maybe.

Of course, the NDP in Manitoba have sought intervenor status to stop that pipeline. Yes. That's right. The NDP, your cousins, the same party, in Manitoba have sought intervenor status to stop that pipeline. I don't believe Albertans are fooled by your suggestions that Energy East is a go. How can it go past Manitoba when there's a court action to stop it by your cousins?

The NDP government says that they're not in favour of Keystone – what kind of signals does that send to the Americans? – and not in favour of pipelines to the west coast. So we will never receive our fair market value for the work that Albertans do, the hard work

that they do, the 12-hour shifts they do. Seven in a row, 10 in a row 12-hour shifts: try doing that. I am very proud of the Albertans that work in the oil and gas sector, and I encourage you all to come to Fort McMurray and watch while they wait an hour and a half to two hours every day to get to the plant site on a 30-kilometre stretch of road because there's too much traffic and the previous government did very little about it. See what it's like to wait two hours to get home.

The question is: what are you going to do about it that's better? How do you encourage our men and women that work in the oil sands industry to feel they are providing value not just to their families with the great wages and great opportunities but also to the people of Alberta when you restrict their opportunity to sell their product to market, when you say that their worth is less than the worth that they should have because they do not get full market value for their product?

Now, I mentioned the wildly out of whack revenue projections. Do you have any idea, Madam Speaker? I know you must because you're very wise. It's up to \$50 million, the differential between what we get and what we should get. It's up to \$50 million a day – a day – that we lose. It's not \$50 million a year. It's up to \$50 million a day we lose because we don't have access to tidewater. Does that not trouble anyone in this room?

Yet we have this government that is suggesting and counting on about a 25 per cent – 25 per cent – increase in government revenues between now and the next election. I think what somebody did was grabbed it out of the air and pulled it down and threw it on the book because that's what you wanted to spend. How can you justify a 25 per cent increase in revenues when the revenues are the highest they've ever been already? I will talk about that in just a second. A 25 per cent increase in government revenues between now and the next election is a fantasy. Yesterday I called that a superboom, and I've lived through every boom in Alberta. A superboom? I really don't believe there's a superboom on the horizon. There is no superboom on the horizon. We've been through booms. It is not going to happen, and these revenue projections are simply a fantasy.

The record spending, the record borrowing, and the make-believe, fantasy revenue numbers will lead us to staggering debt. Let's be clear. At the end of the NDP government's mandate we will be at the highest debt levels this province has ever seen, yet only last year we had the highest oil prices we've ever seen. This government is projecting a \$47 billion debt by 2020. I think that's the lowest possible number that we'll see. I truly believe, based upon my analysis of the budget on a very preliminary basis, that number will be much, much higher. I believe the number will be more like \$55 billion or \$60 billion. I truly believe that Albertans will see in three and a half years that these revenue numbers were nothing but fantasy. I truly believe that the number will be far worse, which means that our quality of life will be much worse.

You cannot borrow your way into prosperity. You cannot borrow your way into paying off debt. You will not leave Albertans in a better position, which I think is ultimately what all of us want to do in this place. I do not think there is any nefarious theme to your decision to do this. I just think, frankly, you're not giving accurate numbers and providing an accurate picture of what will take place.

When people may have had, for instance, in some cases, as CNRL did, some wage decreases, those people that suffered the wage decrease obviously weren't happy, but that decision was made, and they kept their job. They went home after that, and they talked to their spouse. They sat down at the kitchen table, very likely, and they had a conversation. They said: "Last year we made this much, but in order to keep my job, in order to keep all our jobs, because the oil prices are low, the revenues are low, we've agreed

to take a cut. So now we have to cut our spending.” You might want to hear this. “Now we have to cut our spending.”

So the husband, the wife, the spouses, the partners decide that they have to cut some of their entertainment or other expenses. That’s what the government should do. If Albertans have to react as a result of this budget and as a result of low oil prices, why would our government be any different? Why is the government increasing salaries of the public sector, increasing the numbers of the public sector? Why? I think Albertans will be asking that question for the next three and a half years as thousands and thousands and thousands of Albertans continue to lose their jobs because of this government’s actions.

Even if we take the most optimistic number that you have brought us, that debt will lead to a lowering of our credit rating. There is no question; it will. When you have a great credit rating, it means that you can walk into a bank and they actually want to see you. It means that they give you the best rate possible to be able to borrow on your house or your car. It means that you save money on interest payments.

Interest payments are significant, especially with this government, because interest payments alone – alone – will be \$1.3 billion in four years. That’s right: \$1.3 billion in four years. Now, I don’t know if anybody knows what a billion is, but I’m going to tell you what I’ve learned a billion is. In 2005, representing my constituents of Fort McMurray-Athabasca, I collected in six weeks 7,000 signatures from Fort McMurray, out of three offices, to twin highway 63, the highway of death, where many of my constituents died.

3:40

In 2006, when I had the pleasure of announcing in February as the parliamentary secretary of transport with Minister Lawrence Cannon \$150 million to twin part of that highway, most of that highway, a decision by Stephen Harper and the Conservative government of Canada, the Alberta government came to the table. The PC government came to the table, and they invested \$170 million on that, and of course it was their responsibility to get that job done. Now, that was \$320 million to twin most of highway 63. Three hundred and twenty million. That’s not even close to the \$1.3 billion that this government is going to spend on interest payments as a result of nothing short of negligence.

Do you know what? I want to tell you another story about highway 63 and my 7,000 signatures that went to the federal government and went to the provincial government that I was able to petition and, I believe, forced the government of the day in Ottawa and the government of the day here to do something about it. Because they waited so long to get that twinned, it cost more than a billion dollars. That’s what timing means. That’s how important timing is in a government’s mandate, the timing to decide when to invest, when to save, and when to spend.

I truly believe, with respect, Madam Speaker, that this NDP government has it backwards. This debt will lead to a lowering of our credit rating. It will mean more expensive money for not just the government of Alberta but for all of those other organizations such as schools and other organizations that use this credit level and this incredible credit rating to borrow. It’s not just the Alberta government. There are scores and scores of organizations across this province that rely on that great interest rate. Guess how many provinces have that great credit rating? Too many answers. One, one province, has that credit rating. That’s this province, and this province will lose that.

Now, I have complimented this government on some parts of its budget. I have to admit it’s about that much of a that much budget, but I did, the same as I complimented the previous government for

some work that they got right. They did agree to twin highway 63. It was their responsibility. Unfortunately, it took them more than 10 years to do it. But they did some good work, and they gave us part of that great credit rating. They didn’t spend it all, almost. They didn’t spend it all, and we had a great credit rating. We are going to lose that, and the significance of that, folks, Madam Speaker, is very high indeed, and it will be a high price to pay for all Alberta families.

It will increase the cost of borrowing, leaving much less money for programs. That means we’ll have to borrow more money and more money just to pay the interest on the debt. Now, we’ve all seen the budget and the line items, but what’s the third-biggest number that’s going to be on the budget in three years no matter what happens? It’s going to be interest payments, interest payments for debt borrowed by this government. One point three billion dollars means fewer hospitals, fewer schools, fewer roads and bridges, and, most importantly, fewer front-line services.

We need to protect our front-line services. We need to protect our nurses, our teachers, our doctors, and all those people that are front-line workers providing services to Albertans. Yet this government, with its reckless spending and budget process, is threatening that, is threatening our front-line workers. No matter how you suggest that you can do otherwise with numbers, the truth is that you cannot, because sooner or later if I don’t have to pay it and if you don’t have to pay it, my children will have to pay it and my grandchildren will have to pay it.

I have two grandchildren that live in this city. Now, I don’t want to see those grandchildren have to pay for debt as a result of bad performance by the NDP government – I truly don’t – and I am concerned for my grandchildren, as I wish that all of you were, because I want my grandchildren to walk into a hospital and speak to somebody and get in there. If they’re sick, I want them healed and I want the nurses to be there ready for them. I want the doctors to be there ready for them. I want the teachers to give my grandchildren what they deserve, which is the number one education in the world. Right now our education system is rated about fifth in Canada.

An Hon. Member: In the world.

Mr. Jean: That’s fifth in Canada. I appreciate the help. Yeah, I really do. Thanks. If you could maybe stand over here a bit.

Truly, truly, folks, it’s not a laughing matter. You think you’re doing the right thing by borrowing so much money and by spending so much money, but who has looked at any possible efficiencies in the government, the most expensive government in Canada? Not one person has said: we can save some money here; we can look at some efficiencies. There are a lot of opportunities. All Albertans know that.

As you can tell, I’m fairly passionate about this because people work hard for their money. Albertans work extremely hard for their money. The people in the oil and gas sector work so hard for their money and usually away from their families, from their loved ones for long periods of time. This debt spiral: you will see it in the future because you are not doing anything to correct it. There has been no attempt and there is no suggestion in this budget whatsoever of any interest to find savings.

I am a businessperson. I ran many businesses successfully, and I know for sure that the only thing that you can control in businesses is your expenses when you have government interference. Sure, you can try to grow sales, but the truth is that the only thing you can really control is the expenses. That’s why when revenues are down – and the revenues in my businesses are down, and the revenues in all businesses in Alberta are significantly down – that is the time to

adjust your expenses, not to lay off people. I've heard that it's a joke. I was clear during the campaign; I've been clear since the campaign. I rely on front-line services. I will protect front-line workers, and I will stop this NDP government from firing and eliminating front-line positions.

Now, it does worry me. It doesn't seem to worry anybody on the other side, but I will tell you, more importantly, that whether it worries me or not is not really an issue. Worry in the capital markets is the issue. Five billion, 10 billion, 15 billion are just numbers, but they're numbers that nobody in Alberta can afford to invest in oil sands plants. If you want a plant, if you want a refinery, if you want an upgrader, you need to find someone, a business, a corporation with \$15 billion. Fifteen billion dollars: that's what it costs to set up an organization, a business like that. Who sets up those businesses? Shareholders. Albertans own shares in oil sands companies. They own shares in all of our companies, as all Canadians do. So when you penalize oil sands companies and oil and gas companies, you penalize Albertans because it's they that have their pensions invested. Teachers' pensions, nurses' pensions: they have them invested in our companies in Alberta. So when you penalize our companies, you hurt Albertans and you especially hurt the most vulnerable Albertans, retirees on fixed incomes.

I am worried about capital markets. I have talked to many people in the industry. No one is investing in Alberta right now. You can pull this and that and the occasional \$50 million or \$1 million of investments that may come into Alberta. I have talked to a lot of investors, and no one is bringing money into Alberta right now. The NDP government has put far too much unpredictability, uncertainty, and bad monetary policy into this budget, terrible monetary policy, especially during a time like this.

3:50

It should worry the government, but nobody on the other side is worried. I see smiles. I see smiles and smirks. That's not helpful. We're trying to be helpful. We have always tried to be helpful since we started here because we clearly saw the importance of working together.

Madam Speaker, let me point out that no one expected the government to balance the budget this year. Did you hear? No one expected the government to balance the budget this year or even next year. No one did because, frankly, in my opinion, it would be very hard to do and the cuts would be too draconian and would not be satisfactory. Wildrose wasn't going to balance the budget in these two years. We were not. In fact, during the campaign we said that we would not balance the budget for two years, but in the third year we would. The difference between the Wildrose and the NDP policies is that we were going to start. We were going to start to head down that path because when you start out on a journey, if you want to change the direction, you have to change the path. I would suggest that this government needs to seriously think about heading in the right direction and find fiscal prudence with some of the areas that are necessary.

All of us use Alberta's services, so we know when you enter into an office and when you have an opportunity to look at all of the assets this government owns, whether it be the 14,000 cellphones currently utilized by Alberta Health Services employees – the famous story I love is where one of the senior managers in Alberta Health Services wanted to go shopping at Christmas and had his staff go and save a parking spot at one of the malls in Calgary. And you're putting more money and more people into Alberta Health Services when we hear this kind of thing, when we have 5 employees for every 1 manager. Five employees for every 1 manager.

But let's not stop there. Let's talk about the Alberta government, that has 3.7 employees for every manager. Now, WestJet, who takes

my life in its hands every time we fly, has 12 for every manager. Twelve employees for every manager, and they fly in the sky. Don't you think we can do better? Why can we not find efficiencies in the Alberta government? Why can you not find efficiencies in Alberta Health Services, the third- or fourth-largest employer in Canada? Every other province has the same constitutional obligations that we do.

We did want to start in the right direction, and we knew that the right direction was savings because we had a government that had been in power for 44 years and was the most expensive government in Canada. That's right. The Progressive Conservative Party of Alberta, when they were in government, was the most expensive government in Canada's history. But good news. Good news. They don't have it anymore, folks. The NDP government of Alberta is the most expensive government in Canada's history. So congratulations. You even beat the PCs on that.

Now, let me tell the most expensive government in Alberta's history that there is an opportunity to change that because you haven't spent the money yet. So I encourage you to do so. You have an opportunity to actually do things differently. I mentioned today in question period how you could do things differently and restore democracy here. Even Stephen Harper gave more democracy to the NDP than the NDP is giving to the opposition parties here in Alberta, even Stephen Harper, whom I hear fearmongerers all the time talk about how bad he was. I believe he was the greatest prime minister we've ever seen in Canada. [interjections] Those people on the other side have so much knowledge on the issue because, of course, you were there. No, you weren't. [interjections] I was there, and I was very proud to be there.

You know, the one thing I did see that Stephen Harper did was that he allowed us to actually have an opportunity at committees to study legislation. Now, I know you don't know that because you're backbenchers and all of you are new except a couple. All of you are. [interjections] I appreciate the banter. What I'd appreciate from you is the opportunity to talk about that because democracy is the most important thing that we can possibly have. Democracy means that we get better decisions because we all have input into those decisions, but we can't start unless we change the path and the direction that we go in.

Now, I did mention earlier that under my leadership Wildrose is always committed to protecting Albertans and protecting the jobs of front-line workers, who are important to all of us. These are workers such as teachers and nurses, that deal with all of us every day, that serve Albertans and are there to serve Albertans, but Albertans are not there to serve them. They are hired to serve Albertans, and every single one of our proposals in the last election – every single one of them – and since has had a clear commitment to not lay off any front-line workers. In fact, I have suggested several times in several interviews that the NDP should bring in a moratorium to protect those workers. You heard it here first. I believe that we should protect our front-line workers. You can start down the path to a balanced budget without impacting services and front-line workers who support Albertans. You can. It is possible. It has been done before, and it will be done again.

Wildrose has also expressed its support for this mandated freeze many times. That would be for all government managers and nonbargaining union employees. Now, I sometimes hear the House leader say: "We can't do that. They've bargained in good faith, and it's covered by union contract." No, no, no. They're not covered by union contract. They're not. We have about 6,000 government managers that are not unionized that just got a big raise. In fact, we were very concerned when the new NDP government removed the wage freeze for managers instituted by the previous Prentice government. We were very concerned because that would be the

wrong signal to send to our energy industry and, in fact, to all corporations and all businesses and Albertans as a whole.

We noted that when the Premier brought in a political staff from British Columbia to become a senior deputy minister, this B.C. politico, she actually immediately – immediately – used an order in council to increase wages, to reinstate the wage increase to the top levels of the civil service, to the managers. Immediately. Tens of thousands of lay-offs in Alberta, and what's the first thing someone from British Columbia comes in to do in Alberta? Charge Albertans more by reinstating a way to take away a wage freeze and to reinstate these high wages of already high-paid employees. I heard today that somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$77,000 was the average wage, which means that there are a lot of people that make a lot more than that.

Now, I'm not suggesting cuts. I don't want cuts. This is not the time to cut, just like it's not the time to give wage increases. This summer managers in the civil service got a big, big wage boost. This government, when they undid the freeze to management salaries that the Prentice government put in, propped them right up. Now, what kind of signal does that send to the unemployed in Alberta, the people who have been laid off? People say that 40,000 people have been laid off in Alberta. That's just Albertans. That's just Albertans that have been laid off in Alberta. That does not include the people from across Canada that worked in Alberta. That's just Albertans. Forty thousand people have been laid off, and immediately the 6,000 managers in the civil service get a wage boost, a wage increase.

Well, what are the private-sector unions doing? What are they doing? Well, we recently noted that the private-sector unions have been negotiating wage freezes. Yes, that's right, and some of you know that. They have been negotiating wage freezes out of respect and for the reality of the current economic conditions. Now, there are some members of the government who are actually building trades unionists. They know this, and they know that it makes sense.

4:00

It is an example, in my opinion and Wildrose's opinion, of a responsible trade union in their behaviour because they recognize that it's not all about them. It is an example. It is an example of what great things private unions can do. It is an example of free collective bargaining working well. Very important to our province and to our country. I represent more union members per capita, I think, than anybody in the country except for maybe the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo now.

Wildrose does think the government would do well to begin discussions with its public-sector unions. Yes, begin discussions now with the public-sector unions because now is the right time to start down that path and to talk to them about getting a temporary freeze on public-sector salaries. They are Albertans. They understand what's going on. I've worked with them for many years, and they are logical, smart people, and they get it. They want what's best for Alberta, just like Wildrose wants what's best for Alberta. We certainly are in this together, all Albertans, whether they work in the public sector or the private sector. All of us want Alberta to succeed. I honestly believe that a sincere effort on the part of this government might find some success. I truly, truly believe that. Take the time to pick up the phone. Have an informal conversation. I think you will be surprised at what you find, and I would encourage you to do this.

Wildrose has always been clear – during the election campaign, today, yesterday – and will always be clear about front-line workers. We would not lay off front-line workers like teachers or nurses or government employees, that provide absolutely essential services to Albertans. These services make us the best country in

the world and the best province within this country, but we do need to shrink the size of the civil service. We do. We can do that in a number of ways that don't include any firings, any layoffs.

There is a thing called attrition. People actually leave the civil service. I believe the leader of the third party or one of his members mentioned today that there were about 212,000 civil servants. Well, that means a lot of people decide to move around, move to different provinces, and – guess what? – people do retire. And there's the other option of early retirement. I know many people in the civil service would be happy to have that opportunity. They would. But the subject is not broached by this government. We have not talked about it. They are not interested in it. They, in fact, ignore it.

So let me take some time talking about how we got to this stage, a little history lesson. I love history because it has a way of repeating itself. But this history will set the context for why, in my mind and Wildrose's mind, this budget is so disappointing. First of all, how we got to this place and how we got here. I'm going to go way back in time in the distant past, that is starting to look like the near future. That's right. I'm going to go way back to a time in the distant past, that is starting to look like the near future. In the late '80s oil and gas prices were sluggish, and things were slow, and Alberta's government had not adjusted and was spending far more than most provinces. The heritage fund had stopped for years despite the fact that we were still getting royalty payments at that time that every province in the country envied, that every Premier in the country envied, that everybody in the country envied, and we were having problems with sluggish gas and oil prices.

Not only at that time were we not saving our resource wealth; we were taking on significant debt, just like today. But like today the relatively low oil prices were not the reason for our fiscal hole because nobody else really had that at that time. There weren't any more oil and gas revenues across the country except for in Alberta that were of any significance. Now, we've had some expansion since. We've seen Newfoundland and Labrador. We've seen Saskatchewan. We've seen northern British Columbia. They envied our position because they saw our position as being one they wanted to emulate, so they expanded their oil and gas sectors.

Like I said, like today the relatively low oil prices were not the reason for our fiscal hole. It was sloppy spending habits. Sloppy, sloppy, spending habits. Alberta's government was spending too much on just about everything, and they weren't getting the results. How do we know that? Because, as I mentioned earlier, we're under the same fiscal framework, under the same constitutional obligations, under the same demands as every other province in this country, and we were doing it without getting better results than anyone in the country.

Our politicians at that time had got in the business of being in business, much similar to some of the things I see in the NDP budget, and at that time they were doing that without recognizing that when the government picks winners and when the government picks losers by giving handouts, everyone loses – everyone loses – especially taxpayers. They tried to chase a government-sponsored diversification dream, and it was a dismal failure. Now we have the North West upgrader and other boondoggles that are going to cost our taxpayers, hard-working Albertans, billions and billions of dollars.

They tried to chase that sponsored diversification dream, and it was a failure. They tried to put off making any hard decisions, hoping an oil spike would come. Sound familiar? That government hoped an oil spike would come and that they wouldn't have to worry about looking for efficiencies. But all that did was make debt worse, squeezing out program spending with ballooning interest payments that bankrupted many, many Albertans. After the '80s I had a chance to be a lawyer, and I saw the foreclosures in Fort

McMurray. I saw people committing very sad actions as a result of their financial position.

For us in this place, we have a great job. We have a guaranteed job with a guaranteed income for four years, but Albertans don't have that. We have a great pension plan. Well, not anymore, but we have a great plan. I know that because I used health care the other day. We have a great plan. We get all these benefits. Albertans don't get those benefits. So when you manage their money, please, I would implore, through you, Madam Speaker, that you recognize that people spend a lot of hours away from their family, working hard to pay their taxes to allow this government to spend that money. All I would ask, through you, is that risky social experiments are not the way to go forward and to use tried and true methods that other jurisdictions have done and succeeded with.

But, as I said, all that did was make debt worse, squeezing out program spending with ballooning interest payments, and as a result all Albertans suffered. Then in 1993, as federal politics were shaken up by Bob Rae's NDP government because they were running the biggest provincial economy in Canada into the ditch, it finally became clear to both the Liberal and PC leaders in Alberta that we had reached a point where some tough medicine needed to be administered. That's what happens when you spend too much and you don't do it efficiently. People pay the price. And Albertans will have to pay the price of the NDP government's failure just like they paid the price with the NDP government's failure in Ontario.

Now, over that next four years the Klein government reduced bloated government spending by a whopping 20 per cent. We suggested 2 per cent. Our fiscal plan in the election was 2 per cent; Ralph Klein, 20 per cent. Now, that got Alberta to a balanced budget and was an ambitious plan to eliminate debt that was just a little bit above \$22 billion. In this case we're going to be looking at more than \$50 billion.

4:10

Now, nobody disputes that these initial years were tough for Albertans. Let me be clear. In the '90s they were tough, but they weren't nearly as tough as the '80s. I am not saying, nor have I ever said, that that kind of reduction in spending is what the Wildrose would pursue. In fact, 2 per cent is a lot different than 20 per cent. All our proposals in our election platform were about attrition, about early retirement if they wanted it, not forced draconian measures. It was about finding ways to move forward down a different path of efficiencies.

Now, NDP Premier Roy Romanow was balancing Saskatchewan's books by reducing program spending by 10 per cent. Ten per cent. I have to be truthful, as I always am. I was very interested and hopeful to see the opportunity where you brought in 10 chiefs of staff from every province in the country other than Alberta. I see that's your employment plan, to employ people from other provinces by hiring NDP personalities from every province but Alberta. So I was kind of hoping that, you know, we would see a Romanow government, an opportunity to see some efficiencies, some opportunities for savings because Albertans do pay that price, but no. We actually see more money being spent, more civil servants being hired.

What is often misunderstood is that by the end of the '90s, as our royalties went through the roof, the Klein government started spending recklessly again, such that by 2005 Alberta was a middle-of-the-road operational spender amongst provinces and above average in capital spending, infrastructure spending. Now, had Klein's successors been able to keep us in the position of average spending or from that point kept spending increases to the rate of inflation and population growth, which is very reasonable during good times, we would not have run any deficits and would even be

balanced by this year. Let me repeat that. Had Klein's successors been able to keep us in the position of average spending or from that point kept spending increases to the rate of inflation and population growth, we would not have run any deficits and would even be balanced this year. Does anybody care over here? Does anybody care over there? No, they don't.

But Klein's successors could not restrain spending increases. In particular, Premier Stelmach's government opened up the taps in his first few years both on operating and capital. As Mark Milke noted in the *Calgary Herald* earlier this year, in 2005 program spending in Alberta was \$8,965 per person in inflation-adjusted dollars. That actually matched the high in 1993, when Getty had retired, before Ralph Klein brought in changes. That's right. It actually matched it. Put another way: if Klein had come full circle. And the notion that there was still some inherent deficit in our spending levels is false.

The government oversaw major spending increases between Premier Klein's last budget and the 2009 recession. While there were a few years of relative restraint following that, after Premier Redford's first two budgets Milke noted that the provincial government spent \$10,967 per person on government programs. That was \$2,000 more per person than in 2004-2005. Two thousand dollars more than 2004-2005. That's 17 per cent more with the cost of inflation. It's ridiculous if you compare it to other provinces. Truly ridiculous.

This problem was actually recognized by Premier Jim Prentice, whose budget had a section showing that the extra \$2,000 per person, beyond inflation, is exactly how much more we spend than our neighbours in British Columbia on government programs. Two thousand dollars per person. In fact, I spent some time right across the country with infrastructure and transportation issues in 20 Crown corporations, so I had a chance to travel the country and to see how different provinces spent money. Well, \$2,000 per Albertan translates into \$8 billion extra that gets spent in Alberta on government, \$8 billion more than British Columbia. Adjusted for population, that's \$8 billion more here than they spend in British Columbia. Somehow British Columbia manages to deliver its services without that extra \$2,000 per person.

Now, I call these extra dollars because I have yet to hear one defender of the status quo explain how we are getting 20 per cent better services than British Columbians are. How? We aren't. It's certainly not in health care, where we have in Alberta among the worst wait times in the country. Saskatchewan, next door, puts us to shame on wait times: three months for just about anything.

Here in Alberta we have the third- or fourth-largest employer in the country, Alberta Health Services, and we have one of the worst wait times. It's unbelievable the social cost let alone the economic cost of these people waiting for those operations. They impact on their families and their friends and their jobs. It doesn't cost any more to get an operation for a knee today than it does in eight months. Why are we having Albertans wait eight months for a knee operation? Why can every province in Canada do it better than we can with less money?

Now, I can't explain it, and I've not heard anybody be able to explain it, not in any rational terms. In fact, everybody on the other side seems to ignore that, seems to ignore the very issue. Nor can it be explained away by a cost-of-living argument. Now, sure, Alberta has seen some inflationary pressures. I would say that my community of Fort McMurray, where I've lived for 50 years, has had some interesting inflationary things happen to it, but it cannot be explained with inflationary pressures, certainly not in the last decade.

British Columbia has always been expensive relative to the rest of the country, but I dare the government to prove that it costs more

to build something in Alberta than it does in Vancouver. I dare the government to say that or to prove it, because it's not provable. I know from my time in Ottawa working on infrastructure files that paving or twinning roads costs significantly more in mountainous British Columbia than it does in Alberta.

The difference I see between Alberta and B.C. is that Alberta has had a 44-year dynasty holding the purse strings through a series of massive royalty booms. After the late '90s instances of fiscal irresponsibility became far more common than any interest in restraint. The result is that, like in the '80s, a relatively low period of oil prices puts us into a situation where we turn to massive borrowing.

I saw earlier our coalition between the PCs and the NDP. You seem to have the same mantra in government, the same spending habits, the same lack of interest to find any efficiencies, the same interest to put this burden onto Albertans unfairly during times of being laid off. Maybe that's going to be the situation in the future. That would be, of course, up to the third party. But just as then, Premiers and Finance ministers act as though it is simply a revenue problem.

Now, a revenue problem means increased taxes, and if we are not going to address it with a massive tax hike, then we will have to do massive borrowing. I see this government doing both. But it is dishonest and unfair to look at our deficit and simply say that it's the fault of low oil revenues or low revenues.

4:20

Now, I will prove my point. For one, I wonder how many of my colleagues in this House could guess where this year's supposedly horrific revenues rank in our 110-year history? Well, you'd probably be shocked given all the dire talk about revenues, revenues, revenues. But you should find out and know that this year it's going to be \$44 billion according to your own numbers. That's the third-highest revenues this province has ever seen. That's right. The third-highest revenues. If I was in business, this would be a banner year of revenues. This would be a great year of revenues. So in 110 years 107 of those years or 108 of those years have seen worse revenues than this year for Albertans and for the government. [interjection] That's right. The third-highest revenues ever.

So that is not a good argument, that revenues are down, because they are not down; they're up. They're up. The last two years of \$100 oil have put revenues through the roof. It has gotten close to \$50 billion when you include the SUCH sector, but that's no measuring stick, in reality.

What's more illustrative is that even at \$100 a barrel, this government was still taking out billions of dollars in debt. That government, by the way, not this government. That government. But why? Because Alberta's government is too expensive: \$8 billion more than our neighbours in British Columbia. Again, to repeat, just because we are spending \$8 billion more than what we need to does not mean it is an easy matter to stop doing it, and we in the Wildrose understand that. Wildrose recognizes this, and that's why, despite all the fearmongering about drastic cuts and all of that, which is balderdash, we have never claimed we would eliminate that 20 per cent and get spending in line with British Columbia. We have a great quality of life, and we have a gift with our oil and gas sector and our natural resources. We should live better, but we should live within our means and make sure that Albertans don't lose their jobs because of this government's failure to manage properly.

Instead, we have proposed a very modest \$1 billion per year reduction in spending for three or four years to get us to a place where, thanks to our strong revenue streams, we can plausibly say that we have eliminated the structural deficit and then be in a place,

a responsible place, where we can keep taxes low even in leaner times but save for the future when royalties are down. Save for the future when royalties are down for my grandchildren, for your grandchildren, for Alberta's future, for the competitive advantage so that we don't have to pay \$1.3 billion in interest payments and forgo all of those wonderful things we expect in front-line services and capital spending and infrastructure. This is my vision of responsible government, the kind of government Albertans do deserve, a kind of government that I think Albertans truly want. That to me is the real Alberta way.

Now, that vision is nowhere to be seen in this budget. Nowhere. This budget takes our already bloated spending and inflates it further, 2.8 per cent per year, far beyond inflation and far beyond population growth, 2.8 per cent per year without any justification based on the actual numbers of population or inflation. Why? There is no logical explanation. Zero. This budget takes our already bloated spending and inflates it to a place where it's going to be even more difficult to recover. This budget puts off those tough decisions indefinitely, saying that we never have to worry about paying it back because there's no plan to pay it back: zero, zip, nada, not even a single plan to pay off the money.

Simply put, this government is banking on a boom to balance the budget and racking up an absolutely reckless \$47 billion in debt in the meantime, \$47 billion of debt that we have to pay back sometime in the future, which will affect our ability to borrow, that will hurt our quality of life because when you pay for debt and interest payments, something else has to go.

Now, I'm going to put an asterisk beside that \$47 billion because that's the optimistic number, and we're going to owe a lot more than that under the NDP government's rule. A lot more. That number is counting on oil prices getting to an average of \$50 for this year – fantasy – but rising to \$61 next year and \$68 the year after that. Two more years of fantasy. Don't believe me; look at the experts. Even Moody's has suggested those numbers are off \$20 a barrel. Off \$20 a barrel. That's 33 per cent. I'm concerned. I wish there was more concern over there, but there seem to be smirks and laughter and, you know, some comments. Those things are not helpful.

We have tried to be helpful, and we will continue to be helpful because that's what Albertans elected us to be, and that's why we want to have the opportunity – the opportunity – to get democracy right, to have the opportunity to participate in those choices so that the voices that elected us are heard. Right now they have to be silent because you're not allowing us to participate in committees, where we decide on legislative issues, where we have an opportunity for input.

These projections are far higher than what groups like Moody's or the American government are forecasting. These groups do this for a living. The Americans are usually right about this stuff for a reason.

On page 4 of the budget we see, without knowing what kind of assumptions they are, that this government is banking on huge revenue growth in years 4 and 5 to get us to a so-called balanced budget. You're not even going to be in power then. Overall this government is projecting 26 per cent growth in revenues over those five years. That's laughable.

Recall that this year isn't some trough that we can expect a massive rebound from. This year is our third-highest revenue year ever – third highest – yet you think it's going to grow by 26 per cent over the next five years? Let me repeat that. This year isn't some weird, low-level revenue year. It's not. Don't believe your own press releases. This is not something that we can expect a massive rebound from. This year is our third-highest revenue year ever – ever – but somehow the government thinks 2020 will be way better.

With few prospects for pipelines because the NDP, including the Manitoba NDP and the federal NDP, are against all pipelines . . .

Some Hon. Members: That's not true.

Mr. Jean: It's true. With little prospect of pipelines getting us to tidewater any time soon and with no reputable agency projecting that oil gets anywhere above \$80 anywhere in the near or foreseeable

future, keeping our debt to only \$47 billion relies on a lot of fantasy, wishful thinking.

Now, I'd never say that anything is impossible in Alberta because this is the greatest place in the world. No question.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 4(2) this Assembly stands adjourned until Monday at 1:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 4:30 p.m. to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 29th Legislature - 1st Session (2015)

Activity to October 29, 2015

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 1 to 200 are Government Bills. Bills numbered 201 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills numbered with a "Pr" prefix are Private Bills.

*An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If a Bill comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel, Alberta Justice, for details at (780) 427-2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned chapter numbers until the conclusion of the Fall Sitings.

1* An Act to Renew Democracy in Alberta (Ganley)

First Reading -- 9-10 (Jun. 15, 2015 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 30-38 (Jun. 16, 2015 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 85-94 (Jun. 17, 2015 eve.), 152-157 (Jun. 22, 2015 eve., passed with amendments)

Third Reading -- 157-159 (Jun. 22, 2015 eve., passed on division)

Royal Assent -- (Jun. 29, 2015 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 15, 2015; SA 2015 c15]

2 An Act to Restore Fairness to Public Revenue (Ceci)

First Reading -- 104 (Jun. 18, 2015 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 161-162 (Jun. 22, 2015 eve.), 183-193 (Jun. 23, 2015 aft.), 201-213 (Jun. 23, 2015 eve.), 213-227 (Jun. 23, 2015 eve., passed on division)

Committee of the Whole -- 242-257 (Jun. 24, 2015 aft.), 259 (Jun. 24, 2015 eve., passed)

Third Reading -- 259-271 (Jun. 24, 2015 eve., passed on division)

Royal Assent -- (Jun. 29, 2015 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force January 1, 2015, with exceptions; SA 2015 c16]

3 Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2015 (No. 2) (\$) (Ceci)

First Reading -- 77 (Jun. 17, 2015 eve., passed)

Second Reading -- 107-114 (Jun. 18, 2015 aft., passed on division)

Committee of the Whole -- 145-152 (Jun. 22, 2015 eve.), 159-161 (Jun. 22, 2015 eve., passed on division)

Third Reading -- 182-183 (Jun. 23, 2015 aft.), 213 (Jun. 23, 2015 eve., passed on division)

Royal Assent -- (Jun. 29, 2015 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 29, 2015; SA 2015 c14]

4 An Act to Implement Various Tax Measures and to Enact the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act (\$) (Ceci)

First Reading -- 331-332 (Oct. 27, 2015 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 379-81 (Oct. 29, 2015 aft., adjourned)

201 Assuring Alberta's Fiscal Future Act (Fraser)

First Reading -- 104-105 (Jun. 18, 2015 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 128-139 (Jun. 22, 2015 aft.), 302 (Oct. 26, 2015 aft., defeated on division)

202 Alberta Local Food Act (Cortes-Vargas)

First Reading -- 105 (Jun. 18, 2015 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 303-313 (Oct. 26, 2015 aft., adjourned)

203 Election (Restrictions on Government Advertising) Amendment Act, 2015 (Strankman)

First Reading -- (Oct. 28, 2015 aft., passed)

Pr1 The King's University College Amendment Act, 2015 (Schmidt)

First Reading -- 377 (Oct. 29, 2015 aft., passed)

Pr2 Bethesda Bible College Amendment Act, 2015 (Nielsen)

First Reading -- 377 (Oct. 29, 2015 aft., passed)

Pr3 Rosary Hall, Edmonton Repeal Act (Shepherd)

First Reading -- 377 (Oct. 29, 2015 aft., passed)

Pr4 Canadian University College Amendment Act, 2015 (Orr)

First Reading -- 377 (Oct. 29, 2015 aft., passed)

Pr5 Concordia University College of Alberta Amendment Act, 2015 (McLean)

First Reading -- 377 (Oct. 29, 2015 aft., passed)

Pr6 Covenant Bible College Amendment Act, 2015 (Fildebrandt)

First Reading -- 377 (Oct. 29, 2015 aft., passed)

Pr7 Living Faith Bible College Amendment Act, 2015 (Nixon)

First Reading -- 377 (Oct. 29, 2015 aft., passed)

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Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, November 2, 2015

Day 13

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

First Session

Wanner, Hon. Robert E., Medicine Hat (ND), Speaker
Jabbour, Deborah C., Peace River (ND), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Feehan, Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (ND), Deputy Chair of Committees

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Rocky View (W)	Malkinson, Brian, Calgary-Currie (ND)
Anderson, Shaye, Leduc-Beaumont (ND)	Mason, Hon. Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (ND), Government House Leader
Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (W)	McCuaig-Boyd, Hon. Margaret, Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley (ND)
Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (ND)	McIver, Ric, Calgary-Hays (PC), Leader of the Progressive Conservative Opposition
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (W)	McKittrick, Annie, Sherwood Park (ND)
Bhullar, Manmeet Singh, Calgary-Greenway (PC)	McLean, Stephanie V., Calgary-Varsity (ND), Deputy Government Whip
Bilous, Hon. Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (ND), Deputy Government House Leader	McPherson, Karen M., Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill (ND)
Carlier, Hon. Oneil, Whitecourt-St. Anne (ND)	Miller, Barb, Red Deer-South (ND)
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-Meadowlark (ND)	Miranda, Ricardo, Calgary-Cross (ND)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, Calgary-Fort (ND)	Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (ND)
Clark, Greg, Calgary-Elbow (AP)	Nixon, Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (W), Official Opposition Whip
Connolly, Michael R.D., Calgary-Hawkwood (ND)	Notley, Hon. Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (ND), Premier
Coolahan, Craig, Calgary-Klein (ND)	Orr, Ronald, Lacombe-Ponoka (W)
Cooper, Nathan, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (W), Official Opposition House Leader	Panda, Prasad, Calgary-Foothills (W)
Cortes-Vargas, Estefania, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (ND)	Payne, Brandy, Calgary-Acadia (ND)
Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake (W), Official Opposition Deputy Whip	Phillips, Hon. Shannon, Lethbridge-West (ND), Deputy Government House Leader
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (ND)	Piquette, Colin, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater (ND)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South West (ND)	Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie (W)
Drever, Deborah, Calgary-Bow (Ind)	Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (ND)
Drysdale, Wayne, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (PC), Progressive Conservative Opposition Whip	Rodney, Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC)
Eggen, Hon. David, Edmonton-Calder (ND)	Rosendahl, Eric, West Yellowhead (ND)
Ellis, Mike, Calgary-West (PC)	Sabir, Hon. Irfan, Calgary-McCall (ND)
Fildebrandt, Derek Gerhard, Strathmore-Brooks (W)	Schmidt, Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (ND), Government Whip
Fitzpatrick, Maria M., Lethbridge-East (ND)	Schneider, David A., Little Bow (W)
Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (PC)	Schreiner, Kim, Red Deer-North (ND)
Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., Calgary-Buffalo (ND)	Shepherd, David, Edmonton-Centre (ND)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (ND)	Sigurdson, Hon. Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (ND)
Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (PC)	Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (W)
Gray, Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (ND)	Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC), Progressive Conservative Opposition House Leader
Hanson, David B., Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills (W), Official Opposition Deputy House Leader	Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (W)
Hinkley, Bruce, Wetaskiwin-Camrose (ND)	Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (W)
Hoffman, Hon. Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (ND)	Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (ND)
Horne, Trevor A.R., Spruce Grove-St. Albert (ND)	Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Hunter, Grant R., Cardston-Taber-Warner (W)	Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (ND)
Jansen, Sandra, Calgary-North West (PC)	Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (W)
Jean, Brian Michael, QC, Fort McMurray-Conklin (W), Leader of the Official Opposition	Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (ND)
Kazim, Anam, Calgary-Glenmore (ND)	van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)
Kleinstuber, Jamie, Calgary-Northern Hills (ND)	Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND)
Larivee, Hon. Danielle, Lesser Slave Lake (ND)	Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Littlewood, Jessica, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (ND)	Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)
Loewen, Todd, Grande Prairie-Smoky (W)	
Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (ND)	
Luff, Robyn, Calgary-East (ND)	
MacIntyre, Donald, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (W)	

Party standings:

New Democrat: 53 Wildrose: 22 Progressive Conservative: 9 Alberta Liberal: 1 Alberta Party: 1 Independent: 1

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W.J. David McNeil, Clerk	Stephanie LeBlanc, Parliamentary Counsel and Legal Research Officer	Brian G. Hodgson, Sergeant-at-Arms
Robert H. Reynolds, QC, Law Clerk/ Director of Interparliamentary Relations	Philip Massolin, Manager of Research Services	Chris Caughell, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms
Shannon Dean, Senior Parliamentary Counsel/Director of House Services	Nancy Robert, Research Officer	Gordon H. Munk, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms
		Janet Schwegel, Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>

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Rachel Notley	Premier, President of Executive Council
Deron Bilous	Minister of Economic Development and Trade
Oneil Carlier	Minister of Agriculture and Forestry
Joe Ceci	President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance
David Eggen	Minister of Education, Minister of Culture and Tourism
Kathleen T. Ganley	Minister of Justice and Solicitor General, Minister of Aboriginal Relations
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Danielle Larivee	Minister of Municipal Affairs, Minister of Service Alberta
Brian Mason	Minister of Transportation, Minister of Infrastructure
Margaret McCuaig-Boyd	Minister of Energy
Shannon Phillips	Minister of Environment and Parks, Minister Responsible for the Status of Women
Irfan Sabir	Minister of Human Services
Lori Sigurdson	Minister of Advanced Education, Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Ms Miller
Deputy Chair: Mr. Nielsen

Cyr	Sucha
Ellis	Taylor
McKitrick	Turner
Renaud	

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Miranda
Deputy Chair: Mr. Schneider

Anderson, S.	Hanson
Carson	Hunter
Connolly	Jansen
Coolahan	Piquette
Dach	Schreiner
Fitzpatrick	Taylor
Gotfried	

Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee

Chair: Ms Gray
Deputy Chair: Ms Payne

Anderson, W.	Miranda
Clark	Nielsen
Cortes-Vargas	Nixon
Cyr	Renaud
Jansen	Starke
Loyola	Swann
McLean	van Dijken
Miller	

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

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Hinkley	Pitt
Jansen	Rodney
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Payne	

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Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Ms McPherson
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Anderson, S.	Kleinsteuber
Anderson, W.	Littlewood
Babcock	McKitrick
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Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

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Carson	McPherson
Coolahan	Nielsen
Cooper	Schneider
Ellis	Starke
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Kazim	Woollard
Loyola	

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. Fildebrandt
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Barnes	Malkinson
Bhullar	Miller
Cyr	Payne
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Loyola	

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Ms Goehring
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Aheer	Kleinsteuber
Babcock	MacIntyre
Clark	Rosendahl
Dang	Stier
Drysdale	Sucha
Horne	Woollard
Kazim	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, November 2, 2015

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Let us reflect. As we begin this week's deliberations, let us commit ourselves with renewed resolve to work together with determination but also with compassion and understanding as we carry out our duties to serve Albertans and those who visit us in this great province that we proudly call home.

Hon. members, we will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Mr. Robert Clark. I would invite all to participate in the language of their choice.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
 True patriot love in all thy sons command.
 Car ton bras sait porter l'épée,
 Il sait porter la croix!
 Ton histoire est une épopée
 Des plus brillants exploits.
 God keep our land glorious and free!
 O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
 O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Thank you. Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my absolute pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly students and teachers from the Two Hills Mennonite school, a total of 53 students and including six parents and teachers. These students are the reason that I have stood up in this House on several occasions to bring to your attention issues regarding their new school. Their parents are frustrated, and these are some of the faces of the Two Hills students, who badly need a solution that works best for their community. May I ask the students and their chaperones to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my absolute honour today to rise before you for the first time in this House to introduce to you and through you 65 members from Edmonton-Castle Downs school, Dunluce elementary. They are here today with their teachers, Mrs. Hines, Mr. Kostiuk, and Mr. Thorne; and their parent volunteers, Mr. Yamac, Mrs. Menard, Mrs. Abdille, Ms Thomas, Mrs. Anderson, and Mr. Lee. I would ask that you rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Are there any other school groups for acknowledgement today?

To the students – and I don't say this often enough on behalf of this House – it's particularly pleasing when students and young people come here. You are very important.

The Minister of Advanced Education and Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour today to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly Ms Judy Carter and Ms Margaret Hodgson. Judy Carter is a family friend from my childhood. We both grew up in a small town in northwestern Alberta, in Valleyview. She spent her career teaching in postsecondary programs at Grant MacEwan University and NorQuest College, including English as a second language and English in the workplace. She also taught adult literacy to Canadian-born students and newcomers, and before retiring, Judy's last teaching assignment at NorQuest College was teaching in the language instruction for newcomers to Canada program.

Margaret Hodgson is currently semiretired. She worked for many years as an adult educator in English as a second language at NorQuest College, and she now does occasional work as an examiner at both Grant MacEwan University and NorQuest College. In the 1980s Margaret and her class from Grant MacEwan were guests of the Premier's father, Grant Notley.

I'm pleased that Judy and Margaret were able to join us here today. They're both seated in the members' gallery, and this afternoon I'd ask that you give them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my sincere pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a large contingency of forestry stakeholders. Today we have 24 mayors and Reeves from various towns, counties, and municipal districts that have forestry as a major industry that supports the livelihood of thousands of Albertans and their respective local economies. With them are 17 board members and officials of the Alberta Forest Products Association, an industry that's been providing jobs to thousands of our citizens. Alberta's forest sector represents a great story for our province. The industry is a major contributor to the economy, provides excellent opportunities, a sustainable steward of our forests, and a great place to build a career. I would ask them to now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly six special guests today. As you may know, November is Family Violence Prevention Month in Alberta, and I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge a group of Albertans who have helped individual families and others get the help they need so they can live their lives feeling safe and supported in their communities.

First, Dr. Allen Benson. Dr. Benson is chair of the Alberta Family Violence Death Review Committee and chief executive officer of Native Counselling Services. Dr. Benson has led many groundbreaking programs for Alberta's aboriginal people. Dr. Benson is joined by his wife, Dr. Patti Laboucane-Benson, who also works for Native Counselling Services of Alberta as their director of research, training, and communication.

Also with us are Pat Garrett, the executive director of Wings of Providence, a second-stage women's shelter dedicated to supporting women and children impacted by family violence; Deborah Miller, who established a family law office to help low-income Albertans who experience family law problems, including family violence; and Jackie Foord, CEO of YWCA Edmonton, whose agency offers programs and services that support girls and women and their families in the Edmonton area.

I would like to finish by introducing a very special guest. Gerry Kilgannon, mother of Bill Moore-Kilgannon, my chief of staff, is one of Alberta's early family violence prevention pioneers. Ms Kilgannon started the office for the prevention of family violence well over 30 years ago.

Your presence here today is a reminder to all Albertans that everyone can do something to prevent family violence at any time or in any place. It's my honour to ask my distinguished guests to rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my great pleasure today to introduce to you two close friends of ours that are visiting us from Hollywood beach, Florida. First is Sergeant First Class U.S. Army (Retired) Jim Mahon and his wife, Rosemary Chelick-Mahon, formerly of Fairview. She grew up with my husband, and for more years than I can count now they've been close family friends. We're enjoying them visiting here this week. I'm happy to have them attend my first day back in session. If they would please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Minister of Seniors.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this House visitors from the Edmonton Down Syndrome Society. Today, November 2, marks the beginning of Down Syndrome Awareness Week across Canada, and our guests are very active in advocating for and motivating members of this community as well as raising awareness of the important contributions that people with Down syndrome make in all of our communities.

I'm pleased to introduce Tanya Ponich and her mother, Rosalind Mosychuk, who also happen to be constituents of mine in Edmonton-Glenora, as well as Adam Faulkner, Gail Faulkner, Matthew Smith, Brandon Smith, Alana Gersky, Diane Gersky, and Marie Nichols. To use Tanya's words: "Use your gifts. Take a risk and create a life that is happy and healthy. By doing so, you and your family and your friends, our community, will become well." What a wonderful message. I now ask that our guests rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to the rest of the Assembly three individuals that are part of the Rotary youth exchange program. Melissa Gosewinkel is from Minden, Germany. She is 16 and is spending this year in Westlock as the current in-bound Rotary youth exchange student with the Westlock Rotary Club. She is here with no preconceived ideas of Canada and wants to learn the geography, history, and culture of our country first-hand. She is very enthusiastic about all this, has already learned our national anthem, will be experiencing many new ideas and challenges for her, including ice-skating. During her year here she will spend time with host families and has already experienced farm life and riding along in a combine during harvest.

Kathryn Anderson from Rochester, Alberta, is the returning Westlock Rotary Club out-bound exchange student. Kathryn spent time in Curitiba, Brazil, and has learned how to speak Portuguese through this program. She is a grade 12 student at R.F. Staples high school in Westlock.

Les Dunford has been a member of the Westlock Rotary Club for 30 years and is involved in various aspects of the club. He's a lifelong member of the community. Les lives on a family farm near Dapp, near where I live. Les still does a little farming with cattle and has been a writer/photographer with the town and country section of four local newspapers for the past 25 years.

I would ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome, particularly the international guests from both the United States and Europe who are with us.

The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three women who are also here to celebrate National Down Syndrome Awareness Week. Cheri Lefebvre is the older, perhaps wiser sister of my good friend Jules. She's an accomplished Special Olympian, having competed on the national stage. She's worked in a variety of capacities in a variety of St. Albert businesses for years. Krysten Pysyk is without a doubt one of the most determined, strong-willed, and supportive women I've ever met. They are both here supported by their staff from the Lo-Se-Ca Foundation in St. Albert, Jasmine Baker. If they're not already standing, I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise today and introduce to you and through you to the other members of the Assembly a wonderful group from the St. Michael's Health Group. St. Michael's Health Group is a health care organization that provides long-term care, supportive housing, and numerous programs and services for the seniors of our community. I have visited St. Michael's Long Term Care Centre as well as the Millennium Pavilion Seniors' Lodge, and I'm proud of the work that they are doing in my riding of Edmonton-Decore. Today I am pleased to introduce Stan Fisher, president and CEO; Kay Willekes, director; Geraldine Journeau, controller; and Charmon Balcom, executive assistant. I would like to ask them to rise, please, of course, and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A busy day today in the Assembly. I'll be brief. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Elena Ryland. Elena is a second-year law student at the University of Alberta, and I wonder if one day she'll be joining us here in a seat on the floor of the Chamber as opposed to up there in the gallery. I'd ask that Elena please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome, one and all.

Members' Statements

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

Suicide and Mental Health

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to talk about an issue that affects all of us as Albertans but too often is unheard. If the House would indulge me, I'll tell them a little bit of a story, a

story about someone I knew and I wish I had known better, a story about Evan Tran, a student who was well known on the University of Alberta campus, known for his ear-to-ear grin, involved in numerous student groups, and known as a jokester who was always bubbly and happy, helping others whenever they needed it. A week and a half ago I attended a memorial service to commemorate his life. On Tuesday, October 13, Evan took his own life after having struggled with mental health issues since the age of 15. He was only 21 years old.

Mr. Speaker, mental health isn't an issue that only exists in postsecondary institutions, but it is there that it is painfully prevalent. That is why I am proud to support a government which is leading a mental health review, a government which understands the importance of quality mental health services.

Evan was described as someone who put his heart into making things better for other people and was a real giver, and Albertans can learn from him. Albertans deserve better. Albertans deserve a mental health initiative that leaves no one behind. Evan would want us to learn from his tragedy. Whether it's through student or peer support services or providing easy access to counsellors when it's needed, we need to be able to reach out to students and Albertans in a proactive way to bring services to them. We need to build on the work already being done on our campuses and recognize the importance of the work our mental health professionals do every day.

Mr. Speaker, I know Evan would have wanted us to celebrate his life. He would have wanted us to celebrate his life by achieving more, and I'm proud that our government is doing just that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Hon. members, this last week we were back into the new routine, and I deliberately made the decision to allow preambles to continue, but in our shared desire of the floor, to get as many questions as possible, I want to remind you that there are no preambles to supplemental questions after the first five sets of questions. I wish to inform you with some authority based on previous precedents, I will be more diligent in rising should members have preambles on their first and second supplementaries.

I would recognize Her Majesty's Official Opposition leader.

1:50

Job Creation

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, today the government told everybody it would be releasing some more details on their \$5,000 job subsidy program. What we got were precious few details and promises of more information to come. We know that business groups and economists have serious reservations about the program. They smell a boondoggle in the making. Can the Premier tell Albertans how this program will actually create new jobs and that it won't just waste another \$200 million of taxpayers' money?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I've said a number of times before, our government believes in supporting Alberta's entrepreneurs, visionaries, and job creators to ensure the right conditions for growth, and this is one of the pieces in that platform that's designed to encourage job growth in the face of an economic downturn. This is a plan that, as I've said before, is modelled a little bit on a plan that the member opposite voted for previously. We know that in the past he's been in favour of supporting government-funded job creation plans, and apparently

it's just a question of who proposes it in order to determine whether he'll support it that time.

Mr. Jean: You cannot compare a program for registered apprentices that is linked to accredited training with this potential boondoggle that you're proposing.

Mr. Speaker, there are still so many questions about this program. In question period last week we heard some disturbing things. Some of these subsidies are going to go to part-time jobs. There are so many details we don't know yet. To the Premier: will this program apply to jobs for temporary foreign workers? Will it apply to companies that contract with the government?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I believe the Minister of Advanced Education and Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour clarified last week, this program will be rolled out in a way to ensure that double-dipping is not allowed because we want to be able to spread out the many, many programs that we're putting into place to create jobs and encourage job creation in Alberta. This is a plan that we hope will create up to 27,000 jobs for Albertans. We are taking this problem seriously as opposed to talking about cutting and slashing the jobs that already exist.

Mr. Jean: So apparently temporary foreign workers are eligible.

Mr. Speaker, there are just so many questions about this program. So far we haven't had any real answers. We know business groups are suspicious. We know that the expert the Premier hired to advise her on this budget doesn't think it will be feasible.

Let me give the Premier another potential problem. Will this program only apply to existing companies, or can companies create spinoffs and then move jobs to rake in half a million dollars in subsidies?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, the member says that the minister hasn't provided details, but it appears as though he hasn't actually listened to the details that the minister has provided, because what we've talked about already is a program that would ensure that that kind of thing doesn't happen. You know, I'll tell you this as well. Albertans are concerned about their jobs. They're concerned about the economy. That's why over 70 per cent of Albertans polled about our budget are in favour of this plan.

The Speaker: Second major question.

Mr. Jean: The jobs minister held a press conference on the \$5,000 jobs subsidy program but did not provide any specifics, and I quote your minister: further details on the program, application requirements, and procedures will be made available at a later date. Jobs are being lost right now in Alberta. It's absurd that the government is spending time and resources on photo ops for a program that won't be available until far after the next budget that you bring forward. Can the Premier tell Albertans: when exactly will this program start? Will any part of this program begin in this fiscal year?

Ms Notley: Again, Mr. Speaker, I really wish that the member opposite would listen to the details that have been rolled out so far. He'd probably be able to use his question period a bit more effectively. What we've talked about is comparing the 2015 EI and tax returns with the 2016 EI and tax returns. So what will happen is that the grant will be rolled out. After the fact there will be a rebate that's delivered at the end of next year and for jobs that are created

beginning on January 1, 2016. It's been fairly clearly laid out, and I'm not quite sure why it is that member opposite hasn't . . .

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, it looks like the only extra employment this program will generate for quite a while is when media photographers show up to take pictures of the government's announcements about the program itself.

When you look at all the unanswered questions – and there are many – and all the opportunities for waste and fraud and abuse, frankly, it's scary. Can the Premier assure Albertans that the only good jobs this program will create won't be new bureaucratic jobs needed to police the program?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, just to be clear, I think those media photographers already have jobs. They're photographers. I would suggest that maybe a job they might want to consider creating is researcher or somebody that listens to the press conferences that the minister is delivering, where she gives the details of the plan over and over and over again. That being said, our government is committed to doing a number of different things to create jobs, to incent jobs, to work with our partners in the business community to kick-start this economy, to be the shock absorbers when the economy slows down, unlike the plan that those folks have over there to simply . . .

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Jean: I would agree. Albertans are shocked by your budget.

Speaking of jobs and bad policy, we have been warning about this government's plan to radically raise the minimum wage. We have been told that the government contractors who employ low-wage workers are raising their price because of the minimum wage increases. We hear that the government is actually renegotiating some of these contracts to reduce work requirements and, thus, staff levels. Can the Premier assure us that no Albertans will lose their job because of radical minimum wage increases?

Ms Notley: Well, again, going back to my previous comment about maybe creating some more research jobs, I suggest that the member opposite provide a little bit of paper and perhaps some evidence for the rumours he's hearing because none of that makes any sense, so it's very difficult to even answer the question. To be clear, the issue is very clear that when you raise the amount of money in the pockets of the lowest income people in the society, generally speaking, that creates more jobs, and we know that that's what the evidence will show over time.

The Speaker: Third major question.

Provincial Budget

Mr. Jean: This NDP government seems oblivious to what is happening in Alberta's private sector. Last week we heard about Devon Energy and 200 layoffs; Husky energy and 1,400 jobs lost; Cenovus, 700 more jobs lost on top of the 800 lost earlier this year, and on and on it goes. Bloomberg describes it as: "Money is flooding out of Canada at the fastest pace in the developed world." To the Premier: what, if anything, is her government doing to give any hope at all to our energy industry and to our energy workers?

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I mean, the member opposite is correct in that with the massive drop in the price of oil, over which this government has no control, the energy industry is

suffering and people are losing jobs, and families and communities are suffering as a result as well. We are very, very aware of that. That is why we have come up with a multipronged plan to create jobs and to incent economic activity. Whether it's venture capital, whether it's freeing up access to capital for small- and medium-enterprise businesses, whether it's for a job-creation program, whether it's through our capital plan we are trying on many fronts to deal with this . . .

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Jean: All over Alberta companies and families are making hard decisions, and this is the third-highest revenue year for this government in our history. Across boardroom tables senior managers are trying to adjust to the economic conditions and minimize the impact of layoffs. Across kitchen tables Alberta families are working hard to make do, maybe keep a vehicle a little longer or choose a stay-cation instead of a vacation. Everywhere Albertans are trying to adjust, but so far we've seen no adjustments whatsoever from this government. Can the Premier point to any tangible efforts to economize on the part of her government?

2:00

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we outlined in our budget, what we plan to do is to carefully and cautiously engage in restraint across a number of government departments throughout the province. For instance, many ministries received no funding increase in this year. With Health we've reduced, slowly, the rate at which they can increase their budget, carefully because we don't want to create chaos but at the same time slowly reducing how much they can increase and getting to 2 per cent. So we are carefully reducing expenditures because, at the same time, we don't want to add to chaos with chaos.

Mr. Jean: This NDP government talks about fairness, but in reality they do play favourites. While private-sector workers across Alberta are taking pay cuts or having their work hours reduced or being laid off, times have never been better for public-sector managers. One of this government's first actions was to lift the wage freeze for managers and non-union workers. They got back a 2.25 per cent pay increase, and next year they get another raise. To the Premier: how does she justify this to a private-sector worker who is actually hurting so badly today in Alberta?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, when it comes to wage freezes, it was this government that introduced a budget wherein we talked about taking to the Members' Services Committee a proposal to freeze MLA salaries, and this Official Opposition raised a point of privilege over it because they didn't want us to do it. You know, they've got to pick a side and stick on it for just – I don't know – half a day. Half a day.

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

Job Creation

(continued)

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, the labour minister this morning reannounced her below-the-poverty-line job grant. On Thursday the Premier had to admit that a \$3,300 grant translates to a \$33,000-a-year job, which is below the poverty line. The jobs minister now wants to raise the minimum wage to \$15 an hour and cut off entry-level jobs where Albertans can get the jobs, skills, training, and labour to qualify for a higher paying job. To the labour minister:

what programs are you planning to actually help Albertans get good jobs so that they can support themselves and their families?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Our job creation incentive grant is there to support business, to support the nonprofit sector, the charitable sector. These are the job creators in Alberta that we're working with to create jobs for Albertans. We're very proud to do that with them.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, in Alberta people start paying taxes at around \$50,000 a year. That means that jobs over that contribute to the provincial coffers more than jobs under and create a good living for Alberta families, yet this minister wants to create \$33,000-a-year jobs, which are below the poverty line. Please. To the Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour: for Albertans that have lost good jobs in the energy sector due to your government's policies, what can you do to help them stay in Alberta? What are your plans, actually, to help those workers get jobs so that they can continue to support their families in their homes like they have been?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. We are investing \$178 million into this program. We are supporting employers to create jobs, and they are determining what salaries there are. We're not saying how much to do. It's up to the creativity of the marketplace. So we're very happy to support them. They can have jobs that are high end if they like. It's really up to the employers.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, the jobs minister doesn't know her own programs. She's making it up as she goes along, and it doesn't look good.

Before May 5 the towers in Calgary and Edmonton were a lot fuller, before you were laughing at the job losses, folks. Before then, through down cycles and up cycles, they knew there was a government that would support the energy industry, and they stuck around knowing that support was there. Since this government has come in, they've gone to war with the industry, talking about royalty reviews, corporate tax increases, regulatory changes. When will this minister actually start to reverse those policies and do things that will bring jobs and economic development into this province instead of driving it out?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Of course, the energy industry is at the heart of Alberta's economy, and we care very much about the energy industry. We've created a whole ministry, Economic Development and Trade, because we want to make it easier for business to work with us as a government, a one-stop shop. We're committed. Our job creation plan is another initiative. Other things we're doing. We're very committed to supporting business in this province.

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

Gas Station Leak Site Remediation

Ms Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Some of the members may be aware that the Gas Plus spill occurred in my constituency. About

7,000 litres leaked into the ground. The spill occurred in 2010, five years ago. This is affecting families and businesses in my constituency. Given that the previous government did very little to address this, to the minister of environment: what steps are you taking to ensure that this is being cleaned up in a prompt manner?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the member for the question. You know, this has gone on for way too long, and that's why there has been a significant amount of money expended already by Environment and Parks to mitigate this site. We began injections of oxidizing chemicals on the week of October 12. Of course, I've also directed the ministry to have a look through the legislation to ensure that we can at least prevent future Gas Plus incidents. We have contaminated sites across the province, and it's time to get serious on polluter pay.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister: given that spills such as these greatly affect Alberta's businesses and Albertan families, what is the government doing to ensure that spills of this nature will be dealt with quickly in the future?

Ms Phillips: Well, Mr. Speaker, unlike the previous government, our government is committed to polluter pay and working to strengthen our government's ability to enforce those laws, which is why I've directed our department to review legislation and regulations and come back with a suite of options to regulate contaminated sites, bring us options with some teeth.

Ms Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that there is some belief that the previous government did not act quickly enough in their response to the spill in Bowness, again to the minister: what sorts of changes with regard to early warnings or incident analysis is the government undertaking?

Ms Phillips: Thank you to the member for the question. As I mentioned, I directed our department to review legislation and regulations. We are going to ensure that we are enacting the polluter-pay principle, that we are working with the city of Calgary and other municipalities across the province, Mr. Speaker, who are left with these legacy contaminated sites. We're going to make sure that we put the right pieces in place to ensure that municipalities and communities and homeowners don't have to live with these going forward.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Forest Industry Issues

Mr. Rosendahl: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's forest industry is key to economic growth and diversification in this province. Many families in my constituency rely heavily on the forestry sector for the good jobs it provides and to support their families. Many of these folks would tell you that the mountain pine beetle is one of the biggest issues concerning Alberta's forestry sector. My question to the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry is: what is your department doing to combat this serious problem?

The Speaker: The minister of agriculture.

2:10

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Mountain pine beetle remains a very serious threat

to the health of Alberta forests. Infestations threaten social, economic, and environmental values. This year our department is investing \$35 million to combat mountain pine beetle. Through single tree removals of pine infested with beetles and industry harvests of susceptible stands, Alberta is making gains against a serious threat in co-operation with the forestry industry.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Rosendahl: Thank you, Minister, for the answer.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the mountain pine beetle can produce so much damage to Alberta's forests, my question to the same minister: what are you doing to protect jobs and support growth in our logging industry?

Mr. Carlier: Mr. Speaker, forestry is a critical sector of our economy. Over 15,000 hard-working Albertans work in forestry, and the industry is a key economic driver in at least 70 Alberta communities, including Whitecourt in my own constituency. As we move to diversify our economy, this sustainable industry, based on a renewable resource, becomes even more important. Our government is committed to working closely with industry to improve efficiencies and to support innovation. We are working to expand markets for Alberta's wood products, particularly in Asia. I'm proud to be a champion for Alberta forestry products, and I'm going to work hard every day to support this industry and the hard-working families that depend on it.

Mr. Rosendahl: Thank you, Minister, for your answer.

Mr. Speaker, given that Alberta's forests are one of the best renewable resources and given that Albertans want us to move away from reliance on a single resource, to the same minister: what is your department doing to ensure the sustainability of this resource for generations to come?

Mr. Carlier: Mr. Speaker, the high amount of value-added processing activity in Alberta's forestry sector is a success story that we need to maintain and support. When done right, forestry is one of the most sustainable industries in our province. We will continue to ensure a thoughtful and sustainable approach to forest management that balances the economic, social, and environmental needs of Albertans.

The Speaker: As I speak to the balance of the questions, I was trying to sort out if there was a preamble in your second supplemental. I'm sure there wasn't. I'm sure I'll hear no more of that in the future.

Resource Revenue Projections

Mr. Fildebrandt: Let's try something a little more difficult, Mr. Speaker. Oil prices are a critical number in crafting Alberta budgets, but this government's numbers are a little bit fuzzy. There are two different sets of numbers presented for the price of oil in the budget, one that is estimated, on page 70, and the other, which is the government's assumptions, on page 52. Will the Minister of Finance tell us which set of numbers he is using for revenue?

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The numbers we're using for revenue are WTI. They are \$50 for this fiscal year, \$61 for the next, and \$68 for the next.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Well, let's try again, Mr. Speaker. Given that in previous years there was a number to the penny that showed a weighted average between the department's calendar estimates and the fiscal year – let's look at page 70 of the budget – it appears that

they just switched from the lower government estimate for this year to higher numbers for years 2 and 3. Is this a typo, a printing error, or is the minister inflating his numbers?

Mr. Ceci: I think I've just told this House what those numbers are. I'll stick with those.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Mr. Speaker, the number is different between the two pages.

Given that every \$3 swing in the price of oil means a half a billion dollars shift in revenues, this discrepancy means the better part of a billion dollars. This is the equivalent of misplacing the entire Department of Seniors. These are serious issues that have serious consequences, that deserve a serious answer from the minister. Will the minister commit to coming back to the Assembly and showing us his math?

Mr. Ceci: Mr. Speaker, preparing the budget took months and months and months. We were serious throughout. I commit to producing Budget 2016 with the same rigour. Thank you very much.

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

Tobacco Use Reduction Strategy

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was an honour to help launch Alberta's new tobacco reduction strategy just under a couple of years ago, and it was hailed at that time as a leading approach to reducing smoking and preventing tobacco use in the first place. The path towards a tobacco-free future has also been laid out in previous private members' bills such as the Smoke-free Places Act and government bills such as the Tobacco Reduction Act. Meanwhile, the NDP's Budget 2015 is hiking taxes for tobacco for the second time in a year. To the Minister of Health: what specific plans does the minister have to ensure that tobacco taxes are channelled towards tobacco prevention and cessation programs?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you for the question, Mr. Speaker, and to the hon. member for asking it. Definitely, we have a number of different people in the department who are working on initiatives around wellness, and one of them, of course, is around reducing tobacco consumption. That's one of the reasons why they're using evidence to help drive recommendations, that they bring forward to me, like removing menthol products from the marketplace. It's really clear that of students and minors who are smoking, a large number were smoking menthol products, and that's one of the reasons why we've removed that product from the market.

Mr. Rodney: Again to the Minister of Health. I know Albertans are looking for more specifics than just that. Hopefully, they are still forthcoming.

She did mention wellness, and I really appreciate that. Given that the path to wellness has already been laid out in North America's first robust wellness strategy and given that Alberta enjoys a rich history of leading the way with wellness programs for Alberta students and those in the workplace and our seniors, can the minister please tell us: what specific wellness programs will the minister invest in, utilizing the tax increases, that is, for both tobacco and alcohol?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We are absolutely committed to making sure that we have a sustainable health care system. That includes having access to cessation supports like calling 811 and being able to talk to somebody around how you

can access different supports in your own community. That's obviously a really valued investment, and I find a relation because members opposite proposed cutting significantly from the budget . . .

An Hon. Member: Chaos.

Ms Hoffman: . . . and did want to pursue a situation that would result in a great deal of chaos. We're committed to providing stability, and this revenue will help us do that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Rodney: Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, I didn't hear any specific wellness programs she'll invest in.

Let's try this for the final question to the Health minister. Given that the ministry is charged with an obligation to help create a healthy environment for Albertans and given the proliferation of e-cigarettes and related products, which are both condemned as public health risks and praised as smoking cessation aids, and given that Albertans, you know, could become subject to a patchwork of e-cigarette legislation, can the minister please tell us: what specific products, locations, and strategies is the minister proposing regarding the restriction of the use of e-cigarettes and products in Alberta?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With regard to the specific line item on wellness and how that'll be used in the upcoming budget, I'd be happy to discuss that and will discuss it with the hon. member when we debate the budget estimates in the coming weeks. In terms specifically of e-cigarettes I'd be really happy to hear recommendations from the hon. member and any members of this House on ways that we can ensure safety and well-being for all Albertans, including youth.

Thank you.

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

Job Creation (continued)

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While Albertans in the private sector are losing tens of thousands of jobs, life in the bureaucracy has never been better: secure employment, comfortable pensions, and fresh off an 8 per cent, three-year pay raise. The spending tap is wide open. The fact is that Alberta has the most expensive bureaucracy in Canada. This is a slap in the face to all hard-working Albertans when bureaucrats and managers get extra perks. To the jobs minister: is that fair to all Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. This government is absolutely committed to working with job creators in Alberta, to supporting vulnerable workers' getting a fair wage. We're absolutely committed to making sure that everyone in Alberta is doing well.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

2:20

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The fact is that NDP policies are putting jobs at risk. Given that across the province business owners are struggling to hold their heads above water and that bad policies like a dramatic minimum-wage hike, higher taxes, and more red tape are literally handcuffing our job creators and given

that the NDP solution is record debt and higher spending to maintain the most bloated bureaucracy in Canada, Minister, why do you insist on continuing to tax and hurt jobs in the private sector while expanding the size of government?

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In our campaign, that we were elected on, we said that we were going to increase the minimum wage, and we increased it moderately. We listened to businesses, and they told us to go gradually, so we've increased it by just under 10 per cent. We know that when we put more money with low-income Albertans, they spend it in the local economy, which, again, stimulates and helps businesses. So we're going ahead with our promises, and we're fulfilling them.

Mr. Hunter: Ten per cent might be palatable, but 50 per cent is going to kill businesses.

Given that Albertans in the real world are facing wage cuts and job losses and are waking up wondering if they're going to be the next person to receive a pink slip, Minister, will you commit to the Wildrose suggestion to begin thinning out the ranks of upper government managers through retirement and attrition so that we can protect jobs and keep money in the pockets of hard-working Albertans?

Ms Sigurdson: Well, as I said earlier, we're happy to work with business, to support the nonprofit sector and the charitable sector with this job creation incentive grant. This is putting \$178 million into the hands of businesses to support them, to create good jobs for Albertans. We're happy to do this, and we're excited to work with business.

The Speaker: I must tell the House that I am being challenged to clarify when preambles exist and when they don't.

The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Public Service Senior Appointments

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans sent a message loud and clear in the last election. They want a government that ends special favours for friends and plays by the rules, but since the election we've seen the NDP fall into the same old bad habits. There's no better example than the appointment of a notorious B.C. NDP staffer and strategist to be in charge of policy co-ordination for the entire nonpartisan civil service. How can the premier justify using these same bad habits barely six months into her first term?

Mr. Mason: Well, Mr. Speaker, I want to say from the outset that I take exception to the torque that the opposition is applying to a very talented and skilled individual. "Notorious" is a very unfair characterization. I think the hon. member should withdraw it. Having said that, the person he's referring to is highly qualified, originally from Alberta, and served with the NDP caucus staff back when we formed the Official Opposition. So he's no stranger to Alberta, and he's highly qualified.

Mr. Nixon: Recently we saw another former NDP communications strategist and senior manager for the AUPE get appointed to head the supposedly nonpartisan Public Affairs Bureau . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I think I heard a preamble in that first supplemental. Could you reframe your question?

Mr. Nixon: Well, given that it's just another sad step in the history of the government's communications branch and given that it's become nothing more than a partisan political wing of the Premier's office, can the Premier explain to Albertans if there was even a

competitive job posting, or was this just another purely partisan patronage post?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, in fact, I think the first thing that is important for Albertans to know is that in this budget the Public Affairs Bureau has shrunk significantly in size. The second thing to know is that the person that is leading it now is someone that comes with many, many years of experience working with and around the public sector and somebody with a proven track record of communications: communication skills and corporate communications. Presumably, the idea is to hire people that are good at the job, and that's what we did.

Mr. Nixon: So no competitive posting. Thank you.

Given that I would have liked to believe that the NDP government could have made changes to make their hiring process more open and accountable and given that after 44 years of this previous government you'd think they would change it, why is it that all across this government they are just plopping NDP activists, many from out of province, into supposedly nonpartisan positions . . .

The Speaker: I'm sorry. Hon. member, could you reframe the question? What was your question?

Mr. Nixon: Why are you doing it?

Mr. Mason: Well, I did wonder if there was a question there, Mr. Speaker, so I want to thank you very much for prompting it. It's preambles you're not supposed to do, not questions.

Mr. Speaker, this government is choosing competent professionals to fill senior political positions and nonpolitical positions alike, and we're going to continue to do just that.

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

Drug Treatment for Retinal Conditions

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recently the Health minister announced the retina antivascular endothelial growth factor program for intraocular disease, mercifully shortened to RAPID, for the expanded use of bevacizumab in the treatment of a number of retinal conditions, including wet macular degeneration and diabetic retinopathy. While seeking lower cost drug alternatives is a noble objective, there's a problem. Bevacizumab is not approved for intraocular use and carries a Health Canada warning for a higher incidence of infection. To the Health minister: why are you promoting the off-label use of an unapproved drug on Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The drug that we have approved will have no copay. It will make costs much more affordable for the patients as well as for the government, and the member opposite knows that. It's been used for many years by the retinal specialists, who propose that we continue to use it and actually provide coverage for it rather than paying \$1,500 a dose, as we were previously. This one is available, and the government will pick up the cost for less than \$50, and that's good economic sense. In terms of the safety: it is absolutely safe; the retinal specialists say that it's safe. In terms of off-label: it's because the pharmaceutical companies need to apply to put it on the label.

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, given that I trust these specialists as well because I've received treatment for bilateral retinal detachments at

the very same office that the Health minister made her announcement and given that I don't trust this government to interfere with the doctor-patient relationship by mandating an 80-20 prescription ratio of unapproved bevacizumab to approved ranibizumab, Minister, why is the government telling retinal specialists what to prescribe?

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, we're not. Retinal specialists have the ability to prescribe either. They're required to present the options to their patients. The retinal specialists themselves told us that they believe this is the best ratio to ensure that they have a good sample and that they continue to move forward in maximizing savings and providing safe patient care.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, despite the minister's protestations, off-label drug use is a very big deal. Given that veterinary practitioners make every attempt to avoid off-label drug use in production animals to maintain food quality assurance and in pets to assure patient safety, Minister, if off-label drug use isn't good enough for the pets we keep or the animals we eat, why is it good enough for Albertans?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Of course, we are considering case-by-case situations. As the member opposite knows, the way Health Canada regulates what's on label and off label is that the actual drug manufacturers need to apply to have something put on the label. Is it in their best interest economically to push for a \$50 drug when they've got a \$1,500 drug on label? No. We're going to put people first. We're going to put this province first and increase access to safe, effective treatments, and this pilot project is a way to do that.

Tourism Industry

Mr. Carson: Mr. Speaker, from musical festivals and dude ranches to Segway rentals and fly-fishing, tourism has a key role in helping to diversify the economy. Many of these are small businesses looking for the tools and leadership that they need to grow and create good jobs here in Alberta. To the Minister of Culture and Tourism: what is the current impact of the industry on Alberta?

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, there's lots of opportunity for our tourism sector to expand during this economic time, especially with a lower Canadian dollar and more people spending time on holidays here in the province of Alberta. We expect to see a lot of growth, and we're willing to make investments to ensure that this service industry will be leading our diversification process here in the province of Alberta.

2:30

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that word about the great culture and tourist attractions in the province continues to spread throughout the country and around the world, to the same minister: what is the potential for growth in this industry?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, a lot of people across the regions, not just in the traditional tourism areas here in the province but in many corners of the province, are seeing lots of investment in the tourist industry. We've set up an entrepreneurial tourist program, which is training and helping new businesses to get started, and we're expecting robust growth in the next couple of years to exceed \$10 billion in business for the tourism industry.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that growing the economy is how we are supporting jobs that support families, again to the same minister: what is the minister doing to get our tourism industry to the targeted number?

Mr. Eggen: Well, certainly, we have concrete measures by which we will grow this industry to help with diversification. We know that at this juncture this is what Albertans want. Certainly, we are making investments, as I say, not just in the mountain parks but in many centres across the province, and we've seen a lot of success. In this last year I suspect, Mr. Speaker, that we've seen a record year for tourism in many corners of the province, and we will continue to do so for families and for regular people to get the job done right.

Youth Employment

Mr. Orr: Mr. Speaker, one of the demographics hardest hit in this tightening job market is Alberta's young people. Youth unemployment is now at 12 per cent. Typical sources of youth employment are retail, food, and accommodation. For youth this job market is being further tightened by the government's dramatic 50 per cent minimum-wage hike. To the minister: why does this government insist on destroying the job market for Alberta's youth by hiking the minimum wage to unsustainable levels?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. We believe as a government that there needs to be fair wages and that people making the lower wages should have a fair minimum wage, so we're moderately raising it this year, just a little under 10 per cent. We know that the majority of people, 64 per cent of adults, are making minimum wage, so they're making minimum wage to be able to put food on the tables of their families, to pay for their education.

Thank you.

Mr. Orr: Mr. Speaker, for the minister. Employers from Lacombe-Ponoka have begged me to ask this government to rethink the minimum wage. They have said that it will lead to fewer hours for their staff and fewer jobs and they will have to increase their prices for consumers. Will the NDP continue to make it harder for Lacombe-Ponoka employers and job seekers, or will they reconsider their decision on the increase to the minimum wage?

Ms Sigurdson: I know, like many Albertans, that I am willing to pay a little bit more to support people to get fair wages so that they can care for their families. We have also created the job creation incentive grant, which absolutely is helping employers hire people that they need to run their businesses. We're absolutely, very seriously listening to businesses, making sure that they can still be viable here in Alberta. We know we still have the lowest business taxes in the west.

Mr. Orr: Mr. Speaker, for the same minister: whereas the energy sector has traditionally provided thousands of high-paying jobs for youth, especially in rural Alberta, which is my concern, why does this government persist in hammering the energy industry with taxes and a royalty review, which will effectively hike unemployment, especially for youth, when thousands of energy jobs have already been lost?

Ms Sigurdson: Absolutely, the energy industry is at the heart of our economy. We care very much about the energy industry, and

we're prudently moving forward. We've made no changes. We're just reviewing things at this point. We made a commitment not to change anything until 2017. We've had a strong economic shock. We are working with industry, working with employers, working with business to make sure that business is supported in Alberta, and we're absolutely pleased to be working with them to make it better.

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

Fentanyl Use Prevention

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Fentanyl is a killer. This terrible drug killed 145 Albertans between January and June of this year, and the numbers keep rising. Alberta Health Services and the Calgary Police Service are both calling fentanyl a public health crisis, and CPS is attributing a rise in crime to the drug's presence on their streets. To the Justice minister: given that police, Alberta Health Services, and communities are all concerned about fentanyl and given that addressing any kind of an emergency needs to include three components – education, prevention, and intervention – why is your ministry doing nothing to address this crisis?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. We know how devastating addictions can be to families and to the individuals who are addicted as well, and that's one of the reasons why we've moved forward with the mental health review that's under way right now. Obviously, addressing the root causes is one of the best ways to make sure that we can move forward safely in support of one another.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you. We'll try this to the Justice minister again. Given that young Albertans take this drug for a recreational high, never knowing that each tablet could contain a deadly poison that will ultimately end their lives, and given that AHS's specialized triage units deal with the after-effects of fentanyl, overdoses, but do nothing to prevent deaths – you have not even spoken to the chiefs of police about this issue. How long are you going to wait to gather the chiefs together to determine an immediate action plan to create a proactive approach to addressing this crisis?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to the hon. member for the question. It is true that addiction issues are absolutely devastating. Certainly, police and my ministry have been working hard in conjunction with the Ministry of Health to come up with solutions to address this problem. You know, in terms of the question, "How long?", well, we're already working to address this problem. We're already working to support families so that we can avoid the underlying drivers of addiction.

Thank you.

Mr. Ellis: Okay. To the same minister, then: given that Albertans, particularly innocent young people, are playing Russian roulette with their lives every time they pop a pill and given that Albertans are looking for leadership from your government to put a halt to the tragic and unnecessary fatalities occurring in every corner of this province, why are you not offering any additional resources to police, who are trying to combat drug dealers distributing fentanyl?

How many more Albertans need to die before you show true leadership in this crisis?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to the hon. member for the question. Well, I think that the hon. member is being very unfair to the police services in this province. I think that they're working very hard to address this problem. In addition, as the hon. member is aware since he has seen the budget, in fact, the municipal police grants were increased in accordance with population. I have been in contact with the chiefs of police, and they are quite happy with that situation.

Thank you.

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

Syrian Refugees

Mr. Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, I myself came to Canada from Chile with my family, fleeing violence. Along with many Albertans I've been watching with a heavy heart the tragic affairs occurring in Syria and surrounding countries. This question is directed to the Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour. Can the minister please update the House on what supports our Alberta government is providing for these refugees fleeing their war-torn countries?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. Certainly, we're very saddened as a government to see the human tragedy that's unfolding before us. We stepped up quickly and contributed \$75,000 to support the Red Cross in their efforts to support them, and that was quickly matched, within days, by Albertans who also were concerned. We've put in an additional \$75,000, so it was \$150,000 plus the \$75,000 Albertans matched. In addition to that, we have contributed a hundred thousand dollars to settlement agencies so that when the refugees come to Canada, we will have supports for them available.

Thank you.

2:40

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: with the possibility that the federal government will bring thousands more refugees to Canada, will Alberta's settlement services have the resources necessary to serve these newcomers?

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, we do have a new government federally, and we will work with our federal counterparts to be able to support those who do come to Alberta. We had said at the outset that we wanted right away to step forward, but we can revise and work with our federal counterparts to make sure that the refugees who come to Alberta will be supported.

Mr. Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: is our government planning on taking any additional action to support refugees' resettlement to Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Absolutely, we're going to be working with the federal government, and we already are developing a plan on how we can help these vulnerable people. I

know Albertans like myself and our government are very concerned about this human tragedy that's unfolding, so we're happy to work with the new federal government to develop a plan here for Alberta.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Provincial Fiscal Policies

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The people of Drayton Valley-Devon are hurting. They're frustrated about the NDP's risky economic policies, higher taxes, and record debt.

About two months ago a constituent congratulated me on my election victory, and as we began to talk, I asked her how her family was doing. Her response was so sad. Her husband was without work, and she said: I never thought that my little income from babysitting out of my house would be my family's main source of income. It nearly broke my heart, and I walked away frustrated knowing that this would not be the last time I would hear a similar tale from one of my constituents.

Just the other day another constituent made an appointment to see me in my office. He explained to me that his business was doing about 20 per cent of the business it had done the year before. He had laid off all of his workers except his two sons. His frustration was written all over his face.

These are the people Wildrose is fighting for. They are clearly frustrated when they listen to the Minister of Finance deliver a budget that will create a \$50 billion debt, increase taxes, and make every Albertan poorer. These constituents are hard-working, creative, entrepreneurial individuals. They have built businesses in communities and created jobs.

Municipal officials in my constituency are also working hard under the dire economic circumstances. The town of Devon is undergoing a visioning process. Drayton Valley, through the Clean Energy Technology Centre, is planning for job training and creation to meet future needs.

My constituents deserve a provincial government that will help them where it can and will not pass the economic burdens of today onto their children. As a Wildrose MLA I get this. Maybe it's time for the NDP to start listening, talk to Albertans, and then get to work. Just a suggestion.

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

Violence against Sikhs in India

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak about an event which still haunts all Indians who love peace, justice, and the rule of law as well as Sikhs around the globe. On October 31, 1984, waves of anti-Sikh genocidal violence lasted for days throughout India. Official reports claimed 3,000 Sikhs were murdered while unofficial reports cite the number as being as high as 8,000.

I want to speak of the story of 45-year-old Gurdip Kaur. Gurdip Kaur, a 45-year-old mother, witnessed her three sons and husband being dragged out of their home, beaten, and then set ablaze. However, Gurdip Kaur's agony did not end there, Mr. Speaker, and I quote: they tore my clothes and stripped me naked in front of my son. My son cried: elder brothers, do not do this; she is your mother just as she is my mother. She continues: but they raped me right there in front of my son in my own house; they were young boys, maybe eight of them. After her rape they took her youngest child,

and I quote: they took him to the street corner, hit him with lathis, sprinkled kerosene over him, and burned him alive.

Thirty-one years later, Mr. Speaker, there has been no justice. For those that were paid 500 rupees to kill a Sikh: no one has been brought to justice. It wasn't the first time that there was a price on a Sikh's head, and if you speak to our brothers and sisters in Afghanistan, it won't be the last.

It was Rajiv Gandhi, Mr. Speaker, who said that when a mighty tree falls, it is only natural that the earth around it does shake a little. Well, Mr. Gandhi, thousands of mighty trees have fallen, and 31 years later the entire world shakes. The difference is that we shake for justice; you shook for vengeance.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Springbank Reservoir Flood Mitigation Plan

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In June of this year I used my first opportunity for a member's statement in this Assembly to address the urgent need for a flood mitigation strategy for southern Alberta. I'm proud now to rise again to express my gratitude that this government has taken swift, decisive action on this important issue. The plan recently announced by the Minister of Environment and Parks will protect communities sooner and with more certainty than any other course of action. By moving forward in this way, our government has taken concrete steps towards protecting Bragg Creek, Redwood Meadows, and the city of Calgary.

I'm proud, Mr. Speaker, that this decision was taken after the government carefully examined the evidence provided by the expert firm Deltars. That evidence clearly points to the Springbank option. It is the quickest and most cost-effective option and includes \$33 million for local mitigation in Bragg Creek. Springbank will have less impact on the environment and is less susceptible to catastrophic failure during construction. The minister's plan will fully fund local mitigation projects identified for Bragg Creek by Rocky View county.

Mr. Speaker, with this funding announcement this beautiful, vibrant community at the doorstep of Kananaskis Country has a much brighter future in store. Bragg Creek already has an outstanding four-season trail network, restaurants, retail stores, and festivals throughout the year. Area residents are working with the county on a revitalization plan that will make Bragg Creek an even better place to visit and to live. I urge you all to pay us a visit sometime soon.

Thank you very much.

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

Down Syndrome

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Labels. They have the power to segregate, to restrict, and to damage. Thankfully, our society has begun to let go of the many hurtful labels and expressions that divide and exclude. People with Down syndrome have a long, dark history of segregation due to the labels assigned them. Down syndrome is not a disorder, not a defect or a medical condition. Contrary to popular belief, not all people who have this syndrome share the same characteristics. They're as unique and as different as you and I.

I'm proud to be part of a government that understands that inclusion is not simply a trendy policy word, but it's an action that requires vigilance and determination. I'm proud to be part of a government that isn't simply waiting on the powerful but is doing the work that we were sent here to do, which is working towards including all Albertans.

To the national and local Down syndrome associations: thank you for your dedication, your advocacy, and your awareness. When Canadians with disabilities such as Down syndrome are supported to be fully contributing participants in their communities, we all win.

Join with the Down syndrome associations. Work with your schools, your communities, your businesses to open up Alberta so that all of us can share our talents and make this province the best that it can be.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

2:50

Hope Christian School

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my great pleasure to rise today to speak about an independent school in my riding. Hope Christian School is located in the village of Champion, Alberta, and offers a variety of different options for learning. Education is offered through online courses, through a home-schooling program, and through their classroom program. While the school is owned and operated by the Evangelical Free church of Champion, it is a nondenominational school in operation, and they accept students from all backgrounds. They are a grade 1 through grade 12 school that is committed to ensuring that their students' academic and spiritual needs are met. Their belief is that they offer a value-based education, which, in turn, tends to empower families. They achieve this by using the accelerated Christian education program and teacher-developed materials that are directly aligned with Alberta Education outcomes as well as facilitated Alberta distance learning courses.

The ACE materials are also supplemented with locally developed materials that are necessary to meet the Alberta Education curriculum requirements. Their home education program supports a large population of home-educated students and their parents. With the home education program the clients may use the resources of their choosing but are required to fulfill the outcomes laid out by the Alberta Education home education regulations.

This program is facilitated by Alberta-certified teachers. Their students participate in regular field trips, and some of the students had an opportunity to be involved in a trip to Costa Rica, where they did volunteer work within a community there. They also compete in sports activities with other schools in the area and belong to the Alberta Schools' Athletics Association.

Mr. Speaker, this school works hard at giving their students a well-rounded education, well supported by parents and teachers alike as many schools across this great province do.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table the required number of copies of the Alberta Securities Commission 2015 annual report. As you know, the commission has a mandate to protect and educate investors, foster a fair and efficient capital market in Alberta, and contribute to the success of Canada's securities regulatory system. As the report entitled *Transparent. Unbiased. Accessible.* explains, the commission works to ensure strong capital markets through three important streams of activity: regulation; investigation, which includes enforcement; and education. In tabling this report, I wish to thank the commission for the important work that it does on behalf of government.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I have three tablings related to last week's questions to the Premier on the tax-deductible contribution to small business. The first article, from *Metro* news, is entitled Alberta Tax Credit for Adding New Employees Simply Not Needed. That's according to the Edmonton Economic Development Corporation.

The second one, from the *Calgary Herald*: Small Business Confidence in Alberta Nearing Historic Low.

The third is from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, indicating that the current level of business optimism is the lowest seen since 2008.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

Privilege

Obstructing a Member in Performance of Duty

The Speaker: I would like to address the issue purporting to be a question of privilege raised by the Official Opposition House Leader concerning obstructing a member in performance of his or her duty.

Hon. members, I would like to issue a ruling concerning the purported question of privilege raised by the Official Opposition House Leader last Wednesday, October 28, 2015, the discussion of which can be found on pages 351 to 355 of the *Hansard* of that day. In a nutshell, the essence of the member's purported question of privilege was that the news release issued by the Minister of Finance's department prior to the delivery of the budget prejudiced a decision by the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services by stating that the ministers and members would take a pay freeze not only until 2017 but until the end of this Legislature.

I would point out to the House that this is the first question of privilege that I have had to address in this Legislature, and it may well be the first one that most members will have witnessed as well. While I do not wish to take more time than is necessary in delivering this ruling, I think it is important to outline some essential elements of privilege for the benefit of new members. I personally did considerable research on this matter and on all the precedents of this Assembly.

Members should be advised that there are some formalities to be followed in raising a purported question of privilege. Under Standing Order 15(2) notice of a question of privilege must be provided to the Speaker's office at least two hours before the opening of the sitting. In this case notice was received in my office at 11:18 a.m. on Wednesday, October 28, so the precondition has been met.

To expand upon the allegations in this case, the Minister of Finance's department issued, according to the Official Opposition House Leader at page 353 of *Hansard* for October 28, 2015, a news release stating as follows:

Budget 2015 takes a careful and responsible approach to managing government finances, steadily phasing out the deficit without reckless cuts to the frontline services Albertans rely on.

This includes:

- A salary freeze for Cabinet ministers, MLAs and political staff for the entire term of this Legislature.

The member further states that this news release was presented while the Minister of Finance was delivering his budget speech in this Assembly on Tuesday, October 27. As the Government House Leader pointed out in speaking to this issue, what was in the news release differed from what the Minister of Finance actually said in this Assembly. At page 333 of *Alberta Hansard* for October 27 the Minister of Finance said:

Our government will propose that members of this House agree to freeze the salaries of the members of cabinet, MLAs, and political staff positions for the entire term of this Legislature; in other words, until after the next election, in four years.

I draw members' attention to the use of the word "propose" in this statement rather than "implement" or "put into place" or some other phrase that would imply that the government was taking action without respecting the Assembly's jurisdiction.

The question arises as to what law or rule of this Assembly or parliament in general this action allegedly violates. First, while this matter is raised as a question of privilege, it may actually be known as a contempt of the Assembly. The distinction is discussed in the following quotation from the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, page 82, where it is said:

It is important to distinguish between a "breach of privilege" and "contempt of Parliament". Any disregard of or attack on the rights, powers and immunities of the House and its Members, either by an outside person or body, or by a Member of the House, is referred to as a "breach of privilege" and is punishable by the House. There are, however, other affronts against the dignity and authority of Parliament which may not fall within one of the specifically defined privileges. Thus, the House also claims the right to punish, as a contempt, any action which, though not a breach of a specific privilege, tends to obstruct or impede the House in the performance of its functions; obstructs or impedes any Member or officer of the House in the discharge of their duties; or is an offence against the authority or dignity of the House, such as disobedience of its legitimate commands or libels upon itself, its Members, or its officers.

3:00

This was the definition of contempt used by Speaker Zwodzesky in his October 31, 2013, ruling, which can be found at pages 2655 to 2657 of *Alberta Hansard* for that day.

On a somewhat related matter, about which I will say more later, the issue of contempt was relevant to the question of privilege raised in late 2013. The December 2, 2013, ruling by Speaker Zwodzesky, where he found a prima facie question of privilege, was referred to several times during discussion of this matter. In the 2013 case the government of the day had published brochures that went to every home in Alberta which, amongst other things, stated that MLAs' salaries were going to be frozen until 2017 when, in fact, the motion to do so in the appropriate committee was not moved until the brochures had been distributed. I would invite members to review Speaker Zwodzesky's comments in finding a prima facie question of privilege at pages 3231 to 3234 of *Alberta Hansard* for December 2, 2013.

In the case before the Assembly today there was a news release issued at the same time that the minister was presenting his Budget Address in this Assembly. The address gives appropriate respect and deference to the decision-making bodies while the news release arguably does not. In this case there is ambiguity between the minister's statement in the Assembly and the news release. When they are occurring at the same time, can the news release be said to prejudice the actions of a committee of the Assembly when the Budget Address does not? In my view, this possible misstatement in a news release does not give rise to a prima facie question of privilege.

Since being elected Speaker in June this year, I have come to appreciate how context is so very important in understanding what occurs in this Assembly. It is clear from the research I have conducted that the government of the day had been warned about not showing adequate respect for the Assembly in an October 31, 2013, ruling by Speaker Zwodzesky about the release of the contents of the bill involving the then Minister of Transportation. A prima

facie question of privilege was not found, but the Speaker warned the government about advertising bills as if they had passed and about early release of bills on notice. There seems to be a wide gulf of difference between those events and the one under review today. The government of the day appears not to have heeded the warnings and advertised province-wide about wage freezes that were not within the government's jurisdiction and were not before the appropriate committee. I would like to thank the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster for making this point and for adding context to the discussion.

One other point that I reflected upon is that the nonincrease in pay for members and ministers is already in place and will be so until March 31, 2017. What the government is proposing would extend the time period, but technically it has nothing to do with the estimates of this year's fiscal budget or for the next fiscal year. Could this be a relevant question of privilege when the decisions would not take place for 18 months from now? While this is not a prima facie question of privilege, I would caution the government not to prejudge the actions of this Assembly or its committees into the future. It's my hope that this would not arise again, and I would stress to members that this Speaker, on behalf of this Assembly, does not take these matters lightly.

This matter is now concluded for all purposes. In conclusion, I want to remind members that true questions of privilege should arise infrequently. As Joseph Maingot says in his book *Parliamentary Privilege in Canada*, second edition, page 217, "A genuine question of privilege is therefore a serious matter not to be reckoned with lightly and accordingly ought to be rare, and thus rarely raised in the House of Commons."

Orders of the Day

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 202 Alberta Local Food Act

[Debate adjourned October 26: Mr. Barnes speaking]

Mr. Barnes: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was done voicing my opposition to Bill 202.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there any other members who would like to speak to this motion? Calgary-Bow.

Ms Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 202, and I thank the Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park for bringing forward this bill to the House. There is no doubt that Albertan farmers are producing world-class crops and that the supply is there for Albertans. I don't think any member of this House will disagree that Albertan farmers want to get their produce, crops, and livestock to local markets. It has already been mentioned that 95 per cent of Albertans want to be able to buy and eat locally grown food, and in Alberta the resources are here to support that.

One great example of this is community gardens, a way for a community to come together to grow and harvest local food. Food advocates say that locally grown food decreases a community's reliance on fossil fuels. Community gardens are effective to help relieve some of the effects of climate change and the issue of making fresh produce increasingly unaffordable. Community gardens also encourage an urban community's food security,

allowing citizens to grow their own food or for those to donate what they have grown.

In the riding of Calgary-Bow there are constituents who grow their own produce on an 11-acre parcel of land just west of Canada Olympic Park. Their mission is that all Calgarians should have access to local fresh food. A team of volunteers comes together to grow the produce for the Calgary Inter-faith Food Bank and also develops programs that inspire people to make healthy food choices. My constituency has many community gardens available to the residents. In Calgary-Bow there are four beautiful community gardens that are offered to people of all ages, including two in Bowness, one in West Springs, and one in Valley Ridge. Community gardens are vital as they create community spirit and provide a connection to the environment, and they are also educational.

Albertans recognize that farmers here in Alberta play a key role in our economy and that investing locally creates stronger communities. The reality of the situation, however, is that local grocery stores, the most successful way for Albertans to buy their groceries, lack in locally harvested and produced Albertan food. Farmers' markets are a fantastic way to get the product from farm to table, but we need to find creative and alternative ways to promote and facilitate eating local to a wider audience.

The reason I support this piece of legislation is because I believe it is up to the government to work in partnership with farmers to close that gap and find solutions, and to that point we need to lead by example. We should be investing in Albertans when choosing where our public-sector organizations procure food. That, to me, sounds like common sense.

While I sat here listening to the thoughts and concerns of members on both sides of the House, it seems as though this bill has been painted as black and white. The bill, as I read it, is another tool for farmers to use to promote their products and their way of life. The number of nonindustrial farmers in this province has been declining steadily, and I certainly see that this bill will help empower those farmers to be more engaged in the current system. This bill seeks to show those in the agricultural industry here in Alberta that we support them and we want to invest in them. I urge all of my colleagues to vote in favour of Bill 202.

Thank you.

3:10

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise on Bill 202, the Alberta Local Food Act. The bill proposes to establish an advisory committee on food and agriculture to review the current state of local food systems, develop a local food and agriculture strategy, improve and maximize economic return and food security, encourage the purchase of local foods by public-sector organizations, and establish a local food awareness week. It mirrors certain aspects and goals of the Ontario Liberals' food act, 2013, the first legislation of its kind in Canada.

I stand in strong support of this initiative. I think it's long overdue that we encourage the community coming together around something fundamental like food, food production, and food security. There's no question that food and food security are going to be key issues in the coming decades, especially if water is a problem in our province, especially if agricultural land and food production become an increasing challenge, which is a very real possibility with climate warming and water shortages, especially in southern Alberta.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Anything we can do to bring communities together, to learn from each other, to support each other, and to understand the complexities and the opportunities of food and community security is good. We are a divided culture, many divisions for many reasons, including technology that separates us and that limits our capacity to work together as communities to solve local problems. This is an important initiative to do something very fundamental, which is to bring people together to talk about common values.

The second thing, of course, is jobs. Who doesn't want to stimulate jobs? There are local people within the bounds of the municipality or even outside with rental land and potentially community-shared agriculture, a tremendous opportunity to stimulate jobs, a new understanding and new inspiration for young people and others in the community to branch out. Perhaps it could be a secondary job for them, an employment opportunity. It will develop new skills. It will develop a new appreciation for where our food comes from and an understanding of nature and the importance of how we care for our environment.

It, of course, will contribute to food security. If people know how and develop more of their own capacity to grow food, especially if it's organic and less dependent on pesticides and fertilizers and presumably more committed to local provision, so less transportation and less environmental impact, then this is a win-win-win situation for the kind of values that most of us, I think, in Alberta want to see happen.

So I applaud this private member's bill and will support it completely from the Alberta Liberal caucus side. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wish to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-East.

Ms Luff: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I also rise today to voice my support for this bill. I do represent an urban riding; however, I do have some close connections with the farming industry. My in-laws run a large dairy farm in Saskatchewan, just northeast of Regina, and I've spent plenty of time in my life milking cows and wrestling bull calves and shovelling all manner of things.

An Hon. Member: Did you say "wrestling"?

Ms Luff: Wrestling. Yeah, that's correct. Sometimes they don't do what you want them to. Bull calves are stubborn. My family is a group of folks who make food. They also grow canola, and they grow wheat. I do want to just take this opportunity to applaud anyone who chooses to become a farmer, because they are responsible for the food that we eat. Quite frankly, it's hard work, the rewards aren't huge, and it's such, such important work, so I really do just want to applaud the people who choose to be farmers in Alberta.

I see this bill as having two main benefits. In the way that I read this bill, sort of the first goal of it is really just data collection. No good policy comes without good data. This bill really seeks to identify amounts, actual amounts of local food production, local food processing, and local food purchased both by individuals and by public entities. I know many of us in this House are fans of good data. I like my charts and graphs, much like anybody else. Really, seeking to collect good data on local food production I think is really, really valuable. Knowing more is always a good thing.

[The Speaker in the chair]

Then the second point that I think is really key with this bill is that it seeks to eliminate barriers to purchasing local food, to increase ease of access. I'm very lucky. I have the privilege that I

can shop locally at one of Calgary's three year-round farmers' markets: the Kingsland market, the Calgary farmers' market, and Crossroads farmers' market. I am a big fan of my Spragg farm pork and my Sylvan "Star" cheese and my Made by Marcus ice cream in all of its forms: bars, sandwiches, and just ice cream in the tub. It's delicious.

I have that privilege. I have that privilege to go to the farmers' market and to talk to the producers and to learn where my food comes from. You know, the lady that I buy my eggs from notices when my children have gotten bigger. I have that privilege. Most Albertans, actually, unfortunately, despite their desire to buy local food, don't necessarily have the privilege to get out and buy it because the local food is concentrated in places like farmers' markets. Our three farmers' markets in Calgary, while wonderful, are not particularly easily accessible by transit and are only open certain days a week, so that limits the access by people who want to be able to access local food.

The way that I see it is that access to local food shouldn't be a matter of privilege in Alberta. For anyone who wants to be able to access local food, those 95 per cent of people – the statistic is that 95 per cent of people either already do or would like to purchase local food – I think you'll find that if you increase the options, more and more people will make those choices. Currently, unfortunately, it's not available to all people. I think that local food and the privilege of that fresh food, that we all love, should be available to everybody.

This bill, I think, could really help working Albertans. Shift workers who are short on time and don't have time to get to the farmers' market could buy more local food in their supermarkets. I think this could really help postsecondary students. I have a friend who has been working for years to make it more accessible to postsecondary students to be able to access local food both because of cost and, again, because often they have to go off campus, have to take transit to get there. To make that local food available to them on their postsecondary campuses would, again, ease that access for more people.

I can envision seniors having access to local food at assisted living facilities. I know that my grandmother, for one, would have very much appreciated some fresh, local salads in her assisted living facility as food was always her main complaint. She was such a fantastic cook herself, so when someone else had to cook it, it didn't always live up to snuff. But I think that having local food at those facilities could really have facilitated that a lot. Because local food is currently limited to people who have time, money, and transportation to access it, it's just not available to everybody. So the second point there is that I really see this as being a way to increase access for people who don't have the access to it.

Like the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, I also see this as a win-win-win situation. We end up with better data, so we know more about our local food, which is hugely important. We are going to have better access for people who don't necessarily have the access now and would like it, and at the same time we're providing better markets for farmers, those folks who are working so hard every day to provide products for us to enjoy at our tables and who really do provide the basics of life for us. It really is a win-win-win situation, and I believe this is something that everyone in this House should support.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for . . .

3:20

Mr. S. Anderson: Leduc-Beaumont. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You'll get it. You'll get it. No problem.

Thank you for allowing me to rise and speak today about the Alberta Local Food Act, brought forward by the Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park. Local, sustainable food systems are a hot topic these days all around the world, and Alberta is certainly no stranger to them. As a father with a young family I want to ensure that I'm able to put the best quality food possible on our table. I know that by supporting local food, I'm supporting a great product. That being said, mostly I make Kraft Dinner for my kids because I'm a terrible cook, but that's beside the point.

In my constituency of Leduc-Beaumont we're lucky not only to have great farmers' markets, but we're also home to numerous farms that provide the Edmonton area local, sustainable, delicious products. One such farm is Green Eggs and Ham, whose products you've likely seen in local farmers' markets and tasted in your favourite local restaurants. This bill will help local producers like Green Eggs and Ham expand their market and get their products into the hands and mouths of more Albertans. From farm markets to local grocers to farmers in general, many producers are seeking direct access to markets so consumers can enjoy homegrown products.

There is a huge market opportunity for connecting local food producers with local consumers in Alberta, and this bill will help facilitate access to that market. We all choose homegrown local products for a variety of reasons, be it freshness, quality, taste, or to support our neighbours. But it's also important to remember that by choosing to support our local producers, we're also working to create local food security and improving maximized return on local food infrastructure. This will help attract new generations to farming, hopefully, and will also help local farmers grow, produce, process, and distribute to more buyers than ever before.

As local producers grow the local market, channels continue to grow in value and are a significant source of farm receipts. There are many intricacies involved on this subject, and I am all for having a thorough discussion about local food and its growth in our markets, and I'm glad we've had this opportunity to do that so far in this House. I'm certain this bill will not only help the local producers in my constituency, but it will help all Albertans get better access to local food and the benefits that local food brings to their families.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage all members of this House to vote in support of this bill, and I thank the Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park for bringing this important bill to the floor for us. Thank you.

The Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's a pleasure to have the opportunity to rise and speak in support of Bill 202, the Alberta Local Food Act, which was brought forward by the Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park and that I'm happy to support. This act would allow our local producers to seek direct access to markets and consumers like my constituents in Edmonton-Decore to enjoy more of those homegrown products.

I've been asked countless numbers of times about when consumers will have the choices that they're looking for when it comes to accessing more local producers. Now, some say that they already have that access, and in part that is true, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, the residents of Edmonton-Decore currently need to travel outside of the constituency to purchase these types of products from farmers' markets.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but the 115 minutes of debate have elapsed, and under Standing Order 8(7)(a)(i), which provides up to five minutes for the sponsor of a private

member's public bill to close debate, I would invite the Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park to in fact close debate on Bill 202.

Cortes-Vargas: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today to close debate on second reading of the Alberta Local Food Act. My thanks to the members of my constituency of Strathcona-Sherwood Park, who I am privileged to represent in this Assembly, and thanks to my colleagues for the interesting debate that has unfolded here. It's been an honour to bring forward conversations about our stable, sustainable local food system in Alberta. The local food movement has seen incredible growth in the past decade, and the agrifood sector is supporting our farmers, connecting rural and urban communities, and is part of our diversified economy. It's incumbent upon us as consumers to ask ourselves where our food comes from. On this Albertans have led the way; 25 per cent of households choose restaurants because of the Alberta-based ingredients.

In the last 12 months 95 per cent of Alberta households have purchased food grown in Alberta. The distinguishing traits of our local food are the freshness, the quality, the taste, the safety, and the support that it provides for Albertan families. As legislators we need to go further and ask ourselves how the public sector is taking positive steps in their operations, just like Albertans.

As with many of my colleagues, this debate has made me reflect on my own personal experiences with local foods. This past Thanksgiving my family was able to share a turkey dinner, like many other Albertans. I'm proud to say that this turkey was locally grown. Through the implementation of direct marketing on the farmer's end I was able to connect to a product she was delivering. Mr. Speaker, the Alberta-grown turkey we had: it was outstanding. I want to see more locally grown food on our tables, whether those tables are in our homes or in schools.

I'm not done speaking about this turkey yet, Mr. Speaker. See, we noticed that unlike many of the other turkeys we had cooked in previous years, this turkey did not cover the bottom of the pan with oil. I was able to text the farmer and ask her how she raised a turkey that made this difference. Now, this points to a key point about local food. By being connected to the farmer, I was able to develop a greater understanding about where my food comes from and how it was prepared. Engaging with our food providers shapes the way we think about Alberta food. It brings awareness to the level of detail and work that it took for this farmer to raise this turkey differently than the other producers, which is what the Alberta Local Food Act speaks to, developing pathways to raise consumer awareness of our local food market. There is a huge opportunity for market expansion by raising consumers' familiarity with the production chain.

Mr. Speaker, the Strathcona-Sherwood Park constituency is home to farmers and consumers that make conscious decisions when it comes to their food. Farmers are innovative and hard-working when it comes to connecting to markets. They use social media platforms, farmers' markets, and many open up their farms to families. The Berry Farm is a good example. It's a small family farm in the constituency that produces a variety of berries. They are one of the farms open to U-pick. These farmers open up their gates on the weekends for families to experience the fun of being part of the food process. Jackie, one of the owners, translates her expertise into children's books that uniquely relate to Alberta's farms. This puts regional identity in a trusting face and engages with our younger generation.

Innovation can be found in many of the fields in my constituency, Mr. Speaker. I was recently able to tour a farming technology centre that connected vertical farming with aquaculture. By joining fish and farming, they have been able to create sustainable food systems that would create produce year-round. Yet the farmers from my constituency, like several others, face huge challenges in connecting

with the wider market. We need to highlight and support the work that farmers do as they provide products that are vital to our everyday lives, which is why the Alberta Local Food Act would also celebrate the agrifood sector by proclaiming a local food week.

To close, Mr. Speaker, I would also like to acknowledge and thank the members opposite for the issues and concerns they have raised. I am currently exploring amendments to the act to guarantee its viability and to live up to its intended purpose, to ensure that Albertan families are able to access local, healthy food, that the government institutions are doing their part to support Alberta's local food whenever they can, and that Alberta producers are able to grow their market access.

I implore all the members of this Assembly to support this bill, and I'm happy to receive any of the feedback that you have and to continue these conversations. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:30 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, S.	Ganley	Nielsen
Babcock	Gray	Payne
Bhullar	Hinkley	Phillips
Bilous	Hoffman	Piquette
Carson	Horne	Renaud
Ceci	Jabbour	Rodney
Clark	Kazim	Rosendahl
Connolly	Kleinstauber	Sabir
Coolahan	Littlewood	Schmidt
Cortes-Vargas	Loyola	Schreiner
Dach	Luff	Shepherd
Dang	Malkinson	Sucha
Drever	McCuaig-Boyd	Swann
Eggen	McKitrick	Sweet
Ellis	McLean	Turner
Feehan	McPherson	Westhead
Fitzpatrick	Miller	

Against the motion:

Aheer	Loewen	Schneider
Barnes	MacIntyre	Smith
Cooper	Nixon	Strankman
Cyr	Orr	Taylor
Hunter	Pitt	Yao

Totals: For – 50 Against – 15

[Motion carried; Bill 202 read a second time]

Bill 203

Election (Restrictions on Government Advertising) Amendment Act, 2015

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to the tabled Bill 203, the Election (Restrictions on Government Advertising) Amendment Act, 2015. For me and for many of my colleagues, particularly on this side of the aisle, democracy is seen

as the bedrock foundation of our society. It is what this nation and our province were founded on.

Allow me for a brief moment to take this House back in time to 1905. It was during that year that Alberta, the province that we know and have come to love today, came into existence as a province within the united Confederation of Canada. Without delving into the details of provincehood for fear of boring my colleagues in this House, it is important to revisit the spirit that motivated Albertans to be in the act of pursuing provincehood. Mr. Speaker, these individuals wanted one thing, democratic representation. With a booming population in centres of the then North-West Territories, these pioneer Albertans believed in having the right to greater representation via population. They wanted democracy to prevail in their livelihood, one free from a large power that would influence decisions for the people. Like these pioneer Albertans who fought for freedom and democracy, I stand here today in this House to fight for the preservation of democracy to ensure that we have an open, responsible, and accountable democratic government.

Mr. Speaker, it is clear that no government should have the power to influence the outcome of an election. This type of corrupt practice has been used in nations around the world and has been a practice frowned upon by the international community, including Canada. Yet in our very own country and in our very own province the government has in the past, unfortunately, misused their office and the influence that comes along with it. In the past we have seen the government making announcements in grandiose press conferences while a by-election is happening. The worst of these pertain to funding during the middle of an election, funding for new infrastructure projects, funding for cities and towns. You name it, they fund it.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, government announcements are by their very nature a tool that can be used only by those currently in office. This creates an imbalance during what should be a fair fight. You see, unlike the parties and the candidates running against the party in power, the governing party has the power of the purse. They can choose when, where, and how much money a particular project or place can receive. With a power like this the public purse has the potential to become a bribe machine during elections or by-elections and can be especially abused by the governing party when they are in fear of losing power.

With this current framework, during the middle of an election writ period the government of the day has the power to allocate public funds to a politically sensitive object or make some other policy announcement to the riding or ridings where by-elections may be happening. This not only makes all politicians look bad but puts public servants, who help to organize these press conferences, in a very uncomfortable spot, where their bosses are telling them to use government resources for electoral gain.

Mr. Speaker, when I had the idea of bringing forward this private member's bill, I thought of two situations in my constituency. The first one was tow truck operators. Tow truck operators have not the safety benefits of highway traffic workers or officers of the law, who have special markings on their vehicles. Tow truck operators have the great danger and fear of being struck and injured in the performance of their duty of retrieving vehicles on the side of the road. That type of legislation can be changed through regulation.

Also, Mr. Speaker, I had the unfortunate circumstance to sit across the table in one of my constituency offices from the mother of a son who was killed on the evening prior to his graduation driving into the back of improperly lighted farm machinery. It was extremely moving for me that the mother of this child did not want to seek any vengeance or revenge upon the operator of that farm machinery. She simply wanted to get the regulation changed.

Mr. Speaker, when I was thinking of this legislation coming forward in this Chamber, I thought of something that we can all do. We can all change what we do and manage this Chamber in a better fashion.

With that, Mr. Speaker, Bill 203 attempts to change the way of running government, not to change the way in which government can conduct its normal business but to prohibit the malpractice of siphoning money to areas of political interest; in other words, attempting to buy votes. It prohibits the government from publishing announcements during a writ period. The impetus for this bill was the inappropriate use of government resources that we saw during the by-elections last fall.

The idea of prohibiting the publishing of government announcements during a writ period is not a new one. In fact, our prairie neighbours to the east, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, have already adopted similar legislation and have since passed it into law because they recognize how tempting it is to misuse government powers for electoral gain. Not only has it been viewed as an effective measure in these provinces, but it has been proven to provide a greater sense of democracy by providing an equal playing field for all political parties during an election, including the party in power. The governing party is not allowed to use its power to persuade voters to vote for them based on cynically timed announcements.

Not only is Bill 203 an already existing law in neighbouring jurisdictions; it is also a bill that the current governing party happens to agree with. Manitoba Premier Gary Doer passed a bill almost identical to this one almost a decade ago in a successful attempt to restore democratic practice during election periods in his province. In both his legislation, which we based this idea on, and in Saskatchewan there are exemptions for all kinds of emergencies and employment, health, and safety issues so that the government is by no means at a standstill. Government can still act fully; it just cannot publicize present and future decisions while a writ is dropped.

3:50

Mr. Speaker, it is about respect for voters. In the Wildrose we like to champion ideas that are in the best interests of our constituents regardless of what political party they may come from. Furthermore, the current Premier of this province, who sits daily in this House, once publicly voiced her support for a bill like this. In a press release dated December 9, 2014, the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona called for “a series of changes that would effectively protect Albertans from several forms of inappropriate behavior demonstrated by the PCs over the last several years.” This series of changes included a clause that called for “fixing the Elections Act to prohibit MLAs from using government resources during elections or by-elections.” The idea was good then, and I believe it is a good idea now.

We all know that there are a lot of transparency and accountability issues that need to be addressed. There is even a special select committee whose mandate is to start on this monumental task, but as the chair already admitted, they won't be able to get to everything over the next year. So I'd like to take this item off their plate and get this straightened out before there are any by-elections, Mr. Speaker. Let's show the people that this House can work together to get things done.

Bill 203 does exactly what the opposition parties were calling for last fall and is what both Wildrose and the NDP pledged to do in our campaign platforms. Mr. Speaker, I believe that's the beauty of this bill. It is a bill that attempts to be as bipartisan as possible, and it attempts to remove politics and partisanship from legislation in the hope that this piece of legislation can successfully be passed in the interests of all Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take a moment to remind this House why this bill matters and why it is in the interests of their MLAs and, most importantly, Albertans to support this bill. It is Remembrance Day, a day in our national history that marks the ultimate sacrifice that tens of thousands of Canadians have made or are currently making to keep our true north strong and free. These brave men and women have fought or are currently fighting day in and day out to defend our rights and freedoms, that we take for granted. One of these freedoms includes the ultimate freedom, democracy, the right to choose your government without influence, interference, or manipulation from government. It is this pure democracy that Albertans have come to expect from their government. Sadly, that is not the case.

The Speaker: I recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Acadia.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank the member opposite for bringing this issue to the forefront. I agree with the principle behind what the member has brought forward in this bill, and I think that legislation to this effect is absolutely needed. In Alberta in years past we've seen the impact of the government of the day announcing infrastructure spending during elections, and we know that the previous government did play a little fast and loose with their ability to advertise. That's why we're committed to doing something on this. During the recent by-election in Calgary-Foothills our government held off on all funding announcements until after the ballots were counted.

Democratic reform is important. That's why our government's first bill was An Act to Renew Democracy in Alberta, and that's why we launched the all-party Ethics and Accountability Committee, of which I am deputy chair, a committee which is meant to further ensure fairness and equality in election financing. Voters deserve to know that dollars are not a significant influence in an election, whether those dollars come from corporations or unions or from the government itself.

The Ethics and Accountability Committee is moving forward with our mandate, and I look forward to presenting this committee's report to this Assembly in due time. The committee is reviewing all aspects of the electoral system, including improvements to further ensure fairness and equality in election financing. Given that this work is currently being undertaken by an all-party committee, it seems hasty and premature to pass a bill limiting the work of this committee, and I will not be supporting this bill at this time.

The Speaker: The hon. House leader for the Official Opposition.

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure today to rise and speak to Bill 203, Election (Restrictions on Government Advertising) Amendment Act, 2015, brought forward by my good friend and colleague from Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Speaker, we have seen over the last number of years a government which hasn't had as much respect for the by-election and the election process as I think Albertans have come to demand and certainly deserve. Members on this side of the House, and not only members on this side of the House but members on the government side of the House, have shown great concern in the past when, perhaps, government resources were used to benefit a particular candidate in a by-election or during a general election. In fact, sir, some of the leg. officers, that function at arm's length from government and, certainly, from this Assembly, have also expressed some concern about the government making funding announcements during elections or by-elections.

Let me be clear, sir. Today is the day to act. We've just heard the deputy chair of a committee express some significant amount of support for such an important piece of legislation, and it's my guess

that there are a number of members on the government side that, too, are sympathetic to this great piece of legislation, that has been crafted to support this important initiative, going forward. I think that Albertans expect us to act. They expect us to act in the best interest of Albertans.

What we have before us is a slam dunk, if you will, when it comes to legislation. I know that all sides of the House have worked together in the past when a piece of legislation has come before the Assembly that is so clearly the right thing to do for Albertans. In fact, I think you'll find that just prior to the last election, sir, a piece of legislation was provided unanimous consent in this Assembly to pass through the Assembly in one day. Now, while, typically speaking, members of the opposition wouldn't support such activities, there are times when agreement can be found to expedite that process. In my opinion, Bill 203 is exactly that.

We have seen members of the government support this in the past. I know that my hon. colleague referred to it earlier, but in a joint press release from the NDP caucus of the day, specifically speaking about making funding announcements during a by-election, they used these words: "to prohibit MLAs from using government resources during elections or by-elections." They were referring, sir, to the fact that the government ought not to be doing that. They've supported this in the past. It's very, very similar to the type of legislation that exists in the other prairie provinces, in the form of Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

If we can expedite this process and act quickly, should there ever be the need for a by-election in the next year – Mr. Speaker, as you know, the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee has been tasked to return to this House in a year with recommendations. While I do recognize that this is in the Election Act, the committee is in that process should there be a by-election.

4:00

Let me commend the government, Mr. Speaker. During the by-election in Calgary-Foothills, where my hon. colleague was elected and the people sent a very strong message, I will commend the government of the day because they did show restraint. But governments have a habit, if you will, that the longer they are in power, the less restraint they seem to be able to show. So if we can expedite this process, we can rest assured that they won't be tempted, should there be circumstances that would require a by-election.

I know that my colleague has referred to the places that have similar legislation. In fact, some would make a case that the legislation in other provinces is even more expanded in that it puts timelines pre-writ as well that would prevent a real slew of announcements immediately prior to a writ period. But in this case the hon. member has reviewed the options and decided that the legislation that was passed almost a decade ago by then NDP Premier Gary Doer is the piece of legislation that we ought to model our legislation on here in the province of Alberta.

You know, oftentimes the opposition gets criticized, Mr. Speaker, about not wanting to accept NDP ideas, if you will. Here we have a piece of legislation that, a case could be made, is an NDP idea, and here we are supporting it, reaching our hand out across the aisle to say: some of your colleagues or comrades in Manitoba have passed a piece of legislation and perhaps you might consider that here in the province.

The bill is quite clear in a number of areas, including allowing the government some flexibility to ensure the business of government can continue to take place during a by-election. I think that it is a very reasonable concession. There are times in case of emergencies where the government may need to act, and this bill would continue to allow that to happen.

I think what's important to reiterate is that this is creating a standard that will ensure fairness for all candidates in a by-election. From time to time we have seen the government act in such a way that that fairness isn't respected and, as a result, is not respecting Albertans. We've been sent here to do our best to ensure that their voices are heard, and I can tell you that the people of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills have spoken to me at length about the fact that the government shouldn't be making announcements during by-elections. That's exactly what this bill fixes.

I encourage all members of the government not to delay. The Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee is so very busy. There is so much work to do. Here is an opportunity for us to take it off their plate and move forward in an expedient fashion. I encourage the members of the government to consider doing just that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Ms Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member opposite for bringing this matter forward. We've seen the perceived abuse of government powers in this province before under the previous government. One might argue that repeated instances of questionable ethical behaviour were a precursor to the recent election results, that put us all here in our current arrangements. When past government failed to self-regulate, the voters did their job for them. That's why today Albertans have the privilege of having so many legislators in this House who are committed to ensuring ethical governing practices.

Renewing democracy is important to this government. That's why our first bill was Bill 1, An Act to Renew Democracy in Alberta, which banned corporate and union donations to political parties. This legislation gave voters back their voices and will ensure elected officials are accountable to the citizens of Alberta, not those with the deepest pockets. This was just the start of our efforts to restore honesty and ethics to government. A special all-party committee was created, the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee, to review all aspects of the electoral system, including future improvements to further ensure fairness and equality in election financing.

We welcome any suggestions for accountability in government from the members opposite. Thank you.

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

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to support this bill and to thank very much my hon. colleague for bringing it forward. Now, I'm sure you would expect that given that I represent the fine constituents of Calgary-Elbow, where the former Minister of Education promised school portables during the by-election just over a year ago. Now, this may be an uncomfortable topic for my friends or, I see, friend in the PC caucus, but, look: the simple fact is that the former government abused their position for political gain. There's absolutely no doubt about that, and, yes, the people of Calgary-Elbow and the people of Alberta ultimately passed judgment on that.

The Ethics Commissioner when asked about it referred to the actions of the former Education minister as "blatant political opportunism." She went on to say: "This issue was not one of general policy or ongoing work. It was a specific political issue that he used his office to resolve in his favour." So why didn't she find that he broke any rules? Because it wasn't against the rules, my friends. It was not against the strict letter of the law.

Those of us in this House, I would expect all of us, would agree that it ought to be against the rules. It is against the rules in at least two other provinces in the Confederation of Canada. We in this

House have the opportunity to right that wrong and make it against the rules. The Ethics Commissioner herself continued to express her frustration about the current state of the rules, saying that the current Conflicts of Interest Act “does not deal with moral integrity.” I’ll repeat that again. Imagine. The Conflicts of Interest Act does not deal with moral integrity.

What exactly is the point of a Conflicts of Interest Act, of ethics legislation that doesn’t deal with moral integrity? I would hope – and I know Albertans expect all of us to act in the highest ethical standard. That is our job. That is what we ought to do. Unfortunately, sometimes we need rules to tell us what to do and what not to do. Now, I think each of us would agree that that is not right. In other words, the Ethics Commissioner felt that it was wrong but didn’t have the legislative tools to hold the former Minister of Education to account.

So what does wrong look like? What’s the impact? Well, those of you will know that William Reid school, which was promised those portables just a little over a year ago, is, in fact, in Calgary-Elbow. What you don’t know is that my younger daughter goes to William Reid school. So this not only was a blatant political move designed cynically by the former government to win a by-election; this was targeted directly at me personally. What choice do I have in that case? They dragged my daughter’s school into the middle of a political fight, so I have a choice to make. I can make it worse, I can continue to exacerbate the problem, I can drag my family in, or I can sit quietly by and say: I’m not going there. They might go there, but I’m not going to go there. And I didn’t.

We know the outcome of that by-election. Who knows what would’ve happened had they not done this? We all know in this House that it was wrong. We in this House have an opportunity to make it right.

4:10

So this issue is doubly personal for me, and the personalization of the political process is but one of many, many reasons why we must end the practice of government using their position to further their own political and personal interests.

Now, I realize this bill is within the scope of the ongoing review of the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee. I will take this opportunity to note that the ND members of that committee do seem hesitant to actually consult Albertans, having adjourned twice my motion to consult Albertans about topics just like this. That is probably the most comprehensive review of Alberta’s democracy that we’ve undergone in the 110-year history of this fine province, so I would encourage them, please, to stop adjourning debate on that motion and to actively consult Albertans on this issue. If we do, we’re going to find that they want us to address this and they want us to address it quickly.

Now, given this bill is based on legislation that exists in other provinces and given that I think most, if not all, members of this House agree that government shouldn’t be able to use their position to unduly influence the political process and shouldn’t make the political personal and given, especially, that we never know when another by-election may be coming, let’s take this opportunity to put these controls in place now.

I want to remind all of my friends in the House, certainly those of us who are private members, that it is within your right as private members to support this legislation. I look specifically at my friends in the ND caucus, and I ask you that if you were to go back to your constituencies, if you were to ask each of your constituents to read the very brief Bill 203 and ask them: would you like me on your behalf to vote in favour of this bill – ask yourself that question

before you have the opportunity to vote on this bill, and I think you will know what to do.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there any other individuals who would like to speak to the bill? The Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 203, the Election (Restrictions on Government Advertising) Amendment Act, 2015. I want to thank very, very much the Member for Drumheller-Stettler for bringing this important bill to our discussion. The underlying premise of this bill is something that our government caucus and the Official Opposition both agree on. It is wholly inappropriate for any governing party to use its position as an advantage by making spending announcements during a campaign period. Any such announcements can be perceived as the government abusing the powers entrusted to it in order to further its own electoral prospects. This Premier and her government, as mentioned, have already demonstrated their strong commitment to proper ethical behaviour when we adhered to a self-imposed spending announcement hiatus during the Calgary-Foothills by-election.

This bill attempts to fill one small part of the rather large ethics and democratic reform gap Albertans have inherited from their previous governments. That is why our hon. Premier made it one of her first priorities to strike an all-party committee on ethics and accountability with a specific mandate to work on democratic reforms. What this bill attempts to achieve is very much in line with the work that this select special committee is undertaking. As I have the distinct pleasure to be the chair of that committee at this point in time, I can assure all members that this is the sort of issue that our committee has been briefed on by the officers of the Legislature and that will be reviewed under our mandate of ethics and accountability.

The members across the aisle have spoken at length and passionately about the value that committee work can bring to potential legislation, and in this case I fully agree. As part of the work of the Ethics and Accountability Committee and with the support of the research and other resources afforded to that committee it makes sense to take a closer look at what other jurisdictions are doing in this area. As well, it would be valuable to discuss the proposed changes with the Chief Electoral Officer, who oversees the implementation of the Election Act, as well as the Ethics Commissioner, who has, as mentioned, been involved in investigations in the past around announcements during an election period. We need to ensure that our made-in-Alberta solution to this problem is one that meets all the ethical criteria while ensuring adequate flexibility to allow any future government to meet its needs with regard to communication with the residents of this great province.

Albertans can take heart and know that our government is fully committed to implementing many long-overdue democratic reforms. That is why our first bill was An Act to Renew Democracy in Alberta, which banned corporate and union donations to political parties. Bill 1 was this government’s first step in renewing democracy in Alberta.

This government will enact many important democratic reforms, but we need to examine them, and we need to examine them under one collective umbrella first, with all parties represented in this Legislature present and providing input, with the guidance and support of committee resources, and having received meaningful feedback from Albertans themselves. I encourage all members to thank the Member for Drumheller-Stettler for his work on this issue, but let us now refer this bill to the Select Special Ethics and

Accountability Committee, where it can be part of the larger body of work that the committee has undertaken.

To that end, I would like to present an amendment to Bill 203, and I can pause while the House distributes copies.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods has proposed an amendment to Bill 203. We will refer to this amendment as A1.

Ms Gray: I move that the motion for second reading of Bill 203, Election (Restrictions on Government Advertising) Amendment Act, 2015, be amended by deleting all of the words after “that” and substituting the following:

Bill 203, Election (Restrictions on Government Advertising) Amendment Act, 2015, be not now read a second time but that the order be discharged, the bill withdrawn, and the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee as part of its current review.

My intention with this amendment is for the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee to thoroughly discuss and implement the information that has been presented in Bill 203, to include it in our work, and to bring that back to the Legislature with our report. I hope that all members will support my amendment and send this important work to an all-party committee that is set up to handle the discussion and to take us to a conclusion on this.

Thank you very much.

4:20

The Speaker: Are there any members who wish to speak to amendment A1? The Official Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise this afternoon to discuss amendment A1. I’m hoping that perhaps you might be able to provide some clarification, just the exact purpose of the amendment.

The heart of my concern, if you will, Mr. Speaker, is around the words, “the bill withdrawn, and the subject matter of the bill be referred.” The way that I read that is that the bill itself won’t be sent to committee but just a general discussion around the topics in the bill, particularly, as we’ve heard this evening, around funding or the government making announcements during a by-election, that topic being covered by the special committee. If, in fact, that is what the amendment does, then I would suggest that many members of the opposition would have grave concern with an amendment such as this.

Having said that, if, in fact, the bill remains in its entirety and is then discussed and a robust conversation – and many people in this House have heard me speak about the need for committees to be used more and to allow Albertans input, allow expert testimony, and allow a much more robust debate, not one where we plow through legislation like we’ve seen the current government allow, changing some of the rules to allow that to happen. Now, I understand that they’ve committed to that not happening, but they’ve certainly set the rules in place or are working on setting the rules in place that would allow that to happen.

So I’m not entirely sure if you’re able to provide clarification on exactly whether or not the bill, in fact, would be fully withdrawn, no longer on the Order Paper and, as a result, the general topics discussed at committee. But I’m certain that perhaps that could help provide some clarification, and I’ll rest at that.

The Speaker: Hon. member, let me just clarify that the clarity around the amendment and, in fact, all motions rests with the Assembly as a whole, and I think it would be inappropriate for the Speaker, in my capacity, to provide interpretation.

Are there other members who would like to speak to the proposed amendment? Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Loyola: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. From my understanding, this does not kill the bill; it’s how the amendment needed to be worded so that it could be referred to our committee, the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee.

I want to remind all members of the House that we were given the special task of reviewing four acts: the Election Act, the election financing act, the Public Interest Disclosure (Whistleblower Protection) Act, and then the Conflicts of Interest Act. In this committee we are receiving special presentations by the Ethics Commissioner, the office of public disclosure, and the office of the Chief Electoral Officer, as well, of which we’ve received more than 80 recommendations that we need to review. So I think it would be appropriate that we then discuss what is brought up in this bill, presented by the Member for Drumheller-Stettler, in relation to all the other acts that are under review by the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee.

I’d like to suggest to all members present here to please support this amendment and stand in favour of it. Thank you.

The Speaker: Any other members who would like to speak to amendment A1? The member for Sylvan Lake . . .

Mr. MacIntyre: Almost. Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

The Speaker: Yes.

Mr. MacIntyre: I understand what the previous member just said that, in that hon. member’s opinion, this amendment doesn’t kill the bill. However, it specifically says that the order be discharged, the bill withdrawn, and the only thing that’s being referred to the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee is the subject matter of the bill but not the bill itself. To me, that clearly states that the bill is killed by this amendment, and the only thing going to the special committee is the subject matter of the bill. In my opinion, that is not what we should be using committees for.

Bills that come to this House, regardless of the source of the bill, should be referred to committee as a bill so that the bill can be debated in the committee, so that the subject matter of the bill and the bill itself can be discussed, witnesses can be brought in, expert testimony can be brought in in the context of the bill that is before the committee. That is the purpose of the structure of these committees in a parliamentary system, and that’s not being utilized here. What this amendment simply does is that it kills the bill and says, if I may paraphrase: we’ll talk about what the bill’s intent was in the committee, but the bill itself will not survive this amendment. It is clearly killed by this, and I believe that is wrong, and it is the wrong thing to do to any bill that is brought to this House, that we intend to have discussed at committee.

There is no reason I can think of why this bill shouldn’t be worthy of travelling as a bill to this committee to be discussed within the context of it being a bill. Thank you.

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

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This almost seems like a little bit of déjà vu because, from what I remember about the first session that we sat here, we had Bill 1 before us, and the government said specifically that this isn’t a perfect bill. The amendments that we brought forward were to be able to, we thought, make it better. They said: this isn’t a perfect bill; let’s bring it forward, let’s start the process, and let’s make sure that it’s

something that we can show the people of Alberta that we're doing the right thing.

We are now many weeks past, and the roles have been reversed. It's almost hypocritical – I won't use that word to describe it, but it's almost – to say that we can't bring forward a good bill that should be bipartisan, that should be something that all of the House can support. Just because it came from the opposition side shouldn't be the reason we're defeating this bill.

It is a good bill. It is something that Albertans want, and it's something that I think would represent us well in this House if we pass it. I hope that the members opposite us will see it as maybe not the perfect bill, as you stated first about Bill 1, but as a good start, the right start, and that you would support this. I support it for that reason.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there any others? Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to speak specifically to the member's amendment here, not closing debate on the bill. I think it's important that I read out the amendment word for word or at least the part that I find . . .

4:30

The Speaker: Clarification if I might, hon. member, from the Clerk.

Can the member speak to the amendment? Thank you. Please proceed.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Mr. Clerk. I take particular exception to the part of the amendment that says, "be not now read a second time but that the order be discharged, the bill withdrawn, and the subject matter of the bill referred to the Special Ethics and Accountability Committee as part of its current review."

Now, Mr. Speaker, I've had an opportunity to speak to the mover of this amendment, and I was given assurances that this bill was going to committee. If we specifically are going to move it to committee, I would be in favour of that, but I am not, and I cannot speak to the withdrawal or the discharge of my bill.

Mr. Speaker, I had an opportunity in my constituency a number of years ago, when I was challenged for the particular nomination of my position in the party as a Wildrose representative, and there were several stalwart community members from one prominent community who told me that I would have volunteer challengers to my position. To those members at that time I said: are you afraid of democracy? In this Chamber I see that with the idea of withdrawing this bill that is modelled primarily after legislation that's been passed in two provinces.

Mr. Speaker, I could go on. I find this wording not what the mover has – I believed it to be understood that we had an agreement. I accept with full face value – I did – that we would go. But the wording of this is not what I believe we had agreed to, so I find this somewhat unacceptable in this Chamber here. I think that we need to move ahead.

The Speaker: The hon. minister of economic development.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the hon. member who is supporting and who moved this bill. I just want to clarify for the member in speaking to the amendment the reason and logic behind the amendment of referring this to the committee.

First and foremost, the committee was struck in order to look at election financing. I agree with the contents of this bill and what it's intending to do to remove politics from elections or before

elections are called, but I think that there's a role for the committee to play in drafting this type of legislation. I do want to clarify for the member that the only way to send this bill to the committee is, essentially, through this amendment, but it does in fact take this Bill 203 off the Order Paper. However, I can assure the member that the contents of this bill will go to the committee, who will debate it – and all parties are present on that committee – and then bring it back.

At this point in time, you know, my point of this is: if we are truly looking to bring forward the best possible legislation for all Albertans, then it shouldn't matter whose name is on a bill or who put the bill forward. The point is that we're trying to pass legislation that is going to protect Albertans and going to remove politics from elections to ensure that, as we saw – and members in this House have spoken about this. Prior to the four by-elections that occurred earlier, there were announcements made leading up to and during the by-elections. Our government is committed to removing that and ensuring that elections are not a way for the government to make announcements to try to win votes. However, again, the only way that we can bring the contents of this bill to the committee is via this amendment. I appreciate the bill and what this bill is saying; however, this is the course of action that we can ensure that all parties will debate this.

The Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee is already tasked with reviewing this legislation, so it would not make sense to send this to another committee so you have two different committees essentially working on the same piece of legislation. You know, I just want to echo the fact that our government does agree with the contents of this bill, and I do want to thank the hon. member for bringing it forward, but I think that the most prudent thing to do is to send this to the very committee that is looking at reforming our Election Act as one whole and to do it all simultaneously. I will urge all members of this House to vote in favour of this amendment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It shouldn't matter, as the hon. minister says, who came up with a good idea. Good ideas can genuinely and truly come from anywhere. This is a good idea. Bill 1 was also a good idea. Bill 1 took a very small step in a much longer journey to improving Alberta's campaign finances. That is precisely within the scope of the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee. This bill takes one small but very important step to addressing the gap in ethics in this province, and I would sincerely hope that our new government is not simply looking at where the bill came from as reason for not voting in favour of it, which is why I'm rising to speak against the amendment.

You know, these sorts of things, when you – now, many Albertans may not pay as close attention to this Legislative Assembly as I wish they might, but it is exactly these kinds of procedural machinations that really turn Albertans off the democratic process. It allows the government and government members to vote against this bill without actually being on the record of voting against this bill. So, again, that's why I'm speaking against the amendment.

I will just say one thing, Mr. Speaker, as evidence to why I believe this amendment should fail, why we should get back to debate on the main bill, and why ultimately we should pass this bill for second reading. Who else thinks it's a good idea to address this? None other than our Premier, when she was leader of the third party in the last House. "It is not acceptable that this PC government uses the public purse as its own personal campaign fund. This doesn't

pass the smell test and Albertans deserve better.” I urge this House to vote against the amendment because, in fact, Albertans do deserve better.

Thank you.

The Speaker: I remind the House that we are dealing with the amendment on second reading of Bill 203. I’ve identified it as A1.

Are there other hon. members who would wish to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I have to agree with my colleague for Calgary-Elbow that this is not inconsistent with Bill 1, which this House passed even though they knew they were going to set up an ethics and accountability committee. There’s nothing inherently damaging about passing this bill now and then the ethics and accountability committee, with which I am associated, reviewing every aspect of the electoral system.

4:40

I would thank the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler, and I think it’s important for all of us to recognize that it doesn’t matter where good ideas come from. It would be a good opportunity to strengthen a sense of collegiality and fly in the face of the previous government, that would never pass anything that came out across the floor, by recognizing this as a good recommendation that can do no harm to what the committee will actually be doing in the next six months or however long it takes to actually go through the whole electoral process review. This could happen within a few months. It could actually enhance the credibility of this government if they vote against this amendment, which would take it out of here and put it into some kind of a longer term process, that may or may not be timely with respect to a by-election. For example, if we have to call a by-election in the next six months, this would be very applicable and give people a sense of confidence that this is a good idea. It should be acted upon. Nothing lost by passing this.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Any other hon. members wish to speak to the amendment?

Hearing none, I call the question on the amendment to second reading of Bill 203, Election (Restrictions on Government Advertising) Amendment Act, 2015, as proposed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:41 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, S.	Gray	Notley
Babcock	Hinkley	Payne
Bilous	Hoffman	Phillips
Carson	Horne	Piquette
Ceci	Jabbour	Renaud
Connolly	Kazim	Rosendahl
Coolahan	Littlewood	Sabir
Cortes-Vargas	Loyola	Schmidt
Dach	Malkinson	Schreiner
Dang	McCuaig-Boyd	Shepherd
Drever	McKittrick	Sucha
Eggen	McLean	Sweet

Feehan	McPherson	Turner
Fitzpatrick	Miller	Westhead
Ganley	Nielsen	

Against the motion:

Aheer	Hunter	Rodney
Barnes	Jean	Schneider
Clark	Loewen	Smith
Cooper	MacIntyre	Starke
Cyr	McIver	Strankman
Drysdale	Nixon	Swann
Ellis	Orr	Taylor
Fildebrandt	Panda	van Dijken
Gotfried	Pitt	Yao

Totals:	For – 44	Against – 27
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[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, I rise to move a request for unanimous consent to waive Standing Order 8(1) and to move directly to Motion 503.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Motions Other than Government Motions

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

Student Participation on School Boards

503. Mr. Dang moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to consult with school boards and youth to encourage senior high school student participation on boards with a view to increasing dialogue, increasing student engagement in board policy and planning, and educating students about democratic governance.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to rise and speak about the importance of student participation in democratic governance at the school board level. It is my privilege today to encourage our government to recognize the important contribution that students make to enhancing their educational experiences and to affirm its commitment to consult with school boards about how student participation can best be encouraged at a local level.

The 2014-15 school year saw over 670,000 students enrolled in Alberta’s education system. Of those, over 160,000 were enrolled between grades 10 and 12. The potential that these students have to make a positive impact in their schools and their communities is tremendous. We are now faced with an opportunity to reach out to students and engage them in meaningful dialogue about their educational experiences.

Students are our province’s next generation of leaders. The experiences that they have while in school help chart the course for both their futures and the future of this province. What better way to ensure our long-term success than by investing in our young people? Students are our future small-business owners, health care professionals, teachers, and entrepreneurs. Providing them with the tools they need to grow and diversify our economy and create good jobs for Albertans in the future will ensure our province’s prosperity.

As future community leaders students are also learning the Alberta way of doing things, how to take care of each other and foster welcoming, caring, respectful, and safe learning environments. Students, if given the chance, could play an even greater role in building a safe and caring society. When students become leaders

in their schools and communities, it can have a positive impact on the province as a whole, both now and in the future.

Students should be encouraged to work with leadership at their schools and with local school boards to provide input on local policies and practices. I've met with former EPSB student trustees, I've met with representatives from Student Voice Initiative, and the value of student leadership is clear, Mr. Speaker. I attended a consultation on the proposed Education Act last week and was pleased to see that students were invited to share with their participation and their perspective.

I believe that the government in collaboration with local school boards has an opportunity to build on that gesture and more fully engage students in democratic governance at the local level. This motion will affirm our commitment to giving students a say in their education and will support students who want to make a difference in Alberta and in their futures.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there other members who wish to speak to Motion 503? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to speak to Motion 503 this afternoon. As a high school social studies teacher introducing students to and engaging them in the democratic process has been a part of my life for 30 years. I think it is critically important to provide real opportunities for students to participate in local politics and to become engaged citizens. Indeed, this is part of the vision of Inspiring Education and one of the pieces that I wholeheartedly support. I often had my students participate in the political process by working for the political parties of their choice.

Schools have debate clubs, student unions, mentorship programs, and other ways of encouraging students to become participatory citizens. This is a key outcome of education and one of the major roles that education must play in society. However, do students have a legitimate role on school boards? Should they participate in budgetary evaluations and contract negotiations? Are teenagers, who may not be old enough to vote in governmental elections or legally purchase cigarettes, equipped to make long-term decisions about education in their school board catchment areas?

5:00

These are issues that policy-makers have battled for decades. It seems that there is a growing recognition that students can and should have a voice on school boards in an advisory role, and we are seeing this begin to happen. For instance, in 2014 high schools in Edmonton public ran a nomination process to select one candidate per school, and the district's Student Advisory Council cast their ballots for the student trustee. This pilot project, aimed to support dialogue between the student body and the board, increases students' engagement in board policy and planning and educates students about democratic governance. It has become a formal part of the board as part of the district legacy course. The student trustee is an elected, nonvoting representative providing student voice to the board.

Alberta is not alone in supporting the notion of students participating on school boards. The first school board in Ontario to enact legislation allowing a nonvoting student member was the former Kenora board of education in 1989. In 1997 the Progressive Conservative government of former Premier Mike Harris introduced the Education Quality Improvement Act as Bill 160. Although this act instigated a labour dispute, within the legislation was the creation of the position of pupil representative. The act allowed individual school boards to draft their own policies, to

allow for flexibility within guidelines. In 1998 every school board had at least one pupil representative.

The key to making this work is to encourage school boards to set up processes that will allow students to participate meaningfully and to ensure that they feel valued as part of the team. I know as a schoolteacher that if I wanted to get my kids engaged in their school work, they needed to see it as being meaningful to their lives. If we want these kids to be engaged in the political process, it must be seen as being meaningful in their lives. I know that I would talk with all of my kids, especially the ones in grade 12, as we looked at the political process, encouraging them to be a part of that process, to be involved in that process, to be engaged in that process. One of the lowest voting groups has been young people, and if we want to engage them in the political process, then this may be a way of starting to encourage that.

A central issue would be to determine how the student trustee would be elected, I think, or even if the student trustee would be elected. You know, a survey was undertaken across the United States in 2009 to summarize this issue. The findings indicate that 25 states do have student trustees while 14 do not. The method of selection for these trustees varied. Some were appointed from local school councils, some states held elections, and some school boards simply appointed a student rep.

One strength, I believe, of this motion is that there is no prescribed implementation process. School boards would be able to determine how best to use this practice to meet their local goals. This practice would provide a vehicle for collaboration between students, school administration, and the board on the issue of civic participation and the rights to participation. Given the range of options in the model of participation school boards that wish to have student representatives may find different ways of meeting that goal that allow for recognition of local concerns. Because of that, this is a motion that I will fully support.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to speak on this motion and to the Member for Edmonton-South West for coming up with this idea. It's entirely appropriate that the Member for Edmonton-South West originated this motion. I think that he's a living example of youth engagement who transformed from an activist to, in fact, a Member of the Legislative Assembly and is certainly a perfect example of how one should not judge based on the age of a person, being young, middle aged, or old, for that matter.

I appreciate the comments from the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon. His comments were well positioned, I believe, as well, and curiously I think the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon and myself actually had sort of parallel courses, to some extent, in that we both taught for more than two decades in high school social studies as well and both, I think, engaged in this sense of engagement and the value of engagement for students. Certainly, I'm sure the member experiences the same phenomenon that I do in running into my students years later and still to this day who have taken a certain path of activism and/or leadership in their chosen fields. I could see the kernel or the beginnings of that when they were 15, 16, 17 years old. So certainly on an anecdotal level we know that engagement of students in the political process is extremely valuable.

Mr. Speaker, I just completed a tour over the last few weeks of all 61 school boards and had a specific discussion with all of them in regard to having student membership on their boards. I used the model, actually, that I first saw Edmonton public schools using a couple of years ago and to this day, and they went through a very

interesting process by which they had a student on the board. They took a nomination from each high school and went through the process. I heard it described that each of the candidates then set up sort of what's the equivalent of a science fair poster board. I'm not sure if maybe this is part of our democratic renewal process that we could use here in the Legislature, where you set up your display and have people voting on whether your volcano explodes sufficiently or not and so forth. But, seriously, this is what they did do in regard to their political campaigns to take this historic spot in Edmonton public.

Also, the Public School Boards' Association of Alberta has similarly engaged students on their advisory board. When you go to their zone meetings or their provincial meetings, these students are there from all across the province and provide, I think, sometimes the most insightful comments, that really do contribute to the meetings.

Certainly, our government is very interested in expanding this, and this motion is very welcome. We know that the future of our democracy depends on our engagement of young people to pick up the voting habit. Once they do so at a young age, then they're very likely to continue through the rest of their lives. Democracy depends on participation, Mr. Speaker, and certainly I think this motion goes far to reaffirm this Chamber's and our government's commitment to ensure that we have democracy that is strong and alive here in the province of Alberta.

Thanks very much.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I note that maybe there were some storyboards in the rotunda last week after the budget. I think I saw some.

Are there other members who would like to speak to Motion 503 today?

5:10

Ms McKittrick: Mr. Speaker, thank you for allowing me to rise and speak about the importance of student participation in democratic governance at the school board level. It is my privilege today to support the motion by the Member for Edmonton-South West and encourage our government to recognize the important contribution that students can make to enhance their own educational experience.

I have seen first-hand how young people and students can impact school boards and municipal decision-making. I was privileged to serve as a school trustee for three terms. For two of these terms I served alongside two elected school trustees who were in university and had just graduated from our own school system. They brought to the board a practical approach and an intimate knowledge of what students wanted and needed. They were instrumental in engaging with the student leadership in our schools and making sure that the impact of our decision-making on these issues came to the board's attention. One of these young people is now the executive director of the Aga Khan Foundation in Canada, and I think that his experience as an elected school trustee has really helped him a lot in this role. I also helped to set up a youth council for a municipality in which youth councillors would debate and discuss matters brought to them by the municipal council and then have to report back publicly at a council meeting their decisions and recommendations.

I think that the 29th Legislative Assembly demonstrates the role and importance of involving youth in elected office and how an elected body can be enriched by having MLAs from all age groups. School trustees play a crucial role in ensuring that our schools provide the best education to all students and that schools meet local needs and concerns. Having youth and student voices on decision-making bodies will enhance this.

Student councils already play a crucial role in schools, and many school boards already have a leadership program that empowers students to be involved in decision-making. The motion clearly urges that consultation with school boards and youth themselves is required as there may be different ways of involvement and participation.

Students and youth already make a huge, positive impact in their schools and in their communities. During both the last provincial and federal elections in my riding a number of schools had election forums organized and led by students. Other students worked as election workers during the last federal election. Students are already engaged in determining their futures. We are now faced with an opportunity to reach out to students and engage them in meaningful dialogue about their educational experience. Students and youth already have demonstrated their interest and engagement in their future. This motion will affirm our commitment to give students a say in their education and will support students who want to make a difference in Alberta.

The Speaker: Any other members to speak to Motion 503? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today in support of Motion 503, Student Participation on School Boards, as presented by the Member for Edmonton-South West. I'm pleased to lend my voice to encourage consultation between school boards and youth to encourage senior high school student participation on boards. I understand that local school boards are indeed in the best position to recognize what steps need to be taken in order to best engage with students at the local level. I think we can all agree that real student engagement is essential to student-centred learning. What better way to enhance student learning than to consult with students and find out from them how best to enhance their own educational experiences?

As you may know, many school divisions already make space for students to engage with decision-makers through student advisory councils. The Edmonton public school board took a historic step toward student leadership and inclusion by including a student trustee on their board in 2014-15. The Speak Out initiative has since 2008 provided a forum for thousands of Alberta student ideas and experiences.

Perhaps one of the best recent examples of the importance and value of student input and leadership is the role that students played and continue to play in the creation and support of gay-straight alliances. Brave students stood up and spoke out, telling adults in leadership roles that they wanted and needed respectful, safe learning environments. Our youth are our future. They're our next generation of leaders, and they should be included in the most important work of guiding their education. What better way to ensure our long-term success as a province than by investing in our young people and giving students a say in their education. It's my pleasure to support this motion, Motion 503.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The House leader of Her Majesty's Official Opposition.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will keep my comments very brief this evening. [interjections] I know that can be hard to believe.

I think my hon. colleague laid out a very clear conversation around some of the really great things about Motion 503, and certainly I, too, will be rising in support of the motion, and I thank the hon. member for bringing it forward. A good idea in this place is a good idea no matter who brings it forward.

The fact of the matter is that I often go around the constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, and from time to time I'll hear people talking about: young people this or young people that; they don't work hard like they used to, or they're not as respectful as they used to be. But I go to a number of events that honour students in the form of awards banquets. I go to leadership classes to have conversations about the future of our province and converse with students, and one thing that I am certain of, Mr. Speaker, is that with the young people in Alberta today the future of our province is very bright.

So I would be remiss if I missed the opportunity – you know, there are some young people in the gallery this evening who, in fact, are also part of the future of our province. They are politically engaged, and they are very keen on the process, not only in the school boards but right here in the Assembly as well. I happen to know them by name. Porter and Paxton and Peyton happen to be my children, but I know that they also would support a motion like this in the name of being active and engaged citizens of the future of our province.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Ms McPherson: Thank you. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to rise and speak in support of Motion 503, Mr. Speaker. There are many examples of the success of including student representation on school boards such as the Calgary Board of Education Chief Superintendent's Student Advisory Council, which was established in 2010. The purpose was to meet regularly with the chief superintendent, discuss the issues in the system, and propose solutions.

Nationally there is the Student Voice Initiative, that gives students a voice in their education. It operates with the support of policy-makers, school administrators, academics, and students from across North America and the world and gives students a greater voice in their own education. It was based on the student trustee positions within the Ontario school system.

All of these models foster a student leadership framework that encourages students to encourage more welcoming learning environments that are respectful and enhance the education of both those students who participate directly and the students that attend schools with this kind of framework.

For the more than 160,000 high school students currently in Alberta's schools it's a tremendous opportunity to participate in their school communities and to make a positive contribution, both of which are skills that are invaluable in the wider community. These young people are our future, and this is a chance to give them even more skills to take forward with them throughout their lives, which is a benefit for all of us.

I encourage all members of the Assembly to support this motion. Thank you.

The Speaker: Any other members who would like to speak to Motion 503? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I'll be brief also. This is a motion that will stimulate all people in Alberta to get more engaged with their democracy. Whether you're a parent or youth, you want to see more opportunity for engagement in the political process. I don't see any downside to including young people on the boards of education. It's obviously more interaction, more understanding, more learning mutually between board

members and students. I see this as a principled and rather visionary step that perhaps could go across the country.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

5:20

The Speaker: Are there any other members to speak to Motion 503? The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thanks. I, too, will be brief. I just wanted to say that if I passed up this opportunity to say that it's a dang good idea, I'd never forgive myself.

I also just wanted to acknowledge that Ontario has had student trustees in place for over two decades. They've been a tremendous asset. It was actually somebody that I met in my school board days who brought this idea forward to me, somebody who had just graduated, I think, two months earlier and had met student trustees from Ontario and, when it came to Edmonton public, was really active in bringing it forward. Her name is Claire Edwards, and I know that she's been a big champion for Student Voice Initiative. As one of the trustees who had the honour of serving with a student trustee in the past, I want to say that, like members of both sides of this House have said, the questions were incredibly thoughtful and the connection to the number one stakeholder that we're there to serve, the kids, was evident at every board meeting, not just from the one individual. It also, I think, reminded everyone at the table of the role we play in making good decisions for the kids we serve.

Thank you to the hon. member for bringing this motion forward. I'm proud to support it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West to close debate.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am glad to see support from both sides of the House on this issue. I think it's a clearly nonpartisan issue. It's clearly something that we are doing to increase the education and increase the dialogue we have between our students and elected officials. We know that our local school boards are the ones that are capable of making these decisions to include their students and to include their peers in the decision-making process.

I would also like to mention that I think the Minister of Health has probably been waiting months to make that pun in the House, and I'm very glad that I've been able to give her that opportunity.

As we know, the students play these key roles in fostering welcoming, caring, and respectful learning environments. Mr. Speaker, I will be brief. I urge every single member of this Assembly to support the motion, and I just want to say again how excited I am that we are going to be able to make that change in the lives of these students, that change that will allow them to become the future leaders and the current leaders that they already are.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 503 carried unanimously]

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Seeing that we made very good progress today, I move that we adjourn until 1:30 tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:24 p.m. to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, November 3, 2015

Day 14

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

First Session

Wanner, Hon. Robert E., Medicine Hat (ND), Speaker
Jabbour, Deborah C., Peace River (ND), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Feehan, Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (ND), Deputy Chair of Committees

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Rocky View (W)
Anderson, Shaye, Leduc-Beaumont (ND)
Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (W)
Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (ND)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (W)
Bhullar, Manmeet Singh, Calgary-Greenway (PC)
Bilous, Hon. Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (ND),
Deputy Government House Leader
Carlier, Hon. Oneil, Whitecourt-St. Anne (ND)
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-Meadowlark (ND)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, Calgary-Fort (ND)
Clark, Greg, Calgary-Elbow (AP)
Connolly, Michael R.D., Calgary-Hawkwood (ND)
Coolahan, Craig, Calgary-Klein (ND)
Cooper, Nathan, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (W),
Official Opposition House Leader
Cortes-Vargas, Estefania, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (ND)
Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake (W),
Official Opposition Deputy Whip
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (ND)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South West (ND)
Drever, Deborah, Calgary-Bow (Ind)
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Ellis, Mike, Calgary-West (PC)
Fildebrandt, Derek Gerhard, Strathmore-Brooks (W)
Fitzpatrick, Maria M., Lethbridge-East (ND)
Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (PC)
Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., Calgary-Buffalo (ND)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (ND)
Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (PC)
Gray, Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (ND)
Hanson, David B., Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills (W),
Official Opposition Deputy House Leader
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Hoffman, Hon. Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (ND)
Horne, Trevor A.R., Spruce Grove-St. Albert (ND)
Hunter, Grant R., Cardston-Taber-Warner (W)
Jansen, Sandra, Calgary-North West (PC)
Jean, Brian Michael, QC, Fort McMurray-Conklin (W),
Leader of the Official Opposition
Kazim, Anam, Calgary-Glenmore (ND)
Kleinstuber, Jamie, Calgary-Northern Hills (ND)
Larivee, Hon. Danielle, Lesser Slave Lake (ND)
Littlewood, Jessica, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (ND)
Loewen, Todd, Grande Prairie-Smoky (W)
Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (ND)
Luff, Robyn, Calgary-East (ND)
MacIntyre, Donald, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (W)
Malkinson, Brian, Calgary-Currie (ND)
Mason, Hon. Brian, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood (ND),
Government House Leader
McCuaig-Boyd, Hon. Margaret,
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McKittrick, Annie, Sherwood Park (ND)
McLean, Stephanie V., Calgary-Varsity (ND),
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McPherson, Karen M., Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill (ND)
Miller, Barb, Red Deer-South (ND)
Miranda, Ricardo, Calgary-Cross (ND)
Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (ND)
Nixon, Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (W),
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Notley, Hon. Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (ND),
Premier
Orr, Ronald, Lacombe-Ponoka (W)
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Phillips, Hon. Shannon, Lethbridge-West (ND),
Deputy Government House Leader
Piquette, Colin, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater (ND)
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie (W)
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (ND)
Rodney, Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC)
Rosendahl, Eric, West Yellowhead (ND)
Sabir, Hon. Irfan, Calgary-McCall (ND)
Schmidt, Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (ND),
Government Whip
Schneider, David A., Little Bow (W)
Schreiner, Kim, Red Deer-North (ND)
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-Centre (ND)
Sigurdson, Hon. Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (ND)
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (W)
Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC),
Progressive Conservative Opposition House Leader
Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (W)
Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (W)
Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (ND)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (ND)
Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (W)
Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (ND)
van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND)
Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)

Party standings:

New Democrat: 53 Wildrose: 22 Progressive Conservative: 9 Alberta Liberal: 1 Alberta Party: 1 Independent: 1

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Shannon Dean, Senior Parliamentary Counsel/Director of House Services	Nancy Robert, Research Officer	Gordon H. Munk, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms
		Janet Schwegel, Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>

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Deron Bilous	Minister of Economic Development and Trade
Oneil Carlier	Minister of Agriculture and Forestry
Joe Ceci	President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance
David Eggen	Minister of Education, Minister of Culture and Tourism
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Brian Mason	Minister of Transportation, Minister of Infrastructure
Margaret McCuaig-Boyd	Minister of Energy
Shannon Phillips	Minister of Environment and Parks, Minister Responsible for the Status of Women
Irfan Sabir	Minister of Human Services
Lori Sigurdson	Minister of Advanced Education, Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour

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Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

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Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

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Kazim	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, November 3, 2015

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Let us contemplate and reflect. Fellow members, let us contemplate and give thanks for the good fortune of being in a province with such a divergence of different faiths and beliefs. Tonight in our rotunda we will celebrate the Eid event, which our fellow Islamic Albertans celebrated in September. Let us give thanks for the significant contribution and strength that the Islamic community has provided to our great province.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and to the Assembly some of the smartest and hardest working students in Alberta, the grade 6 class from Headway School, with their teachers Sandra Nicholson and Jackie Small. I visited the grade 4 class at Headway recently, and they told me that education was so important to them that they thought this House should make it illegal for students to not do their homework. I disappointed them when I told them that with oil at \$45 a barrel, Alberta can't possibly afford to incarcerate that many children. I know that these dedicated students will be our next leaders, maybe future MLAs, or, if they're particularly talented and hard working, perhaps future directors or assistant deputy ministers in Alberta's top-notch civil service. I ask that the Headway School group rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Ms McKittrick: Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly another grade 6 class from St. Theresa school, and I would ask them to rise. As I mentioned another time, St. Theresa school is a school that organizes political forums in our riding every single election, and I'm delighted that these students are learning about the work that we're doing in the Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly grade 6 students from Afton school of the arts in my constituency of Edmonton-Meadowlark. Accompanying the students are their teachers Scott Slatter and Bailee Cochrane. These students are taking part in the School at the Legislature program, and they'll be spending the whole week here learning about the exciting world of the provincial legislative process. I wish them a great week, and I would invite them all to stand to receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: I'm sure the hon. member would acknowledge that they have much to teach this group of hon. members.

Are there any other school groups today?

Hearing none, the hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the

Assembly a group of citizens and staff seated in the members' gallery from the Ashbourne assisted living facility in the constituency of Edmonton-Strathcona. The Ashbourne was funded by members of the Garneau United church who identified a need for an assisted living facility in the community. It is owned and operated by Garneau United Assisted Living Place, a charitable, not-for-profit corporation. Residents of the Ashbourne live independently in a safe, private, and friendly community. I would ask them now to stand, if possible, and remain standing as I read their names: their executive director, Laurie Winder; recreational therapist Danielle Mathias; and residents Gitte Lindsay, Jason Dickson, Hazel Magnussen, and Robert Mill. Please stand and enjoy the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks and Minister Responsible for the Status of Women.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you representatives of the Canadian Wind Energy Association and the Canadian Solar Industries Association, including the organization's presidents, Mr. Robert Hornung and Mr. John Gorman. Robert, John, and other representatives from these important industries will be meeting with members over the coming days. Alberta is home to one of the finest solar and wind resources in Canada. Our work with these industries will help us diversify our economy and build the economy of tomorrow. Our conversations and work with the renewable energy industry are also important as we continue to talk to Albertans about a made-in-Alberta climate change plan. I ask Robert, John, and their fellow colleagues to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the people's Assembly.

The Speaker: If the House would allow the Speaker to make a personal comment. I'm sure that all of this House knows and certainly our guests know that I have the good privilege of coming from the sunniest city in Canada.

The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Fitzpatrick: We'll have an argument about the sunniest city.

Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly Ms Patti Johnsen and her son Kevin McGarvey. Ms Johnsen is the president of the Lethbridge and district Canadian Federation of University Women group and has been for the last four years. Patti has encouraged the members of the group to pursue many initiatives for the betterment of women in Lethbridge and the surrounding areas such as the university scholarship program, providing feminine supplies for Harbour House and ARCHES, the Persons Day breakfast event, weekly bridge group, monthly book club, and the school readers, to name a few. Patti doesn't just encourage people to pursue these initiatives; she participates. I have been so fortunate to be a member of this group and to participate in the work that they do. I ask Patti and Kevin to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my privilege to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly three special guests. Today I have Doug Bertsch, who is vice-president of regulatory and stakeholder affairs for the North West Redwater Partnership. I have Alyssa Haunholter, who is vice-president of government relations for North West Redwater Partnership. As well, I have Jacqueline Andersen, who is the employee services manager with Women Building Futures. If Doug, Alyssa, and

Jacqueline could please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there any other guests or visitors today?

1:40

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

North West Redwater Partnership

Mr. Piquette: Oh, Mr. Speaker, it's my lucky day. Today I rise to talk about the North West Redwater Partnership, whose Sturgeon refinery, I am proud to say, is in my constituency of Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater. It is of utmost importance for this province to find innovative ways to encourage high-value jobs for Albertans. By working with our private-enterprise partners to build a diverse and robust economy, we are guaranteeing a strong, sustainable, and prosperous future.

The Sturgeon refinery is an example of a project that contributes to the diversification of the Alberta economy while also creating value-added jobs right here at home. Every day, Mr. Speaker, I meet someone new in my constituency who is involved in one way or another with this site, and they tell me that they're glad to have a government that supports value-added jobs. Presently there are 3,500 people working on-site, with that number expected to grow to 5,000 by next year. These jobs are an economic gain for the province, not to mention for my constituents, and through the North West Redwater Partnership and Women Building Futures there are social gains as well.

Women Building Futures offers women pretrades training in a number of fields and holds the engagement of aboriginal women as a priority. This partnership will work to address the need for skilled trades at the refinery through proactive recruitment, training, and apprenticeship of women.

I am very disappointed that our friends across the aisle would disparage such a valuable project. I would suggest that they see for themselves and meet the dedicated people who have worked so tirelessly to make this thing a reality.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Family Violence Prevention Month

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. November is Family Violence Prevention Month. As a mother and, most recently, as the shadow minister for the status of women I know how important the work that is being done by awareness campaigns such as Family Violence Prevention Month is.

Members of the Legislature may know that Family Violence Prevention Month is a uniquely Albertan campaign, which was started in 1986 as a local initiative in Hinton. This grassroots campaign has spread across Alberta, and today I am heartened to say that hundreds of communities across our province now work each November to shed light on these issues and how to end the cycles of violence. The fact of the matter is that violence against women and children affects all of us. It weakens the very fabric of our society and takes a heavy toll on individuals, families, and communities.

In my community the volunteers of the Airdrie women's shelter campaign, also called Airdrie POWER, have come together to help create thousands of purple ribbons to wear and display to help raise awareness of this important issue. All members of the Wildrose caucus are wearing the same ribbons here today to show our support

for raising awareness about this very serious issue. Mr. Speaker, it takes all members of society working together to end the cycle of violence. Events like Family Violence Prevention Month provide much-needed support to victims of domestic violence and show survivors that they are not alone.

In addition to the purple ribbon campaign, in Airdrie we will raise awareness with a candlelight vigil walk to honour those affected by family violence. If you're interested, the event takes place this Thursday, November 5, in the south office from 7 to 9 p.m., and it's called Light the Night. I encourage all members of this Assembly to discover what their communities are doing to raise awareness during Family Violence Prevention Month and join in and help raise awareness about this issue.

Thank you.

Energy Policies

Mr. Gotfried: Leveraging export markets for Alberta businesses is a key factor in successful economic diversification. The Asia Pacific market continues to be underrepresented in terms of export opportunities as this market continues to rapidly expand. It would be prudent to build relationships and support infrastructure to allow Alberta business to take advantage of opportunities. To the minister of economic development: what specific initiatives are you undertaking to ensure Alberta businesses have the cultural competencies . . . [interjection] My apologies. I'm going fast.

The Speaker: The hon. minister may want to listen. She just sent a signal.

Mr. Gotfried: I'm going fast now.

Mr. Speaker, the key topic of conversation amongst all Albertans today is jobs, jobs, and jobs. With today's announcement of a further 220 job losses in Grande Cache on top of 40,000 jobs already lost in the economy, many arguably due to the economic picture painted by this government, Albertans are increasingly concerned about the policies that attack the rapidly disappearing Alberta advantage.

Today coal mining and coal-fired electricity generation industries and their employees, investors, and stakeholders deserve our attention. With over 5,600 jobs directly engaged in coal extraction and related electricity generation, Alberta stands to be a big loser in a dogmatic approach to coal-fired generation plants. Job losses, loss of mining and industrial capacity, and handicapping of not only the low-grade but metallurgical coal industry need to be looked at along with the unintended consequences of misguided policy driven by hard-line, often externally funded environmental interests.

Alberta needs stable and reliable electricity generation, and we need to be cognizant of unstable or inadequate supply in the price of electricity and the impact on both consumers and industrial customers. Recent studies indicate staggering job losses are the likely result of poorly planned shutdown policies associated with this issue. Another consideration which speaks to investor confidence in Alberta and the re-establishment of the Alberta advantage is the cost associated with shutdown versus a more prudent and logical dial up, dial down approach to coal-fired electricity.

Mr. Speaker, this is a key issue . . .

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

ARCHES Society in Lethbridge

Ms Fitzpatrick: Mr. Speaker, I'm very happy to stand here today to share another piece of the puzzle that is Lethbridge. AIDS Outreach Community Harm Reduction Education Support Society

is the long name for the program called ARCHES. ARCHES is a critical entity in Lethbridge. It provides needed services to a great number of our most marginalized citizens. Formerly known as Lethbridge HIV connection society, ARCHES helps anyone who is in need of their services, and they provide it in a nonjudgmental atmosphere. ARCHES has been pivotal in saving lives in our community through harm reduction as the drug fentanyl has reared its ugly and often fatal head in southern Alberta.

ARCHES provides support for individuals living with HIV/AIDS and hepatitis C: outreach; harm reduction; take-home naloxone; the Alberta Addicts Who Educate and Advocate Responsibly, AAWEAR; and the southern Alberta growth empowerment centre for women. ARCHES has their own facility nestled in a safe and sober neighbourhood close to the downtown area.

Fundraising sustains the services they provide. Their largest fundraiser is coming up on November 27, the condom couture fashion show. This incredible and innovative way to raise funds is a wonderful and life-saving service in our community, and all the fashions are made totally of condoms.

Again, with this member's statement I hope to shed a little light on this critical entity, and I hope that I've piqued your interest.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of Her Majesty's Official Opposition.

Royalty Review

Mr. Jean: Our energy sector is being crushed by low oil prices, higher taxes, and a government that won't advocate for increased market access. Now the NDP are interfering in a royalty review which the Premier promised would be independent. The Finance minister recently told reporters – and I quote – that as oil companies produce, we will take that profit. End quote. To the Premier: how does it help encourage job creation when your Finance minister is telling potential investors that in Alberta the profit goes to the government?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, it may surprise the member opposite to know that royalties do actually come out of the profits that are paid by oil and gas companies, so that is true. Should there be royalties paid after the royalty review, that's where they'll come from, but we are still waiting to see the outcome of the good work that is being undertaken by the royalty review panel. They're working very hard. They are consulting widely. They are talking with a large number of producers and other advocates within Alberta. I expect that we will get some very innovative and helpful . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, Madam Premier.

Mr. Jean: Energy companies are craving stability in Alberta and have been forced to put investment on hold as they watch this royalty review play out. Albertans are worried about affording their mortgage payments and paying their bills. It's clear that for the NDP this is all about taking the profits from Alberta business to pay for risky experiments. To the Premier: your budget is banking on increased royalty rates, so why even bother with a review that creates so much uncertainty for Alberta's energy sector?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me clarify a couple of things. First of all, in the last campaign we ran on a plan to do a royalty review. Much to the chagrin, I'm sure, of the folks over there, who find it unique to actually move forward on your platform positions, that's what we decided to do. Now, we have put in place an

independent panel, and one of the things that very early on they came back to us with – they said: "You know what? Industry would find it very helpful if they were given until the end of 2016 before any changes came into place." We responded to that and to . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Jean: We can't tax our main industry into oblivion and expect positive results for Albertans. The Finance minister said in June that the review will help, quote, boost government revenues. End quote. In the budget the NDP said clearly that they're banking on higher oil prices and higher royalty rates. It's clear. Any energy workers hoping for a fair hearing are out of luck. Why isn't the Premier worried that a drastic hike in royalty rates will kill Alberta's oil and gas sector and, as a result, kill the quality of life of Alberta families?

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question because it allows me to correct a misapprehension. One of the things that we were also very clear on in our campaign and that I've been very clear on since is that should there be any incremental increases as a result of the royalty review, it is not our intention to have those injected into our operating but, rather, to go to the heritage trust fund. To be very clear, our budget does not bank on any kind of increase to the royalty rates. Our budget banks on a slow increase in the price of oil, so please – please – be clear on that.

The Speaker: Second official question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Jean: Well, right now, Madam Premier, we are paying for the lights with borrowed money in this place.

Job Creation and Retention

Mr. Jean: Today we also found out that 200 union coal miners in Grande Cache will be out of a job just before Christmas. If this is part of the NDP plan to reduce our environmental footprint, Albertans should be worried. It's the same story every morning across every corner of Alberta. Investors are fleeing, businesses are closing, and Albertans are losing their jobs. Temporary employment plans and \$5,000 job grants after the fact just aren't going to cut it. What is the Premier doing to get ahead of this to prevent further job losses and to keep Albertans working?

Ms Notley: Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, let me begin by challenging the premise of the question. First of all, we are very concerned about what impact the job losses at the Grande Cache coal mine will have on the community of Grande Cache, and we will be working with community leaders to talk about things that we may be able to do to ameliorate those problems. But let me be very clear. The Grande Cache coal mine is closing or at least temporarily closing because the underground mine is no longer particularly productive and because the other mine has not yet been approved. It has nothing to do with any of these other issues . . .

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Jean: Tax hikes, royalty reviews, massive debt, credit downgrades, profit grabs, and mixed messages to the market: no, the government doesn't control world oil prices, but it's those actions that this Premier does control, and her actions are not helpful for Alberta families. Businesses create jobs when there's work to be done and profits to be made. They don't create jobs because 18 months later they might get a few thousand bucks back from the government. Why doesn't the Premier understand that?

Ms Notley: What doesn't help the health of the economy is groundless fearmongering. Albertans understand that the price of oil has dropped significantly, and as a result jobs are being lost. We understand that. The question, then, is: how do they want to navigate those tough times over which we have no control? They were given two options: cut billions of dollars and lay off teachers and nurses and hurt communities or work with a government that has a multipronged plan to work through economic diversification, job creation.

Mr. Jean: I wouldn't call 40,000 Alberta families losing their jobs groundless.

Albertans have never been more worried about our economy. You don't have to take my word for it. According to the Canadian Federation of Independent Business confidence in Alberta businesses has never been lower than it is now. They are suffocating under bad NDP policies that result in higher costs, fewer work hours, and less opportunity to grow their businesses. Instead of treating profit like it's a dirty word, why won't the Premier follow the Wildrose suggestion to cut small business taxes so that businesses can create jobs for Albertans that desperately need them?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, what our plan has done – we've thought this through in great detail. We are ensuring increased access to capital for small and medium enterprises, we are increasing access to venture capital for innovators, we are offering up the job incentive program for long-term job creation opportunities, and we've just today, of course, announced that we've brought back the STEP program. So there are a number of things that we are doing through this government to promote job creation. You know, I need to – well, I'll wait until the next question.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Promotion of Alberta's Energy Industry

Mrs. Aheer: Mr. Speaker, yesterday we learned that TransCanada will suspend its application on the Keystone XL, and we can't help but see where they're coming from. This project faces obstacles from Washington and false allegations that Alberta oil is the dirtiest oil on the continent, and right here in Alberta this project faces an NDP caucus, some of whom are bigger fans of Chávez than Chevron. When Keystone comes back online, will the Premier instruct her new Washington envoy to fight for it, or is she hoping Keystone, along with all those Alberta jobs, will just go away?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, we know that getting our product to tidewater is very important to the object of diversifying the market for a product. We know that's very critical. Over the last eight or nine years of a Conservative government in Ottawa and a Conservative government here and an überconservative opposition over there, there has been no success in getting these pipelines built. [interjections] Part of the reason for that is that there is no social . . .

The Speaker: I remind the House that I was having some difficulty hearing both parties.

First supplemental.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, failing to be an open advocate for Keystone XL is just another example of how this NDP

government has pushed investment out of Alberta. The Premier has filled her senior advisors with antipipeline activists. She has publicly opposed Northern Gateway, with zero consultation, interfering in Kinder Morgan. She's even implied an environmental veto on Energy East to a province that, to quote my colleague, prefers raw sewage over all pipelines. What, if anything, is she actually going to do to get pipelines built?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I'm not quite sure. It seems like the premise of that question may have been slightly flawed from the hon. member.

2:00

As you know, Mr. Speaker, I had a meeting last week with the Premier of New Brunswick to talk about mutual strategies that we could adopt to promote the Energy East pipeline. We also have been talking with our colleagues out west about promoting that particular pipeline. We understand that it's important to get our pipelines to tidewater, and we also, of course, understand that it's important to upgrade as much as possible here.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you. Energy investment is fleeing our province because we don't have access to tidewater, and while the Premier sometimes says the right words, her government's actions are drowning them out. In these tough economic times other Premiers are finding ways to boost their provinces; ours seems busy trying to drive away private investment. It's time for the Premier to stop thinking of Alberta as an embarrassing cousin and to wave Alberta's flag proudly. When the Premier goes to Paris, will she stand up for Alberta and tell the world that no one produces oil and gas more responsibly than Alberta?

Ms Notley: What I'm going to do, Mr. Speaker, is that when I go to Paris, I'm going to start by telling the truth. What that will be is that this government is committed for the first time to developing a climate change strategy, a renewable energy plan, an energy efficiency plan, and moving forward in terms of an appropriate greenhouse gas emissions reduction strategy. This is what we will do, and this is how we will earn the credibility . . .

The Speaker: The leader of the third party.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You have to know the truth to tell the truth.

Job Creation and Retention

(continued)

Mr. McIver: Yesterday in this House the NDP caucus laughed when I talked about Albertans losing their jobs. Let's see what they say today. Albertans have heard that this government wants to make the province less reliant on resource revenues and create a knowledge-based, lower carbon economy. Their quote. But we have yet to see any evidence of that. To the Premier: can you tell this House and the thousands of Albertans who have lost their jobs when they can work in this new knowledge-based, lower carbon economy, what their jobs will be, and when they can start?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, as the member opposite knows, the government is not in the business of job creation; we are in the business of working with job creators. By working with job creators, we then get economic diversification, which is what we

are working on. I mean, it would be lovely to wave a magic wand and create 40,000 jobs out of nowhere, but God knows that group of folks never did it. To suggest that somehow we can deal with the drop in the price of oil overnight and replace each and every job is ridiculous. We are working on economic diversification very hard because we care about the Albertans who have . . .

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, the Premier says that they don't create jobs, but it's her own government and their promise that said that they're going to create this new economy. The new economy seems like a fantasy today based on the answers that we just received in this House, so can the Premier enlighten Albertans on this? Until you unveil your plans for a brave new world, will you start supporting Albertans in the ways they've chosen to make their living by putting your efforts into being a friend of the current economy, at least until you can describe your new fantasy economy?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me begin, I guess, by correcting a couple of prefaces to various and sundry questions. In terms of small business confidence, in fact, it appears that according to the CFIB in October, for the first time in several months, small business confidence is up. That is because they understand that this government is committed to working with business to give them the tools they need to promote their good ideas, their plans for diversification: access to capital, access to venture capital, access to innovation support, and access to incentive programs.

Mr. McIver: There you heard it, Mr. Speaker. The Premier just admitted that the fantasy economy isn't coming.

You know what? In one breath they talk about the fantasy economy; in the next breath they talk about building our economy on the backbone of the energy industry. The Environment minister's words, very recently. To the Premier. Let's forget for a minute about the future. Let's talk about the now. Now that we've established that there's no fantasy economy, will you stop damaging the current economy? Will you roll back the corporate tax increases? Will you cancel the royalty review? Will you actually tell the people in Paris that we have a great way of dealing with the energy industry? Will you actually . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I've said before, in the spring it was very clear that this province was going into very tough times as a result of our inability to diversify our economy, so different parties laid out different plans to Albertans. We laid out a plan, and Albertans – I hate to break it to you – chose that plan, so we are moving forward on that plan.

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

Provincial Debt

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Now, earlier today I asked the Minister of Finance if he had calculated the impact of a credit-rating downgrade. It is troubling to learn that his department hasn't even done this most basic financial risk management. Today my single budget researcher calculated that a 1 per cent increase to Alberta's borrowing costs starting in 2017 will result in over \$700 million in additional debt-servicing costs just two years later. To

the Minister of Finance. It seems incredible to me that your department hasn't done these calculations. If you haven't done them, will you? If you have, will you table the results?

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. No one wants to see a credit-rating downgrade, of course, and I can tell you that our plan is to build the economy so that that won't happen. That kind of a view is negative and not optimistic. We have a different view, and we're going to follow through with it.

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker, how do they know it's not a risk if they haven't done the work?

Let's try another finance question, Mr. Speaker. Last week I tabled the Alberta Party's alternative budget, which balances in three years while still investing in infrastructure and protecting front-line services. As of today no other opposition party has tabled theirs. [interjections] As we prepared this document, we discovered that there's a big gap in the ND's plan, which makes it nearly impossible to balance without significant new revenues or spending cuts. To the Premier: where does the money come from?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, let me begin – I do appreciate that coming up with a shadow budget is a lot of work, and one certainly does need to get up pretty early in the morning to find the time to put together a shadow budget. [interjections]

But that being said, all other things being equal, it's very important to understand that this government is in the position of having the lowest debt to GDP of any province in the country now and also five years from now, and the best way to make sure we stay that way is to pass our legislation that this minister will be introducing.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Premier doesn't seem to know where the budget gap comes from, but I do. It comes from overly optimistic revenue forecasts, and there is a huge risk to our province if they're wrong. Now, I've thought about it, and I think I know where the government plans to get the money. They have repeatedly said that they plan to increase royalties. [interjections] Again to the Premier. You seem to assume that higher royalties will fill this budget gap. If you already know the outcomes of the royalty panel, what's the point of the panel in the first place?

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I believe I've already answered this question earlier, let me be very clear. The panel will make the recommendations to the government that they make, but what we have been very clear on is that any incremental increase that arises as a result of any changes will go into the heritage trust fund and is not part of our budgeting process. That's one of the things we committed to in the election campaign, and that is one of the things that we will stick to.

We also have introduced a budget with the lowest debt-to-GDP ratio of the rest of the country now and five years from now. This member over there should know that, and he should be proud that we are building Alberta at the same time.

The Speaker: This place is quite robust today.

I want to remind members again about the preambles on questions from here forward.

2:10

Family Violence

Ms Goehring: Mr. Speaker, I worked with child and family services for quite some time. I am sad to say that research shows that two Alberta cities, Calgary and Edmonton, rank lowest as safe Canadian cities for women. A few weeks back we saw a mother of five die at

the hands of her former partner. The previous government did little to improve services for women. Discrepancies exist in wages, child care affordability is a big issue, and the opposition voted no to affordable child care in government buildings just last week. My question to the Minister of Human Services: in light of recent family violence tragedies in Alberta . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, your time has elapsed. Would the minister mind answering the question?

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Although I didn't hear the full question, [interjections] the question was going to family violence, which is a very important issue, nothing really to laugh about. Our government has allocated \$95 million in this budget to come up with a co-ordinated system of support to provide women fleeing from violence the needed supports. We are absolutely committed that in Alberta there should be no violence, no place . . .

The Speaker: First supplemental, hon. member.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Alberta has some of the highest rates of family violence and intimate partner violence, to the same minister: what is your department doing to ensure that those in vulnerable positions of domestic violence are being taken care of?

Mr. Sabir: Mr. Speaker, our government believes that no one should suffer from or live in fear of violence. Supports to survivors of domestic violence are crucial, and that's why we have invested in such supports. We have invested \$15 million going towards women's shelters to provide a safe place for women to turn to when that unfortunate incident happens. We have invested in FCSS programs. We have invested \$15 million in family and community support programs. All these programs are geared towards preventing family violence.

Ms Goehring: Mr. Speaker, given that women's shelters are important in providing support while fleeing violence, again to the same minister: how is your ministry planning to stabilize the lives of women fleeing domestic violence.

Mr. Sabir: Mr. Speaker, a 2015 survey of front-line agencies found that for people affected by family violence, meeting their basic needs is very critical to keeping them safe. Our Budget 2015 includes \$49 million for the women's shelters across the province. That investment will help us deal with women fleeing from violent situations. We are also creating a new child tax benefit that will also help women to meet the basic needs of their children.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Strankman: Mr. Speaker, I understand that I am to . . .

The Speaker: Proceed.

Spray Lake Sawmills

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Timber harvesting is a well-established activity in the Castle special management area, and throughout Alberta timber harvesting is guided by modern rules and practices. Forestry adds key diversification to Alberta's economy, and with the cancellation of that forestry management agreement, Spray Lake has another move that will hurt our economy. This government appears to have a policy of going ahead without consultation of those affected. Mr. Minister of Agriculture and

Forestry, why is this government hurting Alberta's third-largest industry?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the member for the question. The fact is that it wasn't necessarily an FMA that was cancelled; it was another forestry agreement. Forestry remains a critical sector of our economy. Over 15,000 hard-working Albertans work in the industry, and personally I'm very proud to support this industry and to be their champion as forestry minister. We're working closely with Spray Lake Sawmills in Cochrane, as they employ, you know, 300 with jobs in Cochrane and southern Alberta, and are working closely with them as we move forward.

Thank you.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the abrupt announcement by this government regarding the Castle area is having negative economic impacts and given that Spray Lake Sawmills is deeply concerned because of potential job losses that would be acutely felt in the area, Mr. Minister, what will the government do to address serious shortfalls in our province's GDP and diversification with the cancellation of these types of contracts?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the member. Our government made a commitment in our platform to protect the Castle area, and we have fulfilled that promise. There has been, you know, a slight cutback in their harvesting plants, for sure, but they remain a viable industry in Cochrane and area and continue to do so. Going forward, we will continue our discussions with the sawmill in Cochrane to ensure we can continue to protect those important industry jobs.

Thank you.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Forests Act states that compensation is available for cancelled quotas at the minister's discretion to the amount that the Minister considers just and given that last night the minister said that he will not be providing any compensation to Spray Lake Sawmills, how can this minister consider no compensation at all to be just?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the member: thank you for the question and for the opportunity to correct you once again. I did not say that there would be no compensation. What I was saying is that we are continuing our discussions with Spray Lake Sawmills, including the opportunity for them to present any plans they might have, to ensure that we protect those very important jobs in Cochrane and southern Alberta.

Thank you.

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

School Construction

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My question today, first off, is to the Premier. The Premier and her government have said that the 197 school projects currently under way in this province are of the utmost importance to them. However, in this year's budget they are spending \$301 million less on these school projects. If these projects are such a priority, why have you

allocated \$301 million less to build these schools when that could account for the construction costs of up to 20 schools? Where is that \$300 million?

The Speaker: The Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for that question. You know, Alberta families have been waiting a long time for these new and upgraded schools. We have 200 school projects, either new ones or upgrades, on the books to be built over these next few years. We've forwarded the money to ensure that those schools are being built. So we have a \$1.3 billion capital project expenditure for these schools. It's in the books. It's there, and we're building those schools for Albertans.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Actually, sir, page 44 of your budget document says that you are spending \$959 million in '15-16. First of all, the total sum of money allocated for the school projects is \$301 million less. Secondly, if the school projects are so behind, why are you spending \$120 million more in '15-16?

2:20

Mr. Eggen: Well again, Mr. Speaker, certainly, we have looked to make sure that we are building these schools over a three- and four-year period. We've made sure that every one of these schools is required to ensure that we meet enrolment and increasing enrolment in all of our areas. Certainly, one of the first things we did was to make sure that we put the money in place, that the former government failed to do, to ensure that we build these schools in a reasonable time. Now, we have adjusted the timelines, but we certainly have the money to do it. Albertans know that we are building these schools to meet the needs of our students.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. So we've established a couple of things. One, they are doing a review to see which schools are needed. Hmm. Secondly, given that they are spending \$120 million more this year and given that they are spending \$220 million more in the next fiscal year while they've reduced the pot by \$301 million, was the minister misleading the public by saying these schools are behind schedule, or does the minister plan on . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member. Hon. member.

Members of the Assembly, I want to use our hon. member as an outstanding example. I think I might have heard a preamble.

The Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. All Albertans should know, in each community, that the 200 schools that we have on the books are being built by this government. We have put plans in place to do so. We have more realistic timelines after having to make adjustments from the previous government making outrageous promises to build schools in order to try to win the election. They were unfortunate. Certainly, we are building these schools. The money is in place, and Albertan communities are very excited about the prospect of getting new schools.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Postsecondary Education Funding

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The tuition freeze instated by the NDP government is reducing opportunity for Alberta students. While government argues that it will help the students in this province, they have failed to realize the unintended consequences

associated with their action. Since the tuition freeze does not apply to international students, postsecondary institutions are admitting more and more students from outside of Canada. To the Minister of Advanced Education: are you aware that your government is reducing opportunity for Alberta's students?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. We are very proud to be working with students, and I know first-hand from students that they are so pleased that the government has gone ahead with the tuition freeze for two years plus invested \$133 million this year into stabilizing the postsecondary system. People are speaking very positively.

Mr. Taylor: Given that the tuition freeze may have been instated with the best of intention, this policy has simply disrupted long-term planning for postsecondary institutions as they do not know how long this freeze will last. Since Wildrose believes in capping tuition-rate increases to inflation, this is a predictable, reasonable, and sustainable framework. Minister, how long does your government intend on freezing tuition rates?

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. We've been clear from the beginning. We have put a two-year freeze on tuition, and during that time we're doing an adult-learning review to hear from postsecondary students, to hear from boards across the province to absolutely be working with them to look at how we can make the system better. We're very proud of moving forward on this commitment that we made in our platform.

Mr. Taylor: Given that some universities are facing financial issues, including the threat of insolvency, and given that without institutions like Athabasca University thousands of young Albertans will be faced with even less opportunity to develop and advance their skills and education since thousands of high-paying jobs will be lost should an institution like AU go under, Minister, what is this government's plan to preserve these institutions, that are important to Alberta?

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Well, over the summer I had the opportunity to travel across Alberta and speak with many of the presidents, the chairs, the faculty associations, the students of postsecondaries across the province, and I want you to know that they said: thank you. They said: thank you for reinvesting money back into postsecondary; thank you for stabilizing the sector; we're very grateful. I think we're pretty healthy.

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

Calgary Cancer Centre

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am invested in ensuring that Calgarians and all Albertans have access to timely health care with no financial surprises. The Calgary cancer centre has only been costed to the 2019-20 fiscal year. That leaves a three-year funding gap that hasn't been included in the \$830 million price tag. To the Minister of Health: will this government commit to the completion of the centre with a firm timeline and fully disclosed financials?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. We are of course thrilled to be moving forward on a promise that had been made over 12 years ago, and this government is going to deliver. It's a lot easier to deliver on essential health care services like the Calgary cancer centre when you have a government that believes in having stable front-line health care as opposed to proposing more cuts than a bad slasher film. I have to say that I'm really proud of that.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, Calgarians are telling me they want action from this government, not fearmongering about the opposition. Given the Calgary cancer centre has been announced and reannounced multiple times yet very little progress has been made, again to the Health minister: can you explain why such an essential project has been delayed a further three years?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. Our government is committed to being open and transparent with information. That means when we have updates around timelines that were proposed by the former government, that were not realistic at all, we share that information with the public. We are doing that in an ongoing way, and we will continue to have announcements around the Calgary cancer facility and other facilities when there is new information to announce, including after the updates come in on the original estimates, that are coming through right now. We're moving forward for the next four years. That's the appropriate way to do planning, and when there are further updates, we will share those as well.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, I lost my mother to cancer and have seen first-hand the devastation that this disease causes. Given the fact that measures must be put in place to ensure this project is completed on time and it isn't just an empty promise to Albertans and Calgarians, will this government commit to ensuring that the centre does not become collateral damage of inefficient infrastructure spending?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My sympathies to the hon. member. I know that all of us in this House have been touched by somebody very personally, and that's one of the reasons why we're moving forward on this commitment. Yes, we will continue to invest in the essential infrastructure that's needed in Calgary, including the Calgary cancer hospital.

Economic Diversification

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, I'll try this question again. Given that leveraging export markets for Alberta business is a key factor in successful economic diversification, the Asia Pacific market continues to be underrepresented in terms of export market opportunities. As this market continues to rapidly expand, it would be prudent to build relationships and support infrastructure to allow Alberta businesses to take advantage of growth opportunities. To the Minister of Economic Development and Trade: what specific initiatives are you undertaking to ensure Alberta businesses have the cultural competencies, business knowledge, and market access to successfully penetrate these markets?

The Speaker: The Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. member for his question, a very prudent question. First of all, I want to say that our Premier decided to create this ministry with the expressed

intention of having a one-stop shop for business, to ensure that we can work with the private sector to create jobs within our province. But equally important is increasing Alberta's ability to trade, our export market. Through the international offices that we have, we will be looking at expanding our opportunities to increase our exports, reduce trade barriers, and support Alberta businesses.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

2:30

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister, who seems to have created at least one job: given that the creation of your ministry seems to have potentially cut our international outreach off at the knees and given that fuel costs for rail companies were significantly increased in Budget 2015, making commodity exports more expensive, what do you say to Alberta businesses that feel international economic diversification is no longer a priority of this government?

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, the premise of that question is absurd. The fact is that this ministry was created by our government, not the previous government, that for years neglected diversifying the Alberta economy. This is a priority of our government. Working with small and medium-sized enterprises, working with the Alberta Enterprise Corporation, the minister on my left announced a job incentive grant. Our government has concrete steps and initiatives to increase employment and increase trade for our province.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, congratulations on the one job already created, but given that Edmonton and Calgary already have economic development corporations, which aggressively engage in trade missions and effective lobbying for businesses in their respective cities and around the world, what specifically are you doing to ensure that your ministry works alongside these organizations instead of competing against them, noting that your party was conspicuously absent from Calgary's recent economic outlook event, with over 1,600 local businesses represented?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, first and foremost, our government is listening to business and industry because for years they were asking for a ministry that would focus specifically on partnering with business and industry as a one-stop shop, and our government has demonstrated that this is a priority for us.

Mr. Speaker, it's also worth noting that part of the reason that thousands of Albertans, unfortunately, have lost their jobs is because of an overreliance on one energy sector and a previous government that refused to diversify the economy.

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

Fentanyl Use Prevention

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As noted yesterday, communities across our province have witnessed the horrible effects of fentanyl overdoses and deaths. In these tough economic times we know that taking care of each other is the Alberta way of doing things. My constituents want to know that all Albertans are being taken care of and that our streets are safe. To the Minister of Health: what is your ministry doing in order to protect and support Albertans from fentanyl overdoses and addiction?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. Addictions, of course, are devastating not just to the individual who is addicted but to the family and community members that are involved as well. So our sympathies, of course, to the families that have been impacted.

In terms of some of the initiatives, we moved immediately, once we took office, on a mental health review, and I think members from both sides of this House are working collaboratively on that. This is too important. We're talking about saving lives and helping people see hope in the future rather than falling victim to addiction and far too often overdose.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that many social service agencies are now struggling to keep up with fentanyl addiction and overdose cases, what is the department doing to support these agencies in this time of need?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East, actually, was just talking earlier today about ARCHES and some of the work that's happening there. I had the honour of visiting them this summer as well as the Sheldon Chumir in Calgary. They are doing amazing work in trying to make sure that they increase access to harm reduction initiatives in the community. We have to say a big thank you to them as well as to Alberta Health Services for their education campaign around the dangers of fentanyl. Alberta Health Services has formed a fentanyl emergency command centre. One of their first tasks is to find a way that we can distribute naloxone kits throughout our communities more widely.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that some Albertans with addictions may be reluctant to access services for fear of reprisal, to the same minister: what are you doing to ensure that harm reduction policies are put into place where appropriate?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. We are of course doing the mental health review, but also additional actions are being taken immediately by Alberta Health Services, as I just mentioned. These include prevention awareness, harm reduction, and improving access to treatment for people who are struggling with addictions. I'm really proud of the board that we announced recently for Alberta Health Services. One of the board members is actually Marliss Taylor, who has a very strong international reputation for doing work around harm reduction here in Edmonton with Streetworks and internationally as well. I'm excited to see what type of initiative she proposes as well.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Urgent Health Care Services in Airdrie

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The city of Airdrie is a booming city. We have a population of over 60,000 people within the riding, and with a population as large as ours you would think that the city would be serviced properly, but it is not. Airdrie is severely lacking a 24-hour health care facility. Currently residents are forced to drive

over an hour and a half into Calgary to receive urgent care in the evening and late-night hours. To the Minister of Health: can you tell the people of Airdrie where their urgent care facility lies on the minister's priority list?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, hon. member, for the question and, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to answer it. When I hit Airdrie, I'm pretty excited about being close to Calgary, so I'm sorry that there sometimes could be an hour and a half commute. That, of course, is something that my hon. colleague down the way will have to help us address, I guess, if it's traffic that you're talking about.

In terms of emergency after-hours care I have met with a number of different stakeholders from Airdrie, including the mayor and some individuals from the hospital. I'm aware of the desire to have an expanded health care facility. [interjections] That requires expanded investment, and I find it ironic that members opposite are criticizing . . .

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, the minister's answer is, unfortunately, unsatisfactory. Airdrie does not have an adequate health care facility.

Given that health issues do not follow routinely scheduled business hours and do not hold off to strike a patient between the hours of 9 and 5, Minister, since you find more money to hire additional bureaucrats in AHS, why can't you find the time to tell the people of Airdrie where they are on the priority list?

Ms Hoffman: I find the reference to additional bureaucrats very bewildering. We've brought forward a very focused budget. We've got a tremendous team, and we'll be happy to talk through those details in estimates.

In terms of investing in infrastructure, members opposite have proposed cutting \$9.8 billion from infrastructure investment but then want to say that, of course, one individual facility is more important than every other. I think it's important that we have a thoughtful, outcomes-based plan and that we move forward on making sure Albertans get the health care they need where they need it.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that land has been donated for an emergency health care facility in Airdrie and that the city and local businesses are ready to partner to see the citizens of Airdrie protected, will the minister commit to protect the people of Airdrie and partner with us to break ground on this urgently needed health care facility?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you to the member for the question. It's great when local entrepreneurs step up and want to contribute assets, including land. It's very much appreciated. With the land comes the need for construction and then ongoing operations. What we've done is worked with Alberta Health Services to have evidence-based decision-making so that we can make sure that we've got assurances for all Albertans, not just individuals who can afford to donate land, that they will have health care when and where they need it, Mr. Speaker.

2:40

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Light Up Your Life Society in Stony Plain

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to share the good work that the Light Up Your Life Tri-Community Palliative/Hospice Care Society is doing in my communities. The Light Up Your Life society was established in 1992 in Stony Plain. These dedicated and compassionate volunteers work all year to raise funds to support palliative, hospice, and continuing care. In 2014 the Light Up Your Life society provided close to \$60,000 to WestView health centre. This donation helped ensure equipment, training, and care kits as well as furnish four private rooms and a communal family centre. The society's efforts raised the number of hospice beds in the Edmonton area to 68, and they are badly needed.

As I know from working in health care, sometimes the best gift you can give someone is to hold their hand and help them pass with grace or to be there to hold a family member after their loved one has passed.

This year's Light Up Your Life fundraising campaign began on November 1 and continues until December 31. Each \$10 donation lights a clear bulb on one of the five community symbols of hope throughout the tri-municipal area. These symbols of hope glow in memory of our loved ones, and the names of those remembered are published in local newspapers after the Christmas season. As of 2014 the society's total fundraising surpassed \$1 million. On average, each year 97 per cent of all funds raised are used directly to support people in our own communities.

On October 6 the society was presented with a 2015 minister's seniors service award, which recognizes Albertans whose volunteerism has made a meaningful difference in the lives of seniors. This award was presented by Minister Hoffman and myself. The society was nominated by Mayor Rod Shaigec and the council of Parkland county. I would like to recognize the society for the important work that they do in our communities and the difference that they make.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Interparty Co-operation

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This morning I looked in a dictionary and looked up the word "co-operate." The word refers to individuals or groups of individuals who work together to ensure a benefit that will be of value to all. Members of this government will be especially interested in the notion of co-operation. Before their party was known as the New Democratic Party, it was called the co-operative federation. Their party was

founded as a group of individuals who were supposed to co-operate. That party's first leader called for co-operation within elected bodies, not unlike this Assembly. Their party's second leader said that people should work together in the public interest.

This week, Mr. Speaker, I put forward a nonpartisan initiative that called for co-operation, Bill 203, a measure that would allow all members to lock arms in order to prevent certain kinds of government spending from occurring during election campaigns. It's a measure that the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, the Premier, called for on November 19 just last year, yet this week, when given the chance to show goodwill and a spirit of co-operation on this issue, this government's members chose to behave like members of the previous PC government.

Mr. Speaker, the members of this House who are new may want to remember why Albertans sent them here. It wasn't their political experience. They're here because the past members of the government, who sat in this same Chamber, lost sight of whom they represented. They put partisan politics, optics ahead of the public interest. They weren't interested in co-operating with others. New members would do well to learn from their mistakes because if they don't do their job well, they'll soon be out of a job.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table the requisite number of copies of a transcript of an interview given by the Leader of the Official Opposition to Rosemary Barton on *Power & Politics* in which he makes the outrageous claim that the government was, by moving to morning sittings, "eliminating 50% of our question periods as a result of [the] extension of hours." He went on to say, "They're trying to eliminate the opportunity for us to ask questions." I'd like to table this for the record.

The Speaker: Members of the Assembly, pursuant to Standing Order 7(7) the daily Routine is now concluded. Pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(5) the House stands adjourned until tomorrow afternoon at 1:30.

The legislative policy committees will convene this afternoon for consideration of the main estimates. Alberta's Economic Future will consider the estimates for Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour in the Foothills room, and Resource Stewardship will consider the estimates for Municipal Affairs in the Grassland room.

[The Assembly adjourned at 2:46 p.m. to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(5)(b)]

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Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, November 4, 2015

Day 15

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

First Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, November 4, 2015

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Today I have a reflection that I was provided with from the Church of England, and I thought it might resonate with you and with us here in this Assembly.

Spirit of wisdom and grace, the power of truth and judgment, we pray for all those who are working for peace in the tangled conflict of Syria today. For international leaders holding a thread of control, for the politicians holding a thread of power, for the religious leaders holding a thread of authority, for the fighters holding a thread of influence and the citizens who are clinging to a thread of hope, bring unity through the untangled order of justice, bring reconciliation through truthful dialogue, and bring new life through patient diplomacy, determined mediation, and courageous peacemaking.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly His Excellency Daeshik Jo, ambassador of the Republic of Korea. The ambassador is accompanied by Mrs. Eunyoung Park, his spouse; Mr. Shin, third secretary and consul; Dr. Chung, senior researcher at the embassy. The ambassador joins us today to represent the valuable and productive relationship Alberta and Korea share.

Korea is one of Alberta's key international partners, our sixth-largest export market in 2014, with over \$530 million, and a significant source of goods and investment in both Alberta and Canada. Alberta has a long history of productive relations with Korea, having established a trade office in Seoul in 1988 and a sister province with the Korean province of Gangwon in 1974.

I had the opportunity to meet with His Excellency this morning. The ambassador and his delegation are seated in your gallery, and I'd ask that our honoured guests please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome, Your Excellency. I had the privilege of meeting His Excellency earlier this morning.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The Minister of Education and Minister of Culture and Tourism.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly some students from the radio and television program at NAIT. In their commitment to student success NAIT continues to be a shining example of how we provide job-ready skills to the next generation of leaders. Of course, NAIT happens to be in my own constituency of Edmonton-Calder. I would ask all 32 of them to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there any school groups that members would wish to acknowledge today?

Hearing none, the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Carlier: Mr. Speaker, it's my sincere pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly this year's inductees into Alberta's 4-H Hall of Fame. Dorothy Carlson is a dedicated 4-H leader, enthusiastic community volunteer, and member of an active farm family in the community of Cherhill in my own constituency.

Sherry Howey of Valleyview is known as the 4-H voice of the Peace region. Sherry initially joined 4-H as a member and then later reconnected as a 4-H leader when her children became involved. I would like to personally thank both Dorothy and Sherry for their outstanding service to their communities.

Accompanying them are some of their family members as well as an employee of Agriculture and Forestry's 4-H branch, Stacy Murray. Mr. Speaker, I would ask them now to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three directors from the Mosaic Centre in my riding of Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview. Since 2009 the Mosaic Centre has positively impacted the lives of Albertans challenged by poverty, hunger, and homelessness who reside in northeast Edmonton. Through compassion, love, and acceptance the staff and volunteers work tirelessly to help those who are at risk. In the past six months the Mosaic Centre assisted more than 200 unique individuals to access housing and follow-up supports. I'd ask Megan Schuring, Kelly Hennig, and Linda Deveau to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Having been, for 30 years, a real estate agent prior to being elected and also a member of the Alberta Real Estate Association, I'm especially honoured today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly members of the Alberta Real Estate Association, also known as AREA. AREA members are gathering today here in Edmonton for their government liaison days and are represented in the members' gallery by Brad Mitchell, director of government relations for AREA; Kerri Romanetz, government relations analyst for AREA; and 23 of their industry colleagues in the Alberta real estate business. I'd ask them all to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a friend of both of us from Medicine Hat, a very, very successful radio and media personality, a strong family person and a great mom, a great community person and a hard-working Wildrose candidate in the 2015 election, Val Olson. I would ask Val to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 21 professors from Shanghai, China. They are here today participating in a program through the English language school at the University of Alberta's Faculty of Extension through funding from

the China Scholarship Council. Through a program called the advanced professional program in English, these instructors, whose native language is not English, have the opportunity to teach courses in their subject areas and to come here, then, to enhance their English skills and interact with counterparts here in Alberta. I'd like to welcome them today and ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

1:40

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to welcome three special, distinguished guests today. First, may I introduce Mr. Randy Cook, president of Permolex. Mr. Cook has 37 years' experience within agriculture with a strong focus on risk management, sales, and marketing. His tenure has supported the development of marketing plans for Alberta Wheat Pool, and he has spent considerable expertise advancing agriculture into various national, international, and global markets. Randy has occupied the position of president of Permolex for 12 years and has been successful at accomplishing corporate objectives.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to introduce Bridgette Duniece, VP of Permolex. With an extensive background in engineering, human resources, and safety, her contributions support Permolex's vision of remaining an innovative and forward-thinking organization. Currently focused on working with the provincial and federal governments, the Alberta Bioenergy Producers Group, and other stakeholders, Ms Duniece continues to focus on community relations, the environment, and market-based commodity modelling.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to welcome Mikyla Mifsud. Mikyla is a grade 7 student with a strong focus on her academics. Currently learning provincial government structure, Mikyla feels privileged to witness the history that is being made within this Chamber today.

Would the House please welcome my distinguished guests. If you could please rise. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly three very special guests today. My incredible constituency assistant is Kerri Johnston. Kerri supports me gracefully in my work every day and spends much of her time and energy ensuring that the people of the Stony Plain constituency know we are listening and that we will do our best to help. Her patience is also phenomenal, considering it is take your kid to work day in Parkland school division and Kerri brought two young people to observe our work today.

With her today is her son, Nick Johnston, who attends Blueberry school, and my daughter, Amina Babcock, who attends Meridian Heights school. Both are grade 9 students and exceptional people that I am incredibly proud of. I also have to mention that my daughter was chosen this week to be on her school council. She may not be the youngest guest in our House to be politically engaged recently; nevertheless, I am very proud of her engagement. I'd ask all three of them to stand and receive the warm greeting of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A great honour and pleasure for me to introduce to you and through you to the House a friend and colleague, Shelley Wark-Martyn – Shelley, stand up so that people can get a good look at you – a 4-H'er and junior farmer in Ontario who went on from there to become a city

councillor and then a cabinet minister under Bob Rae and then a past president of the Alberta Liberal Party and candidate in the last election and now a consultant in cybersecurity internationally. Shelley Wark-Martyn has been a tireless volunteer and a great leader in our Liberal Party in Alberta, and I want her to receive the warm welcome of the Legislature.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly members of the Alberta Canola Producers Commission. I met with them this morning and learned a lot about canola. For those of you from urban areas it's that crop with the yellow flowers that we see on the roadside. It's my pleasure to introduce Lee Markert, chairman of the Alberta Canola Producers Commission; Renn Breitzkreuz, director; Greg Sears, council director; David Dzisiak, council director; Karla Bergstrom; and Marlene Caskey. Would you please rise to receive the traditional welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly quite a number of workers from the Culture and Tourism ministry. They've come here today to see what a fine, fine job we all do here in the Assembly, and I trust everyone will live up to their expectations. If they could rise, please, and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there any other guests? The Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to introduce to you and through you to our Assembly three realtors who are here from my home, Lethbridge. Cathy Maxwell is CEO of the Lethbridge Real Estate Board, and prior to that, she was a realtor for 11 years. She loves Lethbridge, and she's also a lover of organized real estate. Brad Cook is an honorary life member of the Lethbridge and District Association of Realtors. Stan Mills, with 35 years as a realtor in Lethbridge, area director, now joins the Real Estate Council of Alberta as a board member. If they would please rise for the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Provincial Long-term Fiscal Plan

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday in estimates I had the opportunity to question the Minister of Finance about his budget plan. Unlike in question period, I had the opportunity to really follow up with the minister, but the minister and I ran into a few bumps on the road. You see, the minister gave us virtually no details for years 4 and 5 of his fiscal plan projections. There are no details, just one single number for expenditures and just one single number for revenues to conveniently project a barely balanced budget in 2020. The minister somehow projects a whopping 26 per cent increase in revenues over four years, and it is weighted towards the last two years of the plan, where no data is presented. Either the minister is planning on a second round of massive tax hikes, or he is just counting on the royalty roller coaster alone to bail out his big spending plan.

Here is the problem, Mr. Speaker. We have no idea because they won't show their work. The linchpin of the NDP's plan is to get us somewhere close to a balanced budget in 2019 without looking for any spending reductions. That means the revenues must soar over \$55 billion, far beyond what Alberta saw even at \$100-a-barrel oil. Now, I'm not saying that this is impossible. After all, it's Alberta, and oil could be at \$100 this time next year. But what I will say is that in looking at the economic situation that our province is in today, the Minister of Finance cannot base his plan on record revenues and not show Albertans how we will actually get there.

The Minister of Finance's budget is asking Albertans to just take the NDP's word for it that the old revenue roller coaster will bail them out and that the debt they are racking up in the meantime will only run to \$47 billion. I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker, but Albertans deserve to see the math. The minister should do the right thing and produce the data underpinning his plan if Albertans are to have any faith in it.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Show Your 4-H Colours Day

Mr. Rosendahl: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The first Wednesday in November is Canada's national 4-H day, better known as Show Your 4-H Colours Day, and the kickoff of 4-H's monthlong national celebration. 4-H Canada invites you to break out your green clothing in November to support the show your colours celebration. Join the 32,000 volunteers and members across Canada this November and show your 4-H colours, which is green, by the way.

Set to celebrate its centennial in 2017, Alberta 4-H strengthens our communities' connection to agriculture and passes important life skills on to our youth. Members are offered opportunities to become leaders and to develop and thrive in a safe and fun learning environment. They are taught how to make a difference, one positive change at a time. 4-H'ers are working together as catalysts for change in their clubs, their community, and their country. Let's celebrate this by wearing green in November. 4-H Alberta is encouraging all clubs, members, families, and partners to show support by sharing their green photos via social media channels using the hash tag #showyour4Hcolours.

1:50

Agriculture doesn't look the same as it did back in the early 1900s, and neither does 4-H. However, the original goal of 4-H, to build strong rural communities and youth leaders, remains unchanged. 4-H clubs are evolving to remain relevant to the interests of today's youth and will always continue to do what they do best, inspiring and shaping young lives to positively impact their communities.

Thank you.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Jean: I'll take that, Mr. Speaker.

Energy Policies

Mr. Jean: If the NDP don't think their policies are doing real damage to our economy, they just aren't listening. Crushing new taxes, regulatory uncertainty, economic experiments: it's all adding up to mean fewer jobs and lower wages. The Petroleum Services Association of Canada actually said that there will be 3,700 fewer

wells in Alberta next year than in 2014, but the Premier insists that her government is not at fault. To the Premier: does she actually believe that a royalty review, higher taxes, and increased uncertainty aren't punishing our energy sector?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What I believe is that it's really important to keep your promises to the people of Alberta when they elect you, and what we talked about was that we would do a royalty review. You know what, Mr. Speaker? A lot of people in industry have actually said: "You know what? It's overdue. There's a lot of modernization which will help the industry." That's what responsible government does when they are representing the people of the province, who elected them.

Mr. Jean: Here's a direct quote from those people of the Petroleum Services Association: "Ongoing market access issues, and an environment of regulatory and policy uncertainty . . . hasn't been able to make anything better out of a bad situation." Translation: NDP policies are kicking Albertans when they're down. The worst part is that the Premier seems completely unapologetic for the damage her risky agenda is doing to Alberta. To the Premier: will she today admit that her campaign against our most important job sector is hurting ordinary Alberta people?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition: I think he needs a new translator because I didn't get what he said from what they said.

Mr. Speaker, we all know that the international price of oil has taken a walk off a very high cliff, and that's created a great deal of difficulty for the energy industry. But simply working with industry to look at our royalty structure does not in itself create the kind of problems that this party would like Albertans to think it does.

Mr. Jean: Sixty-five thousand jobs lost is a good translation.

When the oil services sector is down and investment is drying up, it impacts all of Alberta. Engineering companies in Calgary are closing shop – they're losing workers – gravel companies across Alberta are seeing layoffs, and manufacturing is slowing down dramatically. With higher taxes and fewer jobs, Albertans have less money to spend on their families and their priorities. Albertans are not asking for a miracle. They just want a government to stop kicking them when they're down. To the Premier: will she put ideology aside and start focusing on doing what's best for Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of economic development.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our Premier and government are taking direct action through the creation of my ministry. Now, you know, sadly, the opposition believes that the way to make the price of oil go up is to fire thousands of teachers and nurses. Well, that's not what we believe. We're not about to make problems worse, so we are working with the private sector with incentives and programs that we have to increase jobs and diversify our economy.

The Speaker: Second question.

Mr. Jean: Here's why fighting for our jobs, the economy, and our energy sector is important. Between September and October Alberta's unemployment rate went up. That's 14,000 more Albertans who are out of work. Fourteen thousand. So far this year Alberta has shed 65,000 jobs. That's close to matching the record set during

the Great Depression. Investment will not start coming back to Alberta until we have leaders who are serious about defending our industries. Why won't the Premier start sticking up for and standing up for Alberta instead of putting us down?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, our government does stick up for and stand up for Albertans. We stick up for and stand up for all Albertans. We have been working very collaboratively and very effectively with industry to talk about how we can improve our record on the environment with respect to climate change so that we can ensure greater access to markets for our product. That's what good government does.

Mr. Jean: The Premier has made it clear that Keystone is a threat to her agenda. In opposition she campaigned against it. She's interfering in the review process for the Kinder Morgan pipeline, and Energy East will only be viable if this Premier can convince the NDP Premier in Manitoba to stop trying to shut it down. We know these pipelines mean jobs for the 65,000 Albertans who have lost them under this government. To the Premier: when is she going to stop fighting against Alberta jobs and start fighting for pipelines?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, this summer I went to the first ministers' conference, and I took an approach of working collaboratively and respectfully with our colleagues across the country. In so doing, we got them to agree to the Canadian energy strategy. Temper tantrums were not a way to get our colleagues across the country to agree to the Canadian energy strategy. A collaborative effort was required, and that's what we did. That's the first thing that we did, and that kind of work continues each and every day in this government. We know that we need to build support by improving our record on the environment. We're also going to do that, and we're going to do that hand in hand with industry.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans do expect their leaders to be proud and to fight for our industries, not go on apology tours. They understand we need market access. Instead, our Premier has consistently campaigned against our pipelines and our oil sands. Albertans want stability. Instead, our Premier is increasing royalties and isn't done raising even more taxes. To the Premier: how are these economic experiments going to help any of the 65,000 Albertans who are without a paycheque at the end of this month?

The Speaker: The minister of economic development.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My colleague across the way may have missed it, but our government created a new ministry to focus on economic diversification and trade. In case you've missed it, I'm the minister of this ministry. We are looking at creating new opportunities to get our product to market that will create jobs to support families, which is our government's focus even if the opposition opposes it.

The Speaker: Third question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Small-business Tax

Mr. Jean: Wildrose has spent a lot of time trying to be helpful and provide the NDP with practical solutions. We've put forward policies that we know won't be supported by all of the NDP MLAs, but our moderate approach is best for all Albertans. Albertans are worried. They are seriously worried. They want solutions that work, not more untested NDP experiments. Wildrose has proposed a tax cut for small businesses. It's a step that would benefit every single

Alberta small business today. To the Premier: why not for once try reducing taxes to help get our businesses moving again today, not in two years?

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, you know, our government, as we have outlined several times already today, has put forward a responsible plan to get Alberta back to work and also to protect our education and our health care. Now, the opposition loves to talk about restraint and about cutting, but let's look at this leader's record. In 2009 that opposition leader voted for the biggest deficit in Canadian history, \$55 billion. [interjections] That same year he spent more taxpayer dollars than any other Member of Parliament at that time, \$116,000 on partisan mailing. [interjections] That doesn't . . .

The Speaker: Hon. members, you seem to have gained some more energy. The robustness has increased from yesterday to today.

The first supplemental.

Mr. Jean: Yes, Mr. Speaker. It's a little rowdy over on that side.

The reality is that the NDP's so-called jobs subsidy program is a boondoggle in the making. Businesses are very confused, timelines are simply all over the place, and it will do little for businesses fighting on the margins. Instead, reducing small-business taxes costs just as much as the NDP's subsidy program but will actually work today. It's permanent and benefits every business right now. Why won't the Premier scrap her risky job subsidy program and replace it with an actual small-business tax cut that will help Alberta businesses?

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to remind the members of the House that there was only one party during the election that had a job creation plan, and that was us. The second difference is that instead of just talking about it, our government is taking action to create jobs, so myself and . . . [interjections] I'd love to continue.

Myself and my colleague announced our government's job creation plan, which I, hopefully, will have an opportunity to explain . . .

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The NDP plan lost 65,000 jobs so far and doesn't start giving any money back for two years. Here's the reality of the NDP plan for businesses in Alberta. They bulldozed ahead with a radical 50 per cent increase to the minimum wage, they've raised every single person's taxes, they've sent signals to the marketplace that are causing investments to flee, and now they're pushing forward with a risky job subsidy program when they have a much better solution right in front of them, right here today. To the Premier: why won't she just reduce the small-business tax instead of ramming ahead with more unproven economic experiments?

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, everyone but the opposition knows that the government of Alberta cannot control the price of oil. But there are things that we can do, and our government is taking action. In the budget that the Finance minister tabled, we've got a robust capital plan to invest in infrastructure that's much needed in our province, which will create jobs. We've created this ministry, which is looking at enhancing our access to markets and diversifying our economy.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The leader of the Progressive Conservative opposition.

Government Policies

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Premier said, “It would be lovely to wave a magic wand and create 40,000 jobs,” when she admitted she has no plan to actually create a knowledge-based and lower carbon economy. Knowing that truth, let’s go back to the basics. My question is for the Premier: if you hope to see Albertans with good-paying jobs two years from now – and I hope you do – under your leadership and your governance, which industries will you support to provide these jobs? Which industries, Premier?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, government is not in the business of picking winners and losers. It’s in the business of creating an environment to ensure that we have a good investment climate and that Alberta is a good place for innovators and new business owners and people that want to grow their business to invest. So that is the climate that we are creating by offering up exactly what businesses talked to us about in terms of access to different types of capital that previously had been unavailable to them. That’s what we’re going to do, and that’s one of the parts of the work that the new minister of economic development will be doing over the course of the next few years.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Premier said in this House that when she goes “to Paris, [she’s] going to start by telling the truth.” Well, here’s some truth. Alberta has developed some world-class tailings pond technology, pipeline leak detection, carbon capture and storage, and a whole raft of world-best technologies and practices. When the Premier goes to Paris, is this the truth she’s going to tell, or is she going to trash our industry, that Albertans depend upon to make a living?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, when we go to Paris, we are going to talk about the meaningful action that the government of Alberta after 44 years is finally going to begin in order to ensure that we work as a partner with industry to enhance our environmental record and to ensure that we perform better. We’re going to tell them that there is a new sheriff in town. And you know what? We’re going to make sure that the government does its role, something it didn’t do for the last four decades, to ensure that we do our part on climate change and greenhouse gas emissions reduction.

Mr. McIver: Here’s another truth that I think the government might agree with, Mr. Speaker. The men and women of our Canadian military have sacrificed to provide the freedom, democracy, and quality of life that we all cherish so much. The truth is that the Legislature has inadvertently, I believe, scheduled budget estimates at the same time as the Speaker’s Remembrance Day ceremony tomorrow. To the Government House Leader and with my apologies for not bringing this to your attention sooner: is there any way that we can reschedule estimates away from Mr. Speaker’s Remembrance Day ceremony?

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much, hon. member, for bringing that to our attention. Unfortunately, it’s pretty late in the day, but I will take it under advisement and see what changes we can make. I’m assuming that the House would

prefer to adjust the estimates schedule in order to be able to attend that.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Farm Worker Labour Protection and Safety

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This government has been in power for 163 days after being elected on a platform of change, especially for vulnerable Albertans. Sadly, nothing has changed for paid farm workers in Alberta, who remain the most vulnerable group in Canada. After 163 days of government, paid farm workers, including children, lack basic occupational health and safety standards, any compensation for injury, and even the right to organize or refuse unsafe work conditions. Today, people who feed us are going to work without protection that . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, we must stay within the 35 seconds.

Is there someone who would like to answer? The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, yes, Mr. Speaker. As you are aware, our minister has been talking about this issue, and we’ve been working on this issue. I believe the member will be pleased to know that this is an issue that this Assembly as a whole will be dealing with very seriously within this session. I thank the member for his advocacy on this issue over the last few years. I believe that he will feel a tremendous level of personal success by the time we’ve adjourned this session before Christmas.

Dr. Swann: I haven’t seen any indication of this on the Order Paper, Mr. Speaker, but last night in estimates the Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour refused to answer any straightforward questions about the plan to protect farm workers because, apparently, she didn’t want to spoil a future government announcement. Albertans expect their government to put the health and safety of people ahead of political timing. The Alberta Federation of Agriculture is fully supportive of workers’ compensation for all paid farm workers. What is so difficult about providing basic compensation for injured workers today in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Certainly, our government believes that every worker in Alberta deserves to have a safe, fair, and healthy workplace, and that is something that we’re going forward on. Myself and my colleague the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry have been meeting with stakeholders in this industry and are putting together a plan for this. We are very excited to create safety for all workers here in Alberta.

2:10

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, I guess many of us are puzzled about why it needs to be so secretive. If there is a plan, why not start talking about a plan? The minister last night said that there was never a commitment to workers’ compensation for paid farm workers, but in April of this year the Premier herself in a statement on the Day of Mourning said that it’s time for compensation for injury. The current Environment minister said, quote: there’s no excuse anymore. End of quote. So will the Premier or the minister or anybody on the front bench stand on the courage of their convictions and tell us when and how we’re going to get compensation for people with injury?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. I just want to assure the member that we are absolutely moving forward as a government. We're meeting with stakeholders, making sure that we're hearing their concerns about the specifics of their industry. We're going to be moving forward in a very prudent manner, and I think the outcome will please him very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Northern Hills.

School Nutrition Programs

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We know that students need to be active and have a healthy diet in order to be able to focus and learn in class. We also know that there are many schools offering breakfast and lunch programs to students. The previous government's lack of action on this issue led to a concerted effort by groups of hard-working parents and volunteers that were supported through donations to ensure that our kids have a full stomach to help them learn every day. To the Minister of Education: what are you doing to build on this good work and support our school nutrition programs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks very much for the question. Certainly, we've seen lots of good work in the community and from parent groups and volunteer organizations to provide school nutrition in our schools across the province, and my department is currently evaluating where those programs are so that we can bolster them and build a more coherent program for right across the province. What better job can we be employed in, all of us here, than looking after the health and good education of our K to 12 students?

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the member has met with all 61 school boards in the province, can he provide details on some specific nutrition programs already in place? Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, we found lots of innovative programs across the province already. For example, E4C in Edmonton has an excellent nutrition program. They are active in 10 Catholic schools right here in Edmonton and provide about 2,000 hot lunches every single day. Northland school division offers hot lunches on request, free of charge, for every student in their school board. That's a high bar that we could perhaps emulate. These are the kinds of programs that we're looking at to build a coherent school lunch program across the province.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Mr. Speaker, given that the best way to ensure we get this right is to collaborate with the right partners across the spectrum, to the same minister: is the minister looking to other ministries to help in improving student nutrition?

Mr. Eggen: Well, yes, Mr. Speaker and hon. member. Certainly, we're looking for partnerships with the Ministry of Health and with Human Services as well to ensure that we are working on the widest possible range by which we can provide targeted school lunch programs across the province and build a strategy that is coherent,

that is long term, and that students and school boards can count on to have something in place for students that are most in need. Again, what better job can we employ all of our resources in than to help the unfortunate students in our province and to provide a school lunch program?

The Speaker: Now the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Grande Prairie Hospital

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Grande Prairie hospital was announced many times, including in 2012 prior to the election, when they actually started moving dirt around even though there was not even a plan for the hospital. Now that it's finally under construction, the Minister of Health announced yesterday that the Grande Prairie hospital will have its services cut, it will be delayed, and it is over budget. To the Minister of Health: can you explain to the people of Grande Prairie and the Peace Country, that will rely on the Grande Prairie hospital for their health care needs, why these changes have taken place?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the question. We all know that this is a problem that we've inherited from the past government. Of course, part of that has to do with the fact that those announcements were made without doing due planning. Our government is really committed to making sure that we get it right moving forward. In terms of what the Official Opposition proposed during the election, let's just remind ourselves that they wanted to cut over 3,000 civil service jobs, and their leader said: we will cut lower priority infrastructure projects. I want to know: are those Lloydminster continuing care, Medicine Hat regional hospital, Taber health care, Grande Prairie health care? I don't think so. Our government is investing in infrastructure.

Mr. Loewen: I'm getting really tired of the fearmongering from that side and the mistruths.

Given that in a meeting with myself, the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti, and . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, preamble, and be careful of the choice of your words.

Mr. Loewen: Given that in a meeting with myself, the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti, and the mayor of Grande Prairie on September 9 the minister clearly stated that, rumours aside, the hospital was on time, on budget, and definitely not going to be scaled back and given that the minister suggested that it would be a good question for question period so that she could proudly proclaim in the House those same statements, Minister – here we are – as per your suggestion, can you explain why you made those promises that you have now renege on?

Ms Hoffman: I was really proud to tour the province this summer. The hon. member did not bring staff to that meeting, but I did, and we have very detailed minutes of what I said in that meeting. I'd be happy to share them with the hon. member. What I did ask was: what rumours are in the community, and how can we set them straight? The rumours that were in place included that the whole hospital was going to be shelved. We are not doing that. We've got a plan. I announced it very publicly yesterday. I reached out directly to the hon. member yesterday and to the mayor and to the Grande Prairie College and health advisory council. We're being very open

about what we're able to do and how we're moving forward, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Loewen: Given that during that meeting the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti supported your statements, Minister, showing that there is little or no difference between the previous government and this government in their commitments to infrastructure, how can the people in the Peace Country and, in fact, all Albertans have any confidence in anything this government promises, when rumours and coffee-shop talk have more credence than the minister's own promises?

Ms Hoffman: When I've been touring the province, I've been inviting local MLAs to join in the meetings I'm having with other local leaders, and if the hon. member doesn't want to be in those meetings and wants to make up untruths, I am very willing to take that into consideration. What the hon. member is saying . . .

Speaker's Ruling Intemperate Language

The Speaker: I simply want to advise both the hon. member with the question as well as the responding minister on my read of the discussion in the House. The use of the words by both of you on untruths is somewhat inappropriate, and I would ask that you reframe your statements not using the tone of those allegations.

Hon. minister, are you finished?

Grande Prairie Hospital (continued)

Ms Hoffman: Just to add to the response, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much for the opportunity. I am happy to have meetings with local MLAs, and I will be very happy to share the information from those meetings with the MLAs. I'm glad to set the record straight, and I'm happy to update the House and to be open and transparent moving forward.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The Member for Calgary-North West.

2:20 Youth Addiction Treatment Services

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's crucial that government provides the supports necessary to address problems caused by drug addiction. One of the supports that was introduced to help support young people was the protection of children abusing drugs program created in 2006 by our government. PCHAD allows for youth to be mandated into a court-ordered 10-day detox and stabilization. It was a huge achievement. To the Minister of Health. After that initial 10-day period families are often left with little choice about ongoing addiction treatment. With the rising fentanyl crisis and increased cases of relapse, will you commit today to a meeting with stakeholders and affected parents on this issue?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the initiative she's shown in the past and continues to show today. We know how devastating addiction issues can be for families. I have met with a number of different stakeholders, and if the hon. member would like to propose a meeting with an additional group of stakeholders, I am certainly welcome to receive that invitation.

Ms Jansen: I would, and thank you for that.

Mr. Speaker, after an initial 10-day detox many young people still don't have the ability to make sound decisions about their recovery path. To the Justice minister: would you be willing to re-evaluate PCHAD and examine whether a mandated longer term solution might be needed?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to the member for the question. This is of course a critical issue. Youth who are suffering from addictions are a tragedy in our province, and the number of young people we're losing is an absolute tragedy. I'm happy to review our programs to see what's necessary and to hear from people and make the best evidence-based decisions we can on what's best to support our young people.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Finally, to the Minister of Infrastructure. We know now that you've taken away \$13 million in funding for addiction and detox beds, putting it into a \$4.4 billion slush fund. When will you decide if Alberta's addicted kids are important enough to put it back?

The Speaker: The Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question, hon. member. I don't think you've quite framed the question accurately. In fact, all of the detox centres that were specifically contained in the capital budget are still in the capital budget. There was uncommitted money for that purpose that we have now moved into the uncommitted fund that you're talking about. We'll make decisions in due course about the priorities, and that includes addictions, that includes making sure that the health of all Albertans is safe, among all other priorities that we have to deal with.

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

Job Creation

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let's talk about the numbers. Sixty-five thousand: that's how many jobs have been lost so far this year, and that number will unfortunately only climb from here. Now let's talk about government numbers. Twenty-seven thousand: that's the absolute cap for the job subsidies program created by this government, and it won't even pay until 2017. This program is not helping Albertans and businesses when they need it most, which is right now. To the minister of jobs: when will this government realize that their program is misguided and focus instead on creating the right business environment for our province?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, the opposition uses the number 65,000 jobs that have been lost. The opposition would like government to cut thousands of more jobs from the public service: nurses, doctors, teachers. You know, quite frankly, our government has a plan and is putting that plan into action through initiatives that we rolled out throughout the week. There are more announcements coming. But, quite frankly, we're partnering with the private sector and those job creators to get Albertans back to work.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, once again, we have never, ever said what the member is saying that we've said. We've never said that, and we will continue to say that we will not cut those jobs. Front-line jobs will not be cut.

Now, given that this job subsidy program is like putting a Band-Aid on gaping wounds and that we need to address the root causes of the problems here in Alberta, not issue stopgaps, it is clear that this subsidy program is fundamentally flawed. Will the minister acknowledge that this subsidy program is the wrong way to restore the Alberta advantage?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, you know, first of all, there are a few things that need to be clarified. First of all, under our government 93 per cent of Albertans will see no change to their personal income taxes and the majority of Albertans are actually paying fewer taxes than what the previous government proposed. Our government believes in supporting entrepreneurs, in providing initiatives, partnering with the private sector to diversify our economy and to strengthen our economy. Our solution is not to lay off thousands of more workers.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The more they say it doesn't make it right.

Given that you insist on going forward with this program, which incredibly is a key pillar of your budget, there must be some accountability to this program. One of the fatal flaws of the program is the lack of information surrounding disclosure of who exactly will receive the subsidies. To the minister of jobs: will you commit right here and right now to start your program properly and ensure that a monthly sunshine list is disclosed so we know where exactly these subsidies are going?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, first of all, the sectors that can apply for this grant are all sectors. When we talk about providing supports, this job-creation plan is available whether it's the energy sector, small businesses, and at the same time not-for-profits. We're working with the private sector and not-for-profits to provide incentives for them to hire Albertans and get more Albertans back to work.

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

Royal Alexandra Hospital Renovation

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last month it was revealed that AHS was planning a massive renovation project for the Royal Alexandra hospital. Now, we in opposition have long called on the government to carry out the necessary and sensible maintenance, upgrade, and repair work on this facility, but we were floored to see the price tag under the NDP government come in at a whopping \$4.5 billion. To the Health minister: is this yet another case of incredibly poor value for Alberta taxpayers?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. The document that ended up being leaked by somebody to the media was a document that was given from Alberta Health Services to my ministry staff. What it said was what they would like to see on the Royal Alex hospital site 15 years from now and the different projects that they would like to see invested in. So it was a planning document that was prepared by the service delivery operator, Alberta Health Services, for our consideration.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, given that our province's hospital costs have been spiralling out of control for years and seeing as the average cost for hospitalization in Alberta is a shocking 35 per cent higher than the national average, is pouring billions of Albertans' dollars into just one facility really the best plan that AHS can come up with?

Ms Hoffman: Alberta Health Services is looking at a lot of different sites and has a lot of desires that they'd like for sites throughout Alberta. Our government is focused on making sure that we have an evidence-based decision-making process. I just want to remind people. I know there has been a lot of discussion around what's actually been said. Here's what was actually said. The Leader of the Official Opposition in April said that he would be cutting at least 2,300 civil service positions and that lower priority infrastructure projects would be put on hold. So, hon. member, I think that \$9 billion worth of infrastructure cuts would only make it worse. We are going to be investing in infrastructure to provide stable health care.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We understand there are concerns with the state of the Royal Alex, and we have always been clear about the need for any deferred maintenance and upgrades to be completed in a timely and efficient manner, contrary to this government's fearmongering.

But given that the Royal Alex is far from the only facility needing renovation, how can the bureaucracy suggest that it's prudent to throw the lion's share of funding at just one facility?

Ms Hoffman: Just to remind ourselves, Mr. Speaker, that was a planning document that was submitted by Alberta Health Services for our consideration. We have not made any decisions about how we'll be investing in health care throughout Alberta. But I think it's important for us to know where the deferred maintenance is and what needs to be done in terms of moving forward. That is the long-term plan. What we have submitted is a four-year capital plan, which I will be very happy to go through with the hon. members. You can't talk out of both sides of your mouth. You can't say that you're going to cut \$9 billion and that you're going to invest at the same time. It just doesn't work.

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

Justices and Crown Prosecutors

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Chief Justice Neil Wittman has repeatedly said that we are 11 Queen's Bench justices short in Alberta. If we don't have enough justices in Alberta, victims of crime suffer anguish as does anyone trying to utilize the court system. To the Justice minister: given that the number of Queen's Bench justices is set by provincial regulation with federal authority and given that due to our high rate of population growth Alberta needs an appropriate number of justices just to keep our court systems functioning properly, will the Minister of Justice commit to passing a regulation to expand the number of Court of Queen's Bench justices by 11.

Thank you.

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to the member for the question. Well, just to clarify a few things, Alberta does create the positions, but it is the federal government that appoints Queen's

Bench justices. Currently there are five positions that Alberta has created that haven't been appointed by the federal government. We're hoping to work with our federal partners – and I will be speaking to my newly appointed counterpart – to get appointments made to those. We are looking at creating additional spaces once there's need because the other positions have been filled.

Thank you.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you. I did say that.

Again to the Justice minister. I appreciate your wanting to speak to the new federal Minister of Justice. Given that Alberta has the lowest number of Court of Queen's Bench justices per capita of any province, will the Minister of Justice commit today to demanding that the new federal government appoint the justices needed to bring Alberta up to par with all provinces?

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to the member for the question. The former federal government felt that population wasn't a driver that should determine how many Queen's Bench justices a province got. I feel quite differently, and I'm hoping that my federal counterpart will feel quite differently, too. I will be speaking to them at our earliest opportunity to advocate on this issue.

Thank you.

Mr. Ellis: To the same minister: given that Budget 2015 cuts 4.2 per cent from the Alberta Crown prosecutor service and given that reducing the number of already overworked Crown prosecutors slows down the justice system, will the Minister of Justice tell us how a \$4 million budget reduction for Crown prosecutors does anything but delay justice for victims and result in dropping charges against accused criminals due to long delays? What would the minister say to those victims?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to the member for the question. We're certainly aware that our Crown prosecutors in this province are working incredibly hard to keep things moving along. The government is moving forward on a number of initiatives to ensure that they're better able to move things forward and to ensure that we have an innovative justice system that takes into account new ideas so that we can stream some things out of the court systems. Currently we are committed to working with them to ensure that they can fulfill their function, and we're very proud of the job that they're doing.

Highway 63 Twinning

Mrs. Littlewood: Mr. Speaker, my proud constituency of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville is home to Alberta's Industrial Heartland. The businesses and workers involved in this industry know how important highway 63 is to move people and goods throughout our province. It is a vital link in our eastern transportation corridor, supports and drives economic growth and diversification in Alberta. To the minister of Alberta: could the minister please update the House . . .

An Hon. Member: Minister of Alberta?

Mrs. Littlewood: Oh, sorry. To the Minister of Transportation: could the minister please update the House on the government's

progress on improving the safety of Alberta workers on highway 63?

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much for the question. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to start by thanking the hon. member and other members of our caucus for their advocacy on behalf of this highway. I'm pleased to announce that we've just opened another 16-kilometre section of highway 63. We've made great progress on improving safety this year, with 185 kilometres of twinned highway open to this vital economic corridor of this province. I'm very pleased with the progress so far.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for the update. I'm pleased to hear that our government is making important and long-overdue progress on highway development. To the same minister: could you please update the Chamber on when we will see the twinning of highway 63 completed?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I'm pleased to tell the House that the twinning of highway 63 is now 99 per cent complete. There is only one three-kilometre section, where there's pipeline construction at the present time, that we were unable to get done this year, but it will be fully twinned and opened early in the spring construction season. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members, do we want to have constructive dialogue? I can't hear either side of the House. Would you please tone it down?

Second supplemental.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am definitely interested in a constructive dialogue.

Given the history of that highway I'm sure many Albertans will be relieved to hear that this project is near completion. I would ask the minister if he could please provide an update on other transportation infrastructure projects taking place in the Fort McMurray area.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I'm pleased to tell the hon. member that Alberta Transportation is also working to open phase 1 of the Parsons Creek interchange in Fort McMurray to traffic this year, and we hope to have the project completed by 2016. I know that many residents of the Wood Buffalo municipality are looking forward to the completion of both of these projects.

Emergency Medical Services in Eastern Alberta

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, AHS staffs the Wainwright ambulance station 24 hours a day, ensuring fast response and quality service. On December 14 AHS will be downgrading this service by eliminating staff at the station from 8 p.m. to 8 a.m. Staff will have to respond from their homes to the station before heading out. To the Minister of Health: are you aware that AHS is using this cost-cutting measure to reduce front-line workers' hours in Wainwright and that response times will be dangerously increased?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's really important to us that Albertans can count on having the right care at the right time and the right place by the right health professional. If

the hon. member has any questions about that specific situation in Wainwright, I would be very happy to follow up afterwards and make sure that I liaise an appropriate response to the hon. member and all constituents who rely on the EMS services in the community.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Minister. Given that the town of Wainwright is very concerned that this will create longer response times during a time frame that commonly generates more severe accidents and given that there is only what is known as the golden hour, which is the time from when the accident occurred to the time that the patient needs to be on the operating table – that’s what you need for the best outcome. Minister, if this is in fact going to be implemented, can you ensure patient’s safety and that no lives will be at risk?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, hon. member, for the question and, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to answer it. I’d be very happy to sit down with the hon. member and go through the detailed concerns that he has and make sure that AHS has an opportunity to provide me with that confidence before I provide it to the members of the community. But, of course, their safety is our number one concern.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Minister. Given that AHS has a list for major cities and towns of EMS response times listed on their site yet there are no response times listed for the Battle River-Wainwright area in general, will the minister commit to tracking response times in the communities in eastern Alberta such as Killam, Wainwright, and Lloydminster so that we can see the effect that these changes are having on our rural ambulance service?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. We are, of course, really committed to making sure that we have prompt, timely responses, and I know that Alberta Health Services is doing active monitoring by minute right now. They can look up and find out exactly what the response times are so they can deploy other EMS to the areas where they’re most needed in the province. I’d be happy to discuss this and other opportunities that the hon. member suggests. This is one of the reasons why, before session started, I asked for meetings with the critics from both of the official parties in the House, so that I could have an opportunity to work through some of these challenges. I’m happy to do so when the House isn’t sitting as well. So please be in touch with my office, and we’ll be happy to co-ordinate some increased information so we can have confidence and your citizens can have confidence as well.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

2:40 Northern Alberta Development Council

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, the Northern Alberta Development Council was created more than 50 years ago to support development and growth for Northern Alberta and all Albertans. NADC has contributed greatly to the development of programs and policy to ensure the viability of northern municipalities. With the recent dissolution of the Alberta Economic Development Authority there are concerns that NADC may be next. To the Minister of Economic Development and Trade: can you assure northern Albertans that NADC will continue to be a vital component . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. member for the question, a very good question. I have met with a couple of the members from that council, and I do intend to work collaboratively with them. I know that they do a lot of great work representing and advocating on behalf of Albertans that live in northern Alberta and looking for ways to continue to diversify our economy, our energy sector, and working with our job creators.

Thank you.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that NADC is made up of nine public members and the chair, who is a Member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, and given that NADC has been without a chair since the provincial election, can you advise when the NDP government will be appointing a northern MLA to the position of chair of the Northern Alberta Development Council?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to the member for the question. That board is currently housed in Aboriginal Relations. Our government, in attempting to make sure that we are making effective use of taxpayers’ dollars, is reviewing all of the agencies, boards, and commissions. Once that review is completed, we will be moving forward on a number of appointments that have been sort of waiting to happen. We just want to ensure that we’re making the best decisions in the best interests of all Albertans at prices they can afford.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Maybe now that we have a new ministry is the time to move it, but I’ll stay out of that one.

Given that Alberta is still suffering from a downward spiral in oil prices and oil and gas development and given that northern Alberta needs a strong NADC to help address the rural economic challenges that our northern communities are all facing, can you advise northern Albertans what areas of economic development will be priorities for the NADC in the coming years?

The Speaker: The minister of economic development.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member for the question, you know, very, very pertinent question, especially at this time. Again, I’ll reiterate that one of the largest reasons that the Premier decided to create this ministry is to look at working with the private sector and the job creators to provide them with the tools that they need to continue to develop our economy but also looking at ways to diversify. So to the hon. member’s question, I plan to work very closely with my colleagues here on the front bench, with Agriculture and Forestry, with Energy, with Advanced Education . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Members’ Statements (continued)

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

Job Creation Grant Program

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday I had the opportunity to question the minister on her portfolio and on the new job subsidy program. In a perfect world this subsidy program would be

a good kick at the can, but this is not a perfect world, and our province is bleeding jobs. We have lost 65,000 jobs this year; 65,000 hard-working Albertans have come face to face with our economic troubles. That's like giving a pink slip to the entire city of Medicine Hat.

The government somehow believes that a handout will mitigate this problem, but let's face the facts. The subsidy program can't even be used to hire back those people who have lost their jobs like the hard-working hostesses and dishwashers from the restaurants that I have talked to. It can only be used for net new jobs. Unfortunately, this means that the hard-working Albertans that were laid off can't get their jobs back using this subsidy. This program is categorically flawed.

There's more. The money associated with this subsidy can't be accessed until 2017. That's correct. There will be no money until sometime in 2017. That means that when people are losing their jobs right now, there is no hope for them. There are at least 14 more months to go before one penny of this subsidy will reach the hands of employers. How many jobs need to be lost before the NDP stops their risky economic experiments and helps Albertans when they need it most?

This program sounds like an IOU rather than: I'll help you. Albertans are worried. I'm worried. Albertans need help now, not in 2017. We need to get back to the Alberta advantage, that made Alberta great. This new job subsidy program, their so-called Alberta way, is the wrong way.

The Speaker: Hon. members and the House leaders particularly, as members are exiting the Chamber, if you would please not intervene in the line of sight between the Speaker and the party speaking, I'd appreciate it very much.

The hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Permolex International Zero-waste Facility

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you. Mr. Speaker and my friends here today, I am privileged to introduce Permolex, a producer of ethanol and other biofuel products from Red Deer. Permolex has established itself as a unique, forward-thinking, and diverse organization. Permolex's exceptionally innovative and green operations utilize the waste products from one process as the raw materials for the next, resulting in a zero-waste facility. This is the only process of its kind in North America. Permolex's research and development team works with Alberta's higher learning facilities to support these state-of-the-art operations. This helps provide a structural basis for a clean-tech industry that is competitive and stable within the market.

Permolex strengthens the local agricultural community by using commodities from over 1,400 farmers within a 150-kilometre radius to manufacture high-value energy products. Its plant creates over 50 direct jobs and contributes to the steady economic development and sustainability of Alberta. The fuels produced at Permolex, the only ethanol-producing plant in Alberta, are 71 per cent less carbon intensive. As a result, this sustainable product advances Alberta's reputation as a responsible producer of energy.

As an environmental steward Permolex uses its zero-waste process and its greenhouse gas reduction targets to preserve the health and quality of life for all Albertans. Permolex is an exceptional example of how innovation, motivation, and diversification can positively impact the Alberta economy.

I am grateful for the opportunity to introduce this organization to the Assembly. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Alberta Real Estate Association

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Having previously worked as a realtor for nearly 30 years, I'm pleased to hereby give a member's statement celebrating the work of AREA, the Alberta Real Estate Association. AREA represents more than 10,000 realtors throughout the province and 10 real estate boards province-wide. AREA's vision is to provide world-class leadership that positively changes the Alberta real estate profession and shapes it to serve the population well. It enhances members' professionalism and reinforces the critical value realtors deliver to both buyers and sellers.

Today Alberta realtors from across the province are in Edmonton for government liaison days. Many of us members have met with our local real estate representatives today.

As a professional real estate association for Alberta realtors AREA is in a unique position to advocate with a singular voice on matters which have the potential to impact realtors' careers, their daily work lives, and their ability to effectively serve their clients. AREA provides a provincial perspective on real estate matters directly to the public, when appropriate, to help the public understand a realtor's expertise and the valuable role they play in the success of the industry. Having been a realtor myself, I know the incredible contribution of real estate to Alberta's economy and realtors to their communities. Realtors support Albertans in making the largest financial decision of many people's lives, that of buying a home. AREA also advocates for ideas to help make industry better in Alberta and to help ensure that consumers are protected.

I look forward to a continued dialogue with my former colleagues in AREA to help bring forward their ideas and concerns to the government and to ensure that all Albertans benefit from the best practices advocated by AREA.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

2:50

Charitable Donations

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I draw the Assembly's attention to the generosity of the Lacombe and area residents. Culture and Tourism, the ministry that oversees the voluntary and nonprofit sector, is responsible for reporting on donations made by Albertans. In its most recent annual report the ministry outlines the tremendous generosity of our province. Albertans donated well above the national average. Just over one-fifth of Albertans made donations to charities and not-for-profits, with the highest average amount donated. Truly this speaks to the spirit of generosity found across our great province. It is with great pride that I commend the people of Lacombe and area, who best demonstrate compassion and the willingness to lend a helping hand. The area had both the highest percentage of donors in Alberta, at 26.3 per cent, and had the highest median donation in Canada, at \$780 each.

Such generosity greatly enhances the richness and quality of life for all Albertans, and the ripples are felt around the world through the work of NGOs and charities. Contributions go to local food banks, housing initiatives, youth centres, rehab centres, palliative care, hospital equipment, arts and culture, sports, education, historical and heritage preservation, and a host of other things.

People can and will care for each other without the central and cumbersome control of big government. Albertans donate out of the goodness of their hearts, and it is important that we protect incentives for charitable contributions. The previous government proposed decreasing this incentive, and the reaction was swift and strong. It is also important, Mr. Speaker, that we provide responsible

stewardship of our economy so that Albertans have the disposable income needed for these valuable and life-enhancing contributions.

Thank you.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The hon. minister of economic development.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before I get going, I'm going to ask, first of all, for unanimous consent of the House to waive Standing Order 7(7) in case our orders go past 3 o'clock.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: Please proceed.

Mr. Bilous: Once again thank you, Mr. Speaker. The first notice of motion I have – I have three today, and with your indulgence I will go through them one at a time – on behalf of the Minister of Infrastructure:

Be it resolved that Standing Order 52.01(1) is amended as follows:

1. in clause (a)
 - (i) by striking out “and Service Alberta” and substituting “, Service Alberta and Status of Women”;
2. in clause (b)
 - (i) by striking out “Agriculture and Rural Development” and substituting “Agriculture and Forestry”;
 - (ii) by striking out “International and Intergovernmental Relations, Innovation and”;
 - (iii) by striking out “and Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour” and substituting “Economic Development and Trade and Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour”;
3. in clause (c) by striking out “Environment and Sustainable Resource Development” and substituting “Environment and Parks.”

That is the first one.

With your indulgence I'll continue through all three, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation:

- A. Be it resolved that the Standing Orders of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta effective November 18, 2014, be amended as follows:
 1. The heading preceding Standing Order 78.1 is amended by striking out “Legislative Policy.”
 2. The heading preceding Standing Order 78.3 and Standing Order 78.3(1) are struck out and the following is substituted:
Report of committee on a Bill
78.3(1) A standing or special committee to which a Bill has been referred by the Assembly after second reading shall be empowered to report the same with or without amendments or to report that the Bill not proceed.
 3. The heading preceding Standing Order 78.4 is amended by striking out “Legislative Policy.”

4. The following Standing Orders are amended by striking out “Legislative Policy Committee” wherever it occurs and substituting “standing or special committee”:
 - (a) 8(7)(c);
 - (b) 52.02;
 - (c) 74.1(1);
 - (d) 74.2(1);
 - (e) 78.1(1);
 - (f) 78.2(1).

- B. And be it further resolved that these amendments come into force on passage.

My third motion, Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Government House Leader:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly rescind its approval of amendment A1 to the motion for second reading of Bill 203, Election (Restrictions on Government Advertising) Amendment Act, 2015, so that the bill retains its place at second reading on the Order Paper with 62 minutes of time for debate remaining.

Those are the three motions, Mr. Speaker.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. minister of economic development.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you. I'm quite pleased to rise. Earlier today, the Member for Calgary-Hays asked the Government House Leader about a Remembrance Day celebration that will be held, that you'll be hosting, Mr. Speaker, in the Legislature's rotunda. Here in front of me is the estimates schedule, where we have cleared the morning of November 5 of estimates so that all Members of the Legislative Assembly may attend that ceremony.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Yes. Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Two tablings relating to messages from the Premier regarding her commitment to protecting farm workers' occupational health and safety and compensation, as reported in the *Journal*, that I attach, and another statement from the *Western Producer* indicating that farm labour laws are going to be included in the Legislature.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 7(7) the daily Routine is now concluded. Pursuant to Standing Order 59.01 the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.

Legislative policy committees will convene this afternoon for consideration of the main estimates. Families and Communities will consider the estimates for Education in the Foothills Room, and Alberta's Economic Future will consider the estimates for Infrastructure in the Grassland Room.

[The Assembly adjourned at 2:58 p.m. to Thursday at 1:30 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(5)(b)]

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Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday afternoon, November 5, 2015

Day 16

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

First Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, November 5, 2015

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Welcome.

Let us collectively reflect. As we in this Chamber constructively engage with each other in the practice of free speech, let us not forget those who defended our rights and freedoms to do so. Let us remember those who died and also those who continue to suffer the physical and emotional pain caused by the horrific experiences of war. It is our collective responsibility to nurture, protect, and cherish those who may have returned scarred. Particularly, we in this Chamber must never forget.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford and deputy chair.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am honoured today to rise and introduce to the Assembly on your behalf a group of 16 former MLAs, who are part of the Alberta Association of Former MLAs and are here today for their annual general meeting. It is without reservation that I, on behalf of all members of this Assembly, sincerely thank you all for the significant contributions that you have made to our province and to all Albertans. I would ask that you please rise as I call your names and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly: Ken Allred, St. Albert, and his wife, Marge; Dennis Anderson, Calgary-Currie; Fred Bradley, Pincher Creek-Crowsnest; Denis Ducharme, Bonnyville-Cold Lake; Ed Gibbons, Edmonton-Manning; Wayne Jacques, Grande Prairie-Wapiti; Terry Kirkland, Leduc; Mel Knight, Grande Prairie-Smoky, and his wife, Diana; Juliette Langevin, spouse of former MLA Paul Langevin, Lac La Biche-St. Paul; Karen Leibovici, Edmonton-Meadowlark; Mary O'Neill, St. Albert; Leo Piquette, Athabasca-Lac La Biche; Bill Purdy, Stony Plain; Janice Sarich, Edmonton-Decore; George VanderBurg, Whitecourt-St. Anne; Julius Yankowsky, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview; Les Young, Edmonton-Jasper Place.

Could we all provide them the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: By the sound of that, I would interpret that to mean: welcome back.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: I think Edmonton-Rutherford may have a guest.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very thrilled today to have the opportunity to introduce to you and through you my daughter, Kate, who has recently graduated from the University of Alberta with a degree in fine arts and is now working as a stage manager here in the city of Edmonton. If we could all provide her with the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: With a degree in fine arts you might be considering this House at some future engagement.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this

Assembly a delegation from the Canadian Forces. Joining us here today from the 3rd Canadian Division Support Base Edmonton are delegation lead, Major Sophie Drolet, Warrant Officer Michael Ranson, Corporal Gabrielle Longpré, and Corporal Colin Ward. We thank them for their service, and I'd ask that everyone in the House give them the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly. [Standing ovation]

The Speaker: I think that would be an indication of how proud we are of the service you provide, and I must tell the Assembly that I'm proud of all of you that you showed that kind of respect.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Mr. Speaker, it is my distinct pleasure to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly three Michelles. The first is my younger and beautiful daughter, Michelle Carter, and with her is my favourite granddaughter, Michelle Carter-Snipes. I'd like to thank you both for coming and supporting me the way you do. I love you. The third is Michel Béchar, executive director of advancement and external relations at Lethbridge College. I'd ask the three Michelles to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of guests to introduce today if you'll indulge me. First, I'm pleased to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Liam Jolly. Liam is 12 years old and currently attends St. Kevin junior high. Liam is a student who is very passionate about politics and plans on becoming a page here when he turns 15. Liam also aspires to be a leader for the autistic community and one day sit in this very House as an MLA. I hear that he already has a dress shirt and tie picked out for the day that he becomes an MLA. Liam is joined today by his mother, Jacqueline Fabian, and I'd ask both of them to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Second, Mr. Speaker, I would like to introduce to you and through you several members of the Gurdwara Siri Guru Singh Sabha. After first starting services in the homes of community members, the gurdwara was built in the present location in 1985 and is a major hub of the Sikh community and an integral part of my constituency of Edmonton-Ellerslie. Representing the gurdwara today is a large contingency of guests. I'll quickly read out their names and ask them to stand as I read them: Gulzar Singh Nirman, Mohinder Singh Nirman, Sukhjit Singh Bachhal, Lakhbir Singh Bhambra, Charanjit Singh Dakha, Karnail Singh Deol, Gurmail Singh Deol, Jagroop Singh Gill, Gurcharn Singh Sangha, and Ram Singh. Members, please give them the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I hope you didn't unduly influence the future MLA with the colour of what that shirt will be. Did you?

The Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

1:40

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My first introduction today is some guests from the Pakistan Canada Association of Edmonton, an organization dedicated to world-wide humanitarian causes and the welfare of new immigrants to Edmonton. Over the years they have held fundraisers for the victims of natural disasters, and at this time their fundraiser is related to the victims of recent earthquakes striking Pakistan, Afghanistan, and India. The Pakistan Canada Association of Edmonton will be holding a fundraiser at Maharaja Banquet Hall in Edmonton tomorrow at 6 p.m. Tickets are only \$15, and I encourage all of us who can to attend. Please stand as I give your name: Tariq

Chaudhry, president, Pakistan Canada; Arshad Malhi; Iqbal Kahn; Zafar Kahn; Akmal Randhawa; accompanied by Harpreet Gill, the Alberta Liberal stalwart of Edmonton-Mill Creek. Let's give them the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for indulging me a second introduction. It's my pleasure to introduce a passionate young man and his grandfather. The young man, I dare say, may also be a future member of this Legislature. Quintin Nguyen is in grade 7 at St. Mark junior high school, a goalie with his community soccer league. He's 11 years old and interested in politics through social studies and current events classes and is here to see his legislators in action. Ron Brochu – please stand – boldly carried the banner for Alberta Liberals in the riding of Edmonton-Gold Bar this past election. Let's give them the warm welcome of the Legislature.

The Speaker: The Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I was going to introduce, also, the future MLA, Liam, but that has been done, so I will just acknowledge that Jackie Fabian is a caseworker with Edmonton child and family services region 6. I will ask Jackie to rise one more time and receive the warm welcome of this House.

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

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce three very special people. I've had the opportunity to work with some very wonderful people throughout my life, and these three are another great addition. Carol Vogler and Andrew Traynor are the two people I work with in the St. Albert constituency, and Alicia Clarke is a first-year social work student at MacEwan University and has chosen our office to do a practicum. Please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is truly my honour today to introduce to you and through you to the rest of the House Natasha Bergeron and her family: her father, Alain; her mother, Jacinthe; her brother Mathieu; and friend Kallum McDonald, who is related to past Grande Prairie-Smoky MLA Everett McDonald. Natasha is the Grande Prairie resident that won the poem contest and was, therefore, the poem reader at the Remembrance Day ceremony this morning in the rotunda and presented it en français and very eloquently, I might add. If they could rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there any other guests that we have today? The Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am honoured to rise to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly two entrepreneurs from Sherwood Park, Phillip and Joy Jacobsen. Their company, Greenmunch, was recently nominated for a Sherwood Park & District Chamber of Commerce award. As an MLA I have pledged to make my office as sustainable as possible, and I was pleased to discover in my own riding a business that made this possible. I would ask them to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am humbled and honoured to introduce the three most important people in my life. That, of course, is my wife, Jennifer, and our two sons, Dawson

and Evan. I sometimes refer to Jennifer as TMBWITW, the most beautiful woman in the world, not just for the obvious reasons but also because before we had our children together, we ran our business together – we took trekkers to places like the Himalayas and back – and we established our Top of the World Society for Children. She has supported me through no fewer than four successful elections and, of course, all of the peaks and valleys in between. In recent years, as I've attended to my duties as an MLA, Jen has kept the home fires burning as the best mom ever, which is more than a full-time job. As if that's not enough, she's an accomplished artist and recently started playing hockey.

Meanwhile, Dawson and Evan are absolutely passionate about trying new things, including hockey, skiing, swimming, surfing, skin diving, piano, dance, bull riding, and just about anything else that we will allow a seven-and-a-half- and a five-and-a-half-year-old to do. They definitely wear helmets.

Dawson is very inquisitive. He's a French immersion grade 2 student and a very focused little goalie who aspires to play for the Calgary Flames and Team Canada and hopes one day to quarterback the current Grey Cup champions, the Calgary Stampeders. Evan is a passionate kindergarten student, and he's also a very witty little man who loves to make people laugh. Evan regularly blows us away with his talents as a budding artist and musician and linguist.

Both Dawson and Evan are very kind and caring young men who are enthralled with First Nations cultures and who demonstrate a profound respect for all those who protect our safety and our freedom, so having them attend this morning's Remembrance Day ceremony, during which I was deeply honoured to lay a wreath on behalf of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, was one of the most memorable moments in all of my years of service as an MLA.

Along those lines, I would like to express my deepest appreciation to you, Mr. Speaker, for the events of the day and also to our intrepid Sergeant-at-Arms, not only for his service here today but his dedication to all Albertans, indeed, all Canadians in the past and in the future.

Mr. Speaker, Jen and the boys inspire me every day to be a better man, and I ask them to stand now to receive the warm welcome of the Assembly. I love you all.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member, and thank you on behalf of the House for laying the wreath today.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Remembrance Day

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every November 11 we take time to reflect upon the professionalism and courage and sacrifice shown by our brave men and women in uniform, those who serve now and those who have served in the past and those who have fallen. It is fitting that the day that we chose to honour our brave men and women in uniform is the anniversary of the day that the guns finally fell silent to end the First World War. It was not, as was thought at the time, the war to end all wars, and tragically we have had cause time and time again to call upon our brave men and women to sacrifice even more to ensure our collective peace, prosperity, and freedom. We chose the day that peace was declared to honour them in the hopes that one day the peace will last and future generations need not share in the burden of sacrifice that our brave soldiers carry today.

Moments of reflection are commonly observed on Remembrance Day. These moments allow us to remember how fortunate we are to live in a free society, that this very Assembly is emblematic of. We remind ourselves that this freedom is ensured by our military community's unwavering commitment to protect our society. Across the province Albertans are passionate about their pride and respect towards our veterans and military community. I have seen it first-hand in the village of Griesbach in the past few months, where streets have been renamed after former military pilots and monuments erected to commemorate the RCAF and the iconic poem written by Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae.

To the men and women that are here today representing the military: we sincerely thank you and your families for the sacrifices that you make. To those who have paid the unfortunate sacrifice: you will not be forgotten. This November 11 and every day of the year, let us remember.

Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

UN Climate Summit

Mr. Jean: For 65,000 Albertans who lost their jobs this year, their number one priority is getting back to work. For the Premier her number one priority, with the federal government, is travelling to Paris, not pipelines, not protecting Alberta's energy sector, but how to make Alberta look the most fashionable when cabinet steps out of their 747 in Paris. Albertans losing their jobs are looking at the priorities of this government, and they're shaking and scratching their heads. To the Premier: why is she more worried about Paris than fighting for jobs right here at home in Alberta?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course we sympathize with anyone who is looking for work right now, and we're working hard to make sure that our products are attractive to markets internationally. We will open market access by making Alberta an attractive partner with a responsive and responsible energy sector and a plan to handle climate change. That's a big part of it. Of course, going to Paris with a responsible plan will help us increase markets and therefore increase jobs.

Mr. Jean: The Premier told Albertans that she wants to go to Paris to tell the truth. Well, the truth is that eastern politicians get more of the oil from dictatorships than from Alberta. Canada has the best environmental performance and human rights record of the world's top ten oil reserve countries. Here in Alberta we have achieved a remarkable 30 per cent reduction in per-barrel emissions since 1990. To the Premier: why won't she go tell the world this story, the truth, instead of treating us like embarrassing cousins?

Ms Hoffman: The Premier and our government are working very hard to make sure that we have a government that makes us all proud in Alberta. Part of that is acknowledging that climate change is a reality and that we have a role to play in it. I am very proud. I know the Energy minister has been working diligently to make sure that we are ready to move on a number of initiatives that will make all of us proud and therefore make our product even more marketable around the world.

Mr. Jean: It's very clear that the Premier feels she needs to apologize for Alberta. The NDP have already taken \$800 million in

new taxes from industry. The NDP's own climate panel is pushing for a carbon tax to be paid by every single Albertan. That will raise the price of everything. But leadership starts from the top. Surely, the Premier understands the optics of ministers travelling in large gas-guzzling entourages. What steps is the Premier personally taking to show that she is willing to share in the pain that Albertans now feel?

The Speaker: The minister of environment.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to actually answer a question about climate change from the Official Opposition for the first time in 17 days. I have to assume that the silence coming from the Official Opposition on the topic of climate change can only be because they either don't understand the science of climate change or don't care about the science of climate change.

The Speaker: Second question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Public Access to Executive Council Members

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every single day I hear from stakeholders who can't get meetings with ministers. Businesses, charities, community groups, agencies of government: they're all scrambling to get the attention of cabinet, but on the NDP website we can find out that for \$250 a person they can join the Premier and cabinet and "discuss issues facing the province that are important." Using cabinet for political fundraising is unacceptable, to say the least. Will the Premier today commit to changing the law to make this action completely illegal?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. I know that it's not unlikely for any party to have events and, of course, advise people about who will be attending these events. I think it makes good sense. I'm sure the member opposite, when he was part of the federal government, also was at events and that that was part of the conversation. I think this question has nothing to do with government policy and, instead, is intended to try to talk about something that actually doesn't have anything to do with a responsive government. We've been working really hard to make sure that we increase access to the actual people of Alberta, not just lobbyists.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Jean: Thank you. The answer would be no. I did not do that.

Mr. Speaker, when the Premier was a member of the opposition, she understood that it was wrong for governing parties to use the Premier's office and access to ministers as a fundraising tool. It borders on influence peddling and selling access. Everyone knows it's wrong. Under federal law it would be a clear violation. The laws in Alberta are not as strong as they should be. Will the Premier call the Ethics Commissioner to investigate this matter, or will she leave it up to us?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to take the member's encouragement under advisement. As well, we have a committee that we've established around renewing democracy. It's an all-party committee. These are the types of issues that are certainly more than appropriate to be discussed at the committee level and that we can all move collaboratively on should the committee make those recommendations in the future.

Thank you.

Mr. Jean: When the Government House Leader was the leader of the NDP, he rose in his place and called out the Stelmach government for selling access to pay off campaign debts. In 2007 the current Government House Leader actually wrote to the Ethics Commissioner demanding and getting – it’s so hard, Mr. Speaker, because I can’t believe this is happening – an investigation into a case that is just about exactly the same as this one. Tonight we will find out if the NDP is joining the PCs in having campaign debts. Maybe that’s why they’re skirting the law. Will the Government House Leader once again write . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to categorically reject the assertion that the fundraiser is selling access to government ministers. It’s an opportunity to meet all members of the NDP caucus, including the Premier and all members of Executive Council. It is nothing more than that. It’s not an attempt to sell access in any way, so it’s entirely different in this case.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 2007 the now Government House Leader got the Ethics Commissioner to investigate the Stelmach government for selling access to cabinet. Let me quote from a January 2007 news story. “The Premier is actually offering to listen to people’s concerns for money. And he’s paid by the taxpayers to do that, and so to charge on top of it is unacceptable.” The Ethics Commissioner agreed with him. Private access to decision-makers is wrong. Why is this cabinet asking Albertans to pay for the chance to discuss provincial issues?

Mr. Mason: The answer, Mr. Speaker, is clear. It is not.

Mr. Nixon: In 2007 the government cancelled a fundraiser, that was sold out, for the Premier and cabinet. That allowed the Ethics Commissioner to say that the ethics rules hadn’t been violated because the event was cancelled and all money was refunded. The Ethics Commissioner, though, was clear that the event violated provincial law, and as a result, the PCs stopped calling their events Premier’s dinners. What the NDP is doing with this fundraiser is wrong. Will the Premier cancel this event and commit to never doing it again?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much to the hon. member for the question. I understand that there was an error made by the party in describing the fundraising event that the member has raised. That error is being fixed. The allegations made by the member suggest that there was an untoward intention. That is simply not the case. I believe our party’s Provincial Secretary will have more to say about this. But on behalf of our party I sincerely apologize for a mistake that was made and the impression that it has created. Our government is committed to being open and accountable. As we’ve said to Albertans, when a mistake is made, we’ll . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, more recently the issue of selling access and trading on a government role came up again. In 2012 Gary Mar tried to hold a fundraiser using his government job as a sweetener. The NDP were livid.

Speaker’s Ruling Referring to a Nonmember

The Speaker: I would seek the guidance of the table; however, I’ve heard an individual’s, a previous member’s, name mentioned who’s not in the House to defend it. I trust that you would avoid using the names of individuals who are not in the House.

Mr. Nixon: It wasn’t a member.

The Speaker: It’s my understanding that, in fact, it does not just apply to members. It may also apply to other individuals. With respect, I would appreciate your avoiding that. Thank you.

Mr. Nixon: Sounds good, Mr. Speaker.

2:00 Public Access to Executive Council Members (continued)

Mr. Nixon: Let me once again quote the Government House Leader: I think the important principle here is that you don’t trade on government jobs to raise money for political parties. Mr. Speaker, I couldn’t agree more, but I guess principles go out the window when you form government. Will the Premier cancel this event and apologize to Albertans?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for pointing out the misrepresentation. I believe our party’s provincial secretary will have more to say about this on behalf of our party, but I sincerely want to apologize for any mistaken impression that has been created. Our government is committed to being open and accountable, and as we’ve said to Albertans, when a mistake is made, we’ll be up front about it, and that’s what we’re doing today. Thank you for drawing attention, and we will clarify the actual event.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the Progressive Conservative opposition.

Job Creation and Retention

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When asked yesterday in the House which industries the Premier would support, she said her “government is not in the business of picking winners and losers.” Alberta’s biggest industries include agriculture, forestry, tourism, and energy. We are not asking to pick winners; we just want the Premier to start picking Alberta. Will you, Premier, create policy that picks Alberta industries and Albertans as winners rather than other places in the world, please?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much. We’re absolutely committed to building jobs. That’s one of the reasons why in the actual election we ran on a job-creation strategy that would build Alberta jobs right here, and that’s what people voted for. We are very committed to making sure that we continue to diversify the economy. Industry leaders from Alberta asked us to create a one-stop shop. That’s why we created a ministry for economic diversification, and we’re committed to moving forward with that direction and supporting Albertans.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, yesterday at a media conference the Premier barely used the word “pipeline” and only then in reference

to concern for Canada. Now, as elected members we're all proud Canadians, but we are elected to work for Alberta. Premier, will you please start to remember Alberta and Albertans in your plans to get a pipeline for this province? Please, Premier.

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. We are absolutely committed to working to make sure that we have a well-respected industry. That's why we're moving on making sure that we can go to Paris with our heads held high. We are making sure that there are no excuses that can be made around why people don't want to be able to transport Alberta products, and that's definitely a big part of that. I'm really proud of the fact that during the summer the Premier met with all of the Premiers, and they committed to making sure that we can continue to move our product to open waters without undue drama. We're making a number of efforts along that way and will continue to do so.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, next week the Premier is going to Toronto. Next month the Premier is going to Paris and is now busy, I presume, preparing climate change policy to impress people everywhere in the world except Alberta. To the Premier: when are you going to make Albertans your focus? When are you going to try to impress Albertans with your policies and keep businesses and jobs right here? Thousands of livelihoods depend upon it.

The Speaker: The minister of economic development.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll thank the hon. member for his question. I do find it interesting that for many years when his party was in power they did nothing as far as having a one-stop shop for business and industry and continued to ignore them. Our government, on the other hand, has created a ministry and is looking at supporting Alberta small and medium-sized enterprises through the Alberta Enterprise Corporation, injecting \$50 million to fund funds that will support businesses. We're also looking at improving our trade and making more markets available for export. Our government is . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Addiction Treatment Services for Women in Calgary

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Recovery Acres Society operates the very successful 1835 House addiction treatment facility in my constituency of Calgary-Elbow. This group has ambitious plans to open a new, badly needed facility in Calgary's northeast then repurpose 1835 House as an in-patient facility to help women overcome addiction. To the Minister of Health. I know you met with Recovery Acres this summer to discuss their project. Is this an approved project in this year's capital plan?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. I do, too, need to commend the work that's happening at Recovery Acres. We know how devastating addictions can be for families, and they're definitely creating new opportunities for a new life in the community. In terms of previous commitments that were made by the former government, I understand why Recovery Acres is very hopeful that they'll be in the capital plan. I want to make sure that we're proceeding with due

diligence in making those decisions, and I will be happy to update the House and Recovery Acres at a time that is most appropriate.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Minister, it is a good project. It shouldn't matter who came up with it in the first place. It's an important project and should move ahead. Now, there is some urgency here. Recovery Acres has raised over \$2 million in private donations and has commitments for an additional \$5 million and has secured a development permit and land based on commitments made by the previous government to provide the matching \$7 million they need to complete this important project. These permits expire on November 28 this year. Will you commit to making a decision before that date?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. I did meet personally with representatives from Recovery Acres. We are continuing to discuss with them the perceived urgency. I do want to say that permits can be renewed if necessary. I understand why their desire would be to have a decision before the end of the month, but I think it's important that we do our due diligence and make sure that projects aren't decided as one-offs but that the system is going to best meet the needs of all Albertans around addictions and mental health.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Minister, with respect, it's not perceived urgency; it's actual urgency. We badly need these treatment spaces in Calgary.

Now, I know your government takes women's issues very seriously, and for that you are genuinely to be commended. To the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women: in light of the fentanyl crisis and also to address the overall shortage of women's treatment spaces in Calgary, what is your ministry doing to support this important project?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. We are committed to addressing addictions and mental health issues and doing that throughout Alberta, and of course Calgary is an area in need, as are many other communities. Capital funding is one piece. We also want to make sure that before we say yes to capital funding, which is a one-time investment, we're able to provide ongoing operational funding. I understand the desire to move very quickly, but I want to make sure that I'm doing so with the financial realities in mind.

In terms of this year's budget we have \$10 million for implementing the first recommendations of the mental health review, which are coming through at the end of this calendar year. Hopefully, we'll be able to do a number there, and then we'll continue to discuss additional initiatives after, in the next budget.

The Speaker: Thank you, Madam Minister.

Economic Development

Ms Gray: Mr. Speaker, my office and I hear from constituents on a frequent basis about the tough economic times in Alberta. They want our government to take action to stimulate economic growth and diversification to support job creation. They know that growing our economy is how we support the jobs that support all Albertan families. My question to the Minister of Economic Development

and Trade: what action are you taking with Budget 2015 in order to support these much-needed jobs and growth?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the hon. member for her question. The Premier asked me to take on this role because our government knows, especially in challenging times like these, that we need to show leadership on diversifying our economy and partnering with businesses to create jobs to support families right across this province. I'm quite proud of the budget that the Finance minister tabled with all the different initiatives that our government is taking on in order to support the Alberta economy and further diversify.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that you announced in Calgary last week that your department is investing \$50 million for the Alberta Enterprise Corporation to inject capital into the Alberta economy, to the same minister: will this mean picking winners and losers at the expense of letting the business community decide what is best?

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government of Alberta is not in the business of picking winners and losers. We are providing the leadership and tools that businesses need to grow and create good jobs for all Albertans. That announcement of injecting \$50 million into the Alberta Enterprise Corporation: it's a fund-to-fund model, meaning that the Alberta Enterprise Corporation funds funders that then decide which venture capital companies to invest in in the province of Alberta. This is a great way to stimulate the economy and as well to ensure that businesses have the supports they . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
Second supplemental.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the AEC works to invest in venture capital funds and not directly in companies themselves, my question is to the same minister: what are you doing to ensure that all Albertan families benefit from this program?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every dollar AEC invests in venture capital funds has resulted in more than \$4 in investments in Alberta businesses, which creates good, mortgage-paying jobs for Albertans. I'm also quite happy that more than a thousand jobs have already been created in the province of Alberta. Our government is committed to providing leadership and the tools that businesses need to create jobs and grow our economy.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Public School Boards' Association of Alberta

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Members of the Public School Boards' Association of Alberta unanimously passed a motion to raise an estimated \$1.2 million to take Lakeland Catholic school board to court to stop them from opening a Catholic school in Lac La Biche. They will raise these funds by charging 90 cents per student. Imagine that: charging parents to take away badly needed

schools in northern Alberta. Does this minister believe that school boards should be using government funds to go to court instead of the intended purpose of educating students?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. This is an issue that came up last night in estimates of supply, and certainly it's clear that – I had a call into the public school association, and they did not create a fund, and they are emphatically not saying that they would do so. That being said, it's very important that we do use public funds in the best way possible. I did acknowledge that I would pursue this issue further with the same MLA last night during supply.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do have some motions passed by the PSBAA that do indeed substantiate what we're saying.

Considering the Northern Lights school division and the Public School Boards' Association are hiring lawyers and preparing a legal challenge and given that a school board trustee has said, "We are in the business of education and not in the business of suing," does this minister believe that taxpayer dollars should be used to challenge the right of Alberta families to choose a Catholic education?

Mr. Eggen: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, one of the things we have as a responsibility in this House is to ensure that we have due process and to ensure that the public education system here in this province is defended in its broadest possible way. I would suggest that this member, by entering into this particular thing, is inflaming a situation that is sensitive already, and I would probably tell him that he is doing the wrong thing.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this association stated that they would send out special levy invoices to member school boards on October 31, 2015, to fund the estimated costs for a possible court case, will the minister intervene to ensure that education grants to school boards by his ministry for the education of students are used for that purpose?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, this member knows that we made the call during supply last night to make sure that, in fact, this fund was not created at all. We spoke to them at length. Certainly, as I said before, when we are in the process of good governance, it's very important – and this is a good teaching moment for this opposition member – that you don't inflame the situation. You don't make it worse by getting involved here in this public place. [interjections] It's a big mistake.

The Speaker: Hon. members.

A question from the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Ride-sharing Services

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, imagine, if you will, two airlines. One must be licensed, insured, and inspected on a regular basis; the other is free to operate outside of these protection measures, avoiding the costs associated with them. The second airline would seem to have a significant competitive advantage. Well, the introduction of ride-sharing in the market may create this scenario for Alberta taxi drivers. To the Minister of Finance: are you committed to looking at ride-sharing services and making sure that the drivers follow the same or similar rules as taxi drivers, at least getting insurance, inspections, criminal checks, regulatory standards?

The Speaker: The Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to take the hon. member's question. One of the things that we're looking at is ensuring that the public is safe. That's the first thing that we need to do. So we need to make sure that anyone offering a car for hire, whether they're a taxi driver or part of a ride-sharing service, has the same level of insurance, training, and so on. There are a number of issues that we're working on. We're certainly in contact and having discussions with the major municipalities that have their own taxi commissions or some sort of regulated taxi system.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister. I know that you are or were a professional driver, as I understand it, at some point in your life. Have you talked to taxi drivers and other professional drivers, and what can you share with the House about the advice that you have received from them?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, yes, you do want to hang on to your licence, you know, just in case, in politics. But I can tell the hon. member that I have met with taxi drivers and taxi companies on a number of occasions and that we have an interdepartmental committee that is studying the issue and coming up with recommendations. As I said, the primary and most important thing is to protect the public's safety.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, to the same minister. Albertans want ride-sharing services, and we think that they should have choice, too. But they also want to be safe and know that they'll be protected when they're using the services. Will you commit to working with Alberta municipalities to help develop a set of rules and regulations that will ensure a safe experience for users and a level playing field for everybody in the business?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. member for the question. That is exactly what we plan to do.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Grande Prairie Hospital

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday we talked about the Grande Prairie hospital. When it was announced, nearly a decade ago, it was planned around the Peace Country's needs in 2025. Now we've learned from the Health minister that the construction date has been pushed back to 2019. This project is having core services cut to compensate for the massive cost overruns. To the Health minister: is it fair that the people of the Peace Country should be paying the price for this government's mismanagement?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. What we've spelled out, when talking to local members of Grande Prairie and the media, is that rather than opening 10 ORs, we're going to be opening eight. That's still an increase of two from where the hospital is operating at currently. We're going to be making sure that everyone has an opportunity to access quality health care as opposed to what members opposite

propose, which is cutting nurses and teachers, which they think will magically make front-line services better.

Mr. Loewen: Mr. Speaker, people in Grande Prairie are well aware of the many problems that plague the construction of this facility. Given that the rumour of reduced services at this hospital has indeed been confirmed, can the minister explain why, despite campaigning against cuts to front-line services, her government is now breaking its promises?

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I've mentioned in this House and publicly, there is going to be an expansion of services. They're opening a state-of-the-art education and health facility for Grande Prairie, which we're very proud of. In terms of maintaining good investment in health care and education, we ran on that. Members opposite ran on significant cuts to capital and to operating, and Albertans didn't vote for that. They voted for us.

Mr. Loewen: Mr. Speaker, we've heard too many times, with examples like Wainwright and now Grande Prairie, that the government has no problem cutting service in rural Alberta to find the money . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, again I need to remind you about the preambles. That was a preamble. I didn't hear "given that."

Please proceed. Thank you.

Mr. Loewen: Given that we've heard too many times, with examples like Wainwright and now Grande Prairie, that the government has no problem cutting service in rural Alberta to find the money to pay for bureaucrats and their mistakes, to the Health minister: how many more essential services in rural Alberta will be cut before Alberta Health Services figures out how to build a hospital on time and on budget?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. One of the reasons why we're moving forward with such thoughtful planning is to make sure that when we make an announcement, Albertans can count on that. We're not going to be going and making announcements without knowing what's realistic. I want to remind all members that we are expanding the level of services to people in the Grande Prairie area. We are going to be having access to more quality health centres in Grande Prairie as opposed to proposing mass cuts, \$9 billion of cuts, to infrastructure.

The Speaker: I think we're at Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Royalty Framework

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On April 2 of this year a ministerial order doubled the royalties for gravel. This one hundred per cent increase in royalties was disclosed to the Alberta Sand and Gravel Association but not to all industry clients. To many businesses' surprise they got a letter telling them to pay up in October on this substantial increase. To the Minister of Environment: why did the department fail to clearly communicate to the entire gravel industry back in April?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of environment.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. Of course, there were a number of fees

that were raised by the previous government, and there were a number of ways in which that was communicated. I'll certainly work with the hon. member to discuss with the stakeholders in his riding about what exactly happened there. I'm happy to follow up with him afterwards outside the House.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, I'm sorry. The minister of environment had the chance to get rid of these increases. You need to own these charges. Given that Alberta businesses are hurting, they don't need these kind of surprises. Some businesses may have to lay off staff, go bankrupt as a result of these demands. This NDP government appears to be dead set on making business conditions in Alberta worse. Will the minister of environment rescind retroactive charges to those who were not given proper notice in April?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of environment.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. Of course, there were a number of fee increases that came with the previous government's budget and a number of different initiatives that they undertook as part of their March budget. You know, the fact of the matter is that I am perfectly willing to work with this industry and perfectly willing to meet with them and try to undo some of the damage that was done by the previous government.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this government seems to bungle any attempt to change royalty rates, I have serious concerns about the upcoming royalty review in the energy sector. The Finance minister is basing his budget off assumptions about royalties. This leads me to believe that the independent panel is playing into the government's pocket. Will this government admit that they are only happy with one answer from the royalty review – get higher rates – and that they are doing everything in their power to get that response?

Mr. Ceci: Mr. Speaker, I can tell the hon. member that we are not factoring in any changes to royalties in this budget.

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

Aboriginal Relations

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Like other areas of Alberta, many aboriginal communities are struggling with the explosion of fentanyl abuse. Just one example: the situation became dire in the Blood Tribe when it registered a 20th fatal overdose in just a 12-month period. The band declared a state of emergency, and AHS assisted by making the antidote available to its band and training 50 members to administer it. The band also launched an addiction crisis line. To the Minister of Aboriginal Relations: with respect, when are you going to implement this experience as a model to help other reserves who are looking for ways to deal with this very serious crisis?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. As we all know, fentanyl is a true tragedy currently in our society. A number of young people have died from this, and, you know, we are working with our partners in AHS and with police services. In fact, I just had meetings with the police chiefs yesterday to make sure that we're doing everything that we can about this. I

had committed to the member in estimates to look into making naloxone more widely available on-reserve, and we will get back to him on that.

Thank you.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Minister, and thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Premier has directed her Aboriginal Relations minister to develop a comprehensive plan to implement UNDRIP and TRC, one would expect that Budget 2015 would reflect the government's emphasis on these monumental initiatives, and given that your ministry's budget is increasing by only 1.6 per cent in Budget 2015, can the minister please tell all of Alberta what specific aspects of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report and the United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples will you actually attend to during this budget year?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Well, of course, this government is committed to the implementation of the UN declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples. We have secured some funding to flow through to First Nations so that they are able to talk to us in those conversations as we develop strategies in terms of how best to go forward in consultation with our aboriginal partners. Those programs will flow through to the various departments in which they find themselves situated. In addition, one of the fundamental principles of the UN declaration is respect, and that we can implement for free.

Thank you.

Mr. Rodney: Given that in budget estimates for Aboriginal Relations yesterday I asked a series of questions truly in the spirit of collaborating and assisting with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities and individuals and given that I requested the minister to supply written answers for every member in this House so that they can share the information with all Albertans because it is the right thing to do and given that this is not just a file – as you know, this is serious set of issues affecting real-life people of all ages – please tell us, Minister: when will you table written answers to the questions that I asked in this week's estimates?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Well, as you know, we're all in the process of estimates, and the member did ask a number of questions. In fact, it was probably, well, a five-minute diatribe on the wonders of the previous government, and then he moved on to questions about this budget. We will be responding to those questions, as we are required to do, and we will be tabling those answers in the House, as we are required to do. Given that the UN declaration has, as a fundamental principle, respect, I think that the member's behaviour in the committee the other day demonstrates why his government was not able to implement his response. [interjections]

The Speaker: Order.

Young Offender Centre in Calgary

Ms Luff: Mr. Speaker, the previous government was shutting the doors on the Calgary Young Offender Centre, with plans to ship youth to Edmonton instead. This government cancelled those plans and committed to keeping the centre open. Many of my Calgary colleagues in this House can likely attest to the number of calls that

we received in our offices about this concern, and our constituents were very happy that real action was taken on this important issue. Will the Minister of Justice detail for us in this House why the . . .
2:30

The Speaker: A little faster, hon. Member, a little faster.
The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for this critical question. As we know, the Young Offender Centre involves a lot of rehabilitation and education, and we think that it is absolutely critical to keep young people, particularly vulnerable young people who have come into conflict with the law, near their families and communities, where they can have the support to make better decisions going forward.

Thank you.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Luff: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the hon. minister for the answer. Given that the previous government claimed it was closing the Calgary Young Offender Centre to save costs and given that this government has decided to keep it open, to the same minister: what are the implications of this decision on our budget?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. The cost of keeping the Calgary Young Offender Centre open was approximately \$3 million. We think that that is an extremely small price to pay to ensure that these young people can stay close to their communities and have the support they need from their families to make better choices going forward so that they can become productive members of our society.

Ms Luff: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the minister. Given that the Calgary Young Offender Centre has unused space, to the same minister: how are we looking at using that space?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the hon. member for the question. Right now the space is being used for training of Calgary Young Offender Centre personnel, but, of course, in this time of economic shortage we are examining every option on how we can use that facility going forward.

Thank you.

Rural Emergency Medical Services

Mr. Stier: Mr. Speaker, ever since being elected in 2012, I have fought for the changes necessary to eliminate the risk to the lives of Albertans caused by the government's inadequate and faulty system in rural ambulance service. The service change in 2007 to central dispatch, flexing of units from region to region, and a total lack of non-emergency transfer units all have led to years of unreliable service. Is the Minister of Health aware of these recognized long-term problems with rural ambulances and AHS, and what is she prepared to do about it this fall?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. I do know that the member has been a long-time advocate for making sure that Albertans in rural communities have access to quality health care, and that is certainly a priority of ours. That's one of the reasons we have committed to

providing stable health care funding: for our citizens, no matter where they live, to be able to access front-line health care services. One of the reasons why we're doing this is because we were elected to make sure we have a supported health and education system. Members opposite ran on significant cuts, and they were not.

Mr. Stier: Well, while the minister may not necessarily have noticed these particular problems with this faulty system, now front-line EMS workers are paying the price. Given that recently we've learned about EMS workers having their EMS licences revoked because of PTSD and other health issues directly related to problems in this system, does the minister understand that after years of push towards centralization, absolutely nothing has changed? We still have high wait times, risk to public lives, high levels of stress for front-line workers. What is she going to do about it?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. We are of course committed to making sure we have a strong, vibrant front-line service for Albertans, and one of the ways we're doing that is by ensuring that we have a stable commitment in health funding as opposed to cutting billions of dollars as has been proposed from members opposite. We're working really hard to make sure that they can have stability and confidence in the government investing in their industry and their access.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's obvious that the minister is a big fan of leaving things as they are and centralization, but given that years of pushing towards centralization has only really resulted in high wait times and even areas of the province frequently going without ambulance coverage, will the minister recognize this system is faulty and return the system to the proven, reliable, local, regional control system of the past?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There were two plans laid out for the public during the election. One was about creating more chaos and decentralizing Alberta Health Services, that would rely on a bunch of people . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: I can't hear the question that's been asked by the opposition. As the Speaker of this Assembly, I would appreciate the opportunity to hear the answer and the question.

Thank you.

Please proceed.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Two plans were laid out during the election. One was to decentralize after many years of organizing, reorganizing, disorganizing, and one was about creating stability in the system. One of the reasons why we moved forward with the plan we did is because Albertans elected us, not the members opposite.

Economic Diversification

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, in question period on Tuesday the Minister of Economic Development and Trade said: "the previous government, that for years neglected diversifying the Alberta economy." Wow. That stung, but as a veterinarian I've been kicked, bitten, scratched, trampled, urinated, defecated, and vomited upon by various creatures. So, Minister, do your worst. In 1985 36 per cent of Alberta's economy was based on oil and gas. By 2012 that number stood at 28 per cent. Minister, if what you said on Tuesday had even a passing and platonic relationship with veracity . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again I'll remind the member that it was this government that created a ministry solely focused on diversifying our economy and enhancing our trade. Part of the reason why, unfortunately, right now we're hearing of so many layoffs in the province is because of our overreliance on one single sector. It is our intention to work within the sector to look at value-added opportunities but also to diversify our province and strengthen our other sectors.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, another statement that has a passing and platonic relationship with veracity. You, sir, are the 10th Minister of Economic Development and Trade, and in fact there were 27 years of the past government that had a Ministry of Economic Development and Trade. During that time biotechnology grew to a \$1 billion-a-year industry, employing over 4,600 Albertans; canola production went from 20,000 tonnes to 20 million tonnes and the . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, is there a question in there somewhere? Hon. member, could I hear the question?

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, indeed. The question was: with all of those industries growing during that period of time, how do you explain the increases, Minister?

The Speaker: Thank you.
The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd love to ask the member why they mothballed this ministry back in 2006. Businesses and industry have been asking for a one-stop shop. They've been asking for a government that is truly listening to them and willing to put the resources in to provide that one-stop shop and focus as an entryway into government. Quite frankly, what I've heard from the business community already was that the PCs' approach to the economy lacked focus, it lacked strategy, and essentially was willy-nilly. Our government is focused on working with job creators.

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, the sad truth is that this minister occupies the one and only job that has been created by his ministry.

Given that he's so fixated on trashing the past government that he fails to recognize the great strides that have been made in the Alberta diversification story and insults the efforts of the thousands of Albertans who have worked hard to write that story, Minister, when will you apologize to biotechnology, apologize . . . [interjections]

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

The Speaker: Hon. members, I am still very much a novice at this; however, I know that this House is far more capable of lowering the tone and the volume that is in the room, and I trust it will change back to what I know you're each capable of. So, please – please – out of respect for this House, for what you all believe in, and for our guests, tone it down a bit. Please.

2:40 Economic Diversification (continued)

The Speaker: Hon. minister, please proceed.

Mr. Bilous: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's great to see the hon. member almost as excited as I am about this new ministry.

The Speaker: You've had your time, hon. minister. We're moving on.

Members' Statements (continued)

The Speaker: The Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Commodity Producers

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to salute the men and women who have just completed a provincial megaproject, men and women who have toiled many long hours and at times were concerned whether or not they would be able to finish the project in time. Thankfully, most are now able to proclaim that they have successfully completed the harvest of 2015.

Alberta farmers faced many challenges this growing season, but I'm proud to say that once again they've done a magnificent job growing many diverse crops and doing their part to feed the world. Although the focus is so often on the harvest activity on farms, many peripheral industries and individuals are required to get the harvest done and to market: equipment manufacturing and maintenance; the energy industry providing fuel and fertilizer; businesses necessary to process and market the crop; transportation, providing the roads and rail necessary to deliver the product; and many more. In all of this it is important to recognize that it will be that bushel of wheat, barley, or canola paying the bills, paying for the jobs in all of these industries.

We as legislators need to recognize the role we play in maintaining a globally competitive and viable agricultural sector. Any extra cost that public policy adds is paid for by the products we produce and sell. Mr. Speaker, the jobs Albertans need will be paid for by that bushel of wheat or canola, by that calf, by that pig, by that chicken, by that tree, by that barrel of oil. While this current government doesn't seem to understand that, on this side of the House we stand with Alberta producers and the important work they do. We know that the commodities we harvest, renewables and nonrenewables, create the jobs and services Albertans need. We have a huge responsibility to get it right so that our children and grandchildren can enjoy the same quality of life we have.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Physician-assisted Dying

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In February this year the Supreme Court of Canada handed down the landmark ruling which struck down the Criminal Code's prohibition on physician-assisted dying. Most Canadians, when suffering from a debilitating and incurable or even terminal disease, are looking for regulations and control around their last days. In order to give Parliament time to craft new rules and regulations to govern this practice, the Supreme Court delayed enforcement of the ruling until February next year. Sadly, a lack of political will in the federal campaign has left only a few months to work on new regulations. It's going to be up to the provinces to come up with guidelines for physician-assisted dying. Other jurisdictions and organizations have pushed ahead. In Quebec, for example, they've passed an assisted dying law and are poised to bring it into force in the new year. The College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta has surveyed

its members, and a draft advice document is available. What is still needed in Alberta is public engagement in these sensitive, ethical, legal, and medical issues.

What checks and balances are needed? How will we ensure that individuals are properly informed, of sound mind, and free to make the decision, their last decision in life? How will we ensure the right of physicians who choose not to be part of assisted dying, that they have that right? The Supreme Court has made it clear Canadians can have more control over their dying, but the rest is up to us. Assisted dying is no light subject. Behind every case is a unique, personal decision, the most difficult decision that many will face. We must learn from the experiences of other jurisdictions and respect the rights of all as we create this new policy.

I would urge our Minister of Health and this Legislature to take hold and lead on this issue, and I urge all Albertans to write . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Violence against Sikhs in India

Mr. Loyola: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to stand in solidarity with the members of the Sikh community here in Alberta and across the world as we mark the 31st anniversary of the 1984 Sikh genocide, in which Sikh children, women, and men were targeted and killed in an organized campaign across India. According to former Indian Supreme Court Justice G.T. Nanavati, “The systemic manner in which the Sikhs were thus killed indicate that the attacks on them were organized.”

Let us also take a moment to recognize those who at serious risk to themselves and their families provided refuge and assistance to their Sikh neighbours during these horrific events.

The Alberta NDP and I stand against all extrajudicial killings and in solidarity with the Sikh community and independent human rights organizations, who have waited far too long for answers, and in solidarity as well with the victims and the survivors of 1984, who have waited too long for recognition of their plight and frustration. The truth must be brought to light, and those guilty must be brought to justice.

This is particularly important in light of the increasing tensions in Punjab today following the deaths of two peaceful protestors, allegedly at the hands of security forces. Rehabilitation and support for the affected families must be prioritized while the actions of the police and allegations regarding the role of Congress members and the use of state resources in the attacks must be examined.

The struggle to recognize the dignity of the human person is the ultimate objective of observing the human rights of all. This government recognizes this fact both here at home and abroad. Justice and accountability are the obligations of a democratic state to its citizens. Let us be conscious that remembrance is the tie that binds us to our past as it guides us for the challenge of the future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Greenmunch Ecostore

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Finance minister in the budget speech of October 27 stated: “We are a hopeful and optimistic people. We are entrepreneurial and enterprising. We are community-minded. We care about our neighbours. What we desire for ourselves, we wish for all. That is the Alberta way.”

Strathcona county has a very successful green routine program, with weekly pickup of recyclable materials including Styrofoam, plastics, metals, and all paper goods. The composting bins allow residents to put all food materials and compostable items for weekly pickup. The compost is then sold every spring by nonprofit organizations for fundraising.

A business called Greenmunch, located in my riding of Sherwood Park, was started by Phillip Jacobsen and his wife, Joy, in June of 2011. They started with a home office and have since moved to three different warehouse locations as sales have grown. Prior to starting Greenmunch, Phillip was the vice-president of research and development for an Edmonton-based business, designing high-tech consumer electronic products. But Phillip also desperately wanted to work on some projects that had more social value. For several years his family had a large urban organic garden. This required generating large amounts of compost as the main source of fertilizer. After some research he realized that there were few companies offering compostable disposable products.

2:50

Greenmunch.ca is an online ecostore offering earth-friendly and sustainable products. They specialize in compostable dinnerware, food packaging, and special event supplies, including weddings. They are also the only online retailer for many of the products they offer. They distribute to wholesale customers as well as to individuals, and they have a strong consumer base throughout Canada, the U.S., Europe, and Australia. Their goal is to promote the increased awareness and use of compostable and reusable products.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood.

In Flanders Fields Poem Centennial

Mr. Connolly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On November 11 we take time to recognize the contribution all of our veterans have made and honour those who made the ultimate sacrifice on behalf of Canada. This year’s Remembrance Day is especially significant as it marks the 100th anniversary of *In Flanders Fields*, written in 1915 by Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae, a soldier and surgeon during the First World War. It is believed that McCrae’s inspiration for the poem came from the death of his friend Lieutenant Alexis Helmer, who served in the same unit. McCrae was asked to conduct the burial service for Alexis because the chaplain had been called away on duty that evening. It is believed that later that evening, after the burial, John began to draft *In Flanders Fields*.

When I was in high school, I had the great fortune of travelling to Europe with my public school to visit various sites that were significant to Canada throughout our history, including Vimy Ridge, the St. Julien Canadian war memorial, several Canadian war cemeteries across the continent as well as Flanders and the fortification where McCrae wrote his poem.

Reading and learning *In Flanders Fields* is a proud tradition for Canada’s youth. This November I will be joining the students of Robert Thirsk high school for their Remembrance Day service. So many young women and men gave the ultimate sacrifice so that today’s youth can live in peace, and I will no doubt hear *In Flanders Fields* read proudly by the students of Robert Thirsk high school.

Lest we forget. Je me souviens.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Bill 5**Public Sector Compensation Transparency Act**

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand today to introduce Bill 5, the Public Sector Compensation Transparency Act.

Bill 5 significantly expands Alberta's existing public-sector compensation disclosure. It also follows through on our promise to increase transparency in our public sector. Agencies, boards, and commissions, including postsecondary institutions and Alberta Health Services, will be required to disclose the annual salaries of their employees at a threshold greater than \$125,000, which includes overtime. Compensation will be disclosed for the board members of those agencies, boards, and commissions with no threshold limit.

This bill also requires disclosure from entities like Covenant Health and the independent offices of the Legislature. Further, it allows for regulation on the disclosure of physician compensation by government and other health entities. In addition, Mr. Speaker, this bill enables municipalities and school boards to disclose the names and salaries of paid employees if they wish to do so.

The bill takes the existing Treasury Board directive regarding disclosure for government of Alberta employees and moves that role into the act, maintaining the pre-existing threshold. Mr. Speaker, all thresholds will be annually adjusted for inflation.

Pending passage of the bill, my ministry will consult with those groups affected by the legislation to decide how best to implement the act through regulations. This government is committed to helping ensure that Albertans know how public money is spent. This is another important step towards a more open government in this province.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill 5 read a first time]

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

Bill 204**Residential Tenancies (Safer Spaces for Victims of Domestic Violence) Amendment Act, 2015**

Ms Drever: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request leave, in this month that marks Family Violence Prevention Month, to introduce my private member's bill, the Residential Tenancies (Safer Spaces for Victims of Domestic Violence) Amendment Act, 2015.

This bill seeks to empower and support survivors of violence by removing some of the barriers to leaving an unsafe home environment. This bill will give survivors a choice in breaking the cycle of violence inside and outside the home. We have a problem here in Alberta when it comes to the rates of domestic violence, reported and unreported. Alberta cities rank as some of the most challenging places for women to live, and the rates of domestic violence in Alberta are rising in some places and remain stagnant in others. Instead of moving forward, we as a province are moving backwards. Too often victims of violence stay silent. They don't speak out because they don't feel safe.

The intention of my private member's bill is to give them a tool, a way to support those who need to leave an unsafe environment because of violence or the threat of violence. All across Alberta organizations and agencies are tirelessly working to support survivors and provide ways to leave violence safely. We can support these efforts through this amendment. We know that it often takes someone five to seven attempts to leave a violent environment before they can break the cycle. When that step is taken, there are

supports available, but so often fear takes over. That fear forces people into silence.

I know that we could do better . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I think what I have heard would normally take place within the confines of debate. I would urge the member to introduce the motion and allow the House to vote on it. I would ask members on a go-forward basis that we practise that in the future.

[Motion carried; Bill 204 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

Mr. Smith: Mr. Speaker, I referred to a tabling of a document earlier in question period. I believe I needed five copies of it, so I am tabling this document.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am tabling the appropriate amount of copies of a document from Rick Massini, who is the first vice-president of the Public School Boards' Association of Alberta. He is quoted in here as saying: "The [PSBAA] is committed to providing quality Public Education to Alberta's students. The Association is not engaged in any litigation to stop Catholic Education. The PSBAA is not engaged in any litigation at all!"

Thank you.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Ms Larivee, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Minister of Service Alberta, the Capital Region Board 2014-15 annual report; pursuant to the Vital Statistics Act the Alberta vital statistics annual review 2013; pursuant to the Safety Codes Act the Safety Codes Council annual report 2014; pursuant to the Special Areas Act the special areas trust account financial statements dated December 31, 2014; pursuant to the Government Organization Act the Alberta Boilers Safety Association annual report 2014 dated October 31, 2014; Alberta Elevating Devices and Amusement Rides Safety Association 2014-2015 annual report; the authorized accredited agency summary 2013-2014.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Ceci, President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance, pursuant to the Results-based Budgeting Act the results-based budgeting report to Albertans dated November 2015.

3:00

Orders of the Day**Government Motions****Amendments to Standing Orders**

23. Ms Phillips moved on behalf of Mr. Mason:
- A. Be it resolved that the standing orders of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta effective November 18, 2014, be amended as follows:
1. The heading preceding Standing Order 78.1 is amended by striking out "Legislative Policy".
 2. The heading preceding Standing Order 78.3 and Standing Order 78.3(1) are struck out and the following is substituted:
Report of committee on a Bill

78.3(1) A standing or special committee to which a Bill has been referred by the Assembly after second reading shall be empowered to report the same with or without amendments or to report that the Bill not proceed.

3. The heading preceding Standing Order 78.4 is amended by striking out "Legislative Policy".
4. The following Standing Orders are amended by striking out "Legislative Policy Committee" wherever it occurs and substituting "standing or special committee":
 - (a) 8(7)(c);
 - (b) 52.02;
 - (c) 74.1(1);
 - (d) 74.2(1);
 - (e) 78.1(1);
 - (f) 78.2(1).

B. And be it further resolved that these amendments come into force on passage.

The Speaker: My apologies to the House. Is there anyone who would like to speak to Motion 23? Is that where the House is at? Yes. Okay.

The House leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise. We get to do a number of government motions this afternoon, which, as you know, makes government House leaders and deputy House leaders and opposition House leaders very excited about the nuances of procedure in this House. I will spend just a little bit of time today talking briefly about a couple of motions.

Motion 23. Essentially, Mr. Speaker, the motion allows any bill to be referred to any committee of the Assembly. I just wanted to make sure for the record's sake that the Wildrose Official Opposition has at length talked about the need for us to be referring legislation to policy committees and doing it more regularly. So I'm pleased to see the government take the steps that will allow that to happen. You know, in an absolutely perfect world the motion would read that all legislation would be referred to a legislative committee, but we haven't quite gotten there yet.

In the name of co-operation, that we've seen, perhaps, not during question period but outside of question period, around some of these issues, I just wanted to commend the government briefly on taking this step and encourage them to continue to consider some of our proposals. That would include sending even more legislation through to committee so that the House can work better so that Albertans can have the opportunity to provide more input and feedback to those committees and so that we can receive expert testimony about some very difficult and technical pieces of legislation, that I look forward to seeing from the government later in the session.

The Speaker: The hon. House leader makes a remark. I do not have the privilege of sitting through committees, so I have yet to experience that harmonious process that you address. I hope you might share it in the Assembly, all of you, with me, as well, so I could enjoy that.

Is there an hon. member to speak? The hon. member, please.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Is there any member other than the sponsor of the legislation who would like to speak? You get an opportunity to close debate.

There are no other members?

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll rise to close debate. I'm grateful for the co-operation on this matter. We did not know that we could not send it to the special committee for consideration. We had no intention of killing this bill. So that's what we're going to do is to send it to that committee for its consideration.

I thank the hon. members for their co-operation in this matter. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Government Motion 23 carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks and Status of Women.

Bill 203

24. Ms Phillips moved on behalf of Mr. Mason:
Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly rescind its approval of amendment A1 to the motion for second reading of Bill 203, Election (Restrictions on Government Advertising) Amendment Act, 2015, so that the bill retains its place at second reading on the Order Paper with 68 minutes of time for debate remaining.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, Government Motion 24 is rescinding approval of the decision made on Bill 203, to which I just spoke, so that we can take Bill 203 and ensure that it retains its place at second reading on the Order Paper, with 68 minutes of time for debate remaining, and that that bill might be given its due at the special committee.

The Speaker: Does anyone wish to speak to Government Motion 24? The hon. House leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Government Motion 24 to rescind the amendment to Bill 203, that at the time effectively killed the bill of my hon. colleague from Drumheller-Stettler in his attempt and the many members in the House that supported his attempt to restore ethical practices to the government of Alberta. The Wildrose caucus was happy to hear that the NDP had put together a plan to bring back Bill 203 for further discussion and had hoped that that discussion could take place in this Assembly, not only at committee, and that we could move forward quickly on this important legislation.

Now, having said that, this side of the House is committed to taking due process when it comes to reviewing legislation and can sympathize as to why they would want to send this bill to committee as well. We were disappointed with the actions taken by the government last week that essentially stifled the continuation of debate specifically on the legislation. While we recognized at that time that they wanted to take the general topic to committee, it was disappointing to see the bill killed on the Order Paper.

While we're pleased to see the government is now choosing to try and err on the side of caution when it comes to their intent, we are a bit concerned about the pattern that we see being created when it comes to the Assembly making a decision and then backtracking, or reversing, that decision. I think that you have to do a significant amount of research to find situations where the government has made a decision and then totally reversed that decision, particularly when we speak about private members' business and the business of the Assembly and the members of the Assembly. We are concerned about reversing a decision because of the precedent that it sets. Perhaps the opposition passes an amendment while many government members weren't in the House, and then the next day the government comes back to the House and says: oh, by the way, we rescind the decision of the Assembly.

So there is some reservation around some of the precedent that it sets, and we did ask a number of questions as to whether or not this motion would, in fact, even be in order. I say that as a word of caution, but we do appreciate the decision of the government to try and make right this situation that, you know, was mishandled in terms of the process that had been communicated to us.

3:10

I'd just like to take a moment to remind the members of the government that this is the type of thing that we saw back in September after the NDP members of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices voted to give all senior independent officers of the Legislature a raise of 7.25 per cent and then went back on it. While we appreciate that sentiment to try and do what's right, I'd just like to take a moment to remind the government that not all suggestions that come from this side of the House are not positive ones.

I seem to recall being on the phone during that committee meeting, imploring the government not to go down the road of the 7.25 per cent pay raises, but at that time the government was not listening just like we saw on Monday night with the government having a knee-jerk reaction to the position of the opposition and then winding up here again. Let me be clear that we are pleased that we're back at this spot, but we hope that in the future we can have a House that works a little bit more effectively and efficiently in terms of being respectful of some of the things that the opposition says. It's not our desire solely to divert the government down the wrong path but, in fact, for Albertans to see our House and our Assembly work even better.

You know, this side of the House comes to work every day, just like that side of the House does, to ensure that Albertans are being well represented. All of us have a very similar goal for Alberta when it comes to hoping that the best happens for our province. Our visions may be different for the province, but good governance is the goal of both sides of this House, and we hope that we can see good governance, the acceptance of some opposition ideas so that we can all move forward quickly and that Albertans can get the governance that they expect.

In closing, I want to reiterate that while we have some concerns about how we got here, we're pleased that the government has done the right thing, introduced the motion, and we look forward to further debate on Monday evening, when the House returns, on Bill 203.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members who would like to speak to Government Motion 24?

I will then allow the minister to bring closure to the discussion.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just to underline, it was never the government's intention to extinguish this piece of private members' business by referring it to the Ethics and Accountability Committee because, indeed, that is where this sort of business is being studied in a very rigorous fashion.

Now, there's no need to go over the top in order to hear ourselves speak, but when we talk about backtracking, there's really no nefarious plot here, Mr. Speaker. We're going to make sure that this piece of private members' legislation gets its due. At least we're not having to backtrack because we're having a public conversation about what time we go to work in the morning.

I would like to close debate on this matter and move forward within the spirit of co-operation.

[Government Motion 24 carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Amendments to Standing Orders

19. Mr. Mason moved:
 - A. Be it resolved that the standing orders of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta effective November 18, 2014, be amended as follows:
 1. Standing Order 3(1) is struck out and the following is substituted:
Sitting times and sessional calendar
3(1) Subject to suborder (1.1) and unless otherwise ordered, the sitting hours of the Assembly shall be as follows:
Monday: 1:30 – 6:00 p.m.
Tuesday: 9:00 a.m. – noon, 1:30 – 6:00 p.m.
Wednesday: 9:00 a.m. – noon, 1:30 – 6:00 p.m.
Thursday: 9:00 a.m. – noon, 1:30 – 4:30 p.m.
(1.1) From the first day of main estimates consideration by the legislative policy committees until the day for the vote on the main estimates in Committee of Supply, the Assembly shall not meet in the morning from 9:00 a.m. – noon.
 2. Standing Order 4 is amended
 - (a) by adding the following after suborder (2):
(2.1) When there is a morning sitting, at noon the Speaker adjourns the Assembly until 1:30 p.m.
 - (b) in suborder (3) by adding “or (2.1)” after “suborder (2)”.
 3. Standing Order 7 is amended in suborder (1) by adding “shall commence at 1:30 p.m. and” after “Assembly”.
 4. Standing Order 8(2) is amended by adding “During morning sittings and” before “On Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday afternoons”.
 5. Standing Order 15(2) is amended by adding “afternoon” before “sitting”.
 6. Standing Order 30(1) is amended by adding “afternoon” before “sitting”.
 7. Standing Order 32 is amended
 - (a) in suborder (2) by striking out “10 minute” and substituting “15 minute”;
 - (b) by striking out suborder (3) and substituting the following:
 - (3) Subject to suborder (3.01) and (3.1), a Member may, after at least one division has been called in Committee of the Whole or Committee of Supply, request unanimous consent for the interval between division bells on any subsequent division during that morning, afternoon or evening sitting, as the case may be, to be reduced to one minute.

(3.01) After the first division is called in Committee of the Whole during consideration of a Bill, the interval between division bells on all subsequent divisions relating to that Bill shall be reduced to one minute for the remainder of Committee of the Whole consideration

- for that morning, afternoon or evening sitting, as the case may be.
8. Standing Order 52.01(1) is amended
 - (a) in clause (a)
 - (i) by striking out “Culture and Tourism,”;
 - (ii) by striking out “and Service Alberta” and substituting “, Service Alberta and Status of Women”;
 - (b) in clause (b)
 - (i) by striking out “Agriculture and Rural Development” and substituting “Agriculture and Forestry”;
 - (ii) by striking out “International and Intergovernmental Relations, Innovation and”;
 - (iii) by striking out “and Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour” and substituting “Economic Development and Trade, Culture and Tourism and Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour”;
 - (c) in clause (c) by striking out “Environment and Sustainable Resource Development” and substituting “Environment and Parks”.
 9. Standing Order 59.01 is amended
 - (a) by adding the following after suborder (3):
 - (3.1) During consultation with the Government House Leader under suborder (3), the Official Opposition may designate 4 ministries for which estimates shall be considered for a maximum of 6 hours per ministry provided that the Official Opposition also designates 3 ministries, not including the Executive Council, for which estimates consideration shall be set at 2 hours.
 - (b) in suborder (5)
 - (i) in clause (a)(ii), (iii) and (iv) by striking out “noon” and substituting “12:15 p.m.”;
 - (ii) in clause (d) by adding “subject to suborder (3.1),” before “the estimates”;
 - (c) in suborder (6) by striking out clause (d);
 - (d) by striking out suborder (7) and substituting the following:
 - (7) If a ministry’s estimates are scheduled to be considered for 2 hours, the speaking times shall be as follows:
 - (a) the Minister, or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister’s behalf, may make opening comments not to exceed 10 minutes,
 - (b) for the next 50 minutes, members of the Official Opposition and the Minister, or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister’s behalf, may speak,
 - (c) for the next 20 minutes, the members of the third party, if any, and the Minister or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister’s behalf, may speak,
 - (d) for the next 20 minutes, the members of any other party represented in the Assembly or any independent Members and the Minister, or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister’s behalf, may speak,
 - (e) for the next 20 minutes, private members of the Government caucus and the Minister or the member of the Executive Council acting on the Minister’s behalf, may speak, and
 - (f) if there is any time remaining, to the extent possible, the rotation outlined in clauses (b) to (e) shall apply with the speaking times set at 5 minutes as provided in Standing Order 59.02(1)(c).
 10. Standing Order 59.02(1)(b) is amended by adding “and 59.01(7)(a) to (e)” after “59.01(6)(a) to (e)”.
 - B. And be it further resolved that the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing shall meet to review and assess the operation of the morning sittings of the Assembly brought into force by part A of this motion and report to the Assembly with its recommendations by October 27, 2016, and the committee may without leave of the Assembly meet during a period when the Assembly is adjourned or prorogued.
 - C. And be it further resolved that the amendments to Standing Order 3 in section 1 of part A of this motion shall take effect on November 24, 2015, and the remaining amendments in this motion shall come into force on passage.
 - A1. Mr. Cooper moved that Government Motion 19 be amended in part A, section 1, in Standing Order 3 as follows:
 - (a) in the proposed suborder (1) by striking out “9:00 a.m.” wherever it appears and substituting “10:00 a.m.”;
 - (b) in the proposed suborder (1.1) by striking out “9:00 a.m.” and substituting “10:00 a.m.”

[Adjourned debate October 28: Mr. Schmidt]

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It’s my pleasure to rise on the amendment to Government Motion 19, that was brought forward by the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. I have to express my sincere disappointment with the member across the way today because he seems intent on restoring civility and order to this House and really took the wind out of my sails in unleashing a tongue-lashing on these guys for the unreasonable amendment that they proposed last week. So in that spirit of co-operation and civility I will temper my remarks, you know, with the thought that anything that I could say in this House wouldn’t be nearly as unkind as what has already been said in public about the motion’s amendment. I’m sure that the members across the way have felt the slings and arrows of public disapproval of their unwillingness to show up for work at 9 o’clock in the morning, and I encourage them to see where they’ve gone wrong and vote against their own amendment.

That’s all I have to say, and I’ll sit down.

The Speaker: Are there any other members who would like to speak to amendment A1?

Ms Phillips: Okay. Well, Mr. Speaker, I rise, then, to table a subamendment related to Tuesday mornings, that in the proposed suborder we would strike out “Tuesday: 9:00 a.m. – noon” and substitute “Tuesday: 10:00 a.m. – noon.”

The Speaker: I understand that a subamendment is being proposed. Could you make sure that the members have a copy of that?

I want to make sure that I’m in the appropriate order. There has been a subamendment introduced to A1, and we are in the throes of

having discussion on the subamendment as per what has been distributed. We are calling this SA1.

Is there anybody who would like to speak to the subamendment?
The hon. minister of the environment.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is simply such that we might begin the business of this House at 1:30 on Mondays, that we might begin on Tuesdays at 10 a.m., as I understand the matter, in order to accommodate Public Accounts and their activities, and on Wednesday and Thursday at 9 a.m.

We believe that this is the responsible way to move forward the business of this House and ensure that we get through the business in a timely fashion and that this House begin to reflect in its business the new kinds of families and responsibilities that many members have outside this House, reducing the number of night sittings that we may have to engage in by going to work a little earlier in the morning.

3:20

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a), hon. member?

Mr. Cooper: This is on the subamendment if that's what you're asking for.

The Speaker: Do you have any questions of the member?

Mr. Cooper: No; 29(2)(a) is not available.

An Hon. Member: It is available.

Mr. Cooper: Oh, it is available.

The Speaker: You have an opportunity, hon. member.

Mr. Cooper: My apologies. Yeah. Sure, I'll do it on this so that we can get to the voting aspect of it. Given that it is a time for questions or comments, I might just say that I appreciate the government's movement to make the change to 10 a.m. to accommodate PAC. I know that we weren't here a couple of days ago, so we support this decision to move the House to sit at 10 so that we can accommodate other committees of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Any other questions or comments under 29(2)(a)?

Now are there any other members of the House who would like to speak to the subamendment itself?

Hearing none, I would ask to call the vote.

[Motion on subamendment SA1 carried]

The Speaker: I believe we are now back to amendment A1. On the amendment, would anyone like to speak? No.

I'll call the question, then, on the amendment.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Speaker: We are now back to the actual motion as amended. An informative journey.

Are there any members who would wish to speak to the motion as amended? The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising today to speak about the fundamental rules that govern this Legislature, the standing orders. We are in a unique position right now to set the proper foundation for our Legislature, and as members all across this Chamber know, there's been much back and forth about what is best when it comes to our Legislature and when it sits.

Should the amendment that I'm introducing today pass, any time our Legislature sits in the morning, unlimited all-night sittings

cannot happen. This is important for two reasons. First, we'll make our Legislature more accountable to the people that we represent; second, it will make our Legislature more agreeable to being both a legislator and a parent.

Let me deal with the first point. Careful consideration of legislation in this Chamber is something that we all take very seriously. I have a responsibility to the people of Airdrie to be the best representative that I possibly can be, and that includes making informed votes on legislation that appears before the House. Part of making an informed vote is having the time to check back with constituents for feedback.

I am alarmed to see that this government will be ramming through six bills in just seven days during this sitting on topics that we don't know anything about yet. Think about that. After we finish estimates, we could on any day debate any of bills 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9. We have yet to see any of these in detail. We have no idea whatsoever what will be in bills 6, 7, 8, or 9, but starting on November 24, we will have to debate, consider, and amend these bills. Six bills will be dealt with on November 24, 25, and 26 and then on December 1, 2, and 3. The speed with which this government wants to deal with these laws is risky.

If we don't pass my amendment, we could debate solidly and continuously from 10 a.m. on Tuesday the 24th to 4:30 p.m. on Thursday the 26th and then repeat the process the following week. This cycle will continue on and on through the next three and a half years should the government not concede that when we sit in the mornings, we should not have all-night sittings, that serve as an opportunity to ram through legislation. If there is one thing I know we need in this Legislature, it is to work on ways to improve our democratic system, not to diminish it.

On the second point, as a mom of two young kids I know that people all across Alberta need to make difficult choices on how best to find a work-life balance. Mr. Speaker, I am in no way saying that MLAs have it any more difficult than any other Albertan, but there are certain choices that we can make right here, right now that will create conditions to make our Legislature more representative of Alberta society. I never want being a mom or being a dad to be the reason some of Alberta's best minds don't run for office. In fact, I had long discussions with my family before I chose to run.

Mr. Speaker, we want the best and the brightest coming to this Legislature to debate matters of vital importance to our province, and adopting this amendment will put us on that path. Making a family-friendly atmosphere in the Legislature is something that this government has supported. The amendment that I am introducing will do just that.

It is at this time, Mr. Speaker, that I wish to move the following amendment to the motion.

The Speaker: We'll pause while the proposed amendment is distributed to the members.

Have all members received a copy of the amendment that we will identify as A2? We're prepared to proceed.

The hon. member.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that Government Motion 19 be amended in part A, section 1, in Standing Order 3 by adding the following after the proposed suborder 1.1.: "(1.2) Notwithstanding Standing Order 4(1), on any day that the Assembly meets in the morning, the Assembly shall not meet for an evening sitting."

Mr. Speaker, here are the facts. This amendment will serve to set our Legislature on the right track, to do away with the ability to ram through legislation, to make our Legislature more family friendly, and to ensure that democracy is well served here in Alberta. I

sincerely hope that all members of this Legislature will adopt this common-sense amendment.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Under 29(2)(a), questions or observations for the Member for Airdrie. The minister of environment.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to this amendment and to . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, as you're speaking again, I might clarify: are there questions or observations?

3:30

Ms Phillips: Okay. I shall provide some comments on this amendment, Mr. Speaker. You know, from our point of view this is just the latest excuse for an opposition caucus that does not want to sit in the morning. We have a lot of young caucus members with kids, who want to reduce our need for evenings. That's why we moved to the mornings. We do occasionally need evenings, particularly because we seem to have an appetite for filibustering almost anything in this House. They even filibuster getting up and getting to work at 9 a.m. So we do have a number of pieces of work that we need to get very serious about. You know, the fact of the matter is that we may need evenings periodically.

The Speaker: Are there any other questions under 29(2)(a) for the Member for Airdrie?

Hearing none, is there anyone who wishes to speak to the proposed amendment, identified as A2? Her Majesty's Official Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise just to speak briefly to the amendment this afternoon. Let's be clear that it's the members of this Assembly that set the standing orders for our path forward, and we are setting the rules, if you will, of engagement today for an extended period of time.

The government of the day has spent some significant time talking about how they endeavour to make the Assembly more family friendly. I know that a number of you had the opportunity just last week to meet my three little ones. One of them was a little more excited to be in the gallery than the others. As a young dad – in fact, with the members of our caucus there are nine children under the age of 10 amongst just 22 members, so we, too, have a number of young families. If the goal that the government endeavours to accomplish is to limit night sittings and create an environment where young parents can spend time in the evenings with their kids, then we're providing an opportunity for that.

As the government knows, the opposition is the group that opened the door to sitting in the morning because we believe that in conjunction with a number of other factors we can provide a House that works much better in hours that are better for you, Mr. Speaker, our table officers, our pages, and the entire entity of the precinct area.

What the amendment does is that it provides some assurances that these changes in the standing orders aren't actually about the government's desire to expediate legislation as quickly as possible, giving them the opportunity to sit morning, afternoon, and all evening. I know that in the first session we had a couple of occasions where we were able to spend time together well into the evening, but what the government is proposing is total access to evenings. While many of you may have received assurances from members of your caucus that there is the desire to not sit evenings, the challenge is that there is nothing that prevents that from happening if we are taking the three sessions a day.

All that we're proposing is an opportunity to limit evening sittings on days where we have two other sessions, and if in fact this is about making the Assembly family friendly, I urge all members of the Assembly – and I spoke earlier this afternoon about ideas coming from the opposition, and we've seen now two or three times that not everything we suggest is a horrible, horrible idea. [interjections] I didn't say that most things we said are good; I didn't say that most things we said are bad. I said that not everything is a horrible idea even for the government, just like how the government will say things and not all of your ideas are good. I know it's hard to believe.

But the point is that we have this chance to set up the rules that will be respectful of all parents on both sides of the House, put in some parameters that will ensure that democracy is respected, that the government of the day won't be rushing through legislation and not allowing adequate time for consultation with our constituents, just like in the end of this session, when we're going to see a number of important bills passed in just a couple of days.

So I urge all members of the Assembly, before we have to backtrack on another decision, to accept the amendment to limit. It doesn't prevent the government from having access to evening sittings if there is a time when the opposition feels there is more need for robust debate, and it still provides that valve for the government to use. But what it does do is give an indication that the government is actually serious about making a family-friendly environment for all members of the House, not one that has a desire to expediate legislation in a way that we've never seen in the past.

The Speaker: Are there any questions under 29(2)(a) for the hon. Opposition House Leader? No questions or observations?

I'll recognize the Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. We've had the opportunity to discuss this amendment between House leaders on a couple of occasions, and we had agreed to give it consideration. But in the event that this were passed, it would be possible for the opposition, you know, then, to force an all-night sitting, and that's fine. That's a legitimate thing for the opposition to do if it feels very strongly with respect to something. Delay is one of the things that the opposition has at its disposal when they feel that something is fundamentally wrong about what the government is trying to do.

But let's consider this, Mr. Speaker. We've said – and we've been very clear all along – that we have no intention of going to night sittings unless we are forced to. If we extend the sitting hours in the morning, it should be more than enough to deal with government business, but if the opposition does decide to delay things, if it is deliberately holding up government business, then the government has no alternative but to extend the sitting hours to deal with these matters.

You know, we certainly in opposition did do that. We certainly did. When we felt that the government was very wrong and that the public needed to learn more about what they were trying to do, we would speak, and the government would continue to hold the session into the evening, and sometimes we went all night and into the next day. That was very rare, thank goodness. I used to prefer it more when I was a bit younger than I do now.

3:40

I just want to indicate that the government has always had the power to have unlimited extended sittings if it wanted. It could always go late at night if it didn't want to adjourn. But the fact of the matter is that unless the opposition is deliberately trying to delay the government's agenda, there's no need and the government doesn't do that, and we're not going to do that. We're not going to

force night sittings unless the opposition is filibustering some bill. There may be some rare occasions, some rare exceptions to that, Mr. Speaker, but in general the only reason we would go at night is if we're faced with deliberate attempts.

This legislation is important, Mr. Speaker. There's important legislation that needs to be discussed, and there's a budget, and there are people that have to get paid in the government: our nurses, our teachers, all of the public employees. If we don't pass the budget by a certain day – we've only extended the funding to November 30, so the lights go off if we don't pass the budget in a timely fashion. The government must always retain that.

I want to just indicate that it's a little disingenuous on the part of the Official Opposition, the Wildrose opposition, to say that they're doing this on a family-friendly basis. I don't think that's the case at all, Mr. Speaker. What they want to do is restrict the ability of the government to get its agenda through and to enhance their ability to use delaying tactics.

There's nothing wrong with that, Mr. Speaker. That's a legitimate position for an opposition party to take, but it would be irresponsible of the government to accept that. It would be absolutely irresponsible. We need to have that safety valve in the event that the opposition plays games or in the event the opposition behaves irresponsibly, in order to make sure that the critical business, the legislation of the government, is fully debated and passed and that the budget of the province is passed so that we can continue to operate this government as the people of this province expect.

Mr. Speaker, I think the public's had more than enough of this debate about our working hours. All I can offer the opposition is the assurance that we are not routinely going to call night sittings in addition to mornings and afternoons. We are not going to do it. That is not our intention. They're going to have to accept that. They're going to have to live with it.

That's, I think, very important. We cannot give up the opportunity to deal with this under any pretense that this is something about being family friendly. We do want to be family friendly on this side, Mr. Speaker. We voted for the child care motion. Wildrose did not. We voted for morning sittings. It was originally a Wildrose idea, but then they filibustered it.

Mr. Speaker, there's no question here, in my view, who's family friendly and what side of the House those members are located on. We have a young, dynamic, gender-balanced, diverse caucus that is representative of the population of the province of Alberta. There are some archaic rules that go with this institution that were developed hundreds of years ago in the British Parliament and have not changed to keep up with modern society, and some of our members are providing good, good reasons why we should think about those things and modernize the institution so that it is family friendly and that it's not just a bunch of old men sitting in their rocking chairs making the rules. I can say that as one of them.

Mr. Speaker, I do encourage all members to defeat this motion. We want to have morning sittings. We want to have afternoon sittings. We do not want to have evening sittings unless – unless – the opposition puts us in a position where we have no choice. That's the bottom line. I urge all hon. members to vote against this amendment, and let's get onto the serious business that the people of Alberta elected us to this place to do.

The Speaker: Are there any questions under 29(2)(a) for the Government House Leader? The Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The standing orders – and I am new to the House, so I'm trying to understand these proceedings

better – from what I understand, create the policies that we govern ourselves by. The government has been in opposition for many, many years, so they understand what it means to be here, and I appreciate the members' comments on this. I guess my question is: if you were here now, would you be willing to allow this to go forward? Would you allow this extended sitting to go forward, knowing that you empower the government to be able to ram through as many bills as they want?

A smart man once said: do unto others as you would have them do unto you. I think that's good advice. I think that's something we need to think about in this debate because there's a possibility that you may not be there in three and a half years. If that is the case, would you want to empower whoever it is sitting in the government seat to have that power in the future?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. It's a good question: if the shoe was on the other foot, would we be taking the same position as the Wildrose? Well, I don't think so. If we were in opposition and the makeup of our caucus was as it is now that we're in government just a little smaller, then I think, you know, that there would be this imperative that we want to make this a place that's open and accessible. In fact, I think we've always had that view and have always fought for that.

But I think the hon. member is under a misapprehension, and that is that the government under the current rules doesn't have that power. But it does. That's what I tried to say in my remarks. The government, should it desire to do so, can trigger evening sittings, and it doesn't have to adjourn. The government can go all night if it wants to. If it really just wants to have more hours of sitting every day, every week, it already has the power to do that. It's a simple matter of not adjourning debate in the evening. You can go until 6 in the morning if you want, but the government doesn't do that. The previous government didn't do that. When we provoked them by a filibuster, they did it, and then they brought in another shift at 7 in the morning and kept on going, and we were ready to die.

An Hon. Member: I thought you were tougher than that.

Mr. Mason: Yeah, we were tougher than that. But, boy, it was pretty gruelling when they kept going until 11 o'clock in the morning.

But my point is simply this. The previous government did not abuse that unless the opposition was filibustering and trying to hold up the debate, and then they did it, okay? That is not going to change with this government. We are not going to hold night sittings on a regular basis. There may be a rare exception where we have to do it, but otherwise the only time we will do it is if the opposition is holding up the government's business.

That's a commitment. There's no change with respect to that capacity on the part of government, hon. member. That's my point.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. McIver: Oh, no.

The Speaker: Under 29(2)(a), any member?

To the amendment itself, Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on this at the risk of being taunted, so get ready for it. I am going to try to provide what I believe is a little bit of clarity. We're arguing about when we work. Respectfully, all this talk about family friendly is hogwash. You

know, this is a tough place to work, folks. There's really not much family friendly around here. You can try to pretend there is, but there isn't. We all signed up for the tour of duty, so we've got no one to blame but ourselves, right? No one to blame but ourselves. This is my second tour, so you might say: well, I really should know better.

3:50

But the fact is that most of the people in this House live in another place. For me, when I'm here, there's nothing family friendly about it. What is family friendly is going home to my wife. That's family friendly. So I'd just as soon work like a rented mule while I'm here, so I can get as much done as I can so that when I get home, if I get the odd hour off, I can spend it with my good wife, whom I love, and so far, the last time I checked, she said that she still loves me. Sorry, folks at home and folks here, but trying to pretend there's anything family friendly about this place: we're fooling ourselves. It's not how it is. Sorry.

I'll just repeat it because I think that's the main point. When I'm away from home, it's not family friendly. I don't know how many other people agree with that, but that's how I feel about it. The fact is that we're here to work, and I believe that most if not all of our caucus think we might as well be working all the time while we're here, to get as much done as possible so that we can get back home.

Honestly, on the suggestion that somebody made that we can finally get this Legislature to do business, well, Mr. Speaker, this Legislature has been doing business for a hundred years. People talk about how long our government was here, for 44 years, but this Legislature has been doing business a heck of a lot longer than that and doing it just fine, thank you very much. Not perfect but just fine. Any suggestion that somehow we're going to have this miraculous new ability to provide democracy in the purest, finest, best form is, once again, hogwash.

I'm prepared to work the shifts that are provided. To be clear, we have a set of standing orders, and they're working fine. I know the new government wants to change them. Great. You don't need to. I probably won't support it because I think the ones we've got are working fine.

But here's what I do know, Mr. Speaker. The ones that get the most votes get to make the decisions. That's how it works, you know. It was pretty convenient when we were on that side. It's less convenient on this side. That's the way it is. But that doesn't change the fact that the government of the day gets to set those working conditions. They always will because that is the very nature and I daresay definition of democracy. So we can ask, we can negotiate, we can beg skilfully, whatever we can do. But at the end of the day the government gets to decide when the House meets, when it starts and when it stops.

For me, if I'm going to be away from home and up here, I'd just as soon meet morning, noon, and night. My preference is actually what we're doing now. It's not that we don't work in the morning. For anybody who says that people don't work in the morning, that's hogwash, too, because that's when you get ready for your meetings in the afternoon. If the House starts meeting at 9 or 8 or 7 or 6 in the morning, the fact is that then you've got to get ready for those meetings the night before. It's just a matter of adjusting the schedule. Six of one, really, half a dozen of the other.

So I won't be supporting this. Whether anybody likes it or not, that's my version of what I think is true around here. While I don't like where the government is going, they won the election.

The Speaker: Hon. member, for both yourself and myself, your comments were directed to the amendment introduced and known as A2?

Mr. McIver: That is correct, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Are there any questions or comments under 29(2)(a) to the leader of the third party?

Hearing none, are there any other members who would like to speak to amendment A2?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Speaker: Now we go back to the amended Motion 19, correct? Are there any other individuals who would like to speak to the amended Motion 19?

Mr. Mason: We have another amendment, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in support of this motion but also to move an amendment. As we all know, in addition to moving to morning sittings, Government Motion 19 also made some changes to the standing orders to allow the Official Opposition the opportunity for some additional time during estimates for ministries of their choosing. Of course, with Government Motion 19 not yet passed and we're already into estimates and committee considerations have already begun, clearly we can't put these new provisions into place for this current set of departmental estimates.

Therefore, I have an amendment here that would push the coming into force provision for these changes to January 1. Mr. Speaker, I would like to move that Government Motion 19 be amended by striking out part C and substituting the following:

And be it further resolved that the amendments to Standing Order 3 in section 1 of part A shall take effect on November 24, 2015, the amendments to Standing Orders 59.01 and 59.02 in sections 9 and 10 of part A shall take effect on January 1, 2016, and the remaining amendments in this motion shall come into force on passage.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I understand I will identify this as amendment A3.

Could we pause while the pages distribute the amendment.

To the mover from Edmonton-Centre, I understand that you're moving this on behalf of the Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Mr. Shepherd: Yes, Mr. Speaker. That's correct.

The Speaker: I understand that we have an amendment known as A3 introduced by Edmonton-Centre. Are there any members who wish to speak to amendment A3?

Mr. Fildebrandt: Mr. Speaker, I'll be very brief. This is something that I think all members of the House can agree is needed and overdue. I greatly enjoyed the estimates process. I thought it was probably one of the most productive things we do, our ability to follow through with ministers, and I would encourage all members of the House to support the amendment.

The Speaker: First of all, any questions under 29(2)(a) to the Member for Strathmore-Brooks?

Hearing none, are there any other members who would wish to speak to the amendment to the motion identified as A3?

[Motion on amendment A3 carried]

The Speaker: I believe we are back to the amended Motion 19. Am I correct? I'm hearing that we are. Are there any other members who would wish to speak to the amended Motion 19?

Hearing none, who is the original mover of this motion? Government House Leader, do you have any additional comments you would like to make?

4:00

Mr. Mason: I'd just like to thank all members for their contribution to these changes, and I believe that while some have some difficulty with parts of them, they will advance the work of the Assembly. I thank all hon. members for their contribution to the debate.

[Government Motion 19 as amended carried]

Amendment to Standing Order

22. Mr. Mason:
Be it resolved that Standing Order 52.01(1) be amended as follows:
1. in clause (a)
 - (i) by striking out "and Service Alberta" and substituting ", Service Alberta and Status of Women";
 2. in clause (b)
 - (i) by striking out "Agriculture and Rural Development" and substituting "Agriculture and Forestry";
 - (ii) by striking out "International and Intergovernmental Relations, Innovation and";
 - (iii) by striking out "and Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour" and substituting "Economic Development and Trade and Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour";
 3. in clause (c) by striking out "Environment and Sustainable Resource Development" and substituting "Environment and Parks".

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, that motion was in the event that we were unable to pass Government Motion 19 today, so I will not be moving that motion.

The Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Provincial Fiscal Policies

13. Mr. Ceci moved:
Be it resolved that the Assembly approve in general the business plans and fiscal policies of the government.

[Debate adjourned October 29: Mr. Jean speaking]

Mr. Cooper: He is done.

The Speaker: Is there anybody who would like to speak to Motion 13? The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Yes, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to begin debate on the first budget of the first new government in 44 years. It is an honour to respond today for the Wildrose Official Opposition. This budget continues in the same direction as the last several budgets that this province has seen.

In 2004 former Premier Klein pronounced Alberta's debt to be paid in full. This stood as the crowning achievement of the Alberta advantage. This was something for Albertans from High Level to Sweetgrass to be proud of. Alberta's spending was under control. Alberta's taxes were the lowest in Canada. Private-sector investment

fuelled our economy, and we were the first jurisdiction in our country to be free of debt.

In 2008 the Alberta advantage began to show the first chinks in its armour. Spending spiralled out of control, and soon the province ran its first deficit in 15 years, of \$1 billion. First, the province began by drawing down our sustainability fund, which stood at \$17 billion that year. We were promised that this deficit would be temporary, but as the sustainability fund continued to dwindle, the government of the day began to turn to the millstone that weighs down too many governments, debt.

But there was hope for Albertans. Former Premier Redford stated in 2011 that "debt has proven the death of countless dreams." Just one year later that very same government repealed the Government Accountability Act and the Fiscal Responsibility Act, acts that former Treasurer Jim Dinning said would give Albertans, quote, subpar government if they were ever repealed or even watered down, but repealed these bills were. This allowed the government of the day to run false surpluses as it borrowed year after year, drawing the sustainability fund down to \$2.6 billion and raising our debt up to \$12 billion, all the while telling Albertans that their government was somehow running a surplus.

I said at that time that the Alberta advantage had four pillars. The first was honest and straightforward accounting. The second was a reasonable level of government spending. The third was our low debt and triple-A credit rating. The fourth was our low-tax environment and a private-sector investment that fuelled our economic growth. These four pillars reinforced each other in an economic phalanx.

Wildrose has long warned that unsustainable levels of spending would lead the government to fudge its accounting to hide some of that spending. Wildrose warned that poor accounting would lead the government's debt to run out of control as politicians no longer had to account for all of it. Wildrose warned that with these three pillars of the Alberta advantage gone, the fourth, our low-tax, business-friendly environment, was bound to follow. That final pillar fell when the budget introduced on March 25 came forward, when the government attempted to raise taxes on Albertans by \$2,400 per household without any serious attempt to get our spending or our debt under control.

In March 2015 the Alberta advantage finally died. In June Alberta's new government buried it with a minibudget which authorized 15 and a half billion dollars of unbudgeted spending without any notice paid to its effect on the deficit. A new tax bill, which increased taxes on the businesses and job creators that fuel our economy, went up by 20 per cent. A further erosion of our once proud, single-rate flat tax took place, with a 50 per cent increase on some earners. Taken together with an ill-advised royalty review, increased carbon taxes, and other ill-advised ideological experiments, the Alberta advantage is already beginning to dim in our rear-view mirror. While members of the government might laugh at the prospect of taxes going up for some Albertans, this party believes that it's a serious and nonlaughing matter.

This budget attempts to make us forget that place of prosperity that made Alberta great. Ronald Reagan once said that socialism only works in two places: heaven, where they don't need it, and hell, where they already have it. The NDP are entitled to their own views and ideology, but they're not entitled to their own facts, and the facts are clear. When you want less of something, you tax it. This budget will mean less business. It will mean less employment. It will mean less investment in our economy. It will mean less savings as our already dilapidated sustainability fund finally runs out this year.

It will mean more of some things. It will mean more debt, an incredible \$35 billion of additional debt on top of the \$12 billion

that we already owe. By 2019 Alberta's debt will reach \$47 billion. By that year Saskatchewan's debt is projected to be down to just \$3.5 billion. As the people of Saskatchewan used to flee the NDP of that province to Alberta, we are beginning to see a reversal of our roles in Confederation. Despite already being one of the highest spending provinces in the country, spending \$2,503 more per capita than British Columbia, our government is going full steam ahead with plans to make our government even larger. This budget will see our spending increase by an average of 2 per cent a year for five years until it surpasses \$54 billion. That means that by 2020 every Albertan will have \$12,089 worth of debt to their name. That record spending will be paid for by higher taxes and higher debt.

4:10

Mr. Speaker, this is why it matters. Low taxes, low debt, and balanced budgets have been the time-tested formula for prosperous societies around the world. It made Alberta the most attractive place for families to invest and to build a life together. It ensured that Alberta was the place where families could have more of their money in their pockets instead of in the pockets of bureaucrats and politicians. It would send the message to Albertans that the benefits that they rely on today such as health care, education, and infrastructure will be protected for years to come and not come under attack from creditors or higher taxes yet.

For families worried about their jobs and their futures right now, a budget that showed a hint of constraint and put forward economic policies that encourage growth would say that there is a reason for hope in our future. Instead, we are doing nothing more than putting a Band-Aid on a broken budget that will kick the problem down the road for the next government to solve after the 2019 election.

This higher debt comes with higher debt-servicing costs, which will equal \$1.3 billion a year. That is enough to cover the combined ministries of Culture and Tourism; Aboriginal Relations; Economic Development and Trade; Executive Council; Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour; and the Status of Women.

We made it out of debt once before in this province. The solution was a painful round of spending cuts that every person in Alberta never wants to repeat. Mr. Speaker, if we do not want to repeat 1993, then we must not repeat the 1980s.

Now, I have to take stock of where we are today. We have a new *Star Wars* movie coming to the theatres, Marty McFly, and a Prime Minister Trudeau. I've got to say it: welcome to the 1980s. If Doc Brown and Marty McFly left 1985 and got out of the DeLorean in November 2015 here at the Legislature, they probably wouldn't notice much of a difference.

Mr. Mason: Better hair.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Better hair and a new federal building.

They would be disappointed to see high taxes, high debt, government intervention in the economy, corporate welfare abounding but still no hoverboards. Perhaps the Premier's plan to pay off the debt is to put a little money on the Cubbies.

This budget will have serious consequences, though, for generations to come. It will have serious consequences on families, on workers, on seniors, and on seniors paying taxes. Some of the responsibility for what we are doing today: children and students will end up paying for it and a lot more when today's bill comes due.

Beyond the ideological drive and punitive tax hikes in June, the government is now going further. Mr. Speaker, this is not a plan to return to prosperity. This is a plan to blindly follow the ideology of the governments of Ontario, Manitoba, and Quebec, where the state punishes private-sector job creators and entrepreneurs and bribes them back with their own money in the form of corporate welfare

subsidies. This is a plan to do what governments across Canada have done when they never intend to actually balance the budget.

I'd like to read a little history for you. "Our 1987 budget is part of a medium-term fiscal plan which will see the annual deficit shrink by 40 per cent . . . in '87-88 and move to a balanced budget by 1990-91". Those words were spoken by former Provincial Treasurer Dick Johnston in his 1987 budget speech. Again: "In 1986 the dramatic drop in world oil prices reduced our total resource revenues by over 60 per cent and resulted in a large deficit." That was Mr. Johnston in 1990, still running a deficit.

Another Finance minister had this to say: "Based on our revenue predictions and our spending commitments, we target a surplus of \$1.6 billion this year." That was Finance Minister Evans in 2008, the same year she boasted a deficit. One more Finance minister to quote: "We think it's a responsible budget [that will] put us on a path to balance." Just a little bit later that Finance minister said, "It's going to take a little longer to reach balance than outlined earlier." That Finance minister is the current Finance minister.

Our government has already run eight consecutive deficits, even during years with \$100-a-barrel oil, and I fear that we are following that track that led governments to make unrealistic budget plans between 1985 and 1993 and again between 2008 and today.

Our government has already taken on \$12 billion of new debt. What's another \$35 billion? Years 1, 2, and 3 of the budget have relatively clear numbers, but years 4 and 5 have virtually no details. Revenues in those years rely on a 15 per cent increase in revenues. It's possible but unlikely that the government will meet those targets. During our estimates process I repeatedly asked the Minister of Finance to table the economic assumptions that went into building his revenue projections. Repeatedly the minister refused. I repeatedly asked the minister to table his projected spending breakdown that he based his expenses on. Repeatedly he refused. Either the minister has the data and for some reason refuses to share it with the members of this House or he just pulled it out of thin air.

Without publicly releasing this data Albertans have no reason to believe that this budget is a credible plan to return to balance. We know that the Premier and the Minister of Finance will fearmonger and say that cutting a single penny of waste in this government will result in mass layoffs. We know that the Premier and Finance minister are continuing to cling to voodoo economic theories that tell them that they can tax people for working more without causing them to work, produce, and earn less than they otherwise would. Instead of fearmongering, I believe that we need a reasoned, measured, and practical approach to get our budget under control and kick-start this economy.

People did not cross the prairie in wagons and trains to come here for the weather. They came here for a better life than they could have anywhere else in the world. They came here because their station in life was not determined by their birth, their caste, their race, or their religion. They came here because they could build a new, prosperous life with their own bare hands. In 1988 Belinda Derraugh, in my constituency, founded the Roadhouse restaurant in Strathmore. She came here from England not because of government programs but because of the legendary opportunity that is available to anyone who comes here and is willing to work hard and take risks. And whenever I'm eating at the Roadhouse, I hear worry from those employees and from Belinda. They are worried about the cumulative effects that the minimum wage hike and business tax hike will have on Alberta.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any questions under 29(2)(a) for the Member for Strathmore-Brooks? The Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Yeah. I'd like to hear a little bit more about the ideas that you're explaining there. If you could expand on that, that would be great.

Thanks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. People working at the Strathmore Roadhouse are worried about the cumulative effects that the minimum wage tax hike, business tax hikes, personal tax hikes, and other taxes will have on the viability of their businesses. I spoke to her about the budget, and she had a message for the Premier. She said: don't hurt the entrepreneurial spirit that brought me to Alberta and that keeps my small business employing people. The Wildrose Official Opposition is here today standing up for people like Belinda and her employees at the Strathmore Roadhouse: people who want to succeed; people who want to start that small business; people who want to take that extra shift and not see their earnings clawed back; people who pay their taxes and don't want to see their money wasted by politicians; people who want to see their money spent on roads, bridges, and hospitals and not on interest; people who want the same opportunity for their children that they themselves had. That is why we are here. That is why we will not support this budget. This is why we will fight for a brighter, more prosperous future.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I can't help but ask the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky if he got the additional information that he was looking for, exactly.

Mr. Loewen: Yes. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Are there any others to speak to the motion itself? The Member for Calgary-Hays.

4:20

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I congratulate the government for getting elected and all that comes with that and on producing a budget that is great for, probably, Houston, not quite so great for Alberta. I say that, Mr. Speaker, because over the last decades a lot of jobs moved from Houston to Alberta largely because of an environment that was business friendly: low corporate taxes, entrepreneurial, government policies that were pro business. One of my biggest fears is that – although there are many with the current government and the policies that they're putting forward – we're going to lose a lot of those positions back to Houston, where they came from, and a lot of really good, high-paying jobs, high-tax paying jobs as well will go with them. This probably is the best government and Premier that Houston ever had. Congratulations. I would congratulate you on that.

Mr. Speaker, the last budget before this one was balanced. At the end of this government's reign their own numbers – their own numbers – say that they will have a \$47.4 billion debt in five years. Their own numbers say that the annual servicing costs on that will be about \$1.3 billion. Their own documents say that they will begin to make a plan to pay it back when they're in surplus. Well, when they're in surplus – again, their numbers – they'll have a \$1 billion surplus. So somehow Albertans are expected to feel comfortable and good about the fact that they're going to try to pay back \$47.4 billion with \$1.3 billion a year debt-servicing costs with a mighty \$1 billion surplus. No one believes that. Well, if there is a small pocket of people that believe that, I think I'm looking them all right in the eye right now. They might be the only ones. Albertans should be concerned about it, and they are. I'm hearing that all of the time.

You know, even what they are trying to do right with this budget they haven't got right, Mr. Speaker. Listen: congratulations on

continuing to build the schools that we started. Great. Congratulations on continuing to build the hospitals and Highway 63 that our government started. Thank you. Here's where it falls apart, though. We had a plan to borrow money and pay it back in a reasonable amount of time. Now there is no plan to pay anything back. There is a promise to create a plan five years from now after the people of Alberta are \$47 billion in the soup with debt. It's just not plausible. It's just not credible.

But there is hope, Mr. Speaker. The new government has a fantasy low-carbon, information-based economy to save the day except that we heard from the Premier's own words this week that there is no such economy coming. There is no such plan. Those are just empty words, and the hope doesn't actually exist. Well, that's a problem for Albertans. I think it's going to be a big problem for the people across the way from me here three and a half years from now because at that point Albertans who have lost their jobs and been laughed at will be very unhappy.

You know what, Mr. Speaker? That's probably the most important thing. One of the biggest dignities and best social programs that exists in this world is a job, a meaningful job where you can support yourself and your family. I hate to say it, but this government is attacking that possibility as well with what's in this budget. They have created one job, the minister of economic something. We'll give them credit for one. There's one in the bank, kids. Congratulations. Let's hope that it's not the last one. So far it is. And depending upon whom you listen to, it's somewhere between 40,000 and 64,000 jobs backwards against the one to the positive.

So, Mr. Speaker, a minimum wage that will kill jobs, and as it gets closer to \$15, it will kill more jobs. And – I'm sorry – the promise that it will help people of low income, particularly women, get out of poverty isn't going to do it because even \$15 an hour is below the level of poverty. The best-case scenario of the government doesn't hold water. The fact is that it will actually kill jobs for people that start at the minimum wage, get job skills, and then work their way up the economic ladder. They've actually raised the bottom rung of the economic ladder that those people that have the lowest ability to earn money can reach, work hard, be honest, like Albertans are, and work their way up to make a better living.

An Hon. Member: But stay in poverty.

Mr. McIver: They've just raised the rung beyond the reach of thousands if not hundreds of thousands of Albertans.

You know, I agree with the hon. member that's taunting there. Minimum wage jobs aren't the be-all and end-all, but I'll tell you what they are. They're a starting spot for young people to learn good work habits and good skills. Mr. Speaker, I don't know if there's anybody here that never worked at a minimum wage job. I know I did. I'm going to presume – you're here. You're somewhat successful. You managed to get off that bottom rung of the economic ladder, actually work your way up. Congratulations. Let's just give other people the opportunity to do what we've done. Let's do that. Let's provide that for Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, with the job plan, again, the government is – well, it's not a great plan in the first place. But they're playing fast and loose with the numbers. They love to talk about \$5,000 per job, which would be for a \$50,000 job, and they say 27,000 jobs a year. But if that were so, then they would have had \$135 million in the budget to fund those 27,000 positions. But what did they put in the budget? Eighty-nine million dollars at an average of \$3,300 per job. And at a rate of 10 per cent of the wage that's \$33,000-a-year jobs. All work is good, but this is below the poverty level, at least in the

cities. Again, they haven't really solved a thing, and this is where Albertans are being let down very badly. Very badly.

Now, there is some glimmer of hope. There's potentially 3,000 jobs for university students in the STEP program. Well, we can't really say that it's good yet because we haven't seen ... [interjections] Okay. You have to hope on that one. You know what? We live in hope, Mr. Speaker. I'm being as optimistic as I can because I know that people have got to be feeling bad about themselves because they're making it harder for their constituents to make a living and harder for their constituents to keep a job. So we'll give them that little ray of sunshine, which is that they might help 3,000 university students get that first job. Again, there's that bottom rung on the economic ladder. You know, by doing this program, they've actually admitted that it's important to get somebody on the bottom rung. On the other end, with the minimum wage they raised that rung out of the reach of ordinary Albertans, but at least in this one area they've actually admitted that it's good to have a starting spot. While we can't really compliment it because we don't have the details, we're hopeful that the details will be such that it could be a good program. So we'll give them that much hope.

Mr. Speaker, what we have here is, frankly, a mess. What we have here is a corporate tax program. The extra 20 per cent corporate taxes has been the difference between profit and loss for CNRL this year.

An Hon. Member: That's not true.

Mr. McIver: Those are their words. [interjections] No, that's according to CNRL. That's according to them. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon, member, I would appreciate the comments from the hon. member speaking to the truth of the matter.

With respect to the speaker that's speaking and noticing the juncture we are at in the day – I believe we are at 4:30 – and pursuant to Motion 15, agreed to by the Assembly on October 28, 2015, and Standing Order 4(2), the Assembly stands adjourned until November 16 at 1:30 p.m.

Hon. members, drive safely, go back and serve your community, and spend some of that family time.

[The Assembly adjourned at 4:30 p.m. pursuant to Government Motion 15]

Bill Status Report for the 29th Legislature - 1st Session (2015)

Activity to November 05, 2015

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 1 to 200 are Government Bills. Bills numbered 201 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills numbered with a "Pr" prefix are Private Bills.

*An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If a Bill comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel, Alberta Justice, for details at (780) 427-2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned chapter numbers until the conclusion of the Fall Sitings.

1* An Act to Renew Democracy in Alberta (Ganley)

First Reading -- 9-10 (Jun. 15, 2015 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 30-38 (Jun. 16, 2015 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 85-94 (Jun. 17, 2015 eve.), 152-157 (Jun. 22, 2015 eve., passed with amendments)

Third Reading -- 157-159 (Jun. 22, 2015 eve., passed on division)

Royal Assent -- (Jun. 29, 2015 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 15, 2015; SA 2015 c15]

2 An Act to Restore Fairness to Public Revenue (Ceci)

First Reading -- 104 (Jun. 18, 2015 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 161-162 (Jun. 22, 2015 eve.), 183-193 (Jun. 23, 2015 aft.), 201-213 (Jun. 23, 2015 eve.), 213-227 (Jun. 23, 2015 eve., passed on division)

Committee of the Whole -- 242-257 (Jun. 24, 2015 aft.), 259 (Jun. 24, 2015 eve., passed)

Third Reading -- 259-271 (Jun. 24, 2015 eve., passed on division)

Royal Assent -- (Jun. 29, 2015 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force January 1, 2015, with exceptions; SA 2015 c16]

3 Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2015 (No. 2) (\$) (Ceci)

First Reading -- 77 (Jun. 17, 2015 eve., passed)

Second Reading -- 107-114 (Jun. 18, 2015 aft., passed on division)

Committee of the Whole -- 145-152 (Jun. 22, 2015 eve.), 159-161 (Jun. 22, 2015 eve., passed on division)

Third Reading -- 182-183 (Jun. 23, 2015 aft.), 213 (Jun. 23, 2015 eve., passed on division)

Royal Assent -- (Jun. 29, 2015 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 29, 2015; SA 2015 c14]

4 An Act to Implement Various Tax Measures and to Enact the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act (\$) (Ceci)

First Reading -- 331-32 (Oct. 27, 2015 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 379-81 (Oct. 29, 2015 aft., adjourned)

5 Public Sector Compensation Transparency Act (Ganley)

First Reading -- 448 (Nov. 5, 2015 aft., passed)

201 Assuring Alberta's Fiscal Future Act (Fraser)

First Reading -- 104-105 (Jun. 18, 2015 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 128-139 (Jun. 22, 2015 aft.), 302 (Oct. 26, 2015 aft., defeated on division)

202 Alberta Local Food Act (Cortes-Vargas)

First Reading -- 105 (Jun. 18, 2015 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 303-313 (Oct. 26, 2015 aft.), 401-404 (Nov. 2, 2015 aft., passed on division)

203 Election (Restrictions on Government Advertising) Amendment Act, 2015 (Strankman)

First Reading -- 349 (Oct. 28, 2015 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 404-410 (Nov. 2, 2015 aft., adjourned)

204 Residential Tenancies (Safer Spaces for Victims of Domestic Violence) Amendment Act, 2015 (Drever)

First Reading -- 448 (Nov. 5, 2015 aft., passed)

- Pr1 The King's University College Amendment Act, 2015 (Schmidt)**
First Reading -- 377 (Oct. 29, 2015 aft., passed)
- Pr2 Bethesda Bible College Amendment Act, 2015 (Nielsen)**
First Reading -- 377 (Oct. 29, 2015 aft., passed)
- Pr3 Rosary Hall, Edmonton Repeal Act (Shepherd)**
First Reading -- 377 (Oct. 29, 2015 aft., passed)
- Pr4 Canadian University College Amendment Act, 2015 (Orr)**
First Reading -- 377 (Oct. 29, 2015 aft., passed)
- Pr5 Concordia University College of Alberta Amendment Act, 2015 (McLean)**
First Reading -- 377 (Oct. 29, 2015 aft., passed)
- Pr6 Covenant Bible College Amendment Act, 2015 (Fildebrandt)**
First Reading -- 377 (Oct. 29, 2015 aft., passed)
- Pr7 Living Faith Bible College Amendment Act, 2015 (Nixon)**
First Reading -- 377 (Oct. 29, 2015 aft., passed)

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Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, November 16, 2015

Day 17

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

First Session

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Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (W)
Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (ND)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (W)
Bhullar, Manmeet Singh, Calgary-Greenway (PC)
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Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-Meadowlark (ND)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, Calgary-Fort (ND)
Clark, Greg, Calgary-Elbow (AP)
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Ellis, Mike, Calgary-West (PC)
Fildebrandt, Derek Gerhard, Strathmore-Brooks (W)
Fitzpatrick, Maria M., Lethbridge-East (ND)
Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (PC)
Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., Calgary-Buffalo (ND)
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van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND)
Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
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Party standings:

New Democrat: 53 Wildrose: 22 Progressive Conservative: 9 Alberta Liberal: 1 Alberta Party: 1 Independent: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, November 16, 2015

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Let us reflect. On this memorial day of remembrance for Métis leader Louis Riel let us try and learn from our history. We often speak in this place about a global economy and a global environment. We may also want to think more about our global humanity. Let us think about how the families who lost loved ones in Nairobi, in Beirut, and in Paris might feel today. How and what might we do in this Chamber to create threads of strength for our global humanity? Threads of leadership when bound together may become a rope of strength that reaches over the paper lines we call national boundaries.

Hon. members, we will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Mr. Robert Clark, and I would invite all to participate in the language of their choice.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
Car ton bras sait porter l'épée,
Il sait porter la croix!
Ton histoire est une épopée
Des plus brillants exploits.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Thank you. Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

Mr. Carlier: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly His Excellency Beat Walter Nobs, ambassador of Switzerland. His Excellency is accompanied today by Mr. Fabian Grass, attaché at the embassy in Ottawa, and Mr. Andreas Bayer, honorary consul of Switzerland in Calgary.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta takes great pride in our international relations, and this rings true in our dynamic, strong, and productive relationship with Switzerland. In 2010 and 2014 Alberta's exports to Switzerland averaged approximately \$82 million per year, with our imports averaging approximately \$114 million per year during the same period. And while it's clear that we have strong ties in trade and investment, it is equally important to highlight the fact that our ties with Switzerland extend far beyond this, with many cultural and educational links as well. This visit is a great opportunity to exchange information and identify new areas of mutual interest between Alberta and Switzerland.

The ambassador, the attaché, and honorary consul are seated in the Speaker's gallery. I would now ask our esteemed guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there any school groups here today?

Hearing none, I would recognize the hon. Minister of Health and Minister of Seniors.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Dr. Joseph Abraham, vice-president, leadership and education, of the Professional Association of Resident Physicians. Dr. Abraham is here with a group of resident physicians, who've joined us for resident physician day at the Legislature. Dr. Abraham and all of these physician residents have come to this Legislature to meet with elected officials and share their perspectives on health care delivery in Alberta, with a particular focus this year on seniors' care. Please join me in sharing the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly, and I ask our guests to rise and receive it.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on behalf of the hon. minister of economic development, the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly three guests from the Beverly Towne Community Development Society: Colleen Fidler, Kelly Verhegge, and Terry Verhegge. Since 1997 the Beverly Towne Community Development Society has worked with residents and organizations in the neighbourhood of Beverly in Edmonton, and I'm very proud to say that I was around at that time and assisted in that. The Beverly Towne Community Development Society facilitates ongoing programs for local children and youth aged five to 25, and they work jointly with local community leagues and business associations to produce a quarterly community paper that's delivered to all residents in the area. I would ask these guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and to all members of this Assembly four representatives of the Terra Child and Family Support Centre, located in Braemar school in the Ottewell neighbourhood of my constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar. Joining us today are Rochelle Bartier and Sarah Hendricks, two moms who have children in the centre; Laura Fulmer, Terra's director of knowledge, learning, and evaluation; and Laura Barry-Johansen, a youth leadership facilitator. I'd ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Ms Miller: Mr. Speaker, it's my absolute pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all the members of this Assembly several members of our caucus legislative services team, led by director Tara Ward and joined here by Poushali Mitra, Ben Lemphers, Brent Kelly, and Chris Fulmer. The leg. services team works hard to support the caucus in the daily business of this House and in our committees. They're totally awesome. I'd like to ask them to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly five hard-working constituents of southeast Edmonton working towards a fair, safe, and reliable vehicle-for-hire industry. In the gallery we have with us today Dawinder Deo, Balraj Manhas, Abouzar Aslam, Manjinder Punia, and Husni Al-Khateeb. I'd ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

1:40

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly one of my constituents, Ildiko Spisak. Her parents originally immigrated here from Hungary, and of course she was then born here, right in Edmonton, and has lived here ever since. She's been in the riding of Edmonton-Decore for four years and is an avid gardener. I'm very proud to have her as one of my constituents, and she's here today to see the fine work that this Legislature can accomplish. I'd ask her to now please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly my amazing wife of 15 years, Tiffany, and our two youngest children, Austin and Chyanne. Tiffany is my high school sweetheart. In about grade 10 I met her at laser tag, of all things . . .

An Hon. Member: Big target.

Mr. Nixon: . . . when a short girl caught my attention mainly because she spent the whole time shooting me over and over with the laser. She, like you guys, said that it was because I was a big target. I like to think she was trying to catch me. As you will see shortly, when she stands up in the gallery, Mr. Speaker, there's a slight height difference. She's about five foot two, and I'm about five foot 20. Maybe she was really targeting me because I was big, but in the end I caught her. I have to say that Tiffany is the perfect partner to go through life with and an incredible mother to our three children.

As for Austin and Chyanne they both are a few weeks shy of their ninth birthday, and as twins they have a unique relationship. Austin is the oldest by about two and a half minutes and rarely misses a chance to tell his sister that fact. He also has an incredible sense of humour and an amazing heart. His sister Chyanne is currently slightly taller, and she rarely misses an opportunity to tell Austin that. She is her daddy's girl and has inherited many of my traits, but thankfully she inherited her mother's beauty.

I thank Tiffany, Austin, and Chyanne for teaching me each day to be loved and to love, and I ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. member, is there any truth to the rumour that, in fact, you made your wife wear an orange suit as you were shooting in the game?

Mr. Nixon: Nice try, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a privilege to introduce to you and through you one of Medicine Hat's fine teachers, Sterling Hamilton. I'd like to take this opportunity to commend him for recently receiving the Edwin Parr award for teaching excellence. This award is given to first-year teachers who demonstrate excellent skills in the classroom and who go above and beyond – above and beyond – with involvement in extracurricular activities and professional development. In fact, he's volunteered his time for many years coaching basketball, including my two sons. Sterling has done his family, his community, and Medicine Hat's Crescent Heights high school proud. I'd like to ask that

Sterling rise and accept the traditional warm welcome and congratulations of this House.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there any other guests to be introduced today?

Welcome to all of you.

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: I would remind the House that past precedent is that the hon. Leader of the Opposition may also speak to a ministerial statement, and I would also remind the House that unanimous consent is required by the Assembly for additional speakers.

The hon. Premier.

Global Violence and Syrian Refugees

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to address the House today to speak to two matters, the attacks in Paris and Lebanon and proposals from our new federal government for Canada to accept Syrian refugees. I know that I speak for every member of this House today and for all Albertans when I express our sincere condolences to the innocent victims of these evil attacks and to their families. I want to express Alberta's solidarity with the people of France and Lebanon as they navigate the difficult road to recovery from these deeply shocking events. Mr. Speaker, these events remind us that we must all stand together against violence and against terror.

I also know that I speak for all Albertans when I say that we condemn these despicable, shameful, and evil acts. These are the acts of people who have lost touch with all humanity, including their own. Our deepest sympathies and our solidarity are with the victims. Together as Albertans we say: je suis Paris and I am Beirut. We stand behind you and all victims of terror and violence.

Mr. Speaker, the hundreds of thousands of children, women, and men who are fleeing Syria are fleeing from acts like these. They, too, are innocents, and these children, these families need our help. All people deserve to live in peace and security. These things, which we are so fortunate to enjoy in Alberta, are what we wish for all people, no matter where they live, all over the world.

Mr. Speaker, the history of countries in conflict around the world is very long. Refugees from Syria are only the latest victims of violence who are desperately seeking a safe home for their families. For decades Alberta has provided such safe communities. We have welcomed people from around the world fleeing violence and oppression and seeking a new start. Families have come here from Ukraine, from postwar Europe, from Vietnam, from the Sudan, and from many other parts of the world, and when they arrive in Alberta, they find a place where they can begin a new life, a safe life, a life of promise and opportunity. In return, these families have contributed to our communities, our culture, and our shared prosperity.

For many of us in this House, perhaps most of us, the chance to make a life is what our own families were seeking when they came to Alberta, whether it was months ago or years ago or generations ago. These are qualities of life that each of us holds dear and wishes for our own children. These are qualities of life we wish for others around the world.

Mr. Speaker, bringing refugees to Canada must be done in a safe and secure way that protects Alberta families as well as those fleeing violence abroad. We look to the federal government to assure Canadians that this will be done, and we will then do our part to ensure that these families find sanctuary here.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Leader of Her Majesty's Official Opposition.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Liberty, equality, fraternity: those are the sentiments of the people of Paris. We stand with the people of France, the people of Lebanon. Those were the sentiments of the people whose lives were forever changed Friday evening. Those were the sentiments of the people who lost their lives in a fight brought to the streets of the city, long home to liberty. I rise today to stand with those people, to stand in solidarity, especially with our French brothers and sisters, in the wake of what can only be described as a savage and cowardly attack on the great city of Paris and other places around the world, an attack especially on our great ally and an attack on western values. We as Albertans, as Canadians stand in solidarity with those victims and the families of those victims and with our ally and great friends. We partake in their national day of mourning in France, and we reflect upon the lives of those lost in an attack so cowardly and barbaric, an attack driven by ideological evil and hatred.

Words fail to describe the heartbreak that we feel in the wake of this tragic situation, but words must be used to denounce this deplorable atrocity. Western civilization is under attack. It is under attack by a radical and evil ideology. Make no mistake. As the French President, François Hollande, frankly put it, the attacks on the city of Paris are an act of war. These attacks echo the very fact that our former Prime Minister Stephen Harper pointed out in the wake of an attack on Paris earlier this year, that this international movement of evil has declared war. They have declared war on the western world. They have declared war on nations that are free, democratic, and tolerant. They have declared war on the notion of tolerance and peace. They have declared war on each and every single one of us in Canada. They have declared war on us. With each such declaration of war and the reinforcement of such made this past Friday, now is the time to fight back. Now is the time to stand strong. Now is the time to unite as one. We must be resolute. We must fight to defeat terrorists that would do such deplorable things to our allies.

1:50

Canada has a long and proud history, a history of standing side by side with our allies. We have always acted in times of need. From fighting evil in the two world wars to defeating terrorists in the wake of the September 11 attacks, Canada has defended freedom and democracy time and time again. We have assisted our allies in these times of need because we know how important the collective values that we share are. Our moral compass has always guided us to do what is right. In the wake of this tragedy Canada must continue to be an ally in this fight. We must avoid any temptation to retreat for we know that as a country dedicated to freedom and the rights of all peoples, we too, here, remain a target. We saw it last year with the cowardly attack on Parliament Hill. Now is not the time to back down.

As a province and as a country, yes, let's remain committed to welcoming the true victims fleeing this evil in Syria and Iraq, but let's remember to be vigilant. As Saskatchewan Premier Brad Wall said earlier today, let's not be rushed. Let's not be guided by rushed quotas and deadlines but by ensuring the safety of Canadians as our paramount consideration. Our job as politicians in Canada is the safety and security of the people we represent. We must stand tall with our French allies and must defend the common values that we share. These values are weapons we must use for they are the thing our enemy most despises. Today we are all in mourning, we are all France, and we are all defiant of terrorism. To that I say this. Long

live liberty, equality, and fraternity. Long live the free world, bound by no enemy and by no evil.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members.

Was there any wish to ask consent for other members to speak? Is there a request to speak? Would you introduce the request for unanimous consent, hon. member.

Mr. McIver: So moved, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hearing a request to have unanimous consent for speakers to speak, is it for the leader of the third party or just for yourself?

Mr. McIver: For additional party leaders.

The Speaker: For the party leaders. Thank you.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: Please proceed.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, colleagues. On behalf of the PC caucus I extend our heartfelt condolences to everyone who has lost friends and family in the attacks that occurred in Paris and indeed in Beirut and Baghdad. The news is devastating. As the world grieves these losses of life, we pray for comfort and peace for the global community. The basis of Canada is freedom, freedom to move about and carry on our daily lives without fear of attack. Canadians are encouraged to stand together, with open hearts and minds for all people.

Mr. Speaker, at a time like this it can be natural to strike out with angry words and actions, but it's also time for love and compassion towards the victims. I believe it is the intent of the terrorists to divide our society against itself and make us afraid. Because of this, it is important that we stand together as Canadians and as Albertans to reconfirm our belief in equality for all regardless of race, creed, colour, religion, or gender. In this way, we send the message that we reject acts of fear and embrace the freedoms protected in Canada, in France, and in every country who cares about her people.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View and leader of the Liberal Party.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Canadians from across the country stand in solidarity with the people of Paris, Kenya, and Lebanon, victims of the terrible and cowardly acts of terrorism over the weekend. The perpetrators of these heinous acts seek to shake us. They seek to undermine our commitment to human rights, to tolerance, freedom, and humanity. They will fail.

In the face of such violence and hate, Mr. Speaker, the people of the world have responded with love and solidarity, with moments of silence, prayer, messages of support, the bright colours of the French flag on bridges, towers, Facebook profiles, and this very building. We know there will be much discussion and debate and division in the aftermath of these attacks. Heartbreakingly, we know that all too well from previous experiences of such violence.

I here state that I reject the rhetoric of a declaration of war. The west has contributed to the violence in the Middle East at least since 2003, when the U.S. illegally invaded Iraq, and the carnage continues in that country. There will be debates about the hundreds of thousands of children, women, and men fleeing the Middle East. We will be reminded that they are fleeing from acts of these types and that they, too, are innocents.

We know that violence begets violence and that the world will be left, as the Bible says, with an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, with everyone toothless and blind. We know that they must be helped in a way that is safe and secure and protects Alberta families as well as those fleeing the violence abroad.

For today, Mr. Speaker, the House stands united. Nous sommes Paris. Nous sommes tous Paris.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow and leader of the Alberta Party.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to all of my colleagues. The atrocities in Paris and Lebanon and indeed elsewhere have no place in any society. I stand with you, my Legislature colleagues, and with all Albertans in condemning these vile and cowardly attacks.

I spent a lot of time this weekend talking with my family. We talked first about the victims – those who died in Paris, those who were injured – and the families and friends of those victims. We talked about the first responders, who ran toward danger while others found safety, and we reflected on how truly fortunate we are to live in Canada and how proud we are to be Canadian.

Now, it was difficult to talk with our young daughters, who are only eight and 11, about such a horrible and tragic event, but it allowed us to reflect on the importance of our freedom, how that freedom was won, and how it is maintained. We talked about how important it is to not live in fear in the face of terror and how our society must remain open and accepting.

At times Canada can seem very far away from violence, but we must remain ever vigilant, as the attacks on Parliament Hill just over a year ago show us. But we must not take this to the point of losing our fundamental Canadian values. The moment we close our doors, the moment we close our hearts and our minds, that's when the tyrants win. Like the people of Paris, who welcomed strangers on the night of the attacks – they opened their doors, portes ouvertes – we must keep our doors open and our society open.

Openness can be abused by determined evil people, but it is this very openness that makes our society great. It allows us to chose our own destiny. It makes us strong. Canada has always welcomed immigrants and refugees, and this is a source of strength for our country and a source of great pride, and it must remain so. I support the Premier's commitment to work with the federal government to settle Syrian refugees in Alberta, and in doing so, we must remain vigilant and consider our own security. We can and we must do both. We stand with our Parisian brothers and sisters. Je suis Paris. Nous sommes Paris.

Thank you.

Oral Question Period

Job Creation and Retention

Mr. Jean: Albertans are worried. Jobs are vanishing, and investment is disappearing. Sixty-five thousand Albertans have lost their job since the election, and NDP policies are making it much worse. On Friday EnCana announced it's putting a major natural gas project on hold specifically because of this government's royalty and climate reviews. That's hundreds of new jobs no longer available to Albertans. Does the Premier understand that her policies are chasing investment and jobs out of Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What I understand is that our government is working very hard to inject the kind of

stability into our oil and gas sector which has not existed for many years as a result of the previous government's failure to take responsibility for our need to have a better environmental regime in order to sell our products in new markets. Therefore, hard work has to be done. It hasn't been done for a long time. It does have to be done now. It's being welcomed by many people in the industry, and in the long term it will be better for the industry and for Albertans, whom we are here to represent.

2:00

Mr. Jean: Investors have hit the pause button, but if the Premier is not careful, they will be hitting the stop button. Some analysts are predicting that oil could go down to \$20 a barrel. Companies are trying to stay here, but they're not being encouraged by this NDP government's risky economic policy: higher taxes, more regulations, job-killing royalty reviews, and now a carbon tax. To the Premier: how does her ideological agenda do anything to help Albertans being handed pink slips at the end of every week?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, it's interesting. We continue to learn new things about the Official Opposition every day. First, they tell us that the way for us to control the price of oil and to increase the price of oil is to fire teachers and nurses. Then they spend weeks telling us that they would rather not get out of bed to work before 10 o'clock in the morning. Last week they said that Alberta should ignore its environmental record and reputation because somehow that had nothing to do with the problems that we've had getting pipeline to markets, and this weekend they voted at their convention in favour of allowing for more private health care. So which is it? None of that is going to help Albertans.

Mr. Jean: Two jokes in one answer: that's pretty good.

The NDP could not be more out of touch with basic economics. When times are tough, they raise people's taxes. When pipeline projects are put forward, the NDP campaign against them. When jobs are bleeding, the Premier talks about shutting down our coal industry. In Hanna local officials are warning that if the NDP don't slow down, the NDP would, and I quote, basically be shutting down our community. Unquote. What does the Premier have to say to Albertans who are worried that their jobs are the next ones on the chopping block?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, as we have discussed a number of times in this House and, of course, in the seven or eight months preceding being here in this House, Alberta is going through tough economic times. That's why our government introduced a budget that will stabilize public services which Albertans rely on, put us on a careful, reasonable path to balancing the budget, and stimulate economic growth and job creation. This is the kind of leadership Albertans are looking for, not the panicked, slash-and-burn response that the Official Opposition ran on and then was rejected by the people of this province.

The Speaker: Second question.

Carbon Tax

Mr. Jean: Higher business taxes, higher personal taxes, higher gas taxes, higher insurance taxes, and now this government is proposing a new tax on everything. While the Premier was campaigning for the hearts and minds of people in downtown Toronto, she announced that a new carbon tax is on its way. It would have been nice if she'd told Albertans first. Why is the Premier more determined to create another new tax on Albertans rather than working to protect Albertans' jobs?

Ms Notley: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, one of the things that will help protect Albertans' jobs is getting a pipeline, that neither the previous provincial government was able to get built or this Official Opposition leader's previous federal government was able to get built. One of the reasons it never got done was because they refused to address the issue of environmental change and the need for our province to act responsibly on that issue and be a responsible energy producer on the national stage. That's what we're going to do, and that's how we're going to make the case for us to be able to get our product to market and ensure that people in markets across this world want our product.

Mr. Jean: Well, you can't get oil anywhere without pipelines.

Quote: we will do what needs to be done. Unquote. No, that wasn't the Premier describing a plan to protect Alberta jobs; it was the Premier defending her promise to implement a carbon tax on all Albertans. The damage of this tax is very obvious. It's a tax on everything and will be the latest blow to Albertans who are already losing their jobs or seeing their take-home pay cut. What does the Premier have to say to the Albertans that are losing work and will now have a lot less money because of her brand new tax on everything?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I've said, it is really important for this government to move forward on a good, reasonable climate change strategy. That's what we've been talking about. That's what we talked about in our budget speech, and that's what I talked about in my speech in Toronto because that ties into our ability to get our product to market, to build pipelines, and to ensure that people want to buy our product. So this is what we are going to do. This is not new; there are no surprises here. I'm pleased to be able to move forward on the very agenda that we presented to Albertans, that they voted for, that they see as being important for their kids' and the province's future.

Mr. Jean: Let me be clear. Albertans aren't going to receive any new pipelines if the Premier keeps campaigning against them. If the Premier cared about the damage her policies are doing, she would actually listen to the people pleading with her to stop hitting them with even more taxes that they can't afford. She would pick up the phone with the people in Hanna and hear the fear and anxiety those people feel. That's what Wildrose MLAs have been doing. We're here to fight for jobs, fight for a stronger economy, and fight for a strong Alberta. When will the Premier join with the Wildrose and start fighting for Albertans' jobs?

Ms Notley: Let me be clear, Mr. Speaker. I will never join with the Wildrose to fight for the kind of slashing, burning, layoffs, rollbacks that they want to bring to this province because that will not help jobs in Alberta one bit. It will undercut the future of children, it will undercut the future of people in postsecondary education, and it will make our seniors more at risk. That is what this government will not do. We will grow Alberta, we'll stabilize our public services, we'll get to balance, we'll stimulate the economy, and we'll do it without ripping everything apart in the process.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Public Access to Executive Council Members Premier's Calgary Office Appointment

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. When Albertans are worried about jobs, this government is distracted by its own selfish

interests. The last time we met, we raised the issue of selling access with a fundraiser. The Government House Leader blustered, and then someone got a note, and abject apologies followed. Selling access to cabinet for political fundraisers is wrong. We've heard the apologies, but the event still goes on. Isn't the Premier concerned about the integrity of her government? Will she follow the precedent of Premier Stelmach and cancel this event?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, as has already been indicated, we have consulted with the Ethics Commissioner. We have done exactly what the Ethics Commissioner has told us that we should do, so we are very comfortable that going forward we are handling this very well. I might ask the members opposite if those extra special, more expensive tables for sitting with Wildrose MLAs are still more expensive or if maybe they changed that plan, too.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, I've never made a constituent of mine ever pay for access to me.

So far this year an average of 1,500 Albertans have lost their jobs, but this government continues to be distracted by partisan politics. When the Premier was on this side of the aisle, she understood that it was wrong for the governing parties to use the Premier's office as a fundraising tool. Her party has apologized and renamed the event, but everyone knows now that you can get a meeting with the minister if you give \$250 to the NDP. You will get access. This event sullies the integrity of the government. Will the Premier commit ...

The Speaker: Do you have a question, hon. member? Your question.

Mr. Nixon: This event sullies the integrity of this government. Will the Premier commit that neither she nor her cabinet will attend?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, what I did was that I had my office immediately consult with the Ethics Commissioner to ensure that we were doing the right thing both in terms of the letter of the law as well as in terms of her overall advice about what she thought would be good just in general. That's what we did, and we are moving forward based on that advice. I feel perfectly confident that Albertans are getting a tremendous amount of access to this whole caucus as well as the cabinet and as well as myself, and I'm very proud of that. I look forward to continuing that in the future.

2:10

Mr. Nixon: Last week Finning announced 1,100 layoffs, most of them in Alberta, but this government is distracted trying to find jobs for their friends. A few days ago the Premier put out a very rare Saturday morning press release. It announced that even after voters rejected him, the Premier was determined to create at least one job, and the failed NDP candidate from Calgary-Foothills is now landing a \$150,000 patronage appointment. The Premier used to rail against this stuff. Now she puts out stealthy Saturday morning press releases. What does the Premier have to say for herself?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, let me just say that that position at McDougall Centre is a political position, first of all. It's in my office. Secondly, the person who's gotten that position is earning less than the person who was in that position under the previous government and about 30 per cent less than two predecessors ago. So he's earning less. But, most importantly, the person that got that position has sat on city council off and on for about 25 years, has tremendous roots in the city of Calgary, and, I

believe, will be very helpful in ensuring that people can interact with the government in an effective way.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the Progressive Conservatives.

Job Creation and Retention

(continued)

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, in the House on June 25 the jobs minister stated that minimum wage increases were not killing jobs. In fact, she said that Telus was investing money to create 1,500 jobs. Earlier this month Telus announced that they would reduce their workforce by 1,500 positions in the fourth quarter. Alberta employment has dropped by 10,800 in October alone. My question to the minister: given that your government was wrong in the spring about job investment in Alberta, wrong about the minimum wage, when will the government put a plan in place where Albertans can actually get good jobs to support their families?

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I completely reject the premise of that question. I still believe, as do many economists, that putting more money into the pockets of low-income Albertans will ultimately generate more economic activity. As the members across were concerned when we heard about the Telus recent announcement of job cuts, I too was concerned. Now, those job cuts are spread across Canada; they are certainly not all in Edmonton or in Alberta. So that should be clarified. But what we are doing is moving forward on our jobs plan, which is a heck of a lot more than the previous government ever suggested doing.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, what I hear the Premier rejecting are the facts. The facts are that minimum wages are causing job layoffs, and the fact is that the increases in taxes and the other policies are killing jobs for Albertans and Alberta families. What Alberta families want to know is: when will the Premier stop rejecting the facts and start accepting the facts that her policies are actually taking jobs and work away from Albertans and scratch things and start putting into place a real policy, a real job-creation plan that will actually help Albertans have jobs that will support their families, not poverty-level jobs but good-paying jobs?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I've said, I mean, through our job incentive program we will be creating up to 27,000 jobs. Through our addition to the capital plan above and beyond what was previously planned, we will be creating between 8,000 and 10,000 new jobs. We will be creating an unnamed amount of jobs through our making available to entrepreneurs and business owners \$2.1 billion extra in capital that had previously not been available. So actually our government is doing quite a bit to focus on jobs because we understand that that's critical to all Albertans.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, the government admitted to putting into place a job policy that will have poverty-level jobs. We've established that in the House. We've established it in estimates. The government has admitted that the minimum wage of \$15 an hour is not a living wage, so there are no good jobs. If they are creating 3,000 jobs for students, good for you; that's a good thing. The question Albertans want to know – thousands of Albertans are losing good-paying jobs, and you're not doing a blessed thing for them. When will you begin?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I continue to find it ironic that the member across, who not only was a minister in the previous government but was the minister of labour in the previous government and so was directly responsible for maintaining the lowest minimum wage in the country, now is complaining that a \$35,000-a-year job is not good enough. I will grant you, you know, that that's not a lot to live on, but it's sure a lot more than what they were living on with \$9.25 an hour, which was what this guy was overseeing. So I find this quite rich. Ultimately, as I've said a number of times, we have a multipronged plan for job creation, and we will continue to work on it on behalf of Albertans.

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

Support for Low-income Albertans

Ms Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In my riding, as I'm sure is the case for every other riding, my staff and I frequently help some of our constituents who come in to get on programs such as AISH. This is a necessary lifeline for some of our more vulnerable Albertans who are permanently and greatly limited in their ability to earn a living. After reviewing the budget, it appears that AISH recipients did not see an increase in their benefits despite the rising costs of living. To the Minister of Human Services: does this government plan on increasing AISH benefits to some of Alberta's ...

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. Our government is committed to providing supports to Albertans in need, and we have not only restored, actually, cuts proposed to Human Services, but we have increased funding for AISH and income support. At this time that funding is not enough to increase the payment, but it will help us address the casework growth and the need of AISH recipients.

Thank you.

Ms Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister: given that AISH recipients receive \$1,588 a month and that some of my constituents have expressed that this isn't enough to make ends meet, what sort of investments is this budget making to help our more vulnerable Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Member, and thank you, Mr. Speaker. When looking at AISH benefits, what we need to do is to look at benefits in the context of other benefits available to AISH recipients. For instance, AISH recipients have health benefits available to their partners and their kids. We also announced an Alberta child benefit last week. That's also available to AISH recipients without any clawbacks. Our government will listen to Albertans and will remain responsive to their needs.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister: could he go into detail on the programming investments that will help Albertans get through this tough economic time?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Member, and thank you, Mr. Speaker. Taking care of each other during tough economic times is the

Alberta way of doing things, and our government will continue to stabilize the social services under the purview of Human Services. We have restored cuts that were proposed by the previous government to be made to Human Services. We have restored the proposed cuts to health care. We have restored the proposed cuts to education. All of these investments along with our new child tax benefit and job creation plans are there in place to help Albertans during tough economic times.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Strategic Transportation Infrastructure Program

Mr. Hinkley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents in Wetaskiwin-Camrose are eager to see investments in local roads and regional bridges. These are transport lifelines for several smaller communities in rural and semirural suburban areas. There has been a neglect of spending dollars on needed rural infrastructure for many years. Our municipalities are wanting to know more about the restored strategic transportation infrastructure program, known as STIP. To the Minister of Transportation: what municipalities and projects will be eligible for STIP funding, and how can they access these funds?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. I was very pleased to announce last week that we are restoring \$100 million to the strategic transportation infrastructure program, or STIP. This program had remained unfunded for several years. It provides cost-sharing projects to rural and small urban municipalities related to local and regional roads – rural road, bridge, and culvert construction and reconstruction, resource road improvements – and community airports. It's an application-based program, and I urge all municipalities that are interested to apply as soon as possible.

Thank you.

2:20

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Hinkley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that transportation networks are essential to build a successful economy, how will restored STIP funding drive economic growth in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, hon. member, for the question. We need to make sure that municipalities have the infrastructure they need to grow economically. This will help create jobs for construction and engineering firms and workers involved in capital projects, but it allows municipalities to lock in prices on resources and materials at lower prices and low interest rates, maximizing value for their taxpayers. Providing the infrastructure that enables economic growth and good paying jobs is an important part of helping communities to grow and prosper and to create jobs.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Hinkley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that the STIP promises to fund lifeline transport connections for smaller communities, how will STIP support the entire province's industrial growth? Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and to the member for the question. It helps improve local infrastructure and safety, but it also creates a robust, modern transportation network throughout the province of Alberta. It'll go a long way towards improving resource roads, that face heavy demands as a result of large vehicles and wear and tear from industry traffic, and it will also support community airports, which are a vital economic asset of communities that are looking to bolster their tourism and are also eligible for the STIP program.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Government Advertising

Mr. Fildebrandt: Mr. Speaker, while Albertans all over the province are deeply concerned about jobs, this government is more concerned about spin. You can't watch the evening news without being subjected to meaningless and vapid advertisements for this government's unpopular budget. We have now learned that the better part of a million dollars is being spent on this useless, partisan propaganda. With 1,500 Albertans losing their jobs every week this year, is this government proud that the government is wasting tax dollars on patting itself on the back?

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Advertising budgets and what's in the budget are a typical, normal part of government action. And it's not the better part of a million dollars; it's \$750,000, which is going to TV and online ads.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Albertans might tolerate this advertising if it explained government programs or provided any factual information. Given that the Premier used to rail against this kind of taxpayer-funded propaganda when they were in opposition and, like so many of the democratic ideals they once held, it seems to be inconvenient now that they hold the perks of power, we're willing to give the Premier a mulligan on this one if she'll now do the right thing. Will the government commit to this Assembly that, moving forward, taxpayers will never again have to pay for advertisements that only serve their narrow, partisan interests?

Mr. Ceci: This is a government of Alberta budget, Mr. Speaker, and we're acting on jobs and diversification. We're acting on a responsible pathway to balance, and we're acting on stabilizing front-line services. We're providing information to Albertans, and I think that's a useful thing.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Meet the new boss, Mr. Speaker: same as the old boss.

Until recently the government of Ontario's advertising had to be approved by the Auditor General to ensure that it was nonpartisan, and the NDP is advertising a government union slogan, likely written by politically connected communications officers from those very government unions. Will the government commit to challenging the law to ensure that taxpayers are not paying for their partisan propaganda?

Mr. Ceci: What we're actually doing, Mr. Speaker, is investing in roads, bridges, and flood protection. We're talking about job creation. We're talking about a pathway to balance. All of that is information Albertans want to know, and we're providing it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North West.

Child Care Supports

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two weeks ago I was very proud to vote for Motion 502, presented by the Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park. I was happy to vote for this motion because I believed it would begin a very important conversation about child care in Alberta and the need for affordable child care for parents, but there have been no announcements or details yet. To the Minister of Human Services: has the government done anything at all to act on the member's motion, and when can Albertans expect to see some details?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you for the question, Mr. Speaker. Our government ran on a campaign that we will move with a \$25-a-day daycare plan when our finances permit. In our budget in the out-years we have allocated funds, and we are exploring our options, how we can best move on that promise.

Ms Jansen: Mr. Speaker, one interesting idea proposed in Motion 502 was opening spaces in new government buildings. However, there is space in a number of our older schools and infrastructure that could be repurposed. To our Minister of Infrastructure: has the government done any work so far in identifying potential child care spaces in either old or new infrastructure, as was called for in Motion 502?

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, hon. member, for the question. One of the first things I did upon taking office was to ask my department to take a look at the federal building to see if in fact it was possible to find a child care space there. Apparently, the building is not suitable; hence the importance of the motion that you referenced. It's much easier to do when you're building a building new. I've asked the department to review potential spaces in government buildings that may be suitable for child care, so that's ongoing, hon. member.

Ms Jansen: Mr. Speaker, given that this work is ongoing, it's also important to know that the program is accessible for all Alberta parents that need it. As a mother who worked shift work her entire career, I know the struggle of trying to find child care that works for a career outside of the 9-to-5 workday. To the Minister of Human Services: what specifically will your government do to ensure that these programs fit Alberta parents who need them around the clock?

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Member. Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, we understand that child care is expensive in this province, and for that reason we ran on a promise that we will make sure that it's quality care and that it's affordable to all Albertans. At this time we do provide child care subsidies. We do provide accreditation, like wage top-ups, to the service providers to make sure that child care is available and affordable to all Albertans, and we have also committed funds in the out-years, and we are exploring options to better address this need.

Thank you.

School Board Associations' Spending

Mr. Smith: Mr. Speaker, the chair of the Edmonton public school board has expressed grave concerns over spending by the Alberta School Boards Association, to the point where he believes his board should leave the association. Instead of hiring schoolteachers and classroom assistants, member school boards are using taxpayers'

dollars to fund extravagant perks like adult Easter-egg hunts and pricey conferences. Will the minister direct member school boards and the ASBA to stop this improper spending at a time when Alberta simply can't afford it?

The Speaker: The Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member for the question. Certainly, it's critical at every juncture that education monies be spent in the classroom for our children. Further to that, I have certainly been speaking to all 61 school boards over the last few weeks, and specifically now, with the ASBA revelations, once again I've offered them a level of transparency that we use in the public service, that hopefully they might consider using because certainly their reputation is on the line.

2:30

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Black Gold school division has decided to withdraw from the Public School Boards' Association of Alberta over a special levy directing educational tax dollars towards a court case to limit Catholic education and since the association unanimously agreed to collect 90 cents per student to fight Lakeland Catholic school board's attempt to open a school in Lac La Biche, does the Minister of Education consider this levy a good use of public education funds?

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, from the base principle that we operate from, our government is clearly recognizing the value of Catholic education in this province. Further to that, we certainly do not want to see people using money in an inappropriate way to somehow interfere with that commitment. Further to that, certainly, we will make sure that the process is followed properly. PSBAA is also an independent organization. The bottom line is that the buck stops here. If they're spending money inappropriately, then so be it. We will stop it.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since these two provincial associations are causing division within the educational community and pitting Albertans against each other, we need the Education minister to step up and start making things right. Given that schools are facing overcrowding and funds clearly are being mismanaged, will the minister put an end to out-of-control spending and make sure that educational dollars are providing appropriate resources in the classroom to support our students?

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, that is the intention. Each of these organizations are advocacy groups that the school boards make an investment in, and that's the way they operate. That being said, certainly, like I said before, the buck stops here. I make sure that the money is being spent in schools. The message has been clearly sent to each of the 61 school boards that that's what I expect them to do. In regard to divisions it's very important when you're in opposition not to just try to jam those divisions even wider, to cause even more turmoil than is necessary in this province.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

PDD Residential Safety Standards

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year the former government made it a priority to change the health and safety regulations for

all living spaces assigned to persons with developmental disabilities, or PDD. This action was in order to protect Alberta's most vulnerable people, something the Wildrose supports. This new government has put a stop to such changes thus far. To the Minister of Human Services: does your government actually plan on making changes to health and safety regulations for PDD spaces anytime soon?

The Speaker: The Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. We have heard concerns from care providers, service providers, and PDD individuals that these regulations were brought in without proper consultation. What we have done is extended the compliance deadline for another six months. We are in the process of putting together a consultation plan, which I will have more to say about fairly soon.

Thank you.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this government does plan on making changes to health and safety regulations for PDD spaces in the coming months, stakeholders are desperate for more details. Considering that the NDP ran on a platform of transparency, I would assume this government would have no problem sharing these details. To the minister: will you please inform this House about some of the planned changes coming for PDD spaces?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member.

An Hon. Member: It's a good question.

Mr. Sabir: It's a good question. The safety of those individuals is of paramount importance. As I said, we have heard from stakeholders. In fact, in putting together the consultation plan, we have done a preconsultation with stakeholders across the province. We will be launching our consultation plan fairly soon. It's in the final process, so we will have more to say fairly soon.

The Speaker: Might you have another good question?

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this government plans on making changes to health and safety regulations for PDD spaces, stakeholders involved in PDD care have been coming to me with grave concerns. They tell me that they have yet to be contacted by this government to discuss upcoming changes. These stakeholders would like to be a part of the conversation. To the minister: will you commit today to inviting all stakeholders to one table in order to find a unified solution to this problem?

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Member and Mr. Speaker. I just want to reiterate that the safety of these individuals is of paramount importance. We are committed to consulting extensively. If there is anybody who was left out who approached you, I would invite you to bring forward the names of those stakeholders, and I will pass it on to the consultation team so that they can consult more inclusively and more broadly to get it right.

Thank you again to the member.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

Promotion of Alberta's Energy Industry

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With the Premier protesting at anti oil sands and antipipeline rallies, the environment minister

writing for environmental radicals, and the NDP government implementing policies that have shaken the confidence of our oil industry partners, to the minister of environment: how can Albertans take you at your word that you support your statement that the oil industry is now the backbone of Alberta's economy? Frankly, Minister, your government's actions are speaking louder than your words.

Ms Phillips: Mr. Speaker, leaving aside the irrelevant personal attacks for a moment, the fact of the matter is that our actions have spoken loudly across all of the country and across to our international trading partners as well. We have struck a gold-standard panel to examine the matters of the environmental legacy that was left to us by the previous government. They are providing us advice on renewables, on how to phase out coal appropriately, on how to price carbon, and on how to take leadership on energy efficiency. Those are the actions that we have taken in six short months.

Mr. Fraser: To the same minister. Minister, your government has expressed a desire to support innovation and diversification in our energy economy, and given that many oil sands companies are already exploring new and alternative procedures to lower greenhouse gas emissions per barrel, I'm sure you want to encourage companies to accelerate these investments for emissions reduction. If this is the case, will you commit right now to strengthening the climate change and emissions management fund by allowing more direct withdrawal by contributing companies?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of the environment.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to hon. member for the question. This matter of technology and innovation is foremost in the panel's minds as they formulate their advice to government. We have consulted widely with industry on this matter as well, and we will have more to say about it in the coming days as we receive the panel's advice and as we make our announcements before Paris.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Paris climate change summit is weeks away, Minister, and you and your government have committed to spending over a million dollars on advertising your plan and attendance to European press, when will Albertans actually get to know your climate change plan?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks for the question. We've been clear that we are going to be making some announcements prior to Paris. Stay tuned on that. We will be putting forward a very fulsome plan that will secure us market access, that will refurbish our international reputation, that will make the appropriate investments in technology and innovation so that we can be global leaders on climate in a carbon-constrained world and so that we can take leadership on carbon competitiveness, hold our heads high, secure market access, and create green jobs for the entire economy.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Bullying Prevention

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday marked the kickoff of Bullying Awareness Week, a grassroots initiative that originated

right here in Alberta. This week raises awareness and increases our understanding of the impacts of bullying, promotes prevention of bullying, and informs Albertans about supports available to them. To the Minister of Human Services: what is our government doing to honour this week?

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. We know that bullying in any form anywhere is unacceptable, and we know that everyone has a role to play in promoting healthy relationships and in preventing bullying. Over the next six days we are hosting a cyberbullying webcast, promoting a Post-It Forward campaign, and highlighting events across the province, including the 10th annual GSA Conference, which focuses on inclusion and prevention of bullying. I call on all colleagues in the House to commit to a culture of inclusion and respect in honour of Bullying Awareness Week.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you. Given that bullying has serious and real effects on individuals, families, and communities – and as a father of three young children I am concerned about the effects of bullying – and it can lead to anxiety, depression, impact student achievement, and impact employee production at work, what is our government doing to promote the prevention of bullying and to support victims of bullying generally?

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Member. Promoting inclusion and ensuring welcoming, caring, and respectful environments is a priority for Albertans and for our government. Human Services has invested over \$2 million in Budget 2015 in promoting healthy relationships and the prevention of bullying. This much-needed funding will support initiatives like the school-based program roots of empathy and many more which focus on the prevention of bullying and the promotion of healthy relationships.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that our schools need to be safe and caring places, to the Minister of Education: how is this government going to work to support students, specifically those in the LGBTQ community?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government wants to make it clear to all students looking for safe and caring schools that we stand with them. Recently I have sent letters to public, Catholic, francophone, and private schools directing them to develop coherent policies that ensure that students are free from discrimination. These policies must specifically address the boards' responsibilities as they relate to the School Act. All of our schools need to be welcoming and caring, and we will do whatever is necessary to ensure that that happens.

The Speaker: The Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Highway Safety

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Two years ago in my constituency office I sat across from a grieving mother whose son, returning from his high school graduation rehearsal, had been killed

in a preventable accident. He had driven into the back of an improperly marked piece of farm machinery at night. To the Minister of Transportation: is your department considering any regulatory reviews?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much to the hon. member for the question. That's a good question. I would be very interested in learning more about the situation that you have described, and perhaps we can sit down. I will take the question under advisement.

Thank you.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Given that each year 60 to 80 tow truck operators are killed on North American roads and that tow operators are almost as likely as law enforcement officers to be killed on the job, giving this industry the second-highest occupational death rate per capita, Minister, is your department considering any regulatory review to deal with this life-threatening oversight?

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will take that question under advisement as well.

The Speaker: The hon. member. Second supplemental.

Mr. Strankman: Thanks again, Mr. Speaker. Given that tow trucks are not designated under the Traffic Safety Act as emergency vehicles, their drivers are at serious risk recovering vehicles on busy highways. To the Minister of Infrastructure and of Transportation: is your department considering a review, as we've discussed, and what might the timeline be for that review?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much for the question, hon. member. Mr. Speaker, safety is the first priority of our department. Far too many people are killed on our roads in a variety of ways. The hon. member has quite rightly brought forward some serious aspects to that, that deserve careful attention, and I want to assure the hon. member that it will get the attention that it deserves.

We want to make sure that our roads are as safe as possible. The people that work on the roads, whether they're first responders or people operating tow trucks or whether they're driving a truck or driving their family for a long weekend, deserve to have safe roads, and that's our . . .

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

School Construction Schedule

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. During the Infrastructure estimates when I asked the minister if it takes three years to build an elementary school and a bit longer for a middle school and high school, the minister said, "I think that's fairly accurate." However, the Minister of Education calls these timelines fictitious and unrealistic. My questions are to the Minister of Education. Minister, given that the Minister of Infrastructure is saying one thing and you are saying another, who are we to believe?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, we've been waiting a long time for these new and upgraded schools, and I took some concrete steps to try to get more realistic timelines into place.

We know that there are different circumstances that do take place when you're building on such a large scale, you know, anything from artesian wells to methane gas to land being available and not being available. Taking those vagaries into account is what we're trying to do to ensure that we're getting a fair representation of when the schools will actually get built.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Bhullar: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. I think that the minister is saying that the other minister is incorrect.

Mr. Speaker, given that school construction funding is allocated over a five-year window, the government wants to spend more of that money now and in the first two years of this five-year plan. To the Minister of Education: Minister, would that not indicate that these schools are moving forward relatively on time because money is being moved forward on the five . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I want to correct the record here because the hon. member has been quoting very selectively from the discussion that we had during my estimates. All things being equal, three years is not unreasonable for an elementary school, but in many cases these projects were announced before land had even been identified. In some cases they still don't. The school boards weren't ready. The municipalities hadn't identified the land. There were multiple problems. What the previous government did was to advance these, whether or not they could be built in the time frame that they were suggesting, for political purposes.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Bhullar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It takes three years from beginning to end to build a school. These schools were announced in 2014; ready by 2017. My question again to the Minister of Education: given that we can't get the timelines straight between the two ministers, how, Minister, do you plan on building these schools with \$315.9 million less?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, all of the schools, the modernizations, the new school projects that we have: we are going to build those schools, and we can only do so when we actually move the money up so that we can pay for the schools to start to be built properly. I mean, unfortunately – I've been staying away from it – but we were left with a lot of empty promises by this previous government. I had to take the hit to say what timelines were realistic. I did so, and now we can move forward with the schools that we need for our children here in the province of Alberta.

Castle Special Management Area

Mr. Westhead: Mr. Speaker, Alberta is home to spectacular natural wonders, with the Castle area being one among many. Albertans know the significance of protecting and conserving our natural heritage, and we're eager to see our government take action to protect the Castle special management area. To the minister of the environment: what is the current status of protection and conservation in the Castle area?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of the environment.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. I want to underline that we are bringing the entire Castle area under legislated protection. We are now moving into the development of the parks management plan to encourage Albertans in what they want to see for land use. Of course, we took this action – it was a historic action – because we wanted to protect the headwaters for southern Alberta, for the entire South Saskatchewan regional area, including the drinking water for my own city of Lethbridge.

2:50

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this protection will increase tourism to the area, to the same minister: what are you doing to ensure that the Castle will be protected and its beautiful natural heritage will be enjoyed by future generations?

Ms Phillips: Well, the first thing that we did, Mr. Speaker, was that we eliminated commercial logging from the area because this was an incompatible use with the legislative protection that we are bringing in. The legislative protection was something that had been asked for by ranching groups, by landowners, by municipalities, and others for more than a generation, almost 50 years. We finally made good on that promise. It took us only four months. It took the previous government 40 years, and they still didn't do it.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that logging and mining in the Castle will be stopped, again to the minister: what are you doing to ensure that the protection in this special area does not hurt economic interests, especially of families living in the area?

Ms Phillips: Well, Mr. Speaker, one of the things we did was that we are not allowing surface drilling, but there is still directional drilling in the area. We are engaging grazing leaseholders to encourage the lowest impact on the parks and working with those who own the forestry leases or grazing leases in that area. We're incorporating appropriate rules around off-highway vehicle use, and we're engaging on a broad tourism plan for the area. This is something that I'm pleased to work on with the municipalities and with my colleague in Culture and Tourism.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Palliative Care

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Palliative care provides comfort and medical assistance to those facing the final stages of a terminal illness. It's an incredibly important line of work within our health care system. Alberta has some of the finest palliative care doctors, nurses, and caregivers in the world, people who've developed new tools, new systems to assist patients burdened with final-stage illnesses.

Many Albertans when faced with a terminal diagnosis prefer to stay in their own homes for as long as possible. Expert teams like the palliative care community consult team at St. Marguerite health services centre in Mill Woods help Albertans to fulfill that wish. They provide critical support to physicians, and they facilitate the patients' staying in their homes while continuing to receive world-class palliative care.

For those patients who can no longer stay at home, facilities such as the tertiary palliative care unit at the Grey Nuns community hospital exist. This past week I was able to tour unit 43, the tertiary

palliative care unit, and meet with a few of the staff. I had heard from constituents about the heroes employed there, a team that believes that each patient is special, sacred, and deserves to be treated with dignity. On unit 43 they are dedicated to providing compassionate care and making patients as comfortable as possible. They welcome families, friends, and pets, with 24/7 visiting hours. I found their holistic and multidisciplinary approach to palliative care comforting, and I'd like to thank unit 43 for allowing me to come and see the important work that they do.

We must ensure that our government continues to fund and train the next wave of palliative care providers and that we continue to invest in the facilities that allow for this critical end-of-life care through stable health care funding. Albertans deserve nothing less.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Pipeline Construction

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This NDP government's lack of support for the Northern Gateway and the Keystone means thousands of jobs lost in ridings like my own. Many businesses in Bonnyville-Cold Lake had a major stake in these pipelines, and if we don't secure a major pipeline soon, these businesses and the jobs they provide will soon be gone. Not only were thousands of energy jobs directly affected by the Keystone decision, but a host of other industries and businesses were hurt, too. For every energy job this pipeline would have created, there would have been two nonenergy jobs created. Jobs like grocery providers, hotel clerks, restaurant workers, daycare providers are just a few that either won't be sustained or created.

It is disheartening that the members opposite are not supporting jobs or our provincial economy at a time when we need them the most. While Wildrose is busy fighting for pipelines, they're busy protesting them. While Wildrose is busy spreading a story of success of our environment, they're busy calling our oil industry dirty and labelling Albertans as embarrassing cousins. They don't get it. There will soon be no jobs to sustain the economies in rural ridings like Bonnyville-Cold Lake. Ridings that were once vibrant and alive are now struggling under the weight of this government.

We know that moving energy product via pipeline is a safe and efficient manner and that construction of the new pipeline will create jobs, jobs that Albertans will use to reinvest economically and socially in our great province. We know governments don't build pipelines, but they do influence the opinions of other provinces and federal governments. The NDP government should stand proud for our energy sector and fight for market access in every direction. The future of Alberta depends on it.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Seniors' Charter

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I pass my one-year anniversary as a Member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, I am tremendously proud of an initiative that I will soon bring before the House. This initiative honours some of our most treasured citizens, Alberta seniors. I began working on this initiative, which you will come to know as Motion 514, soon after I was elected. The motion asks the House to support the development of a seniors' charter. What is the intention of this charter? Well, it will provide the following guarantees for our seniors: the highest level of dignity, respect, and treatment; access to safe, affordable seniors' housing;

providing seniors with a healthy environment; access to programs to help them remain physically active and participate in their communities; and access to high-quality mental health programs.

Mr. Speaker, it is my view and the view of the PC caucus that we cannot do enough for the seniors who have helped build our communities and made Alberta the proud province it is today. Our former government created a broad foundation of supports for seniors, and we are proud of that base. I am championing the concept of a seniors' charter now to ensure that these programs and services are always available to them. While my motion proposes that the Legislative Assembly adopt the concept and provide the guidelines I outlined above, I also propose that we leave the development of the charter in the very capable hands of the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta.

I am hoping that each member of this Assembly will find the concept of a seniors' charter as inspiring as I do. I look forward to speaking in more detail on this motion in the coming weeks, but for now I urge all members to take a few moments to consider the value of this proposal. When reflecting on the creation of a seniors' charter, please think about the seniors you know – your parents, your neighbours, your friends – and the expectations you have for them from Alberta's government and what it would mean for them to have these kinds of guarantees from their province as they age.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I would request unanimous consent of the House to extend our time in order to complete the Routine.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: Please proceed. The Member for Calgary-East.

Cornerstone Youth Centre

Ms Luff: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This last Friday I had the utmost pleasure of being present at the opening of Mayland Heights' first outdoor community basketball court, at the Cornerstone Youth Centre. Despite how cold and windy it was, as soon as the ribbon was cut, the court was filled with young people dribbling, shooting baskets, and making bad dunk attempts.

Cornerstone Youth Centre is an organization in my riding, Calgary-East, that is doing amazing work. They are a free, after school drop-in centre that serves 160 registered youth. They provide a safe and caring place for kids in grades 6 to 9 to go after school. With a small board of directors and a staff of just three Cornerstone is a really amazing place to visit.

3:00

Cornerstone's mission is investing in youth to encourage the discovery of their passion and potential. You can clearly see that mission in their work as soon as you walk in the doors. On my first trip there, upon entering, I heard guitar and drums coming from the music studio and saw groups of kids sitting around tables eating healthy snacks and playing board games. It was really remarkably wholesome considering, you know, our opinions of youth these days.

Cornerstone makes sure that vulnerable youth have what they need to be successful. They have help with homework. They have hot, nutritious food. They have outlets and training opportunities for creativity and opportunities for sport and physical activity. All of these things were absolutely free of charge. One of the ways that you can tell how successful Cornerstone is is by how many of the students come back as volunteers once they've outgrown the program.

I look forward to many more visits to Cornerstone and to its hopeful expansion into Forest Lawn, where programs such as this could be of utmost use and would be a really fantastic asset, and I'm also looking forward to more basketball games in the springtime.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Terra Centre

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to celebrate the achievement of the Terra Child and Family Support Centre in receiving the child development professional award of excellence for 2015 in the program category, awarded by our Human Services ministry this past Monday, the 9th of November.

Terra supports teen moms attending classes at Braemar school by giving their young children a high-quality learning experience delivered by professional, qualified early childhood educators. The centre accommodates up to 67 children between the ages three weeks to three years old. The program is designed to provide a safe environment that stimulates a child's natural curiosity and to enhance a child's development in all areas.

Terra also supports the relationship between moms and children by giving the moms the opportunity to complete their high school diplomas while maintaining their bond with their kids. When you tour the Terra Centre, you will immediately feel the safe and supportive environment they create for both the children and the moms. The toys, some of which are made out of common household items, are designed to enhance children's development. On-site food preparation ensures that the kids get the nutritious food they need through the day to grow up strong and healthy. When it's nap time, the rooms at Terra become dark, quiet places for the kids to rest and restore their energy for the next part of the day.

Our government understands that quality early childhood development helps ensure children have the best opportunities for success. Interactions with these skilled professionals significantly impact children's development and well-being. That's why I'm pleased to congratulate Terra Centre on receiving the child professional development award of excellence. Alberta is a better place with Terra Centre helping hundreds of moms complete high school and hundreds of children get off to a good start in life.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Energy Policies

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It has been over six months since the May election. Since then the economy in the Peace Country and, in fact, in most of Alberta has been in decline. The province is feeling the serious effects of the NDP and their risky agenda. The energy sector has been hurting due in part to low commodity prices. However, there is no need for it to be hurting as much as it is.

The Premier seemed relieved when Keystone XL was cancelled, a pipeline she never truly supported. When the President of the United States cancelled it and told the world that Alberta's oil was dirty, how did our Premier react? She was understanding. On top of that the NDP government is hiring anti-oil activists. People who have been campaigning against Alberta's best interests are being paid hundreds of thousands of Albertan's tax dollars, and to do what? To represent our best interests? Sorry; that doesn't stand to reason. Picking and choosing which pipelines are supported and then only half-heartedly is wrong.

Not one policy this government has introduced has been helpful, and many have just plain hurt the economy. It is high time that this government realized that every job loss is not just a number; each one represents a person that has lost the ability to provide for themselves and their family. My heart goes out to those who are sitting around their kitchen tables trying to figure out how to make ends meet.

We are blessed in this province with a wealth of natural resources. Other jurisdictions would love to have this goose that lays the golden egg. Intelligent people would take these golden eggs and use them to benefit our province. If you want to see increased diversity, take the golden eggs and make them work for you. Don't kill the goose. The NDP government must wake up from their poor policies and listen to the people in the Peace Country who have lost their jobs. Listen to those in the industry who know what it takes to create jobs, people who know how to get investment dollars back into our economy. It doesn't have to be this bad. It really doesn't.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Notices of Motions

The Deputy Speaker: The Minister of Transportation and Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. On behalf of my colleague the hon. Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour I would like to give oral notice of a bill to be introduced tomorrow, that bill being Bill 6, The Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act.

Thank you.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Ms Hoffman, Minister of Health and Minister of Seniors, pursuant to the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta Act the Seniors Advisory Council for Alberta annual report 2014-2015.

On behalf of the hon. Ms Ganley, Minister of Justice and Solicitor General and Minister of Aboriginal Relations, the Alberta Human Rights Commission annual report 2014-15, April 1, 2014 to March 31, 2015; Alberta Law Enforcement Review Board 2014 annual report; pursuant to the Northern Alberta Development Council Act the Northern Alberta Development Council annual report 2014-15; pursuant to the Legal Profession Act the Law Society of Alberta 2014 annual report; pursuant to the Legal Profession Act financial statements of the Alberta Law Foundation, year ended March 31, 2015.

On behalf of the hon. Mr. Eggen, Minister of Education and Minister of Culture and Tourism, Travel Alberta annual report 2014-2015; pursuant to the Alberta Foundation for the Arts Act the Alberta Foundation for the Arts 2014-15 annual report; pursuant to the Alberta Sport Connection Act the Alberta Sport Connection annual report 2014-15; pursuant to the Historical Resources Act the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation 2014-15 annual report; pursuant to the Wild Rose Foundation Act the Wild Rose Foundation annual report 2014-15; pursuant to the Teaching Profession Act Alberta Teachers' Association 2014 annual report.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 7(7) the daily routine is now concluded.

Orders of the Day
Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading

Bill 203
Election (Restrictions on Government Advertising)
Amendment Act, 2015

The Deputy Speaker: Any members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 203. This is a good bill. This legislation would be a monumental step towards making elections in this province fairer. This legislation would ban government from using the money and power of government to try and buy votes during or just before the writ period. This piece of legislation alone would bring more credibility and accountability and transparency to government than any other bill that has been introduced yet.

Albertans are tired of the same old politics that only serve to hurt and diminish our democratic system. How many times in election cycles gone by have we seen the government of the day promise a school or a hospital or a major transportation project in a specific riding for the sole purpose of acquiring votes for the government candidate, in some cases not to be delivered on either? It is a total abuse of government power. The government of this province that I love has to be held to a higher standard of scrutiny. The NDP have previously joined the call for amendments to the Election Act, and we welcome them to join with Wildrose today in a show of support for a more open and accountable government.

3:10

In the provinces of Saskatchewan and Manitoba governments are banned from making announcements during an election campaign or a by-election. Our provincial neighbours have had the foresight to recognize that interfering in an election by allowing the government of the day to use money and their power to swing votes their way is completely unacceptable. In Manitoba, as it turns out, the legislation banning announcements during an election campaign or a by-election came in under NDP Premier Gary Doer. This particular legislation stems primarily from controversial practices made by its government during last October's by-elections. We needn't get into the specifics of the history, but, suffice it to say, this province's government absolutely needs to see that the practices of the past that have been used to solicit votes come to an end.

This piece of legislation is expected to be sent to committee to be researched and commented on by professionals and Albertans. Now, without wasting this room's time about how and why this piece of legislation is heading to committee, I would like to say categorically that the Wildrose Party campaigned on a more open and transparent government, that would consistently send legislation to committee for expert opinion and opinions from Albertans all over this province. Rather than ram legislation through the House, as has happened in the past in this room and what appears is going to happen this fall before this legislative session is over, the Wildrose would send all important legislation to committee for comment. Using that strategy is a tremendous step in making government transparent and improving overall government accountability in this province.

I urge all members of the House to support this very important bill. By doing so, we'll be letting the taxpayers of this province, the folks that pay the freight in this province, know that the people that

they have sent to this building to create legislation and to run their government on their behalf are listening.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak in favour of Bill 203. Bill 203 adds a section to the Election Act that ensures that the government does not use its resources to aid in partisan campaigning during a writ or election period. There are many issues that all members of this House can positively subscribe to, and one of them is strengthening the democratic processes and practices of this House. It is appropriate that we take some time.

Madam Speaker, the Speaker earlier today referred to the threads that tie us together, and I would have us dwell for a few moments on the threads of democracy that tie us to all free liberal democracies, especially in France. We remember that it was the great enlightenment philosophers like Voltaire and Rousseau and Montesquieu that encouraged and enhanced the democracy of France in their day. We remember and we pay tribute to these great men of democracy as we support and as we vote in favour of Bill 203.

It was Montesquieu that championed the separation of powers and the creation of a set of checks and balances, ensuring that the legislative, judicial, and executive powers of government would always be controlled by different groups of people and that a system of checks on each group's power would ensure that good and honest and transparent government would reflect the interests of the people and not simply of those that governed. Never is this idea of transparent and responsible government more important than during the exercise of choosing a government or in choosing a representative that the people support during a by-election.

In this bill we have the chance as a Legislature to ensure that elections and by-elections are fair for all candidates. This bill will ensure that the governing party regardless of political creed, regardless of political stripe, will not be able to use the financial resources of the state to try and sway voters.

This bill will ensure that ministers and other officials are still free to talk to the media about issues but that they will not be able to make partisan, unethical announcements designed to win votes. This bill recognizes that there are times during an emergency or a public health issue or a safety issue or for a pre-existing public awareness campaign for provincial authorities to make announcements.

I see here a bill that has balance and that moves forward the cause of democracy, so I believe that all members of this House should be able to stand and vote in favour of this bill and in the process strengthen the democratic rights and processes that ensure that it is truly the people that will rule this great province of Alberta. The NDP and indeed all parties of this Legislature should be able to support this legislative change. We have in the past co-operated, setting aside partisan politics to pass good legislation. This is such a bill, and it deserves the support of all in this House. It is therefore my pleasure, remembering past and present sacrifices around the world in all of the democratic nations, to say that I on behalf of my constituents wholeheartedly support this bill, and I will proudly vote in favour of this bill.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to stand and speak to this bill. This bill talks about limiting government's ability to make announcements during election periods. It's a good

bill. I congratulate the member for bringing it forward. It's an issue that needs to be addressed. I think it will help build confidence in Albertans.

One has to be concerned that one doesn't handcuff government's ability to look after emergencies, events that arise, things like that that happen during an election period, but I don't believe this bill in any way does that. I believe it does leave the room for government to act in cases of emergency or emergent events that have to be addressed right now while still protecting the reputation of the province and the government long term.

As I said earlier, I intend to support it. I thank the member for bringing it forward.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak very briefly to Bill 203. Bill 203 conforms very much to the values that drive our government with respect to fairness and transparency in terms of the electoral process. It conforms very much to commitments that we made during the election.

And I'll just note that it's not just a matter of words. Recently we were faced with a fairly tough by-election in Calgary-Foothills, and there were some major announcements that we wished to make with respect to projects and programs relative to the city of Calgary, and we refrained from making those announcements until after the by-election. The Premier's leadership on that, in my view, was principled and consistent. So it is something that we agree on, and I commend the hon. member opposite for this bill because I think it's a very good one.

Now, Madam Speaker, we are wanting to deal with this as part of a broader package of changes. The Assembly has created an all-party committee to deal with these matters, and it's my wish and it's our wish that this bill should be included in that committee's discussions because it's an important aspect of the work of that committee.

I can just indicate to you, Madam Speaker, that we support this bill and urge all members to support the bill. Subsequent to its adoption by the House, which I hope will occur at second reading, which is the approval of the bill in principle, it is our intention to move a referral motion to the special committee dealing with these matters in order that it can be incorporated into the broader package of reform that we hope this committee will bring forward to the House.

Thank you.

3:20

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm very proud to stand and speak in support of Bill 203. Albertans I've talked to in the recent past have spoken out in support of Bill 203 as put forward by my colleague. They want transparency in government. They want democracy. Using taxpayers' own money during a writ for a general election or during a by-election serves neither democracy nor transparency. Albertans are tired of being bought off with their own money. They want fair, clear election processes. This bill, if we can get it right, will serve to restore democracy in Alberta.

Important bills such as this one demand open discussion in this House. Indeed all legislation worthy of being brought forth in this House deserves the fair debate from all sides and the input of the Albertans that we represent. Therefore, a lot of these bills should be going to committee such as was suggested by the hon. minister.

I will be supporting Bill 203 and look forward to more discussion on it. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm rising today to speak in favour of Bill 203, put forward by the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler. This is a bill whose principles I've fought for for several years now to restrict the ability of governments to use their resources to directly influence the outcomes of elections and by-elections in particular. Many of us recall, without very much delight, the last series of by-elections from the last Legislature, in which it was quite clear that government used government resources to influence the outcomes of those by-elections. But that is in the past.

This bill is about moving forward with a new set of rules that we can be proud of. The Ethics Commissioner spoke about the actions of the last case I just referred to and said that while it certainly violates the spirit of our ethics rules, there were no rules in place to prevent it. That's what this bill seeks to do.

Mr. Cooper: We should strengthen those rules.

Mr. Fildebrandt: We should be strengthening both our ethics rules and our electoral rules around us.

I'm pleased to see this go to committee because I believe that all bills of this Legislature should be going before committees, not just the odd select private member's bill. This is an opportunity for us to work together across party lines, between the government and the Official Opposition and the smaller parties, to put forward policies that benefit all Albertans. Albertans at their core want a fair electoral system that cannot be gamed by the government in power. While there might be other examples in contradiction of this, I will commend the government for doing the right thing and working across the aisle on this issue despite earlier confusion around the issue.

Madam Speaker, I'll keep my comments brief. On behalf of the members of Strathmore-Brooks I'm honoured to support this bill, and I hope that every member of every party in this Legislature does so as well. Thank you.

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

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Many years ago I had the opportunity of being a teacher in a small three-room school that taught native kids that were from the Blood reserve. When I came in, the principal told me: there are two things you need to know; you need to make sure that you love them and that you treat them fairly. As I applied those principles, I found that I was able to work with the kids, and it was a fantastic experience.

Now, many years later, I find myself in this House and faced with a similar experience. We had an opportunity at the beginning of the sitting to discuss Bill 1, An Act to Renew Democracy in Alberta. In that time we made amendments; we talked about being able to send it to committee. The government's response to that was specifically that this wasn't a perfect bill but that it was a bill that was a good start and that it was something that we could move forward on and that they would vote for it in its present condition. I guess the question that I have is: is that a double standard? Yes, we do want all of our bills to go to committee. We think that that's the best approach and the most prudent approach for Albertans. We will get the best results. We'll have good direction from outside witnesses, and that is the best approach.

However, in this situation I can't help but see the double standard here. We are bringing forward a good bill. This is obviously something that has been accepted by the minister, as he said earlier, and he believes that the rest of the House should vote for it. I'm glad to see that there's a change. However, my question still remains. As I asked before, why is it that we are having to take this to committee when it could be voted for and passed in this House? It's a good bill, it's a good start, and if we use the same reasoning that was used before, there should be no double standard in this. This is why I believe it's the right approach and the thing that we can teach our children and throughout Alberta, that we'll be fair here and that we will do things the right way. That's why I'll be voting for this.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Do any other hon. members wish to speak on Bill 203? The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I had a rough time during the election with many people at the door who had truly just lost faith in their government. They didn't think that we were the voice of the people that we were elected to represent, and as sort of that grade 6 government nerd in school it broke my heart, truly and honestly. So one of the reasons that I ran was to bring that faith back to the people, that we truly could make a difference here in this House. I think that Bill 203 is a good step in the right direction to allow fairness in election times.

Airdrie was actually promised a really great health care facility during the election. You know, half of us believed it was going to happen, and half knew it was an election promise. So it be told, we're back to zero, and the people of Airdrie are no longer protected with any sort of 24-hour health care facility. That wasn't fair, and I believe this is a really good step.

I am worried that this bill will get lost in committee. One of the hon. members from the government side actually was quoted:

When it comes to the other three acts included in our mandate, we have the ability to determine where we would like to focus our efforts, and I would suggest that this is critical. Given the size of each of these acts and how much opportunity there is, we will need to focus our time.

So will this bill be seriously considered in committee? It's a grave concern that I have.

But, you know, I encourage the members to vote yes on this bill as is. I think it's a great bill. I think it's a great step towards strengthening our system and democracy in the future. I will be supporting Bill 203, and I urge all members of this House to do the same.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to the bill?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler to close debate.

3:30

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It truly is an interesting day in the Chamber, and we always have these adventures in the Chamber here.

When members of the government earlier this session refused to co-operate with the Wildrose opposition at the time on Bill 203, an initiative to restrict inappropriate spending by governments during the 28-day election cycle, I was reminded of the history of the party and the patriarchs of that party. I was reminded of the traditions that members of the government – of this government – ostensibly claim to represent and defend. I'm referring to the traditions that were set

down by the pillars of their party. J.S. Woodsworth, M.J. Coldwell, and Stanley Knowles are names that come to mind.

Woodsworth, the founding president of what is now the New Democratic Party, spoke of the need for co-operation within the Legislative Assembly. What are we to say when his descendants, the children of Woodsworth, refuse to co-operate? Major Coldwell, who followed in Woodsworth's path as president of their party, spoke repeatedly about the need for co-operation, the idea of co-operating with other people. It was even in the name of their party, Madam Speaker. They called it a co-operative federation. MP Stanley Knowles served for almost 40 years as an MP. He was the CCF and NDP House leader. In Parliament he set a standard for co-operation and professional parliamentary decorum that many in the Ottawa region and throughout the country speak about to this day. Do the members of this New Democratic Party across the way follow in the traditions of those men? Do they emulate Woodsworth, Coldwell, and Knowles?

It is interesting to note, Madam Speaker, that by rejecting the clear, nonpartisan provisions of Bill 203, members of this government do not spurn me, nor do they spurn the opposition Wildrose nor even the members of this Assembly. No. It reaches beyond that. They spurn the very traditions they claim in this Chamber to represent. By refusing to co-operate initially, these government members cast aspersions on the patriarchs of their own party. They show themselves as practitioners of high-handedness and procedural manipulation . . .

Mr. Mason: Point of order.

Mr. Strankman: . . . that characterized the PC government of the past eight or 10 years.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, a point of order has been raised.

Mr. Strankman: Absolutely, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member in his closing with a point of order. However, I feel I'm forced to do that, especially in particular under Standing Order 23(i), "imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member," and (j), "uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder."

Madam Speaker, the facts of the history of this bill are well known. The government initially wished to refer it to the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee, and at that time an error was made with respect to how that was to be done. It was an error. The government has stood up and admitted the error, corrected it, took corrective action to change the standing orders to allow a referral to the committee without attacking the integrity or the very existence of the bill, and has proceeded to do that. The government has also now stood in this place and indicated that it is prepared to support the bill at second reading.

The hon. member is attacking our party, comparing us unfavourably with the founders of our party and leading parliamentarians on the basis of something that happened some time ago, not what is happening now, not what is the intent of the government. We've corrected the mistake, and he needs to deal with the government's position as it is now and not pretend that it is still the same position that it was at that earlier time. In continuing to pursue

his negative comparison of this government's actions with the founders of our party, he is imputing false and unavowed motives. He is casting aspersions on the party and on our actions, which, in my view, are entirely honourable. The hon. member should know better.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, you wish to respond?

Mr. Strankman: Yes, Madam Speaker, to the point of order. I wish to retract any aspersions that I may have presented awkwardly, and I would like to continue with my member's statement to follow up the end of the debate.

The Deputy Speaker: Continue.

Debate Continued

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I put forward Bill 203 as a measure that would allow all members in this Assembly to lock arms to prevent certain kinds of government spending from occurring during election campaigns. As I have pointed out previously in this Assembly, it is a measure that the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, now Premier, called for on November 19 of last year. I have to confess that there was awkwardness and there was misunderstanding in the Chamber, but I still ask: is this government co-operators, or is it not? If the hon. House leader would bear with me as I wrap up my final paragraphs, do the members across the way know how to co-operate? If so, they need to show this to the members and the Speaker.

Madam Speaker, there was a famous newspaper headline that was shown in a movie about Nelson Mandela, where in the morning after his winning the election in South Africa a newspaper headline boldly said: he can win an election, but can he run a country? Rather than being offended by the brash headline, Mr. Mandela responded by saying to a couple of his colleagues: it's a fair question.

I, too, have a fair question, Madam Speaker, and a question in this same fair-minded view. These members across the way won an election, but now can they show the members of this Assembly and the people of Alberta that they can do more than that? Can they show the members of this Assembly that they know how to put down partisanship and co-operate when it is clearly in the public interest to do so? This motion could have been passed in this Assembly easily, and I wish to rest my case.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[Motion carried unanimously; Bill 203 read a second time]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I move that Bill 203, Election (Restrictions on Government Advertising) Amendment Act, 2015, be referred to the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee.

[Motion carried]

Bill 204

Residential Tenancies (Safer Spaces for Victims of Domestic Violence) Amendment Act, 2015

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms Drever: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am honoured to rise today to commence the second reading of the Residential Tenancies

(Safer Spaces for Victims of Domestic Violence) Amendment Act, 2015.

This bill will help bring down some of the barriers for survivors of domestic violence who are fleeing unsafe homes. This small change to the Residential Tenancies Act will have a huge impact on those who feel that they are unable to leave an abusive partner for fear of the financial implications of breaking a lease.

3:40

The month of November marks Family Violence Prevention Month. For us here in the Legislature, we should be reflecting on the barriers facing survivors of domestic violence. How can we remove these barriers to ensure that survivors and their families can live their lives free of fear and uncertainty?

Across Canada over the last few weeks provincial governments have been examining how to better protect survivors of domestic violence. How can we remove these barriers so that they can feel believed when breaking the cycle of domestic violence? I applaud the legislation introduced by the Ontario government amending their Residential Tenancies Act as well as the government of Manitoba, who today during their throne speech promised paid leave for victims of domestic violence, a first in Canada and a much-needed step forward.

Bill 204 was drafted over the last few months after many consultations with stakeholders such as police services, women's shelters, market and nonmarket landlords, housing organizations, and advocacy groups. The stakeholders I worked with all told me that in our province women don't feel safe because it is no longer safe for them to leave their homes.

It happens all the time, Madam Speaker. When women are in situations of family violence, it's messy and complicated, and the logistical challenges can create unneeded barriers. We need a strong structure to empower women by creating safer spaces and dismantling barriers. These women are already victimized and already distrustful thanks to a culture that tells them that no one will believe them.

There is no mention of domestic violence in the Residential Tenancies Act. In order to end domestic violence, we need to take a collaborative approach. In a letter I received from a landlord, the landlord highlighted the need for this legislation, that survivors of domestic violence need to have the freedom and security to seek help, that survivors' interaction with their landlords can be one that promotes change and facilitates a safer dialogue, and as the landlord put it, "It is a no-brainer." Victims of domestic violence should not fear repercussions when leaving a violent situation.

Again, I want to repeat that in our current Residential Tenancies Act there are no mentions of domestic violence, and there are no protections for survivors of domestic violence. These survivors trying to break the cycle of violence face numerous social and financial barriers.

I would now like to read you verbatim some quotes from women currently staying in women's shelters in Calgary. These women had to flee for their safety and understand all too well the challenges that survivors of domestic violence face when trying to change their situation. Quote: my husband didn't want his name on the lease; if the bills were under my name, they were my responsibility. End quote. Quote: I had to leave because my name was not on the lease, and my landlord sided with my partner. End quote. As you can see here, Madam Speaker, these experiences are quite diverse. Quote: I remember a woman who needed an emergency protection order for the police to remove her partner from the apartment; her worry was that he would damage the unit and leave her to pay for it because his name was not on the lease. End quote. Quote: I never wanted

my name on the lease; it makes me nervous; what if I have to leave?
End quote.

We must do better. To put this into perspective, Madam Speaker, in Calgary alone 4 out of 10 people are or have been in relationships that are abusive or showing signs of abuse. If I were to go out with my friends, it might be one of them or one of their friends. This is an issue that affects us all. It crosses all socioeconomic levels in this province. Approximately 200,000 adults in Alberta live with family violence across all ages, income levels, and ethnicities. It has been stated by Andrea Silverstone, co-chair of the Calgary domestic violence committee, that even one incident of family violence is too much. I think we can all agree on that statement.

These survivors have to make a tough decision not only for themselves but also for the safety of their families. We need to support their ability to break the cycle of domestic violence by working with them to break that silence.

According to a 2012 Leger survey 1 in 10 men in Alberta said that it was okay to hit a woman if she made him feel really angry. Madam Speaker, we have a problem in this province when it comes to violence. It is well known that 1 in 3 women will experience violence, but only 1 in 10 of them will actually report it. The Canadian coalition for policy alternatives' annual study on women's equality in Canada remarked that 70 per cent of incidents of domestic violence go unreported. Over the last five years 7.6 per cent of Albertans have reported having experienced domestic violence. Our province can't even begin to support survivors through traditional measures when those who have experienced violence don't even have a way to support themselves to get out.

Women make up 85 per cent of survivors of domestic violence, but let me be clear that this legislation will help all Albertans who are survivors of domestic violence. Since introducing this bill, I have heard from Albertans all across the province. They are hopeful that we as legislators are having this discourse. They are hopeful that this bill will begin an open dialogue as we work towards breaking that stigma around domestic violence. Survivors of domestic violence are hopeful that this bill will help those in similar circumstances. Organizations and advocacy groups who work with survivors of domestic violence on a daily basis are hopeful that this will support options for escaping violence and helping families move towards a healthy life.

We must put partisan politics aside to find solutions. I ask you to take that step with me as we move forward towards an Alberta free of violence. Albertans are ready to bring their voices to the discussion on ending domestic violence, violence against women, and violence against indigenous women. By having this discussion here and acknowledging the barriers in place, we will be sending the message that survivors can step out of the shadows. That is what Albertans want, and we must strive towards it. This bill is a first step. This bill will remove barriers that currently face survivors trying to flee their abusers and will help break that cycle of violence.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I look forward to this important dialogue.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. First of all, I want to thank the Member for Calgary-Bow for bringing forward this bill. I really truly applaud her efforts to help protect women fleeing violence and domestic abuse. Especially in the month of November, that's really fitting. Good timing. The spirit of this legislation is actually really important, and it deserves really thoughtful consideration. I've spoken with many interested parties since the bill was first

introduced and have had really meaningful conversations with many of those. I hope to hear more feedback from Albertans after second reading.

I know this bill will take an important step in removing a barrier to families that are escaping domestic violence. When an individual is trying to escape a terrible situation of violence and domestic abuse, the last thing that should be stopping them is a rental agreement. Sadly, for some victims of domestic violence this situation could literally be life or death. According to Stats Canada in 2013 there were more than 10,000 reported cases of domestic violence in Alberta, a rate of 623 per 100,000 people and more than twice the national rate. Domestic violence is a large problem in Alberta's society, and sadly, as our economy worsens, so too does the domestic violence in our communities. I know that my community is seeing an increase in domestic violence as our economy slows down.

3:50

When women escape a violent situation, they can face difficulties in finding the resources that they need. According to the Alberta Council of Women's Shelters' recent annual report 10,205 women and children found haven at provincial shelters. Sadly, nearly twice that number, 19,251, were turned away for lack of space. A victim is most vulnerable immediately after leaving an abusive relationship and trying to find somewhere new to live. The first 24 hours are crucial. Shelters and social housing must be available to meet the needs of victims of domestic violence and their children that may be fleeing a volatile situation.

In my community of Airdrie a dedicated group of volunteers is working hard to open a women's shelter so that women can stay in our community with their children instead of relocating all the way to Calgary, often away from family and community support, and very often there's no room there either.

I want to take a quick second to applaud this government on its plan to increase space in women's shelters across this province. There is no more important role by a government than to ensure that vulnerable Albertans are protected.

As I said previously, Alberta ranks dead last of all the provinces in Canada when it comes to domestic violence. There is much in Alberta we can be proud of, but we certainly need to improve in this area. The road is long, and the work is hard. However, just because the task is difficult, it doesn't mean we don't start.

Bill 204 would allow a victim of domestic abuse to get a certificate, and after providing notice to their landlord along with their certificate, they must be released from their lease agreement. This change could remove one large financial barrier for someone living in fear and help make the decision to leave easier. I certainly believe in the spirit of this legislation and the work that it is aiming to do to make Alberta safer for victims of domestic violence. Ending the stigma that surrounds domestic violence is so important, and legislation like Bill 204 could be a big part of doing just that.

There are some concerns that I do have surrounding the logistics of the legislation such as from whom a victim of domestic violence can receive a certificate or, perhaps, the unintended consequences that victims may face moving forward and securing housing. However, these questions and clarifications that I have about the legislation will be best served through discussion in Committee of the Whole.

I know that this one bill, Bill 204, will not stop domestic violence; it won't fix the problem overnight. No one bill could hope to achieve that goal. The journey away from domestic violence starts with a step, one brave step, when you finally say: no more. This one bill, Bill 204, will take a step in helping to improve the situation for just one individual. My hope is this, that Bill 204 will remove a

barrier from someone, which will enable them to take that first step away from a violent situation and not be stopped for financial reasons and kept in a cycle of violence. Nobody wants that, Madam Speaker. Domestic violence is the very pitfall in our society, one that we must fight every day to overcome. As I said earlier, no one bill or sweeping proclamation will accomplish just that. However, small steps will make up to a whole, and possibly someday bills such as 204 will not be needed.

I commend the Member for Calgary-Bow for taking the initiative to introduce this legislation. We need to break the silence that surrounds domestic violence in our province and find tangible ways to end the cycle of violence. I believe that Bill 204 is on the right track to do just that.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I rise this afternoon to speak in favour of Bill 204 and commend the Member for Calgary-Bow for bringing it forward. In brief, anything we can do in this House to prevent domestic violence and protect victims of domestic violence is a good thing. The Alberta Council of Women's Shelters' most recent annual report showed that just over 10,000 women and children found haven at provincial shelters between April 2014 and March 2015. More disturbingly, nearly twice that number, 19,251, were turned away due to lack of space.

Now, I do want to praise this government for their recent investment in women's shelters. It is an important step. I also think it's important that we acknowledge the work that has gone on in Alberta. In many ways Alberta is a leading jurisdiction not just in this country but around the world in dealing with domestic violence through our court system, through organizations like HomeFront in Calgary, and other similar organizations around the province where domestic violence cases are seen in a specialized court. That's very important. It has greatly reduced the recidivism rate. It's a focus on counselling for those who are victims of domestic violence, for their children, and often for the perpetrators as well to learn that this is not an appropriate way to have a relationship, and it prevents future domestic violence, which is equally important.

A major issue, of course, that this bill deals with in domestic violence is the inability to leave the relationship. Being able to break a lease on reasonable notice would remove the financial and social hurdles to ending that relationship and preventing further abuse.

It's also important to note, Madam Speaker, that this bill is gender neutral, allowing for victims of domestic violence, both male and female, to ensure that they have options, but it is very important to note that the vast – vast – majority of victims of domestic violence are women.

This legislation also is based on other provinces' legislation. Quebec, Manitoba, and Nova Scotia all have similar legislation. Alberta would be the fourth province to have this legislation. It is an opportunity, then, for Alberta to take somewhat of a leadership role. The fact that other provinces beyond those three have not taken this up is certainly not a reason for this Assembly not to act.

I encourage all members to support this bill, and I once again thank the Member for Calgary-Bow for bringing forward this important issue. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm very pleased to stand in support of Bill 204, the residential tenancies amendment act, and again I thank the member for bringing this forward. I

recently attended a walk for a women's shelter in Lac La Biche. At that time, the previous day, we had just been introduced to Bill 204. I asked the front-line workers and management of that facility to have a look at Bill 204 and provide their input, which I think is very important. They're the ones dealing with these issues on a daily basis, and it is imperative that we have their input to ensure that we get this very important piece of legislation right the first time.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise in support of Bill 204 and say: it is about time. Thank you very much, hon. member, for putting it forward.

Did you read *Insight: Domestic Silence in the Edmonton Journal* on Saturday?

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, there is a tradition in this House that we don't allow props.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Okay. Sorry.

On September 5, 1972, five days after I was married, I realized that there was a problem but could not put my finger on it. Words were spoken, and I felt a shiver on my back and a knot in my stomach. I didn't know it then, but the trap was being set, and I was the game.

The trap was released to some degree on Sunday, July 19, 1981, almost nine years later, when my daughters and I got on a Greyhound bus for a very difficult 62-hour journey across the country, ending in Yellowknife. The trap was finally broken in May of 1992 when I learned that my ex-husband was dead, and I could stop looking over my shoulder.

4:00

My support for this bill comes from the middle of this experience in this trap, a trap that was, intentionally or unintentionally, supported by society. Silence, blame, guilt, and little to no support grew this injustice for decades if not centuries.

Three times I left with my kids, twice I went to shelters, and twice I was forced to return or live on the street. Both times I returned, and the violence got worse, and the threats, which he could have carried out at any time, became more frequent and more intimidating. Broken bones, black eyes, sexual assault, and two miscarriages as a result of this abuse were only some of the physical atrocities I had to endure.

I did not have this kind of experience in my life before I was married, so I was not prepared for it nor for how I could protect my children and myself. I prayed. I asked God: "Why is this happening to me? I'm a good person. I've never intentionally hurt anybody or anything in my life." Someone said to me: God helps those who help themselves. I figured I needed to do something, and I did. I finally got away to a women's shelter and tried to figure out what to do and where to go. Suffice to say, this attempt was unsuccessful as the limit at the shelter was two weeks, and I had nowhere to go. At the end of the two weeks I was forced to return.

The next time I left I was a little more prepared. I had contacted a lawyer before I left. I saved some money and then left again when I saw the chance to run. I met with the lawyer, but I couldn't get a court date for a month. The time in the shelter was only three weeks. Again I had to go back. There were no supports left after the shelter. This time the abuse was so bad that I thought I would be killed, especially when I awoke from a very tentative sleep with a gun to the back of my head and the clicking sound of the hammer as the trigger was pulled. There were no bullets in the gun, and he laughed hysterically. He beat me, he raped me, and then he threatened that

the next time there would be bullets and that he would kill our daughters first to hurt me and then kill me. I knew it would be just a matter of time before he followed through on these threats. I called the police as soon as I could, and he was arrested and then released on his own recognizance, and a restraining order was put in place.

I gathered whatever I could, I begged some friends and family for some money to get out of there, and I called the police 16 times in two weeks before he was arrested again, not so much for assaulting me but because he broke the restraining order. This time he was held in remand until the issue was settled in court. In court he was found guilty and sentenced to a year in jail, but this sentence was suspended, all but the days he'd spent in remand. He turned, and as he was leaving the courtroom, he said that he would kill me. I asked the judge how he could let him go. The judge said to me: it's a marital issue; get a divorce, and leave. He proceeded then to give me a lecture on how much it was going to cost to keep him in jail.

When I returned to my house, he was there, holding my children and my mother-in-law at the point of a gun. At the end of a four-hour ordeal his mother rose and asked God to help us, and he ran from the house. We spent a few more days barricaded in the house before we finally had the opportunity to get out and get on that bus and run for our lives.

This should never have happened to me or these situations to anybody else. My children have been scarred for their lives, and I will be horrified if anybody in this Chamber votes against this bill.

Thank you. [Standing ovation]

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member, for sharing that very painful experience with us.

The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you for sharing your story with us today. I rise in support of this bill, and I'm honoured to rise in support of this bill. Statistically the most dangerous time in an abusive relationship is the time after the victim leaves the abuser. Leaving an abusive relationship is a difficult process, and we can make it easier by passing legislation that helps remove these barriers to leaving.

The RCMP in Leduc estimate they will respond to around 427 domestic violence calls this year, representing approximately only 20 per cent of those actually affected in our community by family violence. If the reporting rates reflected the rate of incidents, the number would actually be around 2,135 cases. As was said before, one is too many. Families in Leduc-Beaumont can go to the closest women's shelter, which is the Camrose Women's Shelter, but they need the ability to break a lease without penalty in order to move on.

Families leave abusive homes with few possessions and resources, and they need to be able to make this clean break with as little connection to the abuser as possible. Some of the barriers to leaving an abuser are the costs of starting over, legal proceedings, and the fear a victim may have of being around their abuser another time. If this legislation is passed, a victim can break a lease without needing their abuser's consent, so it removes a potential block from them for leaving or another opportunity for violence. This pertains to women and men equally.

In many cases the decision to leave or stay hinges on challenges the victim may face after leaving, which includes providing for themselves or their children, not wanting to raise their children in poverty and fear and escalating violence, and the complexity of their relationship with their abuser. These citizens, already victimized and already distrustful thanks to a culture that tells them that no one will believe them, don't want to break a lease and run

from a landlord. They just want to keep themselves and their children safe. This bill is another step forward following the I Believe You campaign. We as a government need to show survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault that we do believe them and that this government is committed to giving them back their voice. We need to empower people to take that first step in breaking the cycle of violence.

Madam Speaker, it is almost 2016. We as men need to do better, we as a Legislature need to do better, and we as a society need to do better. I urge everyone to support this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. An honour to stand in support of Bill 204, Residential Tenancies (Safer Spaces for Victims of Domestic Violence) Amendment Act, 2015. I want to commend the member for her courageous statement. There's nothing like putting a human face on some of the issues that we're talking about. Having spent the last three months on the mental health and addictions review, I can tell you that there are a lot of stories that are important for us to hear that have to do with people with both mental health issues and addictions not getting the support they need, whether it's in the form of housing or if it's in the form of addictions treatment and mental health treatment, that end up in situations that put partners, spouses, others, children at risk.

This bill proposes to amend the act to make it easier for victims of domestic violence to leave an abusive partner or spouse and to establish a process for them to terminate tenancy early and without a penalty. Clearly, everything we can do to make it easier for women and children and partners of any gender relationship to be freed from danger is good.

4:10

Alberta has historically had one of the highest rates of domestic violence in the country. It has to do, I think, with not only the culture that we've grown out of. To some extent, I guess, we all recognize the unique features of Alberta's history and how it's created sometimes the conditions for abusive relationships. It hasn't challenged the environment of abusive relationships. Bullying, mental illness, and addictions, that contribute to that, have not been addressed as aggressively as one would hope. Also, particularly now with the economic downturn in our province and the shortage of women's shelters in this province, it's my understanding that we turned away 14,000 visits last year. I and others, I think, are grateful that this government has stepped up with more support for women's shelters this year, definitely an important step in reducing this appalling rate of domestic violence.

Many of you may know the former Liberal MLA for Edmonton-Highlands-Beverly, Alice Hanson, famous in these areas for her private member's bill, Bill 214, the Victims of Domestic Violence Act, from 1996. That was a groundbreaking piece of legislation that made it possible for a victim to obtain an emergency protection order – in 1996 – granting exclusive occupation of his or her residence for a specified period. Importantly, Hanson's private member's bill acknowledged that perhaps the greatest barrier victims face to escaping an abusive spouse or partner is not wanting to be on the street, such a basic, basic protection and disincentive. This is particularly true in situations with children, of course.

The bill sought at that time to rectify this decades-old injustice by establishing a simplified mechanism whereby a judge could order the abuser to leave and impose additional restrictions. Despite the fact that Hanson's Bill 214 enjoyed widespread support on both

sides of the House, the PC government actually hoisted the bill, effectively killing it. Two years later, in what many viewed as a fairly cynical and petty move, the Klein government introduced and passed Bill 19, the Protection Against Family Violence Act, which was essentially a repackaging of Alice Hanson's legislation as a government bill.

We enthusiastically support this bill on this side of the House in the Alberta Liberal caucus and proudly reference Alice Hanson's legacy in encouraging a new way of addressing domestic violence in the province. Any measures that we can consider that would make it easier for victims of violence to be identified and protected should be considered, and I applaud the proponent of this amendment.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Mr. Connolly: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the Member for Lethbridge-East for her impassioned speech. It is my pleasure to support the Member for Calgary-Bow's Bill 204. The Member for Calgary-Bow has worked with stakeholders to put together a bill that will have immediate impact for survivors of domestic violence if passed. While this bill is a small change, it's a big step forward to make it easier for survivors of domestic violence to find new housing if needed. This bill would allow survivors to flee an abusive environment without the fear of repercussions for breaking a lease. We have an opportunity to empower people to leave potentially life-threatening situations, to break the cycle of violence. Everything should be done to give power back to the survivors of domestic violence and their families. Anyone leaving a violent situation should not have to pay a financial penalty.

Even today some still ask why people being abused don't leave. If it's a life-or-death choice, why stay? The truth is that it's not as simple as picking up and leaving. For some it's a choice between one volatile situation and another, which is not a choice at all. When survivors leave abusers, the risk that that violence will escalate increases. The abusive partner may control the finances or be the sole source of finances for the family. The abusive partner may have destroyed the survivor's credit or forced joint accounts, so starting over financially is not feasible.

In research done by Statistics Canada it was found that after separation a woman's standard of living decreases by 23 to 29 per cent. The act of leaving an abusive partner or family member is already a difficult decision, with potential legal battles ahead. Survivors may need to file for divorce, divide assets, and fight for custody. The last thing anyone in that position needs is possible legal action from a disgruntled landlord.

A recent Alberta survey showed that 90 per cent of Albertans polled believe that family violence prevention should be an urgent priority for the government of Alberta. As a government we have a responsibility to help and protect people when they are in greatest need. Any small change we can make to help survivors of domestic violence should be made, and our government wants to do just that. We ran on a platform of improving gender equality here in Alberta.

According to a study from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives Calgary ranks as the third-worst Canadian city for women. This needs to change, and that change must come from us. That's why I support the Member for Calgary-Bow's bill.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today in support of Bill 204. You know, I've had the privilege of being around the precinct area for the last number of years in one capacity or another, and I can look to a few times in the House that I will never forget. Today is one of those days. The bravery and the courage that were shown today by the Member for Lethbridge-East are hard to even comprehend, not only in the horrific, horrific situation, but the bravery that she displayed again today is absolutely incredible, and I am privileged and honoured to be here and to support in whatever capacity I can moving this bill forward and just being so thankful for your comments and your bravery, both then as well as today. So for that I say thank you.

I'd also like to say thank you to the Member for Calgary-Bow for bringing this important piece of legislation forward. As my hon. colleague from Airdrie mentioned, the road to ending domestic abuse is a long, long, horrific road, and it is so disheartening, in a time that we live in today, that we still have to go down that road. It's disheartening to know that even this evening there will be people in their very homes who fear for their lives and for their children's lives. I can't begin to comprehend what that must be like, to walk up to the doorstep of the place that's supposed to be the safest only to find the horrors that wait beyond that door.

It's so, so disappointing that we have to, in a time like today, put into place preventive measures for this. It's my hope that we will get to a place right across this country and in this province where this sort of legislation isn't needed, because we can all treat each other in a manner that we are worthy of being treated in, but unfortunately we're not there, so we need to take the steps that are necessary to do the things that we can do. It's my belief that one of the very most important things that we can do as legislators is to protect the most vulnerable, and that's exactly what I believe the intent of this piece of legislation is, with the goal of ensuring that the most vulnerable Albertans are protected.

4:20

I know that as the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills I will be pleased to support this piece of legislation, as I believe all of my colleagues will support this piece of legislation, that is critically important to taking a first step down that long and painful journey to ending domestic abuse and violence.

Having said that, I look forward to hearing more of the debate. I also look forward to reaching out to some stakeholders. We play a critical role: to make sure that we get the legislation right, just like the hon. member who proposed it, just like the private members on the government side and the private members here, to ensure that we're doing everything that we can to strengthen the legislation, to make sure we're getting it right, to consulting with stakeholders – I know that I've heard from one stakeholder, and I look forward to hearing from others – just to make sure that we continue to do our due diligence. That's not to say that we shouldn't expedite the process but to make sure that we're hearing back and that we do get it right because it's so critically important that we get it right. If this piece of legislation only helps one Albertan fleeing from a horrible, horrible situation, it will have been worth it.

For that I say thank you to the Member for Calgary-Bow and to the members of this House, and I look forward to seeing this important piece of legislation moved through the stages of debate, and hopefully one day we can point back to this day, when the bravery and courage that we saw today and the willingness of the member to propose it will in fact have helped, hopefully, more than just one, but even if it's just one, it's enough.

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

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you, Member for Calgary-Bow, for bringing this bill forward, and thank you, Member for Lethbridge-East, for having the courage this afternoon to rise and speak your story. As a social worker and as an individual I have worked in women's shelters and with women and children and families in the community fleeing domestic violence. Statistically a woman is abused an average of 35 times before she finds the courage to come forward and tell someone. Edmonton-based women's shelter WIN House has stated that 267 women and 365 children reported family violence in 2014-15. A total of 2,022 crisis calls were made during this time. As I have stated before in this Assembly, Edmonton and Calgary rank second- and third-worst respectively as safe Canadian cities for women according to a July 2015 Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives study. This needs to change.

Shelters, police services, advocacy organizations: all have suggested that in our province women don't feel safe because there is no safe way for them to leave their home. These women, already victimized and already distrustful thanks to a culture that tells them that no one will believe them, do not want to break a lease and run from a landlord. They just want to keep themselves and their children safe. This bill will allow survivors of domestic violence to flee from an unsafe environment without the fear of repercussions of breaking a lease. While we are only making a small change with this bill to the Residential Tenancies Act, it can save lives. It can ensure that those who are in unsafe homes can leave without financial penalty. We must put partisan politics aside to act in the greater good of all Albertans.

Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you, Member.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to the bill? Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. In all honesty, there's not that much I can add to the debate that hasn't been said already today, certainly most so with the powerful words we heard from the Member for Lethbridge-East, for which I thank her very much. I do just want to take a moment to say thank you to the Member for Calgary-Bow for introducing this bill. It was only a few short weeks ago that I received an e-mail from my constituency assistant, my caseworker, bringing to my attention a recent case that we had dealt with in our office, where a 64-year-old woman, a senior citizen, had been forced to flee her home to a shelter operated by SAGE here in Edmonton. My caseworker at that point raised this to my attention and indicated her concern with the difficulties with the Residential Tenancies Act. So it was with great pleasure that I saw the introduction of Bill 204 last week and had the opportunity to share that with my caseworker, who was very pleased to see it as well.

I did just want to take a moment today to recognize that this is legislation that's badly needed. I thank the member for bringing it forward, and I look forward to showing my support.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am proud to stand today in support of Bill 204, introduced by the Member for Calgary-Bow, whom I've had the privilege of working alongside with on this bill, because it's necessary. Ending the cycle of poverty is something that we need to take action on, and I think it's been made clear with situations such as casework, with experiences shared here. It takes a co-operative approach to do it. It takes landlords, it takes government, and it takes a system that makes people feel like they are supported when they take that brave step, because it's hard.

It's hard to decide that they are going to leave their home even if they are in that situation. So the solutions that are proposed by this amendment are commendable. They're a fresh perspective, and that's what I hope the young members of this Legislature continue to bring forward.

I've worked continuously throughout my life as an advocate for vulnerable people, and with this amendment we'll see us building a broad scope of skills and tools that are available to the social workers, to the police force, to everyone that helps aid and support the people in this situation. To us it's frustrating. It's frustrating to know that it can be a piece of paper that keeps them there, that keeps the cycle of poverty continuing. It's something as simple as this that starts creating a system that actually supports the empowerment of our people, starts ending the cycle of poverty.

I commend the Member for Calgary-Bow for coming up with this idea, for putting in the work with consultation, and I'm proud to be supporting it today. I know that in Strathcona county there are multiple initiatives, and there is constant talk of how we're going to address the issue of family violence. There are initiatives such as men as allies, where we talk about the role of every single individual, from men to women, addressing that everyone needs to be involved in ending this. Having those conversations that educate men and women on how to create healthy relationships is also part of that conversation because healthy relationships and talking about that are critical to actually developing the end of this goal, because that's when we'll see the end of the cycle.

I know that in moving forward with this, we'll have to debate the details of this bill, and it is with that that I'm looking forward to the Committee of the Whole discussion. I'm looking forward to supporting this bill.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Ms Miller: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you, MLA for Lethbridge-East, for sharing your story. It's very near and dear to my heart. I'm rising today in support of Bill 204. This bill is a step towards change. We need to help people take that first step to break the cycle of domestic violence. Domestic violence affects males, females, young, old, wealthy, and poor. We as a government need to show victims that we believe them and support them and that we are committed to giving them back their voice. This is a much-needed step to ending the cycle of violence.

Thank you to the Member for Calgary-Bow for bringing it forward.

4:30

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm rising in support of Bill 204. I wanted to discuss it because it's a step towards a larger discourse in this province that needs to happen. Intimate partner violence flourishes in an environment where the misuse of power against the vulnerable or less powerful is tolerated. That environment may be behind closed doors or in the larger community, and we see it with bullying all the time. That's why we need to work to prevent violence and build a society where this is not tolerated anymore.

We've heard from the member herself that one of the most common reasons for a survivor of domestic violence to stay is because they feel they can't leave their home or they haven't been successful getting the abuser to leave. All forms of violence and abuse are serious criminal matters, with a huge impact on society.

Personally, I wanted to talk a little bit about the impact this has on our children and the cycle and the future of what this means. Generally speaking, people aren't abusive unless they've been abused. If we can stop the cycle now, we can stop the next generation of children from growing up in this and stop the next generation of adults from abusing other people. That's so, so important. There are estimates that in 30 to 40 per cent of reported cases where the partner is abused, so are the children. However, there's a growing understanding that simply witnessing intimate partner violence in their home can affect these children the same way that abuse directed at them would affect them. The first step for anyone in or close to an abusive relationship is to get help, and this bill can help with that.

About a year and a half ago in the city of Spruce Grove there was a woman who was killed by her partner. She had five children, and the lives of those children are forever impacted by that. Forever impacted. There is no positive that comes out of intimate partner violence.

We talk about domestic violence survivors; they're all victims first. Things like this bill, tools, can help them become survivors, not just victims.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I hesitate to rise to speak to this bill, but I've been on a journey for the last six, seven years trying to help victimization in families. My wife is a social worker, and she saw the need for providing an opportunity for victims of family violence to escape their situation. For a period of three years we had a facility that we allowed a foundation to operate in our community as a shelter. We learned a lot through that, the committee that was involved, and it's a very complex issue. This is one piece of a very complex puzzle. We can start today by fixing some of the hurdles that are faced by victims of violence. I commend the Member for Calgary-Bow for bringing it forward, and I thank her for that.

I also recognize that we have a duty and a responsibility to also work towards being able to more easily provide services to those victims beyond the two weeks, beyond the three weeks to allow the system to operate more freely and efficiently to get these shelters approved and actually operating. I am currently working with a group in Morinville, the Jessica Martel Memorial Foundation, and look forward to trying to help them move forward with a facility that can bring relief in this area and that some of the learnings that my wife and I have been able to experience previously will be able to help them to set up housing that can be more sustainable long term.

I speak in favour, and I find it very refreshing that we can as legislators come together around this issue and recognize the need to try and help as much as possible. This is one piece of the very complicated puzzle of starting to stem and break that cycle of violence in our homes.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any others wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Hinkley: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just want to add a few more elements to this debate. We have already done a number of things because it is a very complex issue. We have formed the Status of Women ministry. It's one of the pieces. We have put \$15 million to annually increase supports as well. We are in the I Believe You campaign. So we are taking all of these steps, and this

is just one more part of that picture. I do want to support this particular motion.

The aspect or perspective that I want to bring is First Nations victims and victims in rural areas, where a women's shelter may not even exist. They do need an option of some place to go. That would mean leaving the community, and leaving it for two weeks or three weeks and coming back is not the solution. So as important as women's shelters are, if there are none there, there does need to be a more permanent option, and this safe place, safe tenancy may offer that option for those people.

Again, I would just like to close very quickly by mentioning that in my constituency Camrose does have a women's shelter. There were many hundreds of women and children in particular who were helped there, but there were more who were not able to even receive that assistance. So it's very important that we continue to support women's shelters and provide the second one. In Camrose they did receive 107 ladies self-identified as aboriginals. I applaud the Camrose Women's Shelter for accepting those ladies, but it points out to me that we need to provide support everywhere throughout Alberta. This may be a motion that would help make that available and possible.

Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Feehan: Thank you. I'd like to start, of course, by thanking the members for Calgary-Bow and Lethbridge-East for the strength and power that they have contributed to this House today. I also want to say that in many ways, after a 33-year career in the area of social work, particularly in the area of family violence, I feel that this is a profound moment for me to be a part of. So thank you both for doing that.

One thing I also want to remind the House is that this is merely a step in a much longer and more profound journey. What we've identified today is simply one structural barrier that women are facing as they flee family violence, and I would like us to continue to recognize that there are multiple other structural problems and barriers that make family violence possible and make resolving family violence difficult. If we're truly against family violence, then we need to ask ourselves about all of those other structural barriers as well. Every time that we see a lack of child care spaces, we should see a structural barrier. Every time that we see a lack of women's voices in our schools or in our hospitals or in our Legislature, we should see a structural barrier. Every time we diminish public services that overwhelmingly support women to achieve success, we create structural barriers.

I want us to continue to have this conversation and continue to identify these structural barriers and stand proud again and again and again to reduce and eliminate each of these structural barriers. Let us not forget that this is one step amongst many.

Thank you.

4:40

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and I thank the Member for Calgary-Bow for bringing this bill forward. Having worked in the area of criminal law and criminal defence, also having worked with the Elizabeth Fry Society in Edmonton, in the domestic violence courtroom particularly, one of the issues that I saw come forward regularly would be that the police would charge the abuser, and the victim and abuser would attend court. The victim, being the leaseholder in many situations, however maybe not the income

earner, would find themselves in a situation where they would be wanting to undo their having called the police, not by reason of not having been assaulted, which they typically were, but by reason of concern for their financial well-being and future. Their goal in trying to persuade the police and court services workers that we didn't need to proceed with charges against the abuser was that they were concerned about being able to pay the rent.

I think that this piece of legislation provides an out for women who find themselves in that situation. While it may seem like that is a specific circumstance, it's not unique by any means. This was something that occurred regularly, that we would have women, in particular, coming forward and saying that they were concerned about their ability to pay the rent, so they wanted to be able to undo the process that had begun with respect to charging the abuser and the order of protection that had then been placed and prevented them from returning.

This piece of legislation does some good work with respect to giving power to victims to not have to concern themselves so greatly with the financial repercussions of having taken the bold steps of making a complaint to the police in the first place. I commend the Member for Calgary-Bow. I think that this is an excellent step forward when discussing victims of domestic violence and the peripheral circumstances that affect them.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any others? The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'd like to indicate as well my support for this bill, Bill 204, Residential Tenancies (Safer Spaces for Victims of Domestic Violence) Amendment Act, 2015. I think this act by no means deals with all of the issues relative to intimate partner violence and tendencies, but it deals with some very core pieces in a very, very significant way and is a major step forward, as far as I'm concerned, in the objective of all members of the House of making life safer for families and for children.

I want to commend the hon. member for this piece of legislation. This, in my view, is an exemplary piece of legislation as a private member's bill. The hon. member has worked very hard in terms of reaching out and doing the kinds of outreach that is necessary, talking to a wide range of groups – police agencies, people who deal with women and families who are facing domestic violence, including shelters – and a whole range of organizations. I want to commend the hon. member for her work. This is the kind of work as a private member that I think sets a high standard for all of us, and I just want to pay tribute to the hon. member and her hard work in putting this particular piece of legislation forward. I think it's wonderful.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any others wishing to speak to the bill?
Seeing none, the hon. member to close debate.

Ms Drever: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is an honour to close the debate on the second reading of the Residential Tenancies (Safer Spaces for Victims of Domestic Violence) Amendment Act, 2015. I would like to thank the constituents of Calgary-Bow, the stakeholders who helped shape this bill, and my fellow MLAs here for continuing the discourse on ending violence here in this province.

I would also like to specifically thank the Member for Lethbridge-East for sharing her very personal and moving experience with domestic violence. Thank you for showing Albertans that this issue affects us all. You are a role model, and I commend you for your

strength and courage. I believe your story highlights the struggles that women face still to leave an abusive situation.

We all have a role to play when finding solutions to ending violence. Domestic violence does not discriminate and affects all Albertans across all demographics. This bill will help Albertans who are survivors of domestic violence by removing some of the barriers and allowing survivors to be heard. Let me be clear, Madam Speaker. The Residential Tenancies Act makes no mention of domestic violence. This bill proposes a small amendment which will have a great effect on the lives of survivors fleeing domestic violence and on their families. We are talking about everyday Albertans. These are our neighbours, our co-workers, our families, and our seniors. We need to enable them to be able to break the cycle of violence. This bill is a first step. We must take further action as a Legislature to work with stakeholders to come up with solutions to end violence in Alberta.

I have heard from many front-line organizations that deal with domestic violence on a daily basis – and I applaud them for the tireless work that they do; thank you – organizations such as Carya who are devoted to making stronger families and communities, who have shared with me their support.

I think it is admirable that the government is taking steps to increase the level of safety for those citizens experiencing domestic violence. Security of housing is a critical first step for those seeking to rebuild their lives in a violence free environment. This need for safety is . . . more pronounced when children are involved.

Organizations such as HomeFront who work with families in their homes to provide risk assessment, safety planning, and support have expressed their support, stating that Bill 204 will support options for escaping violence and helping families move towards healthier lives. I have received support from organizations such as the Calgary Housing Company who provide safe and affordable housing solutions to the citizens of Calgary. In their letter of support they state that this bill will essentially codify their current practices.

I want to thank the members of this Assembly for their support and their effort to continue the discourse on domestic violence here today. We must ensure that this dialogue acts as a first step as we move forward.

Thank you very much. [Standing ovation]

[Motion carried; Bill 204 read a second time]

Mr. Mason: Madam Speaker, having concluded debate on second reading of Bill 204 and with a view to dealing with the motion that is before us next, being Motion 504, I would request consent of the House to call it 5 o'clock.

4:50

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader has moved that we call it 5 o'clock.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Deputy Speaker: We will continue, then.

Motions Other than Government Motions

Regional Public Transit Service

504. Mr. Kleinsteuber moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to explore the feasibility of regional transit services in the province.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Northern Hills.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Madam Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to rise today and bring forward this important motion. The topic of transportation and regional transit is something that I have campaigned on in the past and a topic that I have discussed at the doors. It's my sincere hope that you'll join me today in supporting this motion, and hopefully this will be one step in the direction of better transit options for Albertans.

In a previous life, before becoming an MLA, I was employed in the transportation industry at Calgary airport. Prior to that, I was based in other Canadian cities, including Ottawa, Montreal, and Toronto. I've always supported public transit in cities where I've lived and places where I have travelled. I've witnessed some excellent examples of transportation networks within our own country and in other parts of the world, networks that could be applied to this province. I know my hon. colleague the Minister of Transportation appreciates public transit given his earlier career experience, and I don't think he's alone in the House here. There may be other members as well. I think he also has a true understanding of the value of public transit and the service it provides Albertans in both small and large communities.

When discussing highway congestion on the QE II, the minister suggested that we need to take a look at this as more than just a highway but as a transportation corridor. The objective of that corridor should be to move people and goods and not necessarily just vehicles. I think that visionary perspective is an excellent point for the discussion of this motion today. It is this understanding that has us leading the charge to expand our support for this useful opportunity across Alberta. I also think it would send a strong message to all Albertans that we can apply some of the successful initiatives in other jurisdictions in the world right here in the province of Alberta.

The feasibility of regional transit can come in many forms and areas. First, there are inner-city initiatives, and there's a precedent in Canada for provincially supported regional rail networks. In Montreal the AMT, the Agence métropolitaine de transport, operates from the island of Montreal, with an approximate population of 4 million, providing six lines of train service to cities such as Hudson, Saint-Eustache, and Saint-Philippe. In the city of Toronto, with an approximate population of 6 million, GO Transit provides about seven lines of service to surrounding areas such as Hamilton, Oshawa, and Whitby. Finally, Vancouver, with a population of about 2.3 million, has the West Coast Express service, with regional service to Waterfront Station in Mission, B.C. The service is said to recover about three-quarters of its revenue from its ridership. It should be noted that these regional train services are not high-speed rail, and in many cases they share the same rail lines with freight trains.

Could a similar transit service operate on the Calgary-Edmonton corridor with several stops in between? The city of Calgary has a population of 1.2 million, and Edmonton has about 870,000. That is a combined population of about 2 million people, which would be unique in Canada due to the proximity of these two cities and the amount of people that travel between them.

A regional transportation initiative must encourage development of a robust transportation network throughout Alberta communities large and small. In this spirit, a successful transit support initiative has been the Calgary Regional Partnership. This organization is currently working with communities on a regional bus service from Calgary to Nanton, High River, Okotoks, Black Diamond, and Turner Valley. Service has also been launched in other areas such as Airdrie and Calgary centre, with an Intercity Express, or ICE, bus service between these points. This organization helps municipalities take advantage of the GreenTRIP funding to support surrounding communities that connect to Calgary.

Certainly, there has been funding available for municipalities to develop their own transit initiatives as well. GreenTRIP funding has also been a successful tool in launching the Roam bus service within Banff and, further, helping Canmore get connected to that network. The intercity service there has been so successful that service frequency improvements have been added.

One of the problems with the GreenTRIP funding initiative is that it creates a patchwork of service throughout these communities that choose to be involved in the funding program rather than benefiting all communities that should be part of a regional transportation network. Clearly, we must do more to better connect Albertans who live in smaller communities to those centres within their region and beyond. Rural Alberta is part of the lifeblood that adds strength to this province. Many companies also consider access to transit as an important criterion when deciding where to locate their business for investment opportunities. Regional and local transit being in place provides labour force mobility for these businesses.

The final piece of the transit puzzle is also lending support to municipalities to improve their transportation networks. A transportation strategy should connect existing infrastructure within cities. In the case of Calgary the C-Train network has been linked up to connection hubs at C-Train stations. A good example of this has been, again, the Airdrie Intercity Express Service, that connects to the McKnight LRT station. Through this connection method extensive light rail transit networks within the cities of Calgary and Edmonton provide necessary connection hubs to regional transit services.

As we do this, by supporting new municipal transit initiatives that bring Albertans together, we will be doing more than providing a much-needed public service for Alberta families who need it. Through the various initiatives discussed here in this motion, the goals are consistent. We are hoping to mitigate traffic congestion and the need to perpetually widen highway corridors. Any time highways are widened, a cost is associated with that construction, and those costs should be compared to alternative transportation methods. In addition to cost comparisons, we will be supporting a cleaner environment by providing more people with access to public transportation, so they can choose public transit to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Our government's budget signals a clear commitment to supporting transit in communities throughout Alberta. My colleagues in the Legislature have the opportunity to signal their own support. I hope that the members from all parties in the Legislature agree that we can serve all Alberta families by voting in favour of this motion, which supports investigating the feasibility of regional public transit services.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Ms Miller: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today in support of this motion. We are fortunate in Red Deer and area to have this much-needed service. Lacombe and Blackfalds are able to utilize the BOLT regional transit service. Red Deer Transit services the towns of Penhold and Springbrook. This is a good start. We must encourage the development of larger regional transportation networks. There are so many towns, large and small, which would benefit from service. We must do more to better connect Albertans who live in smaller communities to those larger centres within their region.

I urge my colleagues from all parties in the Legislature to vote in favour of this motion so we can better serve all Alberta families.

Mrs. Schreiner: Madam Speaker and fellow colleagues, I support this motion brought forward to us today by the Member for Calgary-Northern Hills. I believe the recent funding on behalf of hon. Mason's green transit initiative in Red Deer underpins the importance of regional transit.

5:00

Red Deer is the third-largest city in Alberta and imparts considerable impact on the communities surrounding it. Currently we have municipal transportation that bridges the distance between Red Deer, Blackfalds, and Lacombe. The announcement to support further funding of our transportation system is geared to encompass Red Deer county. This includes accessibility to Gasoline Alley as well as our regional airport, which is also undergoing expansion.

This transportation initiative will directly impact an additional 20,000 rural Albertans within the surrounding Red Deer county who can easily access Red Deer as the central Alberta hub. To central Albertans this means that they will have better access to available services in Red Deer. It supports rural and urban connectivity and provides opportunities to foster healthy, sustainable communities.

Additionally, we can support environmental sustainability through the utilization of compressed natural gas, thus reducing greenhouse gas emissions. When we invest in transportation, we bridge geographic gaps. For Red Deer this means that we have contributed to the mobility of the lives of fellow Albertans while decreasing traffic congestion. As a result, these enhancements will improve access to jobs, schools, and services not only for those who do not drive but also for those who share our vision of a healthier Alberta.

Our decision to support the enhancement of a robust transportation system from Red Deer to surrounding municipalities has exemplified the commitment that we have promised Albertan families. The importance of this motion today is that it not only eases burdens on our Albertan families but supports a synergy amongst our municipal partners. By investigating the feasibility of regional public transit systems, we are letting Albertans know that we recognize the importance of affordable, reliable, environmentally sustainable transportation. Red Deer has been fortunate to witness first-hand the feasibility of this plan, and I encourage my colleagues from all parties to serve well our Alberta families and vote in favour of this motion.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak to Motion 504, urging the government to explore the feasibility of regional transit services in the province, and I place the emphasis on the word "explore." It is very good to scope out, examine, study, determine the benefits and the costs, and evaluate the merits of allocating taxpayer dollars to running regional transit services in the province.

In that fashion exploring the feasibility rather than going ahead with an ideological platform is commendable, but the NDP government has allocated \$330 million over the next three years in the capital plan for transit initiatives, so it already looks like the cart is being placed before the horse. Under questioning in estimates the Minister of Transportation indicated this \$330 million was for multiple municipalities to come together to develop regional transit systems. So we have a motion that wants to explore services, and we have a minister set to lay out capital on systems.

We know there are several regional transit services in existence already in the province. More often than not they are owned and/or

operated by the private sector. That in and of itself is an indication that some regional transit services are feasible or at least they are feasible until government decides to start crowding them out with its own tax-funded services. In the constituency of Highwood privately owned and operated Southland operates a commuter motorcoach service for the residents of High River and Okotoks to get into Calgary, and as the member has identified, over in Airdrie the city of Airdrie's own Intercity Express, operated by FirstCanada ULC, runs into Calgary.

But I am also aware of services that were not feasible. In my constituency of Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock St. Albert Transit, owned by the city of St. Albert and operated by Pacific Western, began running a transit bus from St. Albert to Morinville. The low ridership and lack of use was indicative that the route was not feasible, and it was discontinued. Down in Cochrane someone had a bright idea to run snazzy double-decker buses along highway 1A into Calgary, and that service also fizzled.

As you can see, Madam Speaker, the market determines the feasibility and viability of the service. Perpetual subsidies would be just throwing good money after bad. No one wants to see an empty bus on the road at great taxpayer expense spewing diesel exhaust. But then we have a minister who gets talking about regional transit systems and laying out capital dollars for it. When I hear the word "system," I hear more than one regional transit service bus interlining and providing connections. Buses are relatively inexpensive, but at \$330 million in the capital plan and the minister talking systems, I cannot help but think that the minister is talking about something far more ambitious.

Now, I'm not talking high-speed rail; I'm talking commuter rail is possible with that. For some time, Madam Speaker, many residents in the Calgary region have talked of running commuter trains to free congestion along highways 1 and 2, from Banff to Cochrane and on into Calgary; from Olds, Crossfield, and Airdrie on into downtown Calgary; even from High River and Okotoks to downtown; maybe even in the Edmonton region from Wabamun to Stony Plain, Spruce Grove, Acheson, and on in.

Madam Speaker, we know for a fact that the government of Alberta bought land in downtown Calgary for a train station at 9th Avenue and 4th Street S.E. We also know that the new Royal Alberta Museum in Edmonton was designed to have a train station added on. After all, the old remand centre across the street is no longer needed, giving up much land that can be repurposed for such a venture.

A \$330 million capital outlay seems to be in line with double and triple tracking, signalling stations and sidings, and park and ride lots. But will commuters ride the rails? On this question I turn to the Canadian Urban Transit Association, who indicated that, yes, people will take transit if it is rapid, limited in stops, and meets the right schedule.

So when the member opposite talks service, we know there is already service and where it is feasible. But when the minister talks systems and has a large capital outlay in his budget, I am unsure what he intends. I do not believe that all of the minister's \$330 million is for buses. At \$500,000 a bus, that's 660 buses. There has to be more going on in this fund than just buying buses.

We also have transit services for the elderly and disabled. They are not transit services per se, as they pick up and drop off at point to point, but they do provide public transportation services. People like the Rocky View handibus cannot replace their buses without charitable assistance or subsidies from the municipality or the province. As the province's population ages, services like the Rocky View handibus will be more important than ever before. Perhaps some of the minister's \$330 million will find its way to Rocky View handibus.

Madam Speaker, there are so many options to explore and consider, and the minister is putting money on the table to invest. We know that there are several regional services in existence already in the province. More often than not they are owned and/or operated by the private sector. That in and of itself is an indication that some regional transit services are feasible. I would hope that this government would be sure that they are providing services that are feasible and that they are careful not to start crowding out the private services with its own tax-funded services.

5:10

I will support this motion calling for feasibility studies, hoping that this government completes a thorough review and does not waste a lot of taxpayer dollars investing in transit schemes that are either not viable or that simply push out private operators providing a good service to Albertans already. I want to see the results of the government's feasibility study of regional transit services in the province before the minister starts investing.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour to rise today to support Motion 504. I had the great privilege to carpool several times with the Member for Calgary-Northern Hills, where he discussed the motion and the need for regional transit. I certainly hope that it wasn't my driving that provoked him to create this motion.

Some of the things that we talked about on our drives were connecting people in Alberta. One of the best things about Alberta is our wide-open spaces. That's something that we really hold dear as a value for Albertans, but that also presents some challenges, Madam Speaker. It presents some challenges of moving people from place to place for visiting, seniors to medical appointments.

You know, in my riding the member also mentioned the Roam Public Transit regional service between Banff and Canmore. That's something that I'm very proud of, that exists within my riding. It's been extraordinarily successful. It really represents a good model that we can look toward as a success story and something that we can build upon.

I also represent a rural riding, and I think that we can do a better job of connecting Albertans who live in small communities, get them connected to larger centres within their region and beyond. Rural Alberta is part of the lifeblood of what makes this province so special.

I've also managed to speak with some stakeholders in the hospitality sector in my riding, and they've talked about the difficulty of accessing labour. You know, in small centres like Banff and Canmore oftentimes finding enough workers and having a place for them to live represents big challenges for private industry. So providing those opportunities for Albertans to have increased mobility between centres would certainly go toward the labour challenges that are being faced there.

That also goes toward addressing the housing challenges. I know in the Bow Valley, finding housing, especially affordable housing, is a great challenge. So giving Albertans the ability to live in a centre that has more affordable housing but then also giving them access to work in a place like the mountain parks or in Canmore would certainly go toward solving the housing affordability problem as well.

Just in conclusion, I'm proud to stand up and support Motion 504, and I urge this Assembly to support it as well. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today to discuss some of the issues around Motion 504. You know, one of the challenges that we face in the House, in my opinion, is around motions. Oftentimes a motion can be so vague that it leaves more questions than answers, and other times there are very positive motions that come before the House.

Traditionally speaking, we haven't seen the government act that readily on motions that are passed in the House. I hope that the new government will see the value of some of those motions and, in fact, act on them. I know that the former Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills passed a motion called 508 that nobody has done anything with yet. I encourage the government to take a look at some of those, as many of them do cover some important issues.

Having said that, they also often are vague and a little bit unclear as to what the entire end goal of the motion is, so I appreciated the comments from the Member for Calgary-Northern Hills when he highlighted some of the things that the motion could accomplish.

In many respects studying things that are going to happen here or in the Legislature can be very positive. One concern that I do have, though, is that we only have a limited amount of time and resources in which to study. So if motions only become an hour of conversation with no follow-through because there aren't the resources, that's a concern.

You know, here we have a motion that perhaps might fall into that category because we have some significant number of studies in this area already. I think of the study by the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future, and I recognize that the Member for Calgary-Northern Hills' comments weren't specific to rail transportation along the highway 2 corridor, but he certainly did mention that that would be one of the things that this motion could encourage some study around.

I'm reminded of or I think back to just last year, in May, when a report was submitted to the House by the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future on the feasibility of establishing a high-speed rail transit system in Alberta, and a number of those recommendations. Even some folks here with us in the House this evening sat on this committee and would be very familiar with a bunch of those recommendations, including first and foremost that "the Government of Alberta should not invest in a high-speed rail transit system in the Edmonton-Calgary corridor at this time because the population of the corridor is not sufficient to support the profitable operation of such a system."

Now, some might say: "Well, that was last year. You know, the population has increased since that particular study was produced." But if one is so inclined to read such a fascinating piece of committee work, the committee went on to say that it would require a population of approximately 10 million Albertans to sustain such a system, and clearly in the last year we haven't seen an influx of nearly that many people.

So I get a little wary or concerned when we talk about doing things that have already been done in this place. While I recognize that the third party takes a lot of blame for things that have happened around here over the last number of years and rightfully so, generally speaking, here's a good study that, in fact, has studied the feasibility of regional transit services in the province. For us to go back down that road and rehash it, you know, I just am not convinced that it's an effective use of our time, of our staff's time, of committee time when we can be doing other things, in particular at a time like this, when the province is struggling to find the resources that it needs for its own operations and when we've seen a need and the government of the day decide that they will borrow for the day-to-day operations of this province.

One of the financial considerations that the committee heard was that high-speed rail would cost between \$5 billion and \$7 billion.

You know, some people in the government will say: it's only a motion; we're just going to study stuff. I think I've heard the hon. Minister of Transportation and of Infrastructure make remarks like that in the past, specifically around motions. But the fact of the day is that lots of this study has been done, so it would concern me if we went back down that road.

Now, having said all of that, the desire of the private member, Calgary-Northern Hills, is to try and ensure that we are doing what's right for Albertans, and if that means studying regional transportation services, I can accept that some good can come of that.

5:20

The challenge, again, is to ensure that we are making the most of our time and that we aren't doing tasks that would in fact be detrimental, similar to what my hon. colleague from Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock spoke about, driving private investment out of these sorts of services. You know, again, the motion isn't specific, but we have seen lots of situations in the past where private service providers do a wonderful job of getting great value for money and we see the government believing that it can do better than people on the front lines, so I am often hesitant when we head down that road.

Even with all of my reservation and hesitation I will support the motion today because I believe that ensuring we get things right is of critical importance.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise to speak to Motion 504, that the government be asked to "explore the feasibility of regional transit services in the province." I'd like thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Northern Hills for putting forward this motion. I think it's a worthwhile motion. It is, of necessity, a rather general motion, but I think that it is a useful one nonetheless.

Now, a couple of members opposite have gone to great lengths in terms of speculating what this might mean or what money contained in the budget for new transit services might be put towards, and I would just urge them to restrain their fantasies just a little bit about what it is that we're going to do because there's a great deal of work and consultation and study that has to take place before concrete proposals are brought forward. This kind of speculation is kind of fun, but I'm not sure how useful it is. One hon. member has us building a complete intercity rail system complete with signaling and stations and so on, and the hon. Wildrose House leader thinks we're going down the rabbit hole of building high-speed rail. You know, I think that neither one of them is particularly accurate.

We have allocated \$330 million in this capital plan for new transit initiatives, and I just want to talk a little bit about that because I think the reality is a lot more prosaic than the hon. members opposite have talked about. We will not be having flying cars. We will not be having, you know, teleportation, and the previous government finally got around to selling the government air force, so we won't be flying either.

Mr. Schmidt: What about sending Wildrose MLAs to space?

Mr. Mason: I'm not sure that that would be taken kindly by our friends on Mars, Madam Speaker.

But I think there are a number of things. We're in the process in the Transportation department of developing a 50-year transportation plan, and that requires us to look rather broadly and in a far-reaching way. Of course, technology is changing things all

the time. You know, we've seen the conflict that has been generated about Uber, but there are other technologies. For example, electric cars are here. Driverless cars are just around the corner, Madam Speaker. There are lots of interesting developments in terms of transportation.

One of the things, I think, to bring things down to earth, is that there are a couple of major urban regional centres in the province, of course, being around Edmonton, being in Calgary, and the municipalities there have done a great deal of work in terms of forming collaborations, forming organizations where they can deal with public business in a collaborative and co-operative way.

This is something that, you know, we want to encourage as a government. Certainly, as Transportation minister I want to encourage more working together and collaboration between municipalities. Rather than, for example, the Edmonton area having maybe eight or 12 independent transit systems, some very large, some very small, it would make more sense to deal with this in a co-operative fashion, and that's one of the things that we want to do. It doesn't have to be rail. It can be buses. It can be all different types of transportation.

I've had an opportunity to have some preliminary conversations with the mayor of Calgary and with the mayor of Edmonton and with public officials from the regional areas. They're very interested in this approach. They're very interested in a collaborative approach, and that's something that the government wants to encourage and participate in. We want to improve the transit of people both within the big cities and within the regional areas first of all, and that is really what the objective is.

It's certainly early days, too early to talk about specific proposals and specific technologies, but there are many, many developments. For example, the city of Edmonton is testing electric buses, and they're going to give them a test of a good, old-fashioned Edmonton winter if we can manage to conjure one up. There are experiments, as has already been mentioned, with respect to natural gas buses and so on as well as developments of LRT technology within the cities. Then, intercity rail has been mentioned. That is not something that I see immediately on the horizon but certainly something that people are very interested in planning for as we go forward.

I also want to mention our proposal with respect to rural bus service because, of course, when the previous government deregulated the intercity bus system operating in our province, much service was lost. The members opposite have indicated that here and there private-sector firms have stepped up to fill some of those gaps, but there are still many rural areas that are not served by intercommunity transportation. I've had the opportunity to meet with a couple of private-sector proponents who are very interested, and they have very different ideas about where we might go in terms of this. But there is money set aside in the budget to deal with that. We certainly don't want people who live in small communities to be isolated, to not be able to make medical appointments, to not be able to visit family and friends in other parts of the province. That is something that is also being considered.

All of this is, of course, encompassed by the motion. A motion like this is never designed to set out a specific plan. A motion like this is designed to set the intent of the Assembly, to give the government a bit of a flavour of where the Assembly thinks it ought to go. These are not binding motions, but they are useful for government. I think that it would be very helpful – and it has been helpful for me – to listen to members on both sides of the House about where they think we ought to go with regard to future intercity transit.

I would urge members to support the motion because I think that it sets a positive direction. It's a general direction, but it is still a

direction, and I think that it would be useful for the government to have this motion approved.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Acadia.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'll be brief. I rise today to speak in favour of Motion 504. As an MLA for an urban riding I often hear from my constituents about the value of public transit and the impact that it has on their daily lives, connecting them with work, with friends, with their community, and with local businesses and services. Public transit offers a more affordable and environmentally friendly means of transportation, one that reduces greenhouse gas emissions and reduces congestion on Alberta's roads.

We must do more to connect Albertans from smaller communities to the larger centres within their regions. We must encourage the development of a robust public transportation network in Alberta, in communities large and small.

The government's budget contains a clear commitment to supporting transit in communities across Alberta, and I would encourage all of my colleagues in the Legislature to show their own commitment to improving public transit throughout Alberta in communities of all sizes by supporting Motion 504. By supporting public transit and by supporting this motion, we are showing all Albertans that they deserve access to the public transit services that Albertans in our larger urban communities have come to enjoy and that many have come to rely on.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

5:30

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Madam Speaker. In 2014 I was commissioned by the county of Newell to do a transportation study, and in that study I found out that people who live in rural areas have no access to any kind of public transit system. If you don't have a car, you can't go to medical appointments, and you can't go to court. People in rural areas really, really need to have a kind of public transportation system.

I'm really delighted about this motion because if there's one thing we need to do in terms of keeping people in rural areas – allowing them to have jobs, allowing them to go to Calgary in that case or Lethbridge or Medicine Hat for necessary treatment, to get passports, to go to court – it is some kind of public transit system to meet their needs. I found out, when I did that study, that if you were low income and you couldn't afford to have a car or you had some kind of health problems and you couldn't drive, you were not only isolated, but you couldn't access any of those services that we provide. So I'm delighted that the Member for Calgary-Northern Hills is suggesting that government should be looking at regional transit services.

I also wanted to support what the Minister of Transportation said. The private systems that exist in many parts of the rural areas have not worked. It's really impossible, for example, as I found out, for someone from Brooks to go to a medical appointment in Calgary or Lethbridge in one given day. So if we do anything, I think we really need to work on trying to find access to a transportation system from communities to the major centres.

And because I live in a suburban area, I should also emphasize that it's not only the rural areas that are deficient in terms of an accessible transit system; it's also the suburban areas. Transit in

suburban areas is rather limited at times. I'm lucky to live in Strathcona county, where we have quite a well-developed transit system.

I do look forward to work being done to make sure that all of the suburban areas can be connected to the major urban areas but especially that the rural areas have access to public services.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other hon. members wishing to speak to the motion?

If not, then the hon. Member for Calgary-Northern Hills to close debate.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It was an absolute pleasure for me to present this motion as a topic of discussion today. As mentioned earlier, I have always been a strong supporter of regional transit initiatives. I'm quite encouraged as well to see a similar passion from many other members of this Assembly.

I'd just like to add a detail to the record. I've been advised that the regional population of Edmonton in its current census, with its catchment areas, is 1.33 million. Sorry if I touched a nerve there.

To the hon. members for Red Deer-South and Red Deer-North: I'd like to thank them for explaining the BOLT network to the Legislature today, which connects Red Deer to its surrounding areas, and, as well, for the GreenTRIP funding to get that local network established. I think it's wonderful to hear about other cities' initiatives, that sometimes aren't directly within where some of us are based.

I'd also like to thank the Member for Banff-Cochrane for his comments. Don't worry; your driving is impeccable. I'd like to thank you, also, for your excellent points. And now that's on the record.

By supporting public transit, we are telling Albertans that they deserve the kind of public transit service that until now has only been available to those larger urban municipalities. Furthermore, by supporting new municipal transit initiatives that bring Albertans together, we're doing more than providing a much-needed public service for Albertan families who need it; we will be supporting a cleaner environment by providing more people with access to public transportation so they can choose public transit to help greenhouse gas emissions as well.

In the end, there were some excellent points made here today. I would encourage members to support the motion and urge the government to explore the feasibility of regional transit services in this province.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 504 carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Well, we have performed our duties with uncustomary efficiency. I would like to thank members on all sides of the House for their valuable contribution and dispatch in dealing with important private members' business.

I would therefore move that we call it 6 o'clock.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:37 p.m. to Tuesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, November 17, 2015

Day 18

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

First Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, November 17, 2015

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Let us reflect and contemplate. Let us contemplate, each of us in our minds and hearts, about leadership and the examples of leaders around us. Some of us are leaders by position, others because of chance. But the true leaders are those in this Assembly who demonstrate bravery and courage and say words that cause others to change minds so minds can cause change. At least one of our members yesterday served as an example of leadership for all of us.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The embodiment of leadership is in no greater way portrayed than by six people who are in the gallery. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly six public servants seated in the members' gallery who are taking part in the Alberta public service leadership program. If they can stand up, please: their mentor, Mr. Steve Tyson, director of information security, Justice/Sol Gen; Ms Leanne Connell, legislative co-ordinator, Environment and Parks; Ms Andrea Rohlehr, services co-ordinator, ASCC; Mrs. Diane Duplessis, regional soil and contaminated site specialist with Environment and Parks; Mrs. Wendy Mingo, land management specialist, Environment and Parks; and Ms Sally Greenhill, audit manager, corporate internal audit services, Treasury Board and Finance.

Mr. Speaker, it's wonderful to see members of the public service taking part in programs to build leadership capacity. I can share with this House from personal experience, as can my cabinet colleagues, that the public service is fortunate to have such talented women and men among them. I'd like to ask these guests – they've already risen – to please receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Hon. minister, it's been my experience that the public servants are usually ahead of the politicians most of the time.

Mr. Hinkley: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all of our colleagues in the Assembly a grade 6 class from Griffiths-Scott school, which is in the fine community of Millet, which is in the constituency of Wetaskiwin-Camrose. The Millet school has been designated a UNESCO school, which means there's an emphasis on global awareness and inclusion. We also had a great discussion on decorum in the Assembly, so they're watching very diligently. Their teachers are Mrs. Nancy Killen, Ms Teagan DeSousa and the assistant, Mrs. Randi Williams. If you would please rise and accept the warm traditional greeting of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you a group of 37 Malmo elementary school students. They're here today with their teacher, Mrs. Theresa Bonar, and parent helpers Brandon Bosma and Leila

Saleh. They're from the beautiful community of Malmo in my riding. Would they please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Ms McKittrick: Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you a group from St. Theresa school. St. Theresa has a special place in my heart as I got to experience first-hand how interested the students and their teachers are in politics. If you could please rise to be introduced to the Assembly. They are here with their teachers, Mike Miskiw, Adriana Porter, Nicole Richard, and Joyce Chronik-Rudiak. Please give them the customary warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there any other school group introductions today?

It's my privilege that the Deputy Speaker, the hon. Member for Peace River, has an acknowledgement on my behalf.

Ms Jabbour: Thank you. It is truly an honour today to rise and introduce on your behalf, Mr. Speaker, three guests that are seated in your gallery: your cousin Ms Penny Stone; your aunt Ms Margaret Dashney; and, of course, your lovely wife, Mrs. Joan Emard-Wanner. As I understand it, Penny and Margaret are here today to watch you in action in your new role as Speaker. I'm sure they'll be greatly entertained. Ms Stone resides in the constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar and Ms Dashney in the constituency of Leduc-Beaumont, and I must add that Ms Dashney is an amazingly youthful 101 years old. [Standing ovation]

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members. Very much appreciated. I'm going to claim the prize, until corrected, that she's the oldest lady that's ever been in this Assembly.

The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General and Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

Ms Ganley: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of very special employees of the Alberta civil service. Over the summer and this fall nine enthusiastic individuals were hired to work in six different ministries. They are the very first interns in the brand new Alberta aboriginal intern program. In addition to working within their ministries, these bright interns will also spend nine months working with the community organizations that deliver services to indigenous people. Seven of the nine interns are with us today. I'm pleased to introduce Mathew Morgan, Danielle Belland, Adrienne Larocque, Shaleigh Raine, Camina Weasel Moccasin, Sharlene Alook, Brett McKenna, and the two interns who could not be here today, Colleen Chalifoux and Tiana Shea. I would like you to now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a wonderful group from the Excel Resources Society. The Excel society is a nonprofit organization servicing people with various disabilities, including developmental, brain injury, and early-onset dementia. I have visited the Balwin Villa in my constituency of Edmonton-Decore, and I'm very impressed with the work that they're capable of doing there. With us today in the gallery are Sharon Read, president and CEO; Colleen Scott, board chair; and Brad Perkins, board member. I would ask all of them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a tremendous honour to introduce to you and through you Rob Laird. Rob is currently with 1835 House, Recovery Acres Society. Rob has long been a dedicated advocate and champion for those struggling with addiction and homelessness. He's here in Edmonton today meeting with representatives from the ministries of Human Services and Health. As you know from my question last week, Recovery Acres' 1835 House is an addiction treatment facility located in the wonderful constituency of Calgary-Elbow. Rob is working very hard to expand the services offered by Recovery Acres to include women's addiction treatment. I'd ask Rob to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the Assembly Ms Shauna McHarg. Shauna has been a tireless advocate for years for families who believe they've been unfairly barred from Alberta Health Services facilities and currently have no process for appeal. Shauna is here today to request a meeting with the Minister of Health to explain her situation, restore access for her family, and to establish a fair process for citizens barred from certain sites. Shauna is joined by Mr. Dennis Dupuis, also banned from Alberta Health Services facilities, here to support her. I'd ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks and Status of Women.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you a number of representatives from the Cumulative Environmental Management Association in the lower Athabasca region. There are quite a number of them. I would ask them to rise as I call their names: Bill Loutitt, Fort McMurray Métis local 1935; Arsene Bernaille, Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation; Lena McCallum, Conklin Métis local 193; Alice Martin, Nistawoyou Friendship Centre; Mavis Desjarlais, elected council for Elizabeth Métis settlement; Darrin Bourque, Willow Lake Métis local 780; Diane Scoville, president, Métis Nation of Alberta, region 1; Bryan Fayant, aboriginal liaison, Aboriginal Coordinating Committee for CEMA; Nestor Manalo, program administrator, aboriginal initiatives, CEMA; and Karen Collins, Métis Nation of Alberta, region 2. I ask the Assembly to extend to them the traditional warm welcome.

Members' Statements

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

Gateway Association 40th Anniversary

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today to discuss some of the important work taking place within the Edmonton-Meadowlark constituency. This year marks the 40th anniversary of the Gateway Association and their original vision, a gateway to a better life. This organization has produced many success stories, helping those with disabilities find meaningful employment. This is not always an easy task, but the Gateway Association has built relationships with employers who are willing to help and be helped by those with disabilities.

It was my privilege to join the Minister of Human Services recently to announce that the Gateway Association would receive a grant from the employment first innovation fund. I know that this money means a lot to associations like Gateway, and I'm proud to be a part of a government who recognizes the potential in those with disabilities. I look forward to hearing of more Gateway Association success stories that were able to happen because of this funding.

Thank you.

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

Water Supply in Milk River and Coutts

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I would like to rise and talk about a potential five-alarm fire that could affect two important communities in my riding. As of right now the town of Milk River has two and a half to three months of water supply in their reserve. This water is used to supply both the towns of Milk River and Coutts. Due to low water levels this year residents have been put on rations for months now. To make things worse, if the water freezes or if either of these towns have to fight fires, they will be completely out of water within days. To truck in enough water for these communities, they would need 22 trucks per day. Of course, they would not be able to handle that expense themselves, nor would they be able to find enough water trucks to facilitate such an endeavour.

This issue was brought before the previous government, and a request for funding for an air compressor to assist with the water processing system was requested and granted but never delivered.

The water in the Milk River is shared with the United States. The communities of Milk River developed the storage and canal capacity to capture and divert just 7 per cent of its entitlement, while the U.S. receives well beyond theirs.

To determine ways of how to fix this issue, there have been a plethora of studies performed over the years. It was studied in 1954, '78, '80, '81, '85, '86, '87, 2003, 2006, and 2012. As you can see, we are not lacking information on this issue. These residents need action, not another study. They need immediate solutions to their short-term problems, and they need more than a Band-Aid to the long-term problem.

This government has talked much about diversification. Well, expanding the water storage capacity is a great start. It would allow for the expansion of irrigation in an area that sees some of the best heat units for growing in the province. If you are bound and determined to diversify, then I recommend starting in the agricultural sector, that has been this province's Steady Eddie from the beginning.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Calgary-North West.

Status of Women Ministry Estimates Debate

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Domestic violence and the mistreatment of women and girls for any reason at any time is unacceptable. I was so encouraged yesterday by the courageous speech from the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East recounting her harrowing personal experience of domestic violence. These are hugely important issues that transcend party lines. Thank you.

That's why it was so concerning this morning during estimates for the Status of Women ministry to hear the minister resort to name-calling and finger pointing. During my tenure as associate minister of family and community safety I was the first minister to have women's issues as part of my mandate letter. I took this responsibility very seriously.

I proudly launched our province's first family violence framework, put together with the aid of such notable stakeholders as Sue Tomney, CEO of the Calgary YWCA, and Lana Wells, the Brenda Strafford chair in the prevention of domestic violence at the U of C. We also completed Alberta's first sexual violence framework, again with such notable Alberta experts as Dr. Kristopher Wells of the Institute for Sexual Minorities Studies and Services and Sheldon Kennedy, whose work in this area is internationally recognized. It was a shock to me, Mr. Speaker, to have the minister refer to these framework documents as disgusting and deplorable. The opinions of these stakeholders framed this very important work. Describing their contributions as disgusting and deplorable is disappointing and unprofessional.

Mr. Speaker, many of us who have worked in this area care deeply about these issues and were hopeful that this new government would be a collaborative and willing partner to move forward on some excellent work that's already been done in this province. What we're met with at the table is hostility and scorn, and it does a disservice to every single person who has suffered in the area of family violence or sexual violence in this province. Today's behaviour by the Minister of Status of Women has done nothing to move us forward.

Varsity Community Association

Ms McLean: Mr. Speaker, as you know, I have the distinct pleasure of representing the constituency of Calgary-Varsity. Nestled within my constituency is the Varsity Community Association, of which my husband and I are proud members. This past October marks the 50th anniversary of the Varsity Community Association. The mission of the association is "to enhance and enrich the quality of community for Varsity residents." Over the last 50 years it is clear that this particular community has met that call.

In October we celebrated this golden anniversary with a gala at the Varsity community hall. The gala featured memorabilia from the past 50 years, the sealing of a 2015 time capsule as well as awards and recognition of highly dedicated, long-time volunteers. The event also included a top-notch dinner and bar, which were catered in-house and which, I'll add, is open for rental year-round.

Led by their first president, Ken Brown, the Varsity Community Association began in a bilevel house in 1965, and Varsity represented the edge of the city. Now the neighbourhood is a vibrant and diverse urban community. From seniors' yoga to shinny hockey for ages 6 to 12 the VCA provides essential and innovative programming and space that truly enriches our community.

1:50

Today Varsity has a strong, dedicated board of directors, who operate under the capable leadership of long-time Varsity resident president Bob Benson and past and longest serving president Jay Pritchard, who served the community as president from 2001 to 2013.

Congratulations to Varsity residents, volunteers, past and present committee members, and board members for creating one of Calgary's most desirable neighbourhoods. I truly enjoyed being a part of the 50th anniversary celebrations of the VCA and look forward to the 100th.

Thank you.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: A very brief comment. I wish to advise the House that again I am studying and thinking about and experiencing the

practice of preambles in questions, and I may or may not be having some additional comments for the House with respect to that matter.

I also wish to advise the House that Her Majesty's Official Opposition leader has asked for some leniency with respect to a question today, one question, which I have agreed to, and we were exchanging some communications about that.

Mr. Jean: I just wanted to take the opportunity to thank the Premier for our collegial question-and-answer period this morning. I really appreciated that.

Job Creation and Retention

Mr. Jean: Yesterday another 250 men and women lost their jobs at Enbridge. That's another 250 added to the more than 65,000 Albertans we know are out of work this year. It's the same story every single day. It's why Wildrose stands up in the Legislature to fight for policies that will benefit all Albertans, to fight for a competitive economy, and to make sure that every single Alberta family that is able has a good, paying job. Is the Premier aware of the damage her policies are doing to Alberta's economy?

The Speaker: Thank you for that, hon. member.

The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What I am aware of is that families and communities and Albertans across this province are suffering from the inevitable consequences of the dramatic downturn in the price of oil. I'm aware that that means that many, many people have lost their jobs, and I am very concerned about it, and I share the concern that the member opposite outlines. That is why our government has introduced a budget which is focused on stability, securing public services, finding a path to balance, but also using a number of different mechanisms to try and stimulate job growth because we know – we know – that it is not good for families and for Albertans to lose these jobs, and we're working as hard as we can to make it better.

Mr. Jean: I'm glad to see the Premier recognizes that her budget is not good for Albertans.

For weeks I've been asking the Premier to recognize the damage her policies are having on Alberta jobs. She doesn't seem to believe me, so let's have someone else do the talking. Here's a direct quote from the head of Canadian Pacific on the damage of the NDP tax increases: there is no doubt that, compounded with the government's other announced tax increases, this tax will negatively impact future investment and jobs. Will the Premier now recognize that her high-tax agenda is hurting Alberta's economy?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, what I will recognize is that what will not help our economy is laying off a bunch of public-sector workers, laying off teachers, laying off nurses, pulling back public services that our communities rely on. What we are doing is promoting stability, and we are investing in job creation, and we are investing in economic stimulation, and we are investing in a capital project, all of which will contribute to job creation. We know it's not good times out there. There's not a simple answer. Slashing and burning, laying off teachers to raise the price of oil is not the answer.

Mr. Jean: Wildrose agrees that laying off workers is not the answer, but the question is: what is this Alberta government doing to make sure that they keep their jobs? Sixty-seven thousand men, women, and children in Alberta rely on food banks. This number increased almost 25 per cent in just one year. Times in Alberta have only gotten worse, and Albertans are very, very worried. High

taxes, big government, and an antibusiness agenda: this is the NDP record, that is putting everyone's quality of life at risk in Alberta. When will the Premier back down from her risky agenda so that Alberta families can get back to work and have the great quality of life that they deserve?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, what we are going to continue to do is the work that we have done, which is that we are going to stabilize those public services, we're going to provide a predictable path forward, and we're going to invest where we can. We are acting as a shock absorber to the significant downturn that is being experienced in the Alberta economy. The billions and billions of dollars that that Official Opposition over there campaigned on cutting would make the situation much, much worse. [interjection] That is not fearmongering. That's just the reality. We are not going down that path because Albertans told us not to.

The Speaker: Second major question.

Refugee Resettlement

Mr. Jean: Yesterday we had a ministerial statement and responses about terrorism and refugees. Everyone in this Assembly wants to protect people whose lives are at risk because of the evil actions of ISIS. In the last few days a mass grave of Yazidi children and women was found. This is horrific. Albertans also worry the proper security checks are not being done. Will the Premier tell this Assembly what assurances she has been given by the Prime Minister that proper security checks on these refugees will be conducted?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I said yesterday in my statement, our deepest sympathies and our solidarity are with the victims of the recent attack. We condemn these evil acts, and we must all stand together, and we also need to understand that all people deserve to live in peace and security. People fleeing Syria are fleeing from acts like these. As an open society that is relatively privileged, we can reach out to them. We need to do it cautiously and carefully. We need to make sure that the security of all Albertans and all Canadians is front and centre, and I am quite sure that that is the approach that our federal government will be taking.

Mr. Jean: Yesterday the Premier told the media we expect to take 2,500 to 3,000 refugees in Alberta. Settling up to 3,000 refugees in the next 45 days is a massive, massive task. We know that there are community- and faith-based groups that will do their best to help. Indications are that these folks might be settled into two or even only one community in Alberta. What steps has the Premier taken to make sure that our health services, social services, education system are all able to handle the arrival of 3,000 new people by the end of next month?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much. Those are all very good questions. First of all, we are still in discussions with the federal government about the number of refugees that would ultimately settle in Alberta as well as the funding scheme around that. I will say, though, that we have set up an interministerial group that is working on that issue, led by the deputy minister for Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour. Those very important questions asked by the member are being considered, as are issues around housing and

other social supports. We will be sure that we are well placed to ensure that integration happens in a functional and helpful way that promotes and strengthens all communities.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are a very generous people. They want to help. They know that in Syria and Iraq people are being murdered just because they are Christian or Kurdish or because they follow a different sect of Islam. Albertans have so many important questions. They need to be reassured that the Premier takes their concerns very seriously. Albertans want information on security screening, on where these vulnerable families will go, and on how the government will provide these necessary services. Will the Premier provide any answers to these questions for Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think that I already have provided some answers, but truly we're in a situation where we are working very closely with the federal government. The federal government is the lead on this. Final decisions have not yet been made. So going out with information about decisions that haven't been made yet is not helpful. We will absolutely be clear and open and transparent with Albertans about how this will unfold once we understand exactly what it is the federal government's plans are, and I undertake to ensure that this information is provided as quickly as possible to the members of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Infrastructure Priorities and Municipal Funding

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When it comes to creating an infrastructure priority list, this government can't seem to help themselves. During the campaign the Premier said, "it's time to end the political games" and create a list. Then in July with a smile on his face the Infrastructure minister told us: the list is coming this fall. Less than two weeks ago I was told the list would be coming sometime before Christmas. Now we're told it may never come at all. To the minister: can you show us some backbone and tell your officials to stop backpedalling and deliver the infrastructure priority lists?

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. Certainly, making sure that there are not games played with infrastructure during elections, by-elections, and so on is something that motivates us, and I know it's very much of interest on the other side as well. It's important that we get the infrastructure list right. We need to make sure the criteria that are utilized are transparent and available to the public, and we need to avoid as well, I think, setting up competitions between different municipalities over infrastructure. Those are considerations.

Mr. Schneider: Mr. Speaker, I'm sorry, but that explanation just isn't good enough. Just this fall the Infrastructure minister himself called for an objective criteria to be used to establish an infrastructure priority list that should be made public. Now that the NDP are in power, they seem to be enjoying the comforts and influence a bit too much. Why won't the minister commit to a list that will only serve to bring Albertans more openness and transparency to their government?

The Speaker: I'm not sure if "I'm sorry" fits into the preamble or not.

The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, the fact of the matter is, to the hon. member, that we are going to do that. It is important to us, and we will be bringing forward transparency, transparency in terms of what the criteria is. Of course, they're different between different types. You don't judge a road by the same criteria as a hospital or by a school. All of those things need to be sorted out. It's a little more complex than the opposition would like us to believe, frankly.

Mr. Schneider: Mr. Speaker, without an infrastructure priority list municipalities in Alberta are going to have to make their own tough decisions about funding key infrastructure projects in their communities. This seems to be something that the Infrastructure minister has completely turned his back on. To the Minister of Infrastructure: are you intending to keep the linear taxation model in place, that municipalities are relying on, or are you going to backtrack on that, too?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I'm happy to talk about infrastructure. I'm happy to talk about our plans to move forward, the additional commitments that we've made. I spoke to the AAMD and C this morning, and I was very well received in terms of the reintroduction of the STIP program in particular. So there's lots of goodwill out there. But in terms of the linear assessment, he simply asked the wrong minister.

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

Energy Industry Environmental Issues

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It was recently acknowledged that our province will continue to have for the foreseeable future an energy economy and that this government intends to build on the backbone of that economy, which continues to reel from the combined effects of low prices and policy uncertainty. Now, this government steadfastly refuses to acknowledge its role in making the current situation worse while investment flees to places like B.C., Saskatchewan, and Quebec, where the oil price is the same but government policy is not. To the Minister of Environment and Parks: if we're an energy economy for the foreseeable future, why do you persist in attacking that economy here and now?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, we have undertaken this work of our climate change review because Albertans want us to get serious about climate change. That's exactly what we're doing. Climate change is a serious challenge, and we intend to take it seriously. We've already taken it much more seriously than the previous government ever did by appointing an excellent panel to provide us with advice on matters related to renewables, energy efficiency, our current carbon pricing system and whether there are some changes we can make to it, and, of course, ensuring that we are phasing out coal in an orderly manner for the health of our children.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, quite frankly it's hard to take this minister seriously when the job losses in the sector have been well documented: Enbridge cutting 500 jobs, 250 in Alberta; Cenovus, 1,500 jobs; Husky, 1,000 jobs; and the list goes on. Now, depending

on how calculations are made, we're somewhere in the 40,000 to 65,000 jobs range. Again to the Minister of Environment and Parks. Your caucus did nothing during the course of the federal election campaign to defend our industry against attacks from candidates in the federal election, mostly from your party. Why not, Minister? Whose side are you on?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, we could rewind the clock a few months and discuss that, or we can discuss what this government is actually doing to get serious on climate change, to ensure market access, and to ensure that we can have a conversation with our trading partners that is real and substantive on the leadership that we are showing on issues related to carbon price, renewables, efficiency, and how we effectively phase out coal to ensure the right health outcomes for ourselves and for our children.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, Albertans are waiting with nervous anticipation as to what the Premier and the environment minister will be saying after they board their eco-friendly hovercraft powered by the laughter of children and travel to the Paris climate change conference. Now, I understand that there will be a meeting on Friday with the NDP caucus to share information regarding our climate change strategy. Minister, why are you not sharing this information with Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a good question on timing. Right now we are considering the advice in an ongoing way from the panel, and some of that is continuing to be ongoing. We are having cabinet discussions. We are having caucus discussions, of course, because it is our government's approach that we involve caucus in these matters unlike the previous government, where there was just, you know, a whole bunch of sandbox politics happening between caucus members. We are a government that is going to bring forward a cohesive plan to protect jobs, ensure market access, and ensure we can turn the page on 44 years of lack of leadership on climate change.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Emergency Medical Services

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish I could get that kind of a rise out of my questions. I'll practise. Now I've only got 30 seconds.

A common-sense solution to reducing the pressure on our emergency rooms is to allow EMS workers to practise to their full scope, treat patients on-site where appropriate, and make alternate arrangements rather than bringing every patient to the ER. To facilitate this, EMS workers need to be brought under the protection of the medical professions act, delayed by the past government. To the minister: when can we expect action on this much-needed change?

The Speaker: I must say that you're so much nicer when you play in the sandbox when you're laughing with each other.

The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. We are certainly working with the College of Paramedics in bringing them under the act, and I thank the hon. member and members of the third party as well for talking

about how important that is. In terms of what's happening today, under the current scope I'm really proud of the fact that we have the community paramedic program, which was launched in Calgary in 2013 as well as in Edmonton in 2015. By having that program, we've saved 8,200 patients from having to be transported to emergency rooms by having paramedics using their expertise in making that call.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

2:10

Dr. Swann: Thank you. What progress has been made in using alternate transportation for nonemergency patients and reducing the demand on ambulances and trained paramedics?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Last night in estimates we talked a little bit about some of the initiatives under Alberta Health Services. There are transport vans for patients that aren't in as acute situations, rather than transporting somebody from a long-term care facility to an emergency room when they might just need to be transported safely in a safe vehicle like a transport van. That's certainly one of the initiatives. I'd be happy to send more information to the hon. member about that program and others that Alberta Health Services will be launching in the years to come.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When individuals are not able to get into their family doctors in primary care networks, they will inevitably turn to emergency rooms, yet the minister has cut \$41 million from PCNs, money they were planning to use for emerging community needs. How does this make sense?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We've been in constant dialogue with the primary care networks since prior to the last election. There was an announcement made by the last government that they were going to be rolling back significantly more of their surpluses. What we've done is that when money is in the bank, we've asked PCNs to offset some of their allocations by using some of the money that they have in the bank. That's not what the provincial treasury grants money for, for it to sit in the bank; it's to actually meet patient needs. So we're working with the PCNs in tandem to make sure that that can continue to be the focus, but we do need them to spend some of the money that they're sitting on because that's not in the best use for the taxpayer.

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

Small-business Assistance

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituency of Edmonton-Decore has sometimes been referred to as Edmonton's shopping district. We are home to some of Edmonton's biggest business communities: auto sales shops, three major shopping malls, retail chains, and family-run businesses. Over the last few days during constituency week I met with several of my constituents from the business community. They're curious as to how the government is planning to support them. To the Minister of Economic Development and Trade: what are you doing to support small businesses in Alberta through this economic downturn?

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the hon. member for his very pertinent question. We are definitely facing

challenging times, and that's why right now we need to show leadership, which is exactly what our government is doing. There are several initiatives that we've already launched. The job creation incentive plan: \$178 million for the next two years. We've increased capital rates or lending available by ATB by \$1.5 billion. One initiative that really excites me is the STEP program, the fact that not only have we reintroduced it; we've increased it by \$3 million and opened it up to small businesses to access those dollars.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the new job creation incentive program will support employers in creating as many as 27,000 new jobs and given that we want to ensure that we're growing and diversifying our economy, to the same minister: what types of organizations will be eligible for these grants?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the hon. member again for his question and for standing up for small and medium-sized enterprises in his constituency. This program is one of the most extensive of its kind in Canada. It's going to be supporting organizations of all sizes, available to all nonpublic sectors. We're talking about supporting small to medium-sized enterprises, corporations, registered charities, and not-for-profit entities. This program will be available as of January 1, and we are forecasting that this will create up to 27,000 jobs over the next two years.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Alberta's businesses also need to be able to be competitive in these tough economic times and given that additional training can greatly benefit all workplaces, again to the same minister: what are you doing to support these businesses with current and new employees who may be looking for this additional training?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Once again, the budget that we tabled a few weeks ago is going to stabilize our public services, which is one of the ways that we are ensuring that there aren't further job losses.

The opposition would cut our public-sector front-line workers by thousands of jobs, and these reckless cuts would further exacerbate the problem and make it even more challenging for Alberta families. That's why our government is taking the initiative, showing leadership through investments in a few different programs, as I've mentioned, the job creation incentive program, increasing ATB's lending rate, which is going to help small to medium-sized enterprises grow and move to the next step.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Carbon Tax

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We continue to hear about pricing carbon from this government as though industry doesn't already pay a steep carbon levy. The NDP never campaigned on it. They have no mandate to bring it in, but they're bulldozing ahead anyway to introduce a massive new carbon tax to be laid on the back of every single Albertan across this province. Does the environment minister understand the inflationary impact

on every Alberta family of any increase to the carbon tax we all already pay?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks for the question. You know, we have a situation where we have an intensity-based calculation on our large final emitters as it stands right now. The panel is considering whether that is the most rational and efficient way to organize carbon pricing for an economy such as ours. We are awaiting the advice of the panel, and we're moving forward with a balanced approach to climate change that will keep our economy moving using the best of advice from economists, from industry, with whom we have consulted widely on this matter, from the hundreds of Albertans who engaged in the climate change process, and from all of the technical engagement sessions we undertook.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. MacIntyre: Albertans who are losing their jobs and seeing their wages cut are justifiably worried about how another tax increase is going to bite into their ever-shrinking family budget, and given that 66 per cent of this province's electrical consumer base is industrial and knowing that a carbon tax will flow through to impact prices on almost everything we buy, will the environment minister admit that this new tax will be downloaded onto every Alberta family from every corner of this province?

Ms Phillips: Well, you know, one of the things that we asked the panel to examine, Mr. Speaker, was the current structure of our carbon pricing system as it currently exists because we do have a carbon pricing system. They are going to be providing us advice on this matter. The fact of the matter is that the Official Opposition has offered zero solutions to address climate change. Either they don't believe in the science, or they don't believe it's Alberta's responsibility to do its part.

Mr. MacIntyre: Given that everyone knows that a carbon tax is going to make food, clothes, electricity, running a business, running a farm, owning a house, putting our kids in sports, driving a car, practically everything short of breathing, Mr. Speaker, more expensive, I will ask this minister one more time: does this minister understand that any increases in the price of carbon will be downloaded . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, can I again ask – the preamble is coming in here – what is your question? Please proceed with the question.

Mr. MacIntyre: I was into it.

The Speaker: Please proceed with the question.

Mr. MacIntyre: Does this minister understand that any increases in the price of carbon will be downloaded onto all Albertans and that the ones that will feel it the most are the 1,500 people a week losing their jobs as a result of this government's destabilizing, socialist agenda?

Ms Phillips: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, we have heard from a variety of industry groups and others on this matter of pricing carbon, and they have a number of different pieces of advice for us. What they did tell us was that the climate change review and the royalty review should be linked as they are being implemented, that industry should be consulted meaningfully about our plans, and that

we need to proceed without undue delay. We have taken that advice, which is, as it happens, also the advice of the many, many Albertans who have engaged in this process of the climate change review. I will note that the Official Opposition did not bother to provide us a written submission at all. They had no thoughts on this matter.

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

2:20

Fentanyl Use

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The prevalence of fentanyl in our province has created a public health crisis that is on track to kill 300 Albertans this year. According to police, organized crime and drug dealers are the reason this toxic drug is wreaking havoc in Alberta communities. To the Justice minister: given that controlling illegal drugs falls under the purview of your ministry and given that the prevalence of fentanyl is killing Albertans at a shocking rate, what are Alberta's chiefs of police suggesting you do, since you kindly followed my recommendation to meet with them, to help enforcement agencies gain control over this deadly drug?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to the member for the question. Of course, this is a critical question at this moment in time. We have been working in concert with the Association of Chiefs of Police. Now, it is our government's view that increasing public awareness and ensuring that naloxone is available in all circumstances are critical pieces of this. We also are working with our partners to reduce supply and trafficking in drugs. In fact, I have been in contact with the federal minister just this morning to discuss some issues that the Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police has brought forward to my attention, and we are moving forward on that.

Thank you.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Minister, and thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Justice minister: as I have previously stated, given that every moment's delay in creating a proactive plan to curb the distribution of fentanyl may mean yet another life lost and given that the nation is looking to Alberta to display leadership on this issue because our province is the hot spot for fentanyl deaths in Canada, what is your proactive plan for addressing the illegal production, importation, and distribution of this drug?

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the member for the question. Well, of course, it's critical that we act fast on fentanyl because it is an incredibly dangerous drug. It is having a huge impact on the lives of Albertans. We are moving forward with our plan, which, again, includes three parts, as I've said: to increase public awareness about the unpredictability of this incredibly potent drug; to make sure that the antidote, naloxone, is widely available in all sorts of community agencies; and to reduce the supply and drug trafficking. In fact, school resource officers and schools are working with Alberta Health Services to help educate students to make sure that they are alerted to the dangers of this drug.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that police, addictions specialists, and health professionals are all raising an alarm about fentanyl and given that

we cannot rely on drug dealers to adhere to Health Canada's laboratory standards when they are producing the drug that they are supplying to their victims, what measures have you put in place to ensure that police have the tools today – and I mean today, Minister – to combat and eradicate this public health crisis?

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and again to the member for the question. Well, of course, in this current budget this government funds policing to the tune of half a billion dollars. We are working with our partners to ensure that we are acting quickly on cutting off this supply, and we have been talking to our federal counterparts on measures that we think we could take in order to cut off this supply. But I think it's critical to recognize that drug addiction is a problem which is best solved through information and through health resources, and that's what we're working to do.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Seniors' Housing for Couples

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Health. Couples entering into long-term care are being torn apart and placed in facilities sometimes hundreds of kilometres away. Divorce by nursing home is something that should not be happening in our province. It's doing damage to loved ones and their families as they pay the emotional toll of separation, the anxiety of wondering when they'll see each other and whether it'll be the last time. Our seniors deserve better. What is your plan to ensure that Alberta seniors can live close by their loved ones, with dignity and respect, in their golden years?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. One of the things I'm really proud of is our party's commitment during the provincial election to build 2,000 new long-term care spaces. We are well on our way to making sure that we have an effective plan to carry that goal out. Of course, having access to the right beds in the right communities so that people can stay together is a big piece of the problem. So we'll be moving forward on that plan, and I'll be updating the House on specific communities in the days to come as well.

Thank you for the question.

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, I'm tired of the NDP taking care of the high-paid bureaucrats when they're not taking care of seniors and cutting support grants for long-term care and low-income seniors. Given that the ASLI grants were cut to zero in the budget and new policies are apparently coming soon, how exactly will the minister support an aging-in-place philosophy ensuring that our seniors can live out their final years with the partners they love?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. I'm sure it isn't a surprise that we're not keen on carrying on some of the policies that were in place with the last government as we move forward. We are going to be honouring the announcements that we made two weeks ago around the ASLI projects. Whether or not ASLI will be the mechanism to deliver long-term care in the future we haven't landed on yet. We will be

building long-term care beds, but it doesn't necessarily need to be according to one specific platform that was there previously.

Mr. Yao: Mr. Speaker, there are year-long waits for long-term care space in all Alberta jurisdictions. Not only are we splitting up these couples; we're also driving up the health care costs by taking up bed spaces in the hospitals. Can the minister clarify exactly what infrastructure investments the government will make to alleviate the pressure on our health care system, on our primary care hospitals, and to address the issues of our most vulnerable population?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, I'm very proud of our commitment to build 2,000 long-term care beds. These will help people who are currently in the community in unsupportive environments be in the right place as well as those who are in the hospital. While the Official Opposition proposed cutting \$9 billion from the infrastructure plan, we know how important it is to invest in infrastructure, including long-term care. I look forward to members opposite supporting that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Springbank Reservoir Flood Mitigation Project

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The NDP is rushing ahead with a plan to build a dam at Springbank even though they campaigned against this project during the last election. If you can believe it, before the Member for Banff-Cochrane sang the Springbank dam's praises, he was one of its loudest critics. To the environment minister: we know your party has no problem breaking election promises, but did you really have to pile on and break this promise, too?

Ms Phillips: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is that when we assumed office, we did a careful inventory of the relative merits of the two projects. Our priority as government is moving forward to provide strong protection for the city of Calgary and other communities. We took this decision based on the evidence, the evidence based on the cost to taxpayers, the evidence based on the amount of flood protection it would provide for the city of Calgary and for others, the evidence based on the type of project that it was and the larger catchment area that it would protect. This decision took us three or four months to make, and the reason for that is because we are an evidence-based government.

Mrs. Aheer: Mr. Speaker, this government is growing far too comfortable with breaking their promises to Albertans, including the ones they campaigned on and were elected on. Given that the land valuation for this project is in excess of \$175 million, contrary to the \$40 million that the NDP is using as their valuation, can the minister explain why she is committed to rushing ahead on a project that's based on numbers that do not add up for Albertans?

Ms Phillips: Well, Mr. Speaker, the decision that we took was to move forward with the environmental impact assessment, and we are not about to litigate these matters in public. What we are going to do is take an evidence-based decision based on three factors for the protection of the city of Calgary, which are cost, effectiveness of the project, and environmental impacts. Now, the fact of the matter is that the Wildrose cannot be trusted to get it right on flood mitigation. They would have cut \$9.4 billion for infrastructure. That would have left Calgary with zero flood protection for years.

Mrs. Aheer: Mr. Speaker, an NDP action a day keeps common sense away.

Given that a dam at Springbank would sacrifice thousands of acres of pristine and historic Alberta ranchland and since the broken cost-benefit analysis of this project isn't even enough to help her to do the right thing, does the minister truly care about the environment, and will she put the brakes on this project, that will destroy thousands of acres of beautiful Alberta ranchland?

Ms Phillips: Well, you know, the fact of the matter is, Mr. Speaker, that the project that the hon. member across the way is advocating for would possibly never get built because it is a run-of-the-river hydro project. The competing project, McLean Creek: the fact of the matter is that it would come with significant environmental impacts, and it ran the very real risk of catastrophic failure during the construction phase, leaving Calgary with nothing. Between that approach and the cuts to infrastructure the Official Opposition's approach is to leave Calgary at the mercy of another 2013 event. That is not the approach of this government.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

2:30 Coal-fired Electric Power Plant Retirement

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government is planning to accelerate the phase-out of coal-fired electricity generation. Albertans agree, even those in industry, that coal is carbon intensive and needs to be phased out over time. However, we do not need rash, ideologically driven decisions that lack proper consultation, thorough research, and responsible action. To the Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour: given that there are 5,600 jobs directly related to coal extraction and electricity generation, do you, Minister, believe that an accelerated phase-out of coal respects the livelihoods of Albertans, the best interests of thousands of hard-working Albertans, and the communities they live in?

Ms Phillips: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, we've heard loud and clear from many of the folks both in the health care community and within the coal community, and that is advice that we are taking along with the advice of the panel on how we undertake an orderly transition away from coal-fired electricity. This was an undertaking of the previous government as well, but I do note that they had no plan in place for a transition for workers and a just transition for all Albertans.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the environment minister now: given that an accelerated phase-out of coal is likely to limit supply, reduce stability, and compromise the reliability of our electric system and given that this is also likely to drive up the price of electricity as industry struggles to attract investment to build noncoal electricity generation, compromising our competitiveness for industrial users while also reaching further into the wallets of hard-working Albertans, who are already feeling the pinch of the economy you seem so intent on destroying, why, Minister . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, again, could we please have the question? I'm hearing preambles over and over again.

The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, sure, and thank you to the member for the question, Mr. Speaker. As we move forward with these plans, we are going to encourage lower carbon and renewable options in the place of coal-fired electricity right now. We will make sure that this

transition occurs in a balanced and measured way, working with the energy industry and Albertans. We will have a clear plan in the coming days and weeks on this matter of coal-fired electricity as we receive the panel's advice.

I might add that there are a number of very carefully thought-out plans contained within the climate leadership consultation piece that are online for any hon. members to read, in which we have a number of companies that have shared with us their thoughts . . .

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that an accelerated phase-out of coal raises the issue of fair compensation for stranded capital assets and given that your rejection of a dial-down, dial-up strategy could put Albertans on the hook in the billions of dollars for any fairly negotiated settlements, what is the estimated value of this fair compensation? Who will be negotiating this settlement, and where will this money come from?

Ms Phillips: Well, you know, I thank the hon. member for his observations on what we have and have not rejected. The fact of the matter is that we are considering all of the advice of the panel and the advice that has been given to us by many of the coal-fired power incumbents and other industry players in this space, Mr. Speaker, while we also have conversations with the Electric System Operator and others to ensure an orderly plan that is balanced and measured, that protects the pocketbook, and that takes climate leadership seriously.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Energy Resource Trade with China

Ms McPherson: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, as someone who worked in the oil and gas industry for more than 20 years, I know how many jobs are associated with the industry and how important it is that this government is focused on increasing access to diverse world markets for Alberta's energy products. My office and I also hear from constituents employed in the industry who want the government to diversify the economy and reduce our reliance on a single commodity with limited markets. To the Minister of Energy: why did you . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, could you please state the question.

Ms McPherson: What was accomplished to increase markets for Alberta's energy products?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We went to China, first of all, because, next to the U.S., China is our next important trading partner. So we went, and basically we're going to allow them to get to know us. We wanted to let them know that Alberta certainly is open for business, and we want the world to know it. China represents for us a great opportunity to grow our economy, to diversify both in the energy and the environment fields. Competition, as you know, for markets is fierce, so we need to be active and not stand still.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this trip included not just the minister but also representatives from Alberta energy companies, Minister, can you explain why these companies were there and what they got out of the trip?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, our trip was a mission. We went with representatives from Suncor, EnCana, Enbridge, MEG Energy, and EBW, which is a financial group. It certainly was a great value to go as a team. We were able to have critical discussions with Chinese officials and industry, talk to the Chinese about what their needs are, how we can work as a group and continue the Chinese investment, which currently is \$35 billion in Alberta. We want to grow that.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Alberta has a long-standing agreement to work with China on energy projects, can the Minister tell us what the status is of that relationship and what plans, if any, she has to improve or strengthen that relationship?

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you for that question. Mr. Speaker, certainly, it's a long-standing relationship with China, and we continue to strengthen that. The discussions we had related to strengthening and modernizing. We actually worked to strengthen the China Alberta Petroleum Centre. We looked at enhancing that centre, increasing the number of companies we deal with, placing a heightened emphasis on promoting market access, promoting sustainable development respective of natural resources, and strengthening governance in all those areas.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Minimum Wage Increase

Mr. Cooper: Thank you. I recently sent a survey regarding minimum wage increases to every business in Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. Mr. Speaker, the results were shocking. Ninety-two per cent of respondents said that their business would be directly impacted, while 77 per cent said that it would hurt their small business's ability to compete against large corporations. This is just another example of this NDP government basing their policies on ideology, not what is best for Albertans. To the minister of trade: how can you possibly say that this policy will help diversify our economy?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Our government promised in the election that we were going to make work fair in Alberta, and that's what we're doing. We're raising the minimum wage and making it more fair for Albertans. We're working with small business. We still are a great place for small business to run in Alberta. We have some of the lowest tax rates here in Alberta, and it's a great place to grow a business.

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, given that as part of the survey I asked business owners how they will adapt to the minimum wage increase and 77 per cent said that they're considering limiting hours and 42 per cent are considering layoffs, is that fair?

Given that I've heard from business owners who are reconsidering their participation in the RAP program, how does the minister of jobs think that increasing the minimum wage will in fact create jobs?

2:40

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll thank the member for the question. I'd love to see how many businesses were

actually interviewed in his survey, but I will say that we have been speaking with small to medium-sized enterprises throughout the province.

Our government has initiated a few different programs from the job creation incentive program to help businesses. We as well have announced the STEP program and increased it by \$3 million, so it's a \$10 million program, that small businesses for the first time in our province will have access to. Again, Mr. Speaker, it's important to look at the whole context of the fact that Alberta still has some of the lowest taxes in the country. We are the best place to start and grow a business.

Thank you.

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, given that we're doing real consultation with real businesses and we're hearing from all sorts of folks, including the nonprofit sector, and given that a local nursing home in Linden wrote to me and said that the minimum wage increase will kill us; we will have to up our prices on seniors, which would be horrible for pensioners with limited income. To the Minister of Health: will you acknowledge that your government's policies are having unanticipated social consequences?

[Two members rose]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much. We're both very equally excited to answer this question, Mr. Speaker.

I'll thank the member for the question. Again, Mr. Speaker, there's quite a difference between what the opposition would do, which is that they would lay off thousands of nurses, teachers, and front-line service sector jobs. That in and of itself would cause the very closure of the centres that these members ...

The Speaker: Please sit down.

Members' Statements

(continued)

Diabetes Awareness

Mr. Westhead: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize November as Diabetes Awareness Month. Members in this House today are wearing the blue circle pins in recognition, and I thank them for taking the time to bring attention and support to this important issue.

Mr. Speaker, diabetes touches thousands of people. In fact, in 2010 it was estimated that 217,000 people were affected, and that number is expected to rise to 363,000 by 2020. We also know that many Albertans are living with undiagnosed type 2 diabetes, and this can have devastating effects on their personal health. We know that these Albertans are deeply affected by this condition, and we're proud to have a number of programs in place to support them and their families.

A few of the best practices and developments in Alberta are our insulin pump therapy program, a mobile diabetes screening initiative for aboriginal communities, and health promotion programs for youth at risk of developing type 2 diabetes. Individuals needing assistance and coverage for diabetes medication and testing supplies are provided with assistance through the Alberta adult health benefit, Alberta child health benefit, Alberta seniors' benefit program, and some subsidized coverage of Alberta Blue Cross, and the aforementioned insulin pump therapy program.

We're proud to provide so many programs which support Albertans living with diabetes, and we know that strong access to

preventative and primary care is necessary to ensure that Albertans are living healthy and productive lifestyles. We will continue to promote wellness to lower the number of Albertans living with diabetes and ensure that the necessary supports are there for those that need them.

To all Albertans living with diabetes, we are proud to say that you have our support, and we hope to enable you to continue to live healthy, productive, fulfilling lives.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Education Concerns

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've been hearing a lot about provincial education organizations using or misusing vast amounts of money on things like school boards suing each other to stop schools from opening and overpriced adult Easter egg hunts and staff perks. I'd like to bring a new perspective to all of this by looking at the conditions that some of our teachers and school administrators are having to deal with.

A constituent of mine is a teacher and brought forward the following concerns. A new school in the area is already overcrowded, and they are in need of portables to ease the pressure on the students and teachers. The recommended class size for division 2 is 23 students, and this school is consistently 30 per cent over that.

Mr. Speaker, while teachers and school administrators are struggling to meet ever-widening student learning needs in overcrowded schools, trustees, school boards, and provincial organizations are using education dollars to bully each other and are using funds for 'egg-citing' events. They may end up with egg on their face. I would like to urge this government to ensure that every penny of every education dollar is used for our students and not for adult power plays and perks.

I would also like to urge this government to work alongside the Wildrose caucus to implement policies that will provide tangible results for students in the classroom. In fact, Mr. Speaker, back in September Wildrose introduced our standing up for students initiative. This initiative includes policies that would focus on real results for students, that would return Alberta to a world-class education system.

I know the hon. Minister of Education agrees with us. I know that he would like to improve the state of our education system. That is why I ask him along with the rest of this NDP government to come together and join Wildrose in working in the interests of all Alberta students.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour.

Bill 6

Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise and introduce Bill 6, the Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act.

This omnibus bill proposes to amend workplace legislation so Alberta's farm and ranch workers will enjoy the same basic rights and protections as workers in other industries. Proposed changes would remove the exemption of the farm and ranch industry from occupational health and safety, employment standards, and labour

relations legislation. Bill 6 also proposes to make workers' compensation insurance mandatory for all farm and ranch workers. If passed, Alberta would join every other jurisdiction in Canada in applying workplace legislation to Alberta's farms and ranches.

This is a historic day for Alberta. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 6 read a first time]

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Mr. Carlier, Minister of Agriculture and Forestry, pursuant to the Agriculture Financial Services Act the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation annual report 2014-15; pursuant to the Livestock Identification and Commerce Act the Livestock Identification Services Ltd. report to the minister and summary of activities April 1, 2014, to March 31, 2015; pursuant to the Marketing of Agricultural Products Act the Alberta Agricultural Products Marketing Council annual report 2014-15.

2:50 Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Mr. Clerk, I think there was an hon. member who had a tabling of return or report. Is that correct?

Ms Jansen: Yes.

The Speaker: Hon. member, could you proceed?

Ms Jansen: Absolutely. I'm rising, Mr. Speaker, to table five copies, first of all, of the family violence framework and, specifically, five additional copies of the section referring to gender and sexual diversity, to correct the assertion of the Minister of the Status of Women, who claimed that those areas were not covered in the framework. That is categorically false. I have five copies, of course, of the specific area and five copies of the framework.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, I have to table the required copies of a letter from some home-schoolers in Calgary-North West concerning the proposed home education regulations, and I have five copies of those for you, as well.

Thank you.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 4

An Act to Implement Various Tax Measures and to Enact the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act

[Adjourned debate October 29: Mr. Ceci]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to say that this is the first time I've spoken to a bill that will water down the budgetary rules in this province, that will raise the debt ceiling in this province, that will allow for more fiscal irresponsibility, but this is not the first time I've spoken to it. Instead, I've spoken to nearly identical bills from governments past, beginning in 2012, bills that bury the true financial details of our budget into three separate piles, bills that allow the government to hide how much debt it is taking on. It is, unfortunately, something that we've seen before. I'd like to say that this government, despite its significant

philosophical differences with our party, would be doing something different on accountability, but it's not.

The primary difference between this bill and the previous government's financial management act is that it is removing nearly all limits to the debt. The government, on a piece of paper, is now allowing our debt to exceed over \$50 billion and for it to do so at a moment's notice. It is a proposal to increase our so-called debt ceiling by 15 per cent at the whims of politicians. Now, this is an important debate, and I'm not allowed to refer to the absence of a member here, according to the rules, but I think it would be important for the minister who is responsible for tabling this legislation to be participating in the debate.

This bill has no checks or balances being put into place to ensure that we do not exceed a debt limit of 15 per cent. There are no consequences whatsoever for exceeding the proposed 15 per cent debt ceiling. There is nothing to stop the minister from ordering his staff to exceed that debt ceiling.

Once upon a time this province was debt free, and we can remember the Premier of the day hoisting a sign over his head saying: paid in full. Then we began taking on small, reasonable portions of debt, and then larger and larger unreasonable portions until today, when our debt stands at over \$14 billion and is projected to exceed \$47.4 billion before the next election under the best-case economic scenario.

This proposes to further increase our debt ceiling. Where have we heard of debt ceilings before? The U.S. Congress increases its so-called debt ceiling nearly twice a year. It is merely an argument for politicians about how deep they should dig the hole that they're standing in.

What is the point of creating any law when there are no punishments for breaking that law? There are punishments in law, that we create as lawmakers, for people who do not wear their seat belts, but there's no punishment when members of this Legislature exceed the debt limits that we place on ourselves. Members of this House can vote for a budget that will exceed our proposed debt limit of 15 per cent, and there will be no legal consequences whatsoever. We've passed laws that make it illegal to not wear a bike helmet, which only hurts the person riding the bike if they don't, but unlike a bicycle helmet, we're passing laws now that hurt everybody but have no consequence on ourselves if we break them. Other jurisdictions with debt ceilings have put in place punishments for politicians that exceed those limits, punishments as mild as cutting salaries for elected officials or also as harsh as shutting down the entire government, as happened in 2013 in the United States. That is not what we're proposing, but what we should consider are reasonable penalties placed on governments and politicians that break their own laws.

Perhaps there is no punishment listed in this bill for politicians breaking their 15 per cent debt ceiling because they intend to break that debt ceiling. What happens if our debt stands at 14 per cent of GDP and we face a recession and we exceed 15 per cent? Are there any consequences whatsoever? What happens if the lofty GDP growths in the NDP's budget plan do not come to bear to the degree to which they projected? What if oil does not bounce back to the high \$70, as the Minister of Finance has said that it would? All of these are recipes for our debt to exceed 15 per cent of GDP. What if the NDP have another \$4 billion rounding error? What if their revenue projections are unrealistic?

Now, the budget is also before this House at the same time, and in years 4 and 5 of the fiscal plan the government has provided zero details about how they get to their revenue projections, how they get to their expenditure projections. In years 1, 2, and 3 the government shows us their math, but in years 4 and 5 they pull it out of thin air. During the estimates process I repeatedly asked the

Minister of Finance, however much I wish he was participating in this debate, to provide the math. What is the price that he expects oil to be at to get to years 4 and 5 revenue projections? What does he expect income taxes to be? What does he expect corporate taxes to be?

Now, Mr. Speaker, I assure you this is not a prop. This is merely a document. I've concluded a friendly wager with a member on the government side for \$100 to be payable before the next election if the government does not meet its revenue projections. I think this is the easiest money I've ever made.

An Hon. Member: On paper.

Mr. Fildebrandt: It is, unfortunately, paper money, but fortunately for us the NDP don't control the banks yet.

The likelihood of us exceeding the proposed 15 per cent debt to GDP debt ceiling is very realistic, but there are no consequences whatsoever for exceeding it. This would mean the debt servicing costs would spiral out of control, as they are already projected to hit \$1.3 billion, the equivalent of six entire departments of the government. That is money that we will not spend building schools, hospitals, roads, training doctors, nurses, or teachers. It is money that will be sent straight to the bankers. I never thought I'd see the day where the NDP are the party that wants to fund the banks. Debt servicing costs will be burning cash. Debt interest payments are already approaching a billion dollars, and they will climb higher still. We will throw billions away on debt servicing costs instead of providing services.

However much the government across refuses to acknowledge it, we have a spending problem. We should be focusing on spending taxpayers' dollars more efficiently and cutting excessive expenditures rather than simply increasing the size of our line of credit. We should be cutting waste and not cutting more cheques. The bill will not address our spending problem; it will only make it worse. It will merely whet the government's appetite. We cannot spend and borrow our way into prosperity. We need a plan to save Alberta, not spend Alberta. We need a plan to pay back the debt. Rather than put forward a plan to increase our debt limit, this government should put forward a plan to pay down the debt.

3:00

British Columbia spends \$3,000 per capita less than the government of Alberta, and they receive on almost every measure better services. If B.C., that bastion of right-wing conservatism, can spend \$3,000 per capita less and deliver better services, why can't we? We should be spending more efficiently, not just more.

Now, not everything in Bill 4 is bad. There are important measures to crack down on tax evasion. There are measures to restore some of the quarterly reporting, which was gutted in 2012. For these measures the government has my thanks, but these small positive measures are greatly outweighed.

There are measures to improve the lot of small brewers in the province, to do away with the retrogressive taxation of breweries not relevant to their size. This will help brewers in the province grow. But at the same time we have seen an increase of nearly 500 per cent on some small brewers as they import into Alberta. Many small brewers from Ontario, Nova Scotia, and Quebec will simply see their products vanish from our shelves. This is not something that is good for consumers in Alberta. Protectionism is unbecoming of a country with a free economy.

This budget and this bill are a test for us. Are we willing to grant the government another blank cheque? Are we willing to give this government more powers to borrow and to spend? Virtually anyone who looks at the government's budget knows that without a major

change in the geopolitical, world economic situation there is virtually no way that they will meet a balanced budget by fiscal year 2019-2020. That means that the NDP plan to borrow or simply borrow to the maximum, and the government will likely be here in four years again asking to borrow more.

Our party will be putting forward amendments to this bill which will require that there be penalties for politicians that break their own laws. This is what is expected of us, Mr. Speaker. When we make laws for other people outside of this place, we put in place penalties for those people if they don't follow them. But what about ourselves? If we cannot keep to our own budget rules in this place, if we continue to exceed our debt ceilings year after year after year, should there be no consequence for our actions? I would think that our children would want better, that future generations would want us to behave more responsibly with the money that we expect them to pay back.

I look forward to continuing this debate. I certainly hope that the Minister of Finance, who introduced the bill, will be available for questions so that we can get to the bottom of some of this bill's details.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there other members that would speak to this item?

Mr. Hanson: Are we not allowed to question the speaker under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

The Speaker: I'm told that 29(2)(a) does not apply in this situation. It will to the next speaker, I'm advised, but not to the second speaker.

The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 4, An Act to Implement Various Tax Measures and to Enact the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act, or, as we like to call it inside Wildrose, the Tax Hike, Debt, and More Taxes Act.

Mr. Speaker, the government of Alberta was spending in excess of revenue even when oil was \$100 a barrel. Now with oil around \$40 a barrel the government's spending situation is even worse in spite of revenues being the third highest in history this year and headed back up. In fact, spending is so out of control that the government wants to borrow debt to spend money on day-to-day operations. These operational deficits have been illegal for decades in Alberta. Eliminating operational deficits was the first step in Alberta eliminating its debt. This was part of our Alberta advantage, that allowed for low taxes and smaller government. The approach has resulted in a far more diversified economy now than when the Alberta advantage policy was first brought out.

The bill proposes to raise the debt limit to 15 per cent of GDP and plans to take us up to 10 per cent in two years. What will happen when our borrowing hits 15 per cent or more of GDP? The international bankers who hold Alberta's debt will declare Alberta to be a riskier place to invest. They will lower our credit rating. When your credit score drops, the interest rates on your debts go up. Try it yourself. Rack up a credit card, and don't pay it for a while. Then ask for another loan. Good luck.

A 1 per cent interest rate on \$1 billion of debt is \$10 million. Mr. Speaker, that is the equivalent of one brand new elementary school not being built. The NDP plan to rack up the debt to \$50 billion in less than five years. If the interest rate is 1 per cent, that is \$500 million in interest charges every year. Now we're up to 50 brand new elementary schools not being built, all denied by the NDP. But interest rates won't be 1 per cent. The bond markets want a strong, steady, and stable rate of return. Alberta will likely pay between 3

per cent and 5 per cent for its borrowing. That works out to \$1.5 billion and \$2.5 billion in annual interest on that \$50 billion debt. Now, we are talking about the equivalent of a Calgary cancer centre or a Misericordia hospital replacement not being affordable anymore because the NDP have put Alberta in a position where we have to use that \$2 billion every year just to carry our massive debt.

Jurisdictions that rack up huge debts are less likely to attract private-sector investment to diversify the economy. Isn't that what the NDP wants to do to get us off the oil and gas economic dependency and diversify into other industries?

Alberta runs an expensive government. I don't know if it is envy for their private-sector counterparts, national arrogance and hubris, or just poor management that has led the government of Alberta to be so expensive. Alberta already spends \$2,000 per capita more than British Columbia just on operations. You would almost think it would be the reverse. British Columbia is a bastion of fiscal stability and prudent spending compared to Alberta. Who would have thought it? When it comes to capital, B.C. is spending \$10.7 billion on capital over the next three years while Alberta is spending \$24.6 billion over the next three years. That's right. We're spending more than double what a bigger, growing, expensive province is doing. It's also another \$1,000 per capita that's going into debt every year. I don't get it, Mr. Speaker. B.C. has all the mountains and needs to do blasting to build highways. Pacific Rim investment and geography have made real estate extremely expensive in Vancouver and the Lower Mainland. Yet here we are with lots of flat and plentiful land, but our capital costs are astronomical.

Now, I'll be the first to admit that our public facilities are in disrepair and need to be fixed and that we had a lot of people move to Alberta over the last decade, who did not bring public infrastructure with them, but the costs have to be driven down. We heard the siren song of innovation to drive the costs down, but when construction companies go to bid on the contracts, they're not allowed to innovate. Picking the shades of paint for a new school is not innovation, Mr. Speaker.

Private-sector employees are experiencing pain in this time of restraint. Why can't the public sector, too? By not even asking the public-sector unions to consider something as simple as forgoing a pay raise while the rest of Alberta is reeling, this government is being irresponsible. It is just kicking the can down the road and delaying the inevitable until a champion of the free market is elected to government again. That inevitable is to trim the bloat and the fat among the management class of the government and its agencies, boards, and commissions. Managers managing managers managing other managers is unacceptable. Managers are not front-line workers. Managers are not unionized front-line workers.

3:10

Let me speak for a moment to the myth those on the other side like to tell Albertans. Not once has Wildrose threatened front-line workers. Teachers, doctors, nurses, professors, medical science technicians, psychologists, game wardens, prison guards, social workers: these are all front-line workers, and Wildrose knows we can't afford to lose any of them. The NDP scare tactic that we will eliminate front-line workers will not work.

Mr. Speaker, I will conclude by saying that this fiscal regime is heading in the wrong direction and needs to be halted before serious damage is done to Alberta and the economy during this downturn. I oppose this bill because it is enabling legislation for a government that refuses to see it has a spending problem. I encourage everyone in this House to tell the government to stop taxing and to rein in our bloated spending while protecting the front lines. It can be done, but first you have to want to try.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) applies with respect to the last presentation, by the Member for Little Bow. Are there any questions to the member?

Hearing none, the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have several concerns about this bill. I'll start with the discussion on section 7(1), that reinstates the 1 per cent spending cap. That is a result, of course, of having to repeal the original Fiscal Management Act, and we're simply putting back section 7. However, as the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks has noted, there are no teeth here whatsoever. There's nothing that prevents the government from simply repealing this act or amending this act or deciding that they don't like the 1 per cent spending limit in this act.

But more than that, there's a lot that can be done within the bounds of this act should it be passed into law. There are several loopholes, two of which I will point out. Section 7(2)(c), as we know, reads that an exclusion to the 1 per cent spending limit is "commitments made in connection with collective bargaining or other negotiations or settlements relating to remuneration." Now, that doesn't speak about just past commitments; it could in fact apply to future commitments. The government could decide that, in fact, it needs to increase spending far greater than 1 per cent simply by entering into a new agreement with any number of government workers. I won't pass judgment on whether or not that is a wise thing to do in terms of entering into those agreements. I'll simply say that it creates a huge loophole because fully half of Alberta government spending is spent on salaries; \$25 billion of \$50 billion spent in this government is wages and salaries. So that's a huge and significant loophole. But that was there before. It existed before. It doesn't mean it wasn't a loophole, but it existed before.

What is new in this act from the Fiscal Management Act is section 7(2)(e) with respect to entities referred to in the Financial Administration Act or the Regional Health Authorities Act. They are able to increase "expenses funded from the unbudgeted drawdown of operating reserves or accumulated surpluses or from unbudgeted additional revenue." What is unbudgeted additional revenue? Is that limited only to revenues generated by those entities, or could it in fact include windfall resource revenues from outside those particular entities? That's an important question to answer, and that's a question that this bill does not answer. It creates a significant concern, frankly, about the overall integrity of the bill itself.

I do want to talk for a moment about increased revenues, also known as tax increases. They're raising sin taxes on beer and tobacco. Generally, in fact, that's something I'm in favour of. I actually don't have a huge concern with it. At some point it gets so high that we create a situation where we may have a black market. There is no evidence that I'm aware of yet that that's a problem here in Alberta, but it's certainly something that this government needs to pay attention to.

Having said that, something that came up at a health discussion I had this morning, the Health Coalition, is that perhaps we should think about targeting some of these sin tax revenues to preventative health care, create a tie. The problems that are caused by alcohol and tobacco consumption should be targeted by specific measures within preventative health care.

The other issue I have a real concern about, one that I raised with the minister in estimates and one that I've raised in this House during question period, is whether or not the Minister of Finance and Treasury Board has done a sensitivity analysis on what will happen if, in fact, our credit rating is downgraded. This bill limits debt to GDP to 15 per cent, but it does not guarantee by itself that we will not see a credit rating downgrade in this province. That's a

huge concern, and we're taking on hundreds of millions of dollars, billions, in debt in this province. The impact of even a half percent increase in our borrowing costs would be potentially exponential, and that becomes a huge and significant problem. I would encourage the minister again and I would encourage his department again to conduct that work, to do the analysis of what the impact would be of a credit rating downgrade.

We look at fuel taxes as well. The increase to fuel taxes is substantial, makes a big difference to the cost of transporting Alberta goods and services, especially the locomotive tax increase. I note that that will have a significant impact on the cost of transporting Alberta's bitumen by rail at a time when we are having a significant problem getting pipelines approved in this province. I note the government, in my opinion, has not done enough to encourage the development of pipelines in all directions. I'm disappointed with our government's lack of support for Keystone XL. I'm disappointed with our government's lack of support for Northern Gateway. I think there's significant risk in putting all of our eggs in the Energy East basket. Much as I support Energy East and I think it's a tremendous, nation-building project and something this House should all get behind, I worry very much when we focus only on one project.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will conclude my comments and welcome any questions my colleagues may have. Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there any questions for the Member for Calgary-Elbow?

Mr. Schneider: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member talked about a sensitivity analysis of debt to GDP. I wonder if he could expand on that. That's a term that maybe isn't used enough, that we could stand to understand a little better.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Clark: Sure. Thank you very much for the question. Really what it says is that this bill and all actions of the government assume that we will not face a credit rating downgrade. The question is: what if? A sensitivity analysis says: what if? What if our borrowing costs go up .25 per cent, .5 per cent, 1 per cent? What if? What is that going to cost us? As you know, interest compounds itself and becomes exponentially worse. I have a feeling that within the department that work probably has been done. Given the number of capable financial analysts that we have within our Treasury Board and Finance department, I would imagine that if we dig deep enough, we may find a spreadsheet that has that analysis. I think this government, if they don't know the information, should know the information, and I do wonder if, in fact, they do because those numbers are – my budget analyst spent 20 minutes and did his own assessment, and he found that a 1 per cent increase in Alberta's borrowing rate two years out from now will cost us \$700 million a year in debt-servicing costs. Those numbers add up from there over time, so it is a significant risk to this province.

I want to say that I am in favour, broadly speaking, of well-managed borrowing to build infrastructure. We're well behind in this province, and it's important that we do that. It's important that we create jobs at a time of economic uncertainty, but we need to do that in a managed way, and we need to make sure that that debt doesn't get out of control, and we need to know what those debt-servicing costs are going to be. If you can't measure it, you can't manage it, so I think it's very important that we understand what those numbers are.

3:20

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a).

Mr. Taylor: I was going to ask, Mr. Speaker: how many infrastructure projects does he think would be lost as a result of \$700 million having to be spent on this debt that he was referring to?

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Clark: That's a great question. I won't be able to give you a specific answer. It's something that perhaps our Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation may be able to give you a better indication of. Gosh. You know, \$700 million: that's two and a half Springbank flood mitigation projects. That's the better part of the Calgary cancer centre. That's significant. Significant. And that's every single year. When we're in a situation where the government is going to borrow for operational spending, borrow for pens and pencils and paper and paper clips, that's a huge amount of money. That's a substantial risk to this province, and you can't overstate that risk.

So while this bill attempts to address that, if the only thing we're doing is limiting our debt to GDP to 15 per cent, that's not enough, I think, to maintain our triple-A credit rating. Different credit rating agencies have different measures. Debt to GDP is but one of those measures. We're already on negative credit watch from all of the rating agencies. Although that one step to limit our debt to GDP is important, it is by no means enough. I have some significant concerns that future infrastructure projects and future operational spending are at risk if we let our debt get out of control.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, sir. To the hon. member: given that Alberta's GDP per person is about double that of Ontario and they have a 30 per cent—correct me if I'm wrong—debt ceiling, in your calculations is it true that a 15 per cent debt ceiling to us is equivalent to the same impact as a 30 per cent debt ceiling to someone with half the GDP per person?

Mr. Clark: I guess by that simple math it probably is. You know, a 15 per cent debt to GDP in Alberta is a substantial amount of money. I don't have the calculations in front of me, but I believe it to be well in excess of \$50 billion in debt. That's a significant amount. And at that level debt service costs get to be a significant portion of the budget, your second or third line item in terms of budget, and that money only going to debt service.

Again, I'm okay with well-managed debt. I'm not convinced that allowing our debt ceiling to get up to 15 per cent of debt to GDP is, in fact, a prudent thing to do. It creates trade-offs that I think we do not want to make in this province.

Mr. MacIntyre: Great. Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there any other questions under 29(2)(a)?
The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I truly need to speak to this bill. This government's philosophically and economically flawed fiscal plan bases its justification upon comparisons drawn from the very worst provinces in our Confederation. Who you compare yourself to actually does matter. Comparison to the worst financial managers in the country is, in fact, a very poor standard of measure. Ontario has the dubious and shameful reputation, as reported in the *Financial Post* and other papers, as being the most indebted

subsovereign jurisdiction in the world. Why do we want to compare ourselves to the worst?

Every teenager knows that peer pressure is often bad for you, especially when it comes from those who are failing their grade. Telling me that the worst performing student in the class of provincial economics is the one I should look up to and emulate is just not acceptable. Telling yourself that a 15 per cent debt ceiling is acceptable for resource-rich Alberta is self-delusion or maybe just teenage justification, but the truth is that Albertans really do not want this. Mr. Speaker, Bill 4 reflects the fundamental problem with this government's plan. The NDP refuses to cut fat. They want to increase Alberta's debt load and continue to pay for the most expensive provincial government in the country.

Now, Albertans know that throwing money at a problem is never a solution, and borrowing for bloated operational costs is doing exactly that. Setting a high debt ceiling that this government can arbitrarily change on a whim while they continue to push back the date of a balanced budget does not restore confidence in our marketplace. Instead, it just pushes the province deeper and deeper in debt, making it very hard for investors and business owners to properly plan for the future.

Now, don't get me wrong. I do applaud the effort to increase the financial transparency in this province. That's particularly true with the clarity of 6(1) on revised quarterly projection updates. I'm glad to see that, but I am seriously concerned about the abandonment of offsetting deficit spending with draws from reserve funds. Of course, the problem is that there are no reserve funds or at least very soon won't be. Yes, I admit that those across the floor from us here have been handed a somewhat difficult hand to play because there are no reserves, which is even more reason, actually, to play it well. Beginning to build the Alberta heritage debt fund is not the way to build Alberta.

To make a comparison, condo associations in this province are required by law to plan for, fund, and maintain reserve funds. That's a fiduciary duty of condo association directors. Does the Alberta government consider itself somehow above and beyond the law in this regard? Should the government not lead by example? Is the government creating a double standard where citizens of condo associations must act and invest according to the rule of law but the government does not have to be constrained by it? The condo reserve fund is a prudent requirement for the protection of the people of Alberta. How do the NDP consider that it is not a prudent and protective requirement for the government to also be required to maintain and rely on reserves rather than debt for its operations?

I ask the government to examine the principles that led to legislated condo reserve funds and understand that what is good for condo owners managing millions of dollars is far more important for a government managing billions of dollars. Mr. Speaker, how is it that this government is so comfortable with debt anyway? Who do they think they're borrowing from? I'm speaking about a government that generally views big corporations as the enemy. The NDP believe that corporations are the ones who make their wealth off the backs of the laboring poor, that they control the so-called evil strings of capitalism, and that they are the ones who are the sole cause of income inequality. This government's mantra believes that no one wants to be enslaved to them. [interjection]

The Speaker: Hon. member, do you have a point of order?

Mr. Mason: I have a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Point of Order Imputing Motives

Mr. Mason: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member with respect to this, but 23(i), “imputes false or unavowed motives to another Member,” applies here, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member is sketching what could charitably be called a caricature of the views of members on this side. It’s misrepresenting what the views of members on this side of the House actually are, and I would suggest that he rephrase his comments accordingly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The point of order is noted. I’m looking for procedural direction.

The hon. member.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We’ve been through this particular point of order many times. The Government House Leader has made the point that I’m going to make here, that this is a matter of perception and interpretation. We have regularly risen on points of order on mischaracterizations of policies and priorities of the Wildrose. The government accusing the Official Opposition of wanting to lay off mass thousands of workers: that is not true, but you have ruled that that is merely a political interpretation. The Member for Lacombe-Ponoka is speaking with what is a political interpretation of the government’s policies and views, and due to your past rulings on this issue, I think that the Government House Leader’s point of order is not valid.

3:30

The Speaker: My recollection is that the item that you’re referring to, in fact, was a point of privilege. Nonetheless, your point is taken.

Hon. member, would you like in any way to reconsider your comments? If not, I will make a note of the point of order made.

Mr. Orr: Yeah. I don’t intend any offence. I guess I am confused, actually, that this policy comes forward. Maybe I’m a little too strong, but I’m just expressing what I think I’ve heard before. No offence intended, and I’ll move on if I may.

The Speaker: Proceed.

Debate Continued

Mr. Orr: My question really boils down to – and I get the values of the NDP in terms of corporations and big government. What really, really confuses me in this, then, which is where I’m going, is that it seems to me that the government is betraying its own values and its own people by going hat in hand right back to the very foundations of capitalism, back to the greatest controllers of capitalism, the big banks and the international financiers, to borrow money from them. Why does the NDP government give so much power to those that control so much of our world?

It doesn’t matter who it is: families, businesses, governments. You enslave yourself in the worst possible way by taking on debt, and setting up Albertans and their tax dollars for higher lending rates and higher debt is not going to be benefiting our province. When it’s all said and done, we will have dug ourselves a \$50 billion hole, that really betrays the values of most Albertans on this side of the House and, if they really think about it, I truly believe, on that side of the House. Why do we want to give the big international financiers control over our lives? Every dollar we borrow comes with a chain, and you will not be released until every last cent is repaid.

Mr. Speaker, this government continues to demonstrate, I think, a lack of financial knowledge and a contempt for the Alberta marketplace, and I just ask: when will this government admit that the debt ceiling is a Band-Aid solution and that what it really needs to do is to stop bleeding our dollars away?

Thank you.

The Speaker: Under 29(2)(a) are there any questions for the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka?

Mr. Hanson: Yes. I have a question. Hon. member, just if you could, you know, kind of clarify to us: if we go into debt to the tune of spending \$1.3 billion to \$2 billion a year simply on interest, how is that going to affect your riding and projects that people are putting forward in your riding?

Mr. Orr: Well, one of the most important things in my riding is a major shared infrastructure project between a group of municipalities. That has not been completed yet, and the inability to fund important water for life projects, both freshwater and sewer water, would be a major disaster in my riding. So that would be one very important way.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Any other questions for the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka under 29(2)(a)?

Hearing none, are there other parties who wish to speak to Bill 4, An Act to Implement Various Tax Measures and to Enact the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act? The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in the House today to address the assembled members with my grave concerns over Bill 4. I fear for the future of this province under the guidance of a government that does not seem to understand the very real and negative consequences of debt. This bill, which allows operational borrowing, will take Alberta in an entirely incorrect direction.

Alberta is an incredibly blessed province. We have immense mineral wealth and an industrious population. The hard work and entrepreneurial spirit of Albertans have generated an incredible amount of wealth, affording the residents of this province a high quality of life. The government has done a lot of work in the last six months to dismantle the remnants of the Alberta advantage. They want Albertans to forget that low tax rates cultivated and encouraged the industrious and entrepreneurial spirit of this province. They want Albertans to forget that these low taxes encouraged our job creators to thrive. They want Albertans to forget that low taxes allowed our economy to grow to a point where we never had to choose between low taxes and a high level of services. I want to implore all of you to not forget what made this province a beautiful place to work and to raise a family.

Quite simply, Mr. Speaker, Albertans and industry have long been taxed at a level that has consistently generated a high level of tax revenue. Even this year our level of revenues is the third highest that it’s ever been, a fact that the current government seems highly motivated to have Albertans forget. Let me be clear. This budget will remain unbalanced under the NDP due to high expenditure, not low revenue.

When I look at Bill 4 and this government’s plans for the next few fiscal years more broadly, I’m deeply concerned, and I’m incredibly dismayed. The government plans to debt finance program spending, and this bill will let them do that. The government is refusing to accept the extremely real and negative repercussions on everyday Albertans from this level of irresponsible spending. Instead of paying these debt-servicing costs, we would be paying

for something that we thought was important to this government: schools, roads, hospitals. Soon the government will pay \$1.2 billion to debt-servicing costs, and the new government refuses to take steps to move us away from this direction. The \$1.2 billion could be used, actually, towards the salaries of numerous teachers, nurses, and doctors, and to add insult to injury, they're doing nothing to change the province's trajectory to end the downward economic debt spiral. This is just bad fiscal management.

As your government debt finances program spending, you are choosing to saddle future generations with the cost of program operations from which they will never derive any benefit. You fearmongered about our policies when actually it's your policy of driving this province's economy into the ground that's seeing us borrowing billions at the expense of my children's money and your children's money and all of your great-grandchildren. This is a terrible legacy for our generation to be burdening the next generation and the next generation and the next generation.

It is this government's inability to manage its swollen bureaucracy which is hurting our children, a bureaucracy that has become so large. It is dysfunctional as a result of our high-priced services that are underperforming. In fact, just last week a former Alberta Finance minister clarified that the NDP could indeed maintain a front-line service and cut spending. This former minister noted that this is not about protecting health care, education, or social services but rather the salaries of public-sector unions that deliver these services.

There is plenty of revenue to maintain front-line services. We are borrowing and raising taxes for the increased salaries and benefits for the bureaucrats. This is about being stewards of our economy and acting on sound fiscal planning rather than raises for the bureaucrats and the public-sector unions. We already spend per capita \$2,000 more than B.C. on operations. This government is disinterested in spending money efficiently.

Alberta's population, like the rest of Canada's, is aging rapidly, and we continue to see lower economic growth, a problem that this government seems endlessly continuing to perpetuate. An aging population has profound implications both economically and socially. Interest rates are going to go back up, and with every year it becomes more and more difficult to remove our province from this downward spiral it is currently on. This government's only commitment is pushing us further into a deficit-debt spiral.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there any questions for the member under 29(2)(a)?

Are there any other members? The hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

3:40

Mr. Stier: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 4. It's a pleasure to speak this afternoon to the House regarding this matter. I certainly have listened with interest to some of the comments made by some of the various members, especially from this side, which I think are very appropriate and to the point. I think I'm going to take the opportunity, as I usually do, to hammer the point home a little further if I may.

Anyway, you know, it's known as the act to implement various tax measures and to enact the fiscal planning and the transparency of this whole situation, Mr. Speaker. Let's be clear, though. This bill is about enabling higher taxes and more debt because this government ideologically rejects any reduction to our bloated spending habits that we've had over the past many decades. It allows the government to run operational deficits, which for decades have been illegal. What this means is that the province is

borrowing money to pay for basic services. This is the definition of unsustainable.

Most of my fellow members across the aisle remember the early '90s with loathing, or some of them may not if they were not in politics at that time. Actually, many of my fellow members may not remember the '90s at all, but be that as it may, the challenging years we went through in the early '90s were necessary to eliminate the high debt we had, and it resulted in the Alberta advantage. I'm not sure if anybody remembers the Alberta advantage anymore because it seems as if it's disappeared for years now.

Because of the prudent fiscal management of former Premier Ralph Klein, though, Alberta became the envy of the nation. We experienced massive levels of investment; our services across the board were top of the class, Alberta was debt free, and Albertans were . . . [interjections]

Mr. Speaker, is it the intent of the Speaker to allow heckling during these debates? Just a question for clarification if I may. Just a question, sir, if I may.

The Speaker: Please proceed.

Mr. Stier: Thank you. Since the late 2000s that has been changing. Continuous governments began to increase spending beyond inflation plus population. We came to rely on our oil and gas revenues to pay for basic services. This resulted in deficits and the taking on of debt.

Instead of changing course and working towards getting our province back on stable financing footing, this government has doubled down on the deficits. "Why should we care?" you ask. "Interest rates are low," you say. "This is a perfect time to borrow," they say. "Get in while the getting's good," they say. Well, along with debt comes debt-servicing costs, ladies and gentlemen. Debt-servicing costs are the money we spend to cover the repayment of interest and principal on our debt. Under this government's leadership we will soon be facing \$1 billion in debt-servicing costs, and by 2019 it will balloon to \$2 billion just in debt-servicing costs. That is taxpayers' money, ladies and gentleman, that this government is just tossing away without a concern in the world. This is taxpayers' money that this government is simply throwing away because of their bad economic policies. It was wrong under the previous government, and it's still wrong under this government.

Let's take a moment to consider what \$2 billion would have got us: 400 water treatment plants, 340 fire halls, 339 full water pump stations for municipal needs, 330 community halls, 300 ambulance facilities – I can tell you that we need more ambulance facilities; I've mentioned this in the House several times in the past three and a half years – 286 police stations, 263 intersection improvements all over Alberta. We're talking about doing that all over Alberta because there is such a deficit on that. I could go on, Mr. Speaker, but I think everyone gets the point. Instead of all these critically needed items we are lining the pockets of big banks.

The legislation calls for a debt ceiling of 15 per cent of GDP, but if the government is willing to change the law and says that operational deficits are now legal, what is stopping them from changing this law once they reach 15 per cent? Are there no provisions for punishment if the government exceeds 15 per cent of GDP? What is the point of having a law without any consequences for breaking it? What would be done to civil servants if they were told by the government to borrow illegally? Why are there no protections in place? GDP could drop with cyclical economic changes and unexpectedly take our debt beyond the 15 per cent GDP mark. What then? Fifteen per cent is approximately \$50 billion of debt that future generations would maybe have to pay back if possible. This government is forcing future Albertans to pay

for its bad economic policies, and instead of focusing on spending taxpayers' dollars effectively and efficiently, they're hiking dozens of taxes and fees and running up the credit card every minute of every day.

This government has a serious spending problem. There's no question. This bill will just enable this government to put off addressing the problem. With our massive royalty revenues and economic spinoffs there's no excuse to be running billions in debt every year. Instead of changing the legislation to run deficits, we should be creating legislation that determines how we will save our surpluses and secure our financial future instead of risking it with debt.

This government was elected because they promised to be different. I hope that they will be different; I hope that they will be better than the previous government. Instead, we're getting a government that is much worse, a government that is increasing debt, raising taxes, and destroying what was left of our Alberta advantage.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there any questions of the member? Please proceed.

Mr. Hanson: To the member: I'm not questioning your age, sir, but you obviously lived through the downturns of the '80s and the '90s and must recall how the effects of the high interest rates affected homeowners and businesses. We're justifying borrowing right now because the interest rates are low. Can you give us some idea of what even a 2 per cent increase in interest rates, as opposed to the 23 per cent that we saw in the '80s, would do to our economy if we were sitting on this much debt?

Mr. Stier: Mr. Speaker, if I may. Thank you. Thanks to the hon. member for the question. That's interesting. It's kind of hard to calculate a 2 per cent increase in debt. I don't have a calculator in front of me. I can tell you right now that, yes, I have lived for many years through different cycles and different interest rates, and I can remember the difficulties that we all experienced during the late '70s and early '80s, when interest rates were going up to 18 to 20 to 23 per cent. It was amazing to me how many people were in very difficult times in those days. We suddenly had all kinds of very serious problems. We had people that were losing their homes. We had people who were involved in the construction business, whether from the supply side or the building side or whatever, losing their jobs because construction came to a grinding halt. No one could afford to borrow for homes. No one could make the payments. Property values decreased immensely. Assessments went down. As we all know, our very net worth is based on assessments. Yes, this kind of an increase, even at 2 per cent, province-wide will have devastating effects. We're already seeing the effects and the negative impacts of these kinds of policies that are coming out even before the legislation is passed.

Thank you for the question. I think it's a good one to keep in mind, that experience of the past should be able to guide us for the future.

The Speaker: Are there any other questions for the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod?

Are there other members who wish to speak? The Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Taylor: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to rise to speak on Bill 4. I oppose Bill 4. I'd like to start off by saying that no government has ever taxed its way to prosperity or, put another way, to a surplus. We only have to look across the pond to Greece

to see what will happen if we continue down the lines of this way of thinking.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Alberta runs the most expensive government in all of Canada. Raising taxes and asking people to hand over their hard-earned money does not make Alberta more efficient or give us our Alberta advantage. In fact, I believe it does the opposite. Albertans expect their government to be good stewards of their money. That's something I've been told time and time again, so I would just expect the government to be good stewards of the money.

Let's be clear. This bill is about enabling higher taxes and more debt. That's what we're going to see from this. More debt means more debt-servicing costs, so that means fewer schools, fewer hospitals. It's going to be a compounded problem.

3:50

You know, by 2020 we'll be somewhere around \$50 billion in debt, and it will cost in the neighbourhood of \$1 billion to \$2 billion anyway to service that debt. The cost of the Wainwright hospital, a hospital I've been advocating for in this House before, is about \$241 million. That's the government's number. You're looking at taking four to eight of those hospitals off the market every year, year after year, as long as we have that debt. As long as we have to service that debt, those hospitals will not be able to be built along with all the other aforementioned projects that will not be able to be built. When do you reach the debt ceiling? What provisions do you have in place if you get right to that 15 per cent or exceed that 15 per cent of GDP?

I have another question for you, and I think there's an unintended consequence that comes along with this one. You know, I've never been a smoker, and I appreciate that the sin tax that you're putting on there is a voluntary tax; it's just there for the people that want to do this. But on page 49 of Bill 4, An Act to Implement Various Tax Measures and to Enact the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act, it goes on to say:

(a) On every cigarette or tobacco stick purchased by that consumer, \$0.25.

That goes from 20 cents to 25 cents.

(b) On every cigar purchased by that consumer, 129% of the taxable price of the cigar, with the tax payable on each cigar being not less than \$0.25 per cigar nor more than \$7.83 per cigar.

That was 103 per cent before; now it's 129 per cent. That's fairly significant.

(c) On every gram ... of any tobacco, other than cigarettes, tobacco sticks or cigars, purchased by that consumer, \$0.375.

It goes from 30 cents to 37 and a half cents.

I guess the point that I'm getting at is that I'm looking at the unintended consequences that could happen, the unintended consequences that cigarettes, tobacco, all these products become so expensive that we end up with a policing problem because of illegal sales on cigarettes or perhaps smuggling in our province. That's something that I certainly don't want to see, more criminal activity, and these I think are the unintended consequences that could happen as a result of these taxes that keep getting piled on.

So I'm opposed to this bill. I don't believe that we need to keep raising the debt ceiling, and I think that we need to get our spending under control and look at other measures to get that spending under control.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Fildebrandt: Yes, Madam Speaker. The Member for Battle River-Wainwright spoke about the unintended consequences of raising tobacco taxes now. I think it's likely that every member of this House recognizes that higher tobacco taxes can discourage tobacco use, which is an important social good, and we can use tobacco taxes to pay for the accompanying health care costs that come with tobacco use. However, that does come to a limit. We can see what's happening in Ontario and Quebec right now, where contraband tobacco makes up between 33 per cent and 50 per cent of all tobacco sales in those provinces largely because high tobacco taxes have gotten to such a level that they incentivize a massive black market. Perhaps the member could elaborate on his points around contraband tobacco and how raising tobacco taxes beyond a particular point could in fact reduce the revenue the government intends to collect from tobacco taxes.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you for that. Thank you, Madam Speaker. Raising the tobacco tax will have unintended consequences, certainly could, and have the opposite effect of what was intended. If it was intended that we're going to just stop people from smoking or slow it down, that would be a fantastic thing. However, I don't believe that's going to happen in all cases. What's going to happen is what happened in Ontario. With the rise in the tax you'll end up with potentially more contraband cigarettes coming across the border and creating more problems. Where the tax becomes quite problematic is that we have to spend more on policing just to be able to have this. So if we spend more money on policing, are we actually gaining any money from this raise in these tobacco taxes? I don't think so. I think that it's going to be counterintuitive to what you're intending. I think that all of these taxes that we've been putting in here have the potential for future problems.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wish to question or comment under 29(2)(a)?

The next member to speak to the bill, then. Please go ahead, Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 4, An Act to Implement Various Tax Measures and to Enact the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act. Given the recent warnings that this government has received from bond-rating agencies like Moody's, who already have given this province, you know, almost in writing a warning, "You are on the watch" – they are watching our debt-to-GDP ratio; they are watching the policies of this government because they are considering, you know, lowering our rating – it's a surprise to me that the government would then bring along a bill like this to, well, first of all, increase the cap to 15 per cent and then also change the law which used to make it illegal to borrow for operation. Now it's going to be legal to borrow for operation. These kinds of signals that are sent to the bond-rating agencies are not signals that they particularly like because it means, then, that for the money that we do have to borrow, we are going to be paying more interest.

Now, we're going to be borrowing – well, yeah, we, all Albertans, are going to be on the hook for a few billion dollars more this year. Then a year from now, when another budget cycle comes around and this government still can't rein in its spending, we're going to be borrowing more. Those same bond-rating companies are then going to reassess our bond rating and downgrade us again. Although I have heard a lot of members talking about a \$50 billion debt load by the end of the four-year term of this government, no one seems to have touched on the reality that every quarter between

now and the end of that four-year term those bond-rating agencies may have been dropping our bond rating and increasing our interest rate quarter by quarter by quarter. Our projection of a \$2 billion debt-servicing cost could be substantially low. At the end of the four-year term we could be paying substantially more for the debt that we have simply because we are playing into the hands of the debt cycle. It's like a circus you can't get away from. You cannot borrow your way to prosperity.

Now, as MLA for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake the issues that are outlined in Bill 4 put forward by this NDP government are some of the hottest hot-button issues in my riding. My riding is predominantly agricultural. I do have some urban. There are 14 communities in total. It doesn't matter whether I'm talking to a farmer down in Innisfail or out in Spruce View or whether I'm talking to a young family in Sylvan Lake – we have a lot of laid-off people from the patch in Sylvan Lake, my own hometown – or whether it's a nonprofit group relying on the generous donations from people. Let's be clear; out-of-work people don't have the money to donate to nonprofits. It doesn't matter who I'm talking to. Everyone is concerned about the direction this government is taking. The Alberta advantage is pretty much done, and this blind ideology of tax and spend and tax and spend is putting the last nail in the coffin.

4:00

Madam Speaker, they are concerned about bills like Bill 4 and what it means for our current situation, but more importantly they are worried about the consequences to our children and our grandchildren because of this government's push with bills like this that attempt to spend our way out of trouble.

The good people of my riding know without a doubt that you cannot spend your way to prosperity, so as I travel around my riding and I talk to people that are frightened about losing their jobs – and some of them already have – they are troubled. They are confused. They don't understand what has happened to their Alberta. They don't understand an ideology from a government that higher taxes and increased spending during a downturn in the economy are somehow good for this province, a government who continues to push this kind of ideology while over 65,000 of our fellow Albertans have lost their jobs.

Let's be clear about this 65,000 number that we keep hearing. This does not take into account subcontractors and contractors who are self-employed people, who do not show up on the unemployment rolls. These are people who are not getting contracts for work, but they are self-employed, one-owner operators, little mom-and-pop businesses here and there that are not getting the fab jobs, not getting the welding jobs, not getting the supply jobs, and they don't show up in the unemployment statistics. I would venture to suggest to this House that this number of 65,000 Albertans having lost their jobs is only half of the true picture when you take into account how many small businesses and contractors in this province also rely on our resource industry for work. They are not working. Those welding trucks are parked at home.

With that in mind, Madam Speaker, let's be clear. This bill is about one thing only, and that's enabling a government to raise taxes even higher. It's about more debt, more borrowing against our children's future, and it shows that this government is refusing to deal with bloated spending, refusing to take a look at efficiencies within government, refusing to do what every family across this province knows, that you cannot spend more than you make. Instead of getting our fiscal house in order, this government has chosen to go the other direction and put forward a bill that will allow this government to run operational deficits, which for decades have been illegal in this province. It's going to allow for high debt

loads, and we're chasing this \$50 billion debt load by the next election. Given that there appear to be serious doubts with the rosy revenue projections put forward by the Finance minister, it is, sadly, looking to me at least like it could be a whole lot more.

This Bill 4 pretty much kills the Alberta advantage, destroying the hard work and sacrifice of Albertans when we together in this province eliminated the high debt load of this province that we had back in 1992. In 2004 we watched as former Premier Klein announced Alberta's debt paid in full. It was a crowning achievement that made all of us in this province able to hold our heads high. I was involved in international business at the time, and even countries in the Middle East knew where Alberta was. They had heard about us. They'd heard about our province all the way overseas and in Europe. They knew who we were, and they even knew who Premier Klein was. They thought this was the greatest thing ever, that a country or a place, a jurisdiction, could be debt free. We were the envy of the planet.

All this hard work that paved the way for lower taxes, increased spending on services from the savings from the elimination of the costs of debt servicing, all of this: now a decade later the NDP is throwing it away, and they're choosing higher taxes and high costs that come with debt servicing because they're borrowing tens of millions of dollars instead of looking for ways to save money. It's terrible. Instead of spending money on badly needed schools and roads, Alberta is going to be spending significant amounts of money on nothing more than debt servicing. It is a shame.

Now, Madam Speaker, the government would like us to believe that paper debt ceilings will keep them from going further than 15 per cent of GDP into debt. I submit to this House and to all Albertans that a paper ceiling of 15 per cent is just a piece of paper that can be broken, just like every other law can be broken in this province. Remember the election that we just had? We had a piece of paper that said that the election was going to take place in June 2016, and look what happened. A piece of paper that tells the government, "You cannot exceed 15 per cent of GDP" is, frankly, not worth the paper it's written on if a majority government can come back and just say, "Well, actually, we need to change that to 18 and then next month to 19 and then the next quarter to 20," and on and on it goes, using the 30 per cent example of Ontario as something to achieve instead of something to avoid.

An examination of this makes it clear that these so-called debt ceilings are just paper promises with no credibility whatsoever, Madam Speaker. If there is no provision for a serious consequence in breaking this 15 per cent of GDP, then I repeat: that document isn't worth the paper it's written on.

Let's be clear. There are no provisions for punishment if the government exceeds it, so really this provision is quite useless. What's the point in writing a law where there are no consequences for breaking it? And what about the civil servants? If they're told by the government to borrow and it happens to be illegal at the moment, there's no protection for them either. All these questions this government has not answered, and clearly, Madam Speaker, the government sees no need to ensure that this law is enforced. The debt ceiling is an empty, unenforceable promise, and this government, in reality, can continue to run amok with our future generations' money. It's shameful.

If, of course, the GDP projections happen to be off – not being a betting man, I might just take that bet – I would bet that they are not going to make the GDP projections that they have in this rosy budget. Then, of course, the 15 per cent of GDP mark is blown to smithereens right there. The government has no answer to this question.

Let's be clear on what 15 per cent is. It's somewhere between \$50 billion and \$60 billion debt that future generations are going to

have to pay back, that my children, my grandchildren are going to have to pay back, all of us. It's alarming, especially when you realize that we already spend more per capita than almost anywhere else, \$2,000 more than B.C. just on operations.

When you look at capital spending, our neighbour to the west is spending \$11.7 billion on capital over the next three years, and Alberta is spending \$24.6 billion over that same period of time, more than double our neighbour, which is a bigger and growing, expensive province. That's another \$1,000 per capita per year going to debt. I believe that Alberta needs to focus on spending hard-working Albertans taxpayers' dollars much more efficiently than we are, looking for places to save rather than more places to tax us. Let's be very clear about money here. A dollar in the hands of an Albertan is a better-spent dollar than in the hands of the government or in the hands of a bank.

I believe Alberta needs to focus on saving. If I go home and find out that I've had to take out a loan to buy groceries, then I know that I have a spending problem, and Albertans know that if you're borrowing to do things like that, you have a spending problem. This government hasn't figured that part out yet. They're still borrowing for groceries, and they're making it much worse with this bill, that enables them to put off addressing the problem. You know, part of being a grown-up is facing the problems head-on, and this bill does not do it. It just puts the problem out there for another day, for another generation to have to deal with.

Madam Speaker, with our massive royalty revenues and economic spinoffs, we really don't have any excuse to be running these kinds of billion-dollar debts. We have not got a revenue problem; we have a spending problem.

4:10

We should be creating legislation, Madam Speaker, that secures our financial future, not jeopardizes it, but sadly this government is creating legislation that risks our future even further with a debt prison that comes along with any kind of debt like this. Our revenues are the third highest in history this year and according to this government are supposed to be going up. I think the projections of increased income are highly suspect, and in recent days we've already seen the indication, both from the World Bank and Moody's, that the government is not going to be recognizing their projections, especially based on the oil price trends.

But given the third-highest-in-history number, why is this government finding it necessary to handcuff us with so much debt? If we cannot pay our bills during our third-best year, how are we ever going to get our fiscal house in order? How is this government going to get Alberta's spending back under control? We don't see a bill doing that. Instead, we want to increase the ceiling? We want to be able to borrow for operational? It just makes it worse, with no effort to address the spending problems we have in this province. Alberta's taxes were the lowest in Canada. We were the first and only jurisdiction in our country to be debt free. This bill, taken together with an ill-advised royalty review, increased carbon taxes, and all these other tax and fee increases mean the Alberta advantage is fading away. [Mr. MacIntyre's speaking time expired] And I am done.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Go ahead, hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake for his comments. A lot of that hit home with me. In Brooks we've got a lot of oil patch workers who were laid off. Many of the industries around it are hurting as

well. We've got oil service providers who are moving to Saskatchewan. There's been a lot of noise from the government benches. Unfortunately, not a single member on that side has taken the time to speak to a bill which will leave us indebted for generations to come. Members on this side of the House, the Official Opposition, are standing up for Albertans, asking questions, and we can't even get the minister who introduced the bill to stand up and debate it here. We get a lot of static from the members over there, but not one of them is willing to stand up and defend this bill.

I'd like the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake to perhaps elaborate on some of his thoughts. Tell us, in particular, perhaps why we need teeth in this legislation. The politicians over there are willing to quack, make a lot of noise, but they're not willing to actually debate the issue because they intend to come back here in four years to raise our debt ceiling again. We need real teeth in this legislation to prevent us from raising the debt ceiling again.

To the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake: I'd like to hear his thoughts on why we need teeth in this legislation.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Madam Speaker. As with anything where you're going to put a limit on something, any parent knows that there have to be consequences when the children break the house rules. It doesn't matter what the rules are. There are some things you just don't get away with without consequences. When we have a government, any government – not just this current government but any government – and we're going to say, "All right; we're going to have a debt ceiling, and that debt ceiling is going to be 15 per cent," that has to come with consequences. Otherwise, as time goes by, people are going to try to find ways, when backed into a corner, to break the rules. There is always going to be the temptation on the part of any government – it doesn't matter if it's this one or any other government – when backed against the wall, when things are looking bad and the government wants to spend money and has already borrowed to its limit, to change this debt ceiling and increase it, even incrementally by 1 per cent or 2 per cent.

You know, 1 per cent and 2 per cent, Madam Speaker, may not sound like a lot of money, but 1 per cent of GDP to an economy as big as ours is a significant amount of money. Even an incremental increase of 1 per cent is billions more dollars that a government can borrow, and without any kind of consequence to that government, there's going to be that temptation.

I'm afraid, Madam Speaker, given the lack of restraint that we have seen – I'm talking about the lack of spending restraint that we have seen on the government side of this House – that not having something in there with teeth is going to leave us wide open to more excesses and more debt, more debt-servicing costs. So I would beg the House to consider putting teeth in this bill if it is, you know, the will of this House to pass what I think is this very bad piece of legislation.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, are you still on 29(2)(a), or are you speaking to the bill?

Dr. Swann: No. Speaking to the bill.

The Deputy Speaker: Do any other members have questions or comments on 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Taylor: Yes. I heard the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake talking about these important institutions, the bond agencies,

I should say, like the World Bank and Moody's. Could you explain to me and to the members here how important these bond agencies are globally to our rating here in Alberta?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you. Whether we like it or not, bond-rating agencies carry a significant amount of sway in the world of large finance, and the reason for that is that they do what are called risk assessments. They have a certain metric that they use when they assess risk, whether it be a really large corporation, whether it be a nation, whether it be a provincial government or a state.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. A pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 4, An Act to Implement Various Tax Measures and to Enact the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act. The bill proposes to repeal the Fiscal Management Act and, in its place, enact the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act. In the simplest terms this means that operational deficits will no longer be illegal and that government debt will now be capped at a maximum of 15 per cent of the province's GDP.

The bill also amends the Alberta Corporate Tax Act, the Alberta Personal Income Tax Act, the Fuel Tax Act, the Tobacco Tax Act, the Tourism Levy Act, and the Perpetuities Act to implement budgeted tax measures, in fact, increases, and to make consequential changes. To provide some perspective on this new proposal, I'll start with the plan to cap government debt at a maximum of 15 per cent of the province's GDP. At 15 per cent that roughly equates to \$55 billion today.

Budget 2015 estimates that the province's total debt will increase by \$36.6 billion, at 10 per cent of the GDP, by fiscal 2017-18 and could grow as high as \$47 billion by the end of 2019-20. For the sake of comparison, Alberta's debt under the PCs peaked at \$23 billion in 1993. This is potentially twice what the maximum PC debt was in 1993, in the so-called Klein revolution and the massive cuts to government spending that occurred at that time, that we're still recovering from, might I add, in terms of infrastructure, in terms of delayed schools, in terms of delayed important public services.

The Fiscal Management Act, which the NDP is repealing and replacing with the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act, does set specific limits on government borrowing by limiting the annual capital debt-servicing costs to a maximum of 3 per cent of actual operational revenue for the fiscal year and the previous two fiscal years. The one glaring deficiency in the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act is the lack of a legislated debt repayment plan. Rather, in the October 27, 2015, budget speech the Finance minister commented: "Once the budget is in balance we will present a debt repayment plan as part of an overall re-assessment of our fiscal priorities." The obvious concern here is that if the price of oil doesn't recover, the NDP does not meet its target of balancing the budget in 2019 or even beyond. The province could potentially go on for years without a debt repayment plan. I don't think most Albertans would manage their finances that way.

4:20

Other than continuing to inflation-proof the Alberta heritage savings trust fund, this new act does not commit the government to save any nonrenewable resource revenues. By contrast, the old Fiscal Management Act committed the government to save a portion of nonrenewable resource revenue annually and by 2017-18 to be retaining a hundred per cent of the Alberta heritage savings fund's net income in the fund.

With respect to operational deficits, unlike the Fiscal Management Act again, the new act does not prohibit operational deficits. In fact, the NDP plans to borrow \$712 million in 2016-17 and almost \$4 billion by 2018-19 to cover operating expenses, resulting in the province's first operational deficit since 1993, again raising questions about repayment.

Bill 4 repeals the Fiscal Management Act and creates a new set of fiscal rules. I would argue that it does suit these challenging economic times, other than the concerns I've expressed, and still maintains our commitment to keep debt under control, subject to the provisions I've indicated.

The legacy of the Fiscal Management Act is really about the PCs deliberately clouding the province's finances for political gain. For that reason alone, Albertans should celebrate its repeal. Had the NDP not been elected, we know that Mr. Prentice was already planning to repeal parts of the Fiscal Management Act due to expected deficits and the unlikelihood that the province would have been able to stay within the rules set out in that act anyway. I give him credit for that intention.

What differentiates the NDP's first budget from those of recent PC governments is that there was consensus about the \$6.1 billion deficit figure. As large and concerning as that is, the NDP has to be commended for presenting the province's finances in a clear, consolidated format. The Auditor General has been critical of the province's budget presentation since 2013. It needed to change. However, in today's challenging economic times Alberta Liberals support a flexible government borrowing and boosting infrastructure to repair the schools, hospitals, roads, bridges, and wastewater facilities as well as affordable housing and light rail transit. The infrastructure spending can and should be debt financed at this time, and long-term interest rates that are favourable will be beneficial to our employment and to our children and to our future.

However, we insist that such large-scale borrowing has to be undertaken in accordance with a legislated debt repayment plan, and we will be offering that up in terms of amendments. It's simply not good enough for the NDP to say that a debt repayment plan will be developed after the budget is balanced because, quite frankly, we don't really know if or when that's going to happen.

In his budget address the Finance minister suggested that capping government debt at a maximum of 15 per cent of the province's GDP was sufficient to keep borrowing from getting out of hand. The minister would do well to remember that the maximum we've ever had in this province was in 1993, at \$23 billion.

With respect to the heritage fund, as a province we need to decide what we want the heritage fund to be. If it is to be a future fund, we need to stop pilfering from it. It has to be an investment for our future, for our children.

There are opportunities today to develop an alternate economy and be less dependent on oil and gas and coal as resources. There's a war on carbon on the planet. We need to be getting on with it and not dragging our feet. Clean technology, alternate energy, renewables: these are the future. They're not the sole future, and we need to transition through gas and combined heat and power innovation. That will create more jobs than the current oil and gas industry alone, and we need to therefore invest in postsecondary and innovation.

We need to see a graduated, thoughtful carbon levy that incents all of us to change our use and be more conservative, in small "c" terms, of fossil fuels. That graduated carbon levy should be revenue neutral, should be given back to Albertans in terms of a tax benefit, especially at this time. It will soften the important shift that we're making to a lighter carbon future.

With respect to the alcohol and tobacco taxes: all to the good. The question is: where are they going to go? If we're ever going to start shifting this health care system to more prevention, we have to

give that money to the health care system in terms of prevention and early intervention programs. Our hospitals are overwhelmed because we're not investing appropriately in injury prevention as well as disease prevention, that we know will make a fantastic difference to long-term morbidity and mortality.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank the Member for Calgary-Mountain View for his contribution to the debate. He might be coming at things from a bit different angle, but he certainly brings a lot of experience and perspective to the House.

I'll focus my comments, especially my questions to him, around changes in accounting. There were improvements made, in my view, to some of the transparency in this bill, and that had to do exclusively with quarterly reporting. Quarterly reporting under the Fiscal Management Act – the previous government repealed the Fiscal Responsibility Act and the Government Accountability Act – allowed the government to produce quarterly reports really on the back of a napkin, without any requirement about what details would be in those quarterly reports. I remember sharing his righteous anger about some quarterly reports that did not contain sufficient information to hold the government accountable. This bill does address that.

But I'm a bit confused by the member's comments around providing the books in a clear and consolidated fashion. I've looked at a lot of budgets in this province, studied them in a lot of detail, and the way these books are presented for the consolidated fiscal plan is no different than it was for the budget produced in March and the budget produced the year before that. The only difference in the consolidated fiscal plan is for years 4 and 5, where even less detail is provided than the previous government. The previous government may have provided phony-baloney numbers for the consolidated primary deficit or primary surplus numbers, but it at least showed its math for years 4 and 5.

This year's budget is pulling numbers out of thin air. They don't know where they're getting their numbers for revenues. They don't know where they're getting them for expenditures. They can't even tell us what debt servicing will be in the fourth and fifth years. It's very concerning.

I'll just allow the member to perhaps discuss it in a bit more detail, but it is around how we're presenting the primary deficit and debt number in this. This is not changing presentation of that figure at all. It still does not count capital grants towards the primary debt. Even if we believe we should be borrowing for capital, we should probably still be counting it in our deficits. In fact, our real deficit, calculated the way we used to do things in this province, is \$9.7 billion. That is our net change in financial assets. That is the real deficit that this province faces. The net change in financial assets is effectively the change in our financial worth as a province, a \$9.7 billion shortfall in our financial worth this year. That is by far the largest shortfall in the history of this province. It is twice as large as the shortfall in 1992 under Getty.

I think I share with the Member for Calgary-Mountain View a wish to avoid the pain that came in 1993. No member in this House wants to repeat that. My fear is that we will if we continue down this path. At the end of the day when the banks force you to do something, your politics and your ideology are checked at the door.

I'll ask the Member for Calgary-Mountain View to perhaps elaborate on his comments around clarity of the primary accounting deficit and the way those numbers are presented.

Thank you.

4:30

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Well, thanks for the questions, hon. member. I share with you the concern about debt servicing. I've said a number of times that we need to have a more clear indication from the government where they're going on debt servicing. I dare say that projecting out two and three years is a mug's game by any government, so I don't fault anybody for not knowing exactly what the budget is going to look like in '18 and '19.

With respect to your comments about the consolidated budget I'll take that under advisement and look more carefully at the numbers.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other questions or comments under 29(2)(a)?

If not, I'll call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

Oh, I apologize. You have a question under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Hanson: I'll rise next time to speak to the bill.

The Deputy Speaker: We're out of time. That's all right.

We'll continue with Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd like to speak in support of this bill because, as the Member for Strathmore-Brooks mentioned earlier, we did have a friendly bet as that particular member is on the Public Accounts Committee with me. That bet basically comes down to a difference of opinion on where we're going.

When I go out into my constituency, I listen to my constituents. We talk about things like the importance of health care, schools, the need for capital projects, and the need to protect the services that Albertans hold dear. That, at the end of the day, was what the last election was about. Members often talk about debt and the need to reduce the amount of debt. Well, in times of an economic downturn what cost would not going into debt provide?

Previously, the last time a government tried to cut back a downturn, we were left with a massive infrastructure deficit, which we are trying to fix with this bill by investing in what Albertans care about, things like roads, things like schools, things like the cancer centre in Calgary. That's important to invest in. I think of the tradesmen and -women I worked with on the shop floor not that long ago, and I might give you a quote from Scott Matheson of the Alberta Construction Association. He says: definitely we believe that if 15 per cent is a sustainable and repayable number, we think that it's the right thing to do in our economy right now; it's a great time to buy construction in Alberta.

So if in a downturn we're going to act as a shock absorber, now is the time to do it, as it puts tradesmen and -women back to work and keeps our economy going. At the end of the day that's what Albertans want. They do not want us to make the situation worse by laying off public-sector workers on whom we rely.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the chance to speak again to the bill. You'd almost think I get to be the minister with how much I'm speaking to the bill relative to the minister who actually introduced it. I want to thank the Member for Calgary-Currie for his comments. I'm not sure if there's been a day where he's not worn an orange tie to the Legislature, so we can always know exactly where he is.

He said that we have a difference of opinion and not just on our choice of ties. We have a difference of opinion on the economic assumptions here. As I stated earlier, this is not a prop. This is a document. It would be difficult to table. We have a wager before us right now. I have bet the Member for Calgary-Currie \$100 that the government will not meet its revenue projections in year 5, before we go to an election. I'll be able to collect \$100 from the Member for Calgary-Currie to put towards my re-election in Strathmore-Brooks, hopefully right in time.

It's not just a difference of opinion. It's about a difference of facts. The Parliamentary Budget Officer in Ottawa has come out and said that our revenue projections are nowhere close to realistic. For every \$3 difference in the price of oil it costs the treasury of this province nearly half a billion dollars. If the PBO's numbers are right and the government's numbers are wrong, we are talking about a shortfall of not just \$9.7 billion that we're facing right now but significantly larger than that in years going forward.

The member said that we should not be cutting spending in tough times, that we should be borrowing in bad times. It is classic Keynesian economic theory. I suppose Keynesianism is an improvement for the NDP's theories. Let's just assume that we'll approve of the assumptions of Keynesian economic theory for a minute and say that we should be borrowing in bad times. That means in theory that we should be paying back debt in good times. But in years 4 and 5 of the NDP's budget they are predicting a massive boom, yet they still borrow \$8 billion a year during good times. If we cannot cut spending and stop borrowing in bad times, when are we going to do it?

We have already run eight consecutive deficits in our province. We haven't balanced the budget once in eight years. That is why our sustainability fund is gone. That is why we have \$14 billion of debt today before we even pass this budget. We've been borrowing and spending our savings in good times, and now that our rainy-day fund is gone, the rainy day is finally here. I ask the member in all seriousness: if we cannot control expenditures in bad times, if we're going to borrow in bad times, why does his government's budget still propose to borrow \$8 billion a year when they project a massive economic boom in years 4 and 5?

The Deputy Speaker: Calgary-Currie, do you wish to comment?

Mr. Malkinson: Sure. Part of the reason why I made the bet with the hon. member is that I believe that our government does have a sound plan going into the future. As the Member for Calgary-Mountain View pointed out earlier, hitting an exact number in five years for what's going on with the economy is a bit of a hit-or-miss proposition.

You also mentioned that in the last eight consecutive budgets that were presented in this province, not a single one of them was balanced. I'd like to point out that those budgets were not from this government and that we have what is a clear plan to get back to balance. That is what we campaigned on, and that is what we intend to do. That's what Albertans voted for, and that is what my constituents want us to do in this House.

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Any questions for the member?

Any other individuals who would like to speak? Proceed.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You just about caught me. I almost called you Madam Speaker. I had changed it on my list. Thank you. It's with real concern that I rise today to speak to Bill 4. As an Albertan, as a father and, hopefully, soon a grandfather I

am horrified at the implications of this bill and the impact on our society. I find it very interesting that the members opposite appear to find long-term debt almost as amusing as private-sector job losses. This bill endorses massive debt. It includes tax hikes for Albertans in a flawed attempt to manage that debt. It's everything Wildrose stands against.

To put this into an understandable framework, it is as though my wife and I are spending like crazy on all sorts of extravagances and run ourselves into large debt. That isn't wise, but it's not so much of a problem as long as we stay within our means. Borrowing for extravagances is not living within your means. What happens if we lose our income? Well, obviously, we still have to pay off our debts. So what do we do? Well, any responsible person would cut down on spending and live within a reduced budget. A completely bad idea would be to continue increasing spending and just borrow against your equity, with the idea that we may have to pay it all back at some point in the future.

We can borrow against our children's education plans or get payday loans or increase our mortgages beyond any reasonable expectation of paying the loans back, and the rate of debt increases dramatically as the interest that accrues on the debt makes any chance of paying everything off and coming out even, to say nothing coming out ahead, unattainable. In effect, we would be borrowing against the opportunities to help our children and our grandchildren in the future. We are leaving a legacy of debt.

4:40

Keep in mind that the Wildrose criticized the last government for borrowing in order to save because it's irresponsible for a resource-rich province to have to take out any debt. But this government isn't even saving, just borrowing. A reminder: we have the third-highest revenue in our province's history, and we still have to borrow in order to cover our promises.

Not only are they burning through nonrenewable resources at a record rate while leaving nothing in our heritage fund for future generations; they are running up a massive debt burden to hand off to future generations. It's outrageous. Well, that's just what this government is doing and what this bill explicitly does. This bill enables more debt and increases taxes to try to meet just the interest payments, with no plan to pay off any of the debts.

Another sign of how bad things are is that this government now has to borrow money and raise taxes just to pay off the daily operations. All of this could be changed if the government simply started to scale back the outrageous level of spending in the public sector. Our government spending is so much higher than other provinces. According to Stats Canada the government spending in Alberta on operations is almost \$11,000 per person. Compare that to Ontario, where they are able to manage government with just over \$8,500 per person, and B.C., where they spend under \$9,000 per person. Add capital spending, and we top B.C. by a whopping \$3,000 per person, or \$12 billion. That's a lot of money. This government outspends everyone except occasionally Newfoundland, depending on their capital program in a given year.

I would like to know why this government cannot make a move towards balancing the budget by reducing spending. There's never been one instance of reducing spending. This government inherited a bloated bureaucracy and a culture of government entitlement and overspending. However, the NDP government has been in the driver's seat now for more than six months, and what have they done? Instead of showing leadership and strong fiscal management, they have decided instead to maintain or increase spending, thereby increasing the debt and levying more taxes to try to pay for it all. Instead of looking critically at the levels of spending and making decisions about how to cut the outrageous spending on the

bureaucracy, part 2 of this bill is all about increasing taxes on already overtaxed Albertans.

Here are some of the new ways that Albertans are going to be using their hard-earned wages to support the overspending of this government. Accident, sickness, and life insurance are going up 2 to 3 per cent. Any other insurance premium is going from a 3 to 4 per cent increase. The PC fuel tax increase is being implemented, with rail now included. That'll add a cost to everything that we ship. Gasoline, diesel, and other prescribed fuels are going from 9 cents to 13 cents. Liquefied petroleum gas is increasing from 6 cents to 9.094 cents. Locomotive fuel tax is increasing from 1 cent to 5 and a half cents.

Cigarette or tobacco sticks tax is going from 20 cents to 25 cents. Cigar tax is increasing by 103 per cent, to 129 per cent, with the minimum of 20 cents per cigar increasing to 25 cents and the maximum raised to \$7.83. Every gram or part of a gram of any tobacco other than cigarettes and tobacco sticks is increasing from 30 cents to 30 and a half cents. These are double what the previous government proposed in March. Now, I can tell you that I know people already that are supplementing their trips down into the States by buying tobacco products even if they don't smoke, because they know that a tin of chewing tobacco that sells for \$3.60 down in the States sells for over \$30 here in Alberta, and there's no control over that. You don't get any tax on that.

That's just one side of the lopsided approach to fiscal management. When you add the first part of Bill 4 to the equation, this becomes a recipe for disaster in line with the NDP approach to economic planning and management. The first part of the bill actually serves to remove some of the constraints that typically would place limits on accumulating debt. Increasing the debt ceiling to 15 per cent of our GDP is not the thing to be doing right now. This bill allows the government to run operational deficits, a practice which has been illegal. Now by increasing the debt ceiling, they are basically writing themselves a blank cheque that each of us taxpayers will have to pay for along with our children and grandchildren.

I really wonder about the use of passing a bill, making a law if there is no consequence for breaking it. There is no provision for accountability in Bill 4. What is to stop the government from increasing it to 18 or 20 per cent when they reach and exceed this limit? The worst part of all is that this is the interest that accrues on debt increases. Interest payments is money gone out the window to pay for uncontrolled spending. The interest owing soon will be over a billion dollars, and borrowing and spending are just increasing. The interest that Alberta taxpayers will pay on this debt could be used instead to build schools and hospitals that are very much needed in every sector of our society.

The really frightening part of this bill is that when we put it all together, we are looking at \$50 billion in debt in 2020. In 2008 we had no debt and \$17 billion in the bank for a rainy day in the sustainability fund, not the heritage fund but an extra savings fund, now called the contingency account. This government's plan, if you can call it a plan, is to go from a positive \$17 billion to a negative \$50 billion in 12 short years. It is staggering.

Mr. Speaker, I am joining with every other horrified Albertan to oppose this bill, and we encourage the government instead to address the overspending that is plaguing our economy. We should be looking at ways to use taxpayers' dollars more efficiently and effectively instead of simply going back to the well to support outrageous spending habits. With effective economic policies we should be debating ways to save our surpluses instead of having to spend and borrow ourselves further into debt. I would never consider spending my family into debt that will last for generations,

and I urge the government to reconsider doing exactly that through this ill-advised bill.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there any questions of the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills? The House leader.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the comments of my hon. colleague. I wondered if he might just spend a couple of moments on if he's had the opportunity to consult with members in his community of Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills around some of these debt-related issues. I'm particularly interested to hear what the people of that region of the province are saying when it comes to running up large amounts of debt, changing laws to be able to run operational deficits, and the overall direction that the government is taking the province when it comes to no plan on repayment of that debt. If people in that constituency have provided any feedback, it's interesting to hear. I certainly have a sense of what the people in Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills are saying, but I just might be curious to know what the good folks in Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills are saying.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Yeah. Thank you for the question. The folks that I've talked to in my constituency understand the government's need to borrow money to build infrastructure and, hopefully, you know, stimulate the economy in that way and based on the low interest rates at the time. Their concern is two years down the road, five years down the road, when we're trying to repay this debt and our interest rates are, instead of 2.3 per cent, maybe 5.6 per cent or higher. At the current rate we're going to be losing about one and a half billion dollars a year by 2019-2020 just to service debt. Now, if our interest rate doubles and we're suddenly paying \$3 billion a year or even \$6 billion a year into servicing debt, that's a lot of money that can't go into infrastructure. Their feeling is that we should curb our spending, stop our borrowing, get our spending under control, and only build infrastructure as we can afford it with trying not to increase taxes to people that are already burdened by the downturn in our economy.

Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills is very dependent on the oil economy, and a very, very high percentage of our people have lost their jobs already, and there is more to come. As projects become finished and people get laid off, there are no new projects to replace them, so there's a big concern there about job losses. Everybody is looking for work, but they don't think our province should be borrowing money at this time. Rather, they should be looking at ways to save on spending and put that money into infrastructure rather than borrowing against our future.

Thank you.

4:50

The Speaker: Are there any other questions of the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Dr. Turner: I'd like to ask the member a few questions. I'm fascinated by your statement that this government has not produced any cost savings. Just today in this Legislature I heard of cutting several tens of millions of dollars from PCN funding. The RAPID program we heard about a couple of days ago is going to save Albertans in the range of \$45 million at the same time as producing a better outcome for the most frequent cause of blindness in the elderly, macular degeneration. Our government is also committed

to bending the cost curve in medicine, and that means that the rate of increase in the expenditures in the Health department are going to go down from 6 to 7 per cent under the previous government to what the minister called a flat line of 2 per cent in years 4 and 5. So I'd actually like to hear your comments on that.

I'm also concerned about the tenor of the comments coming that the member had as well as his associates, that when we spend on infrastructure, we're not gaining assets. Those schools and roads and dialysis centres . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, time has been allocated.

Are there other members who wish to speak to motion? The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and speak to Bill 4. I know that we've had the opportunity to hear from a number of my colleagues on the bill. I know it's hard to believe that I haven't spoken to something in the House, but in fact this is my first opportunity to speak to what really is an important piece of legislation. While there is very little about this important piece of legislation that I or the people in Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills that I've spoken to about Bill 4 support, that's not to say that it isn't an important piece of legislation. What Bill 4 does in many respects is lay the groundwork and the structure of what's going to take place in our province over the next number of years.

I think that the Albertans should be very concerned about what the future of our province looks like under a new government. That's not because the new government means mal-intent or malice towards any Albertan or this House or generally towards the province but that fundamentally the government is taking some significant steps away from many of the core values that a lot of Albertans hold. Well, the government will say: "Hey. Listen. We consulted with people, and on the 5th of May we were elected to put that mandate forward." Certainly, no one can argue with that. They were elected.

However, there's still an overwhelming majority of Albertans that voted for two parties that some would say share some similar principles, and those principles are the principles of living within their means. I think that the government would be well served to consider the fact that there are a lot of Albertans that still hold to those key, core principles of living within their means, of not spending every dollar possible at all times possible. These are core conservative principles that lots of people in this province share, and certainly many of the members of the Wildrose share these principles of wanting to ensure that the government is getting best value for dollar.

What we've seen, as we see in Bill 4 is this rush towards \$50 billion in debt and this commitment on behalf of the government to continue to spend at all costs. What we've seen is this desire to move away from many of those core conservative principles that in many ways have set up our province for success.

We saw through a period of pain in the mid-90s that there was some significant cutting that took place, and while the government of the day would like to liken this organization to the mid-90s and spread fear and make all sorts of allegations about how horrible we are and the things that we would do to the province to be more fiscally responsible, nothing could be further from the truth, Mr. Speaker. The Wildrose has laid out some of our core principles that do include finding efficiencies in government, shrinking the size of middle management and the bloated bureaucracy that we saw come out of the last administration of this province. We certainly have made some of those commitments. As I said, the government of the day likes to say and make accusations that we would hack, slash, cut, and burn. Of course, that couldn't be any further from the truth.

The truth is, Mr. Speaker, that the government – I know this is going to be hard to believe – actually spends money on good things. The problem is that the new government of the day believes that every dollar that the government spends is well spent. The challenge that we all face is that in a time when revenue is at a premium, the government continues to be committed to spending every dollar and not looking to efficiencies within that spending envelope. The net result of that, that we see in Bill 4, is this massive increase in debt, up to \$50 billion. One of the questions that I hear a lot in Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills is: what is the plan when it comes to repayment? They're concerned about the future of the province and for their children or their grandchildren as the province over a period of time will continue to feel that pressure of a \$50 billion debt.

5:00

If the government of the day doesn't take appropriate steps to first of all stop the overspending and then take steps to repayment, at one point in time or another, Mr. Speaker, that debt will become crippling, and the weight of that debt will be possibly unbearable.

You know, we see in year 3 of the plan that the government has put forward, the spending plan, \$1.3 billion in debt-servicing costs. It's a wonder to think of what that \$1.3 billion could do, the number of schools that it could build, the number of hospital facilities that it could renovate or build. We run this great risk, Mr. Speaker, of putting the challenges of tomorrow down the road without real thought and consideration for them.

I know that every member in this House came to this place because they wanted to leave the province better than they found it. The question begs to be asked: are we going to leave our children and our grandchildren this debt, where the problems of tomorrow are so great that we create this weight that's so challenging for the legislators of tomorrow that it makes the future unclear? I don't think that that is what we came here to do, and I hope that's not the case on the other side, but these are the types of things, sir, that we need to consider.

When it comes to that repayment plan, we see in years 4 and 5 that there is zero plan. There are no numbers when it comes to what that looks like. It is a major challenge that faces our province, and while we've seen many, many, many politicians just try to kick the can down the road, that is certainly not what this side of the House wants to do because the road to fiscal accountability and responsibility is going to be a long one, and the first step has to be today. That's certainly not what Bill 4 is doing.

What Bill 4 is doing is creating new debt limits. We've seen, all over jurisdictions across North America, when they set a debt limit and say: "Trust us this time. We're not going to raise it ever again." It's a big, big risk as we continue to just raise the debt limit. As we move towards that, it's a big challenge because there's no plan. There's no plan to stop raising the debt limit in the future either.

And now this year, for the first time in recent memory, the government has taken steps to do things that at one point in time were illegal; that is, find ways to borrow for operations. It's a shame to see that that is where we're at, Mr. Speaker, particularly when we're doing so little on the spending side, when, in fact, we've seen ministerial offices' budgets increased, some to the tune of 15 per cent, all at a time when we're raising the debt limit in Bill 4. Obviously, it's concerning, and people in Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills are bringing it up to me on a number of occasions: what is the plan, and how are we going to work out of this hole?

Many of those people believe that there will be a different government. You know, that remains to be seen. But whether it's the current government that is rewarded with another term or it's this side of the House – who knows what the political landscape in

four years looks like? – one way or another it is a big, big hole to dig our way out of. We encourage the government to start today because it's going to be a long road, and it starts with the first step. I hope that the government will consider some of the amendments that we'll be making later should the bill pass, because we need to find ways to start some of this challenge.

In the time remaining, I'll just briefly mention, Mr. Speaker, that one of the challenges with this piece of legislation is that all of these pieces of legislation are so very complex. You know, you could go to any section of the bill, and there are a lot of questions there. For example, on page 43 of the bill:

(5) An authorization granted under this section in respect of a person must be served on the person by the Minister within 72 hours after it is granted, except

(a) where the judge orders the authorization to be served at some other time . . .

And it continues.

The point is, Mr. Speaker, that these types of bills are extremely complex. It's detailed tax legislation. The Wildrose has been committed to the need to be able to receive input from all sorts of people when it comes to stakeholders, perhaps experts on tax law. I know that my colleague from Strathmore-Brooks has a better grasp on this particular issue than I, but the point is that we really haven't had that chance to hear from experts, which is why I would like to propose an amendment to the bill.

Do you want me to continue with the amendment?

The Speaker: Do you have a copy?

Mr. Cooper: Yes, I do have copies here for everyone in the House. It's a notice of amendment that I'm proposing. Do you mind if I read it and then wait for it to be passed around, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: You may read it while it is being distributed.

Mr. Cooper: Continue while it's being distributed?

I move that the motion for second reading of Bill 4, An Act to Implement Various Tax Measures and to Enact the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act, be amended by deleting the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 4, An Act to Implement Various Tax Measures and to Enact the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

The Speaker: The hon. member has proposed an amendment to second reading of Bill 4, to implement various tax measures, which we will refer to as amendment A1. Is there anyone who would like to speak to the amendment? Are there any members? The Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to rise to talk to the House about this amendment and share my acceptance of it and that I will support it. I think the premise behind this motion is that we need to slow down, that we need to take a look at this bill. We need to commit it to committee so that it can be studied and we can make sure that it is the right bill, that will support Albertans and help Albertans.

5:10

I guess the concern I have is that in the past, as I've talked to different ministers and asked them if there's been an economic impact study done on certain measures that they're bringing forward, it seems that the preliminary work that should be done on bills to make sure that they are good bills is not being done and that

there is a need by this government to pass these bills without proper consultation with expert witnesses, without proper consultation from those people who will be affected by it.

I find this alarming and concerning, and I'm not the only one. As I've talked to different members of my constituency and as I've traveled throughout the province talking to other Albertans, they are concerned at the speed with which these bills are being put forward and passed. They're concerned by the lack of consultation that should be there by this House and by this government for passing these bills. I think that it goes against the understanding of how this House should work. This should be a place where we have proper, sober thought, where we're not rushed on issues, where we're not forced to make rash and quick decisions. I've always found in my life that when we do that, when I've done that, the outcome has not been good, and it is my concern that if we rush forward rather than actually putting it to committee and allowing the committee to properly look at this bill and look at the ramifications, the consequences of this bill, we will be in a situation that we don't want to be in.

We are the voice of Albertans. We represent them. We've stepped forward – each of us has stepped forward – with the intent of being able to represent Albertans to the best of our ability, and I think it's wrong for us to be able to go forward with this, and it's not properly representing fellow Albertans if we move this through the House as quickly as it is being moved.

I strongly urge this House to accept this amendment. I urge the members opposite to consider again the consequences of a rash and a quick decision. We have seen in times past where members opposite have made quick decisions, where they have gone forward and made decisions where maybe they should have taken longer to think about these issues and then been in a situation where they've had to come back and say: "You know what? Oops. We made a mistake. We need to do better."

This is a great opportunity for that. We are bringing forward an amendment that I think is in the best interests of all people in this House, and I would urge, strongly urge all members to consider it. It's a short amendment, but the intent is good. The intent is, again: let's slow down. Let's think this stuff through. Let's make sure that we have the right approach for all Albertans, and let's make sure that Bill 4 is the kind of bill that Albertans will be accepting of.

With that, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to speak on this amendment, and once again I urge the members of the House to consider it. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there any questions or comments to the Member for Strathmore-Brooks? No?

Are there any questions or comments to the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner under 29(2)(a)?

Hearing none, the Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to speak to the amendment to move this bill to committee. The members of this House recently voted to move Bill 203 from the Member for Drumheller-Stettler, an act that would prohibit government announcements and advertising during by-election and election periods. Members across deemed that that bill, however small and modest that bill was – and that bill was crafted nearly word for word from an NDP bill in Manitoba that the NDP here had campaigned on. We had already agreed on that bill, but the members across decided that a bill even of that nature should still be going to a committee. That is a small bill. That is a private member's bill.

This, by contrast, is a monstrosity of a bill, not a monstrosity just for its content but for its size and its effect on the people and finances of Alberta. A bill of this nature and of this importance

deserves proper study. It deserves to hear from experts in their fields. It deserves to hear expert testimony from academics, from economists, from accountants, from third-party interest groups. It deserves to hear the kinds of inputs that are necessary for crafting all good legislation. Instead, this government is trying to ram this through the House right now.

Now, members here might want to wax eloquent about the contents of this bill, why we support it or why we don't support it, but it's important for us to consult. The members across felt that it was important to consult on the issue of 203, a bill that every member of this House supports. Well, this is one that not every member of this House supports. In fact, I dare say that every member of the Official Opposition and, quite possibly, some of the smaller parties do not support it as well.

This is a budget that is not just going to change policy, but it's going to change the rules of the game. It is going to allow the government to change the accounting of the province, to present the books in a different way yet again. It is going to allow the government to put forward five-year fiscal plans without a shred of detail for the fourth and fifth years. It allows the government to make things up as it goes along. It allows the government to make projections for balanced budgets into the future without any plan to actually get there. That is changing not just policy, Mr. Speaker, but it is changing the very rules of the game. When you're changing the rules of the game, we should probably take the time to consider it carefully and move it to committee.

It is also changing policy itself, though. It is increasing our debt ceiling from its already high level right now to a whopping 15 per cent of GDP. In a province that has by far the highest GDP per capita in the country, that is not a small sum of money. We deserve the chance to debate this issue around debt financing, about what the appropriate level of debt is, if we should be borrowing for just capital or also for operational expenditures. That is a fundamental debate, and it deserves to have expert testimony hearing it. If the government feels that it is necessary to send a bill consulting about how ethically proper it is to make government announcements and spending announcements during by-elections, then certainly a bill that does not share consensus in the House and that is of this kind of magnitude deserves to go to committee.

This bill will also raise a raft of taxes. We already had a long list of taxes increased by the former government. We then had another long list of taxes increased by the new government in June, that saw income taxes go up, saw business taxes go up, excise taxes go up, taxes on insurance, taxes on birth, taxes on death, taxes on just about everything in between. That bill did not go to committee. This bill proposes to further increase taxes. It proposes to tax insurance. We have sin taxes in the province. For some reason or another we want to tax our sins, our vices like alcohol, tobacco, and gasoline. I understand the point of taxing some things that we want to discourage, but insurance is a social good. This is something we should be trying to encourage as a province, not something we should be trying to discourage. But for some reason we have decided to put a tax on this, for reasons I don't understand.

5:20

The government has not consulted anybody in the insurance industry. The Insurance Bureau of Canada has spoken about this. They've said that they were not consulted and that the costs will be passed on to consumers. We should be listening to the Insurance Bureau of Canada. We should be listening to consumers. We should be listening to underwriters. We should be allowing that kind of expert testimony to come before us as this goes to committee.

We're seeing fees go up: fees on courts, on camping, as I said, on birth, on death, fees on a long list of services that Albertans rely on.

It might be justified, or it might not be. But we're not going to get a chance to hear from a single stakeholder. Alberta's Legislature, Alberta's democracy, belongs not just to the politicians that occupy it; it belongs to the people who send us here. That's why it's important that we have a committee that this goes to so that we can listen to Albertans themselves, the people being impacted by this.

The bill will also have an effect on quarterly financial updates for the government, on the kind of data that is to be provided. There's been an improvement on this front. But, again, we're not going to have the chance to listen to a single accountant, a single economist, a single academic or expert who knows about the topic. This is an opportunity for us to invite expert testimony, to listen to people who know what they're talking about and hear what they have to say. If the government believes that small bills, just because they're proposed by the opposition, should go to committees for study, then surely they believe that their own bills that do not enjoy consensus in this House and that are of monumental importance to the governance and future of this province should be going to committee for study.

Mr. Speaker, I'll close by saying that I know members across know that this is right. Their government whip or House leader might tell them to do something different, but they know that this is right. They know that bills should be going to committee. When the four members who make up the governing party sat in opposition, they demanded a committee system for all bills to go through. Those four members know that I'm right. The government's private members know that that I'm right. I beseech them to listen to their own conscience, to listen to their own democratic ideals, to do what they know is right, and to send this bill to committee for proper study.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there any questions or comments for the Member for Strathmore-Brooks under 29(2)(a)? The Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Hon. member, do you think that Albertans have been well represented in the debate on this bill or this amendment? If no one from the opposite side is willing to stand up and put their name on the record supporting or opposing the bill, are Albertans actually being represented fairly in this House?

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you to the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills for his question. I think the answer is obvious to anyone who has watched this rather invigorating and exciting debate on the changes to the accounting rules of our province. Every member of the Official Opposition in this House has risen to speak about Bill 4, to express our concerns for taxpayers, to express our concerns for young Albertans, who will pay for this. By contrast, the Minister of Finance has not risen once today to debate or defend his own bill.

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

The Speaker: A point of order is noted.

Point of Order Speaking Twice in a Debate

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The minister has spoken to the bill. The hon. member ought to know that each member is only allowed to speak once to each bill. So the minister is not eligible to speak again to this bill except to close debate. The hon. member should remember those rules of this House before he,

in a misinformed way, uses them to attack members who aren't here.

The Speaker: Hon. member, do you have any comments?

Mr. Hanson: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Just to clarify, the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks did not name the minister absent. He only said that he didn't speak to it today. He didn't say that he hadn't spoken to it at all. I don't think that this constitutes a point of order, sir.

The Speaker: The point of clarification on the point of order has been accepted. I think all members ought to be more clear about those kinds of comments in the future.

Could you proceed.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. I was not referring to the minister's original introductory comments to the bill. I was referring to his lack of participation in the debate today under 29(2)(a) or responding to other members, which the minister has every right to participate in.

Debate Continued

Mr. Fildebrandt: Moving beyond that, the members of the Official Opposition have spoken to this. We've spoken about issues passionate to us, about why this is important for taxpayers, why it's important for Albertans, but we have heard only a single private member from the government side speak to this. I thank him for his comments and contribution to debate. We've heard a member of the Alberta Party speak to this. We have heard a member of the Liberal Party speak to our debate today.

We have not heard anything warranting their numbers from government members, which is one reason I feel passionately that we should be sending this bill to committee for discussion, for consultation from Albertans. This bill has not had proper input from Albertans. It hasn't had consultation. It hasn't listened to a single expert. It was merely produced in the Department of Finance and dropped on our desks. The government members seem intent on not actually debating the contents of it, which is one reason why we should send this bill to committee and listen to Albertans directly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there any questions under 29(2)(a) for the Member for Strathmore-Brooks?

Seeing none, I recognize the Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I'd like to address the amendment that's been put forward by the hon. Official Opposition House Leader to refer the subject matter of Bill 4 to the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship in accordance with Standing Order 74.2. Now, in the discussion that has occurred, one might conclude from listening to the Official Opposition that there will be no opportunity for further discussion of the details of this bill or to provide any amendments, and that, of course, is simply not the case.

This bill is essential for the financial supply of the province. This, in addition to the Appropriation Act, forms the cornerstone of the provincial budget. Now, as members in the House know, in the spring session the government passed a supplementary supply bill, which provided funding to continue the operations of the government till the end of this November, which is now, I think, slightly less than two weeks away. As the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship is dealing with estimates, it's clearly unable to do what

the Official Opposition is suggesting; to wit, hearings, listening to evidence from experts, and so on.

5:30

Mr. Speaker, we know that this bill will be considered in Committee of the Whole. There will be an opportunity for further debate, and members can bring forward and represent through writing or through their speeches comments of any experts that they may wish to engage with respect to this. But, clearly, if this bill was referred, as the Official Opposition wishes, to the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship, it would be unable to do the things that the opposition wants and have the bill back in the House so that it could be considered for third reading in time to meet the deadline of November 30. So it's really rather irresponsible, in my view, to go down this direction.

What the Official Opposition is suggesting essentially would lead to the government being unable to pass its budget because this bill is necessary for the Appropriation Act. The two go hand in hand. Therefore, what the opposition is essentially proposing is that the government operations would grind to a halt at the end of this month, and government employees would no longer be paid. We could not continue with the services that the government provides. So I would urge all members to oppose this particular amendment.

We will, when second reading is concluded on the bill, of course be moving to the Committee of the Whole, and the opposition will have ample opportunity to introduce any detailed discussion they wish, any expert opinions that they have been able to solicit. They can represent their constituents' concerns very effectively, I have no doubt, and they can introduce any amendments that they wish. That is, in this case, the most appropriate direction to go. In other cases I might agree with the Official Opposition that a bill might be directed to one of the standing policy committees. In this case, Mr. Speaker, it's, frankly, impossible, and I would have expected the Official Opposition to have realized it.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Under 29(2)(a) you have a question for the Government House Leader, Strathmore-Brooks?

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Government House Leader well knows that this isn't about games. This is about the need for committee, a need that he spoke about very well and eloquently for over a decade in opposition. He knows very well that the Committee of the Whole does not allow us to bring in outside experts and testimony. It restricts our ability to putting forward amendments, which the government will promptly shut down. It doesn't allow us to bring forward people who might know better than the people in this House, accountants, economists.

The Government House Leader said that they cannot put this to committee now because there's not enough time to pass it before their interim supply runs out. Well, perhaps they shouldn't have waited until after the federal election to give us these bills to begin with, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps they should have called us back in the summer to give us a bill to pass. Perhaps they should have brought this forward in September. Instead, the government has been playing political games, holding back a budget from Albertans to help out their federal NDP cousins. Some good that did. The government has been playing political games with the timing of the budget. That is why they are now saying that they must pass it in the next two weeks.

Well, guess what, Mr. Speaker? It's not our responsibility to pay for what the government has done with its own political games in the timing of the budget. There is enough time to send this to committee, and it is my assurance to the Government House Leader

that if this does go to a proper committee, we will not be playing games to hold it up. We will put forward legitimate witnesses to hear from about what we should be doing with this bill. It doesn't even have to be the Resource Stewardship Committee. We could put it forward to any committee. I'm happy to do it. I'm happy to work as long or as late as is necessary to get this done.

Mr. Speaker, it is the government who is afraid of criticism, who is afraid of expert testimony from people who are likely to tell them that this bill is hogwash, that it waters down our accounting rules, that it is dangerous fiscal policy to allow us to go to a 15 per cent debt to GDP. They know this because Albertans are against this budget. The minister knows this, and that is why they are shooting down our recommendation to do what he himself has stood and advocated for for over a decade in this very Chamber, to go to committee. I don't buy the Government House Leader's excuse that they need to get this done because they could have given us this bill three months ago.

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, nothing could be further from the truth. While the opposition was making claims that the government was holding back the fall budget, this government was working day and night trying to get the budget ready for the date that we had set. If this party, God forbid, should ever form a government, they will realize – they will realize – just how much work government is and how much work a budget is.

When they were saying in the summer that we should be bringing forward the budget now, that we were deliberately delaying it for the federal election, they were just talking through their hats because we were working very hard to try and meet the deadline that we had set for ourselves. Making a budget, especially for a new government, especially after 44 years of an old government, is a very, very difficult and daunting task, and it is an enormous amount of work. For the people on this side to constantly chirp and repeat that some games were being played relative to the federal election is just the crass political speculation of a desperate opposition party, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I don't support the amendment, and I rise to speak against it. Bill 4 is a commendable piece of legislation which deserves to be passed.

The Speaker: Excuse me, hon. member. We're still on 29(2)(a).

Mr. Dach: Certainly.

The Speaker: Do you have a question of the Government House Leader?

Mr. Dach: Yes. I could ask the Government House Leader, sir, if he feels it is the intent of the opposition, from his view, to slow down passage of the bill by their amendment or whether it seems to be their intent to grind passage to a halt. [A timer sounded]

The Speaker: We are dealing with the amendment identified as A1. Are there other members of the House? The Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to stand and speak to the amendment to Bill 4. My concern with Bill 4, as I stated to the member . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, you're speaking to the amendment. Is that correct?

Mr. Hanson: Sorry. Yes. Yes, I'm speaking to the amendment. My concern is that Albertans have not been consulted on this bill. It's a very important bill, and it needs to go to committee so that Albertans can be consulted. I don't believe that a lot of the members have had the opportunity to go to their constituents and get their opinions because if they did, they'd be standing up in the House and either speaking for the bill or against the bill.

Our members have all risen and spoken to this, to the bill, and now we'll speak to the amendment because we've actually gone out and talked to our constituents. They understand that this is going to affect them, their future, their children's future, and their grandchildren's future: \$50 billion of debt, unknown interest rates going forward. It's a bad bill. It needs to be considered by professionals. Albertans need to be consulted, and I would suggest to all of you members opposite that you go and speak to your people in your constituencies and actually get their opinions.

Thank you very much, sir.

The Speaker: Are there any questions of the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills under 29(2)(a)? The Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

5:40

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just would like to speak a bit about the need for committee. The whole point of having committee is to consult, so I would like to direct my question to the minister.

The Speaker: Excuse me, hon. member, you can only address your questions to the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you. Sorry.

Regarding the committee and the aspects of committee, the point is to talk about how this is going to impact Albertans and how we feel that they haven't been consulted. As the minister had mentioned previously, this task is daunting. It requires a committee of people to come together to discuss how to take on this daunting task. Over and over again we've heard that they've inherited these issues, that they've inherited what they're dealing with right now. We would love the opportunity to be able to discuss this in a committee situation on behalf of all Albertans, to sit down and make sure that this is actually the direction that the government should be going.

In relation to that, this should be a situation of going across partisan lines to discuss how to move forward, so I would just like to say in regard to this comment that that would be the reason for needing to go to committee. The whole point is to consult. The entire point is to be able to discuss this at length, to make sure that we're making accurate decisions with regard to the budget, with regard to the future. I'm not sure about how the timing would work, but the need for committee is to consult.

Thank you.

Mr. Hanson: Thanks very much for your comments on the question. I don't personally believe that Albertans in Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills are any different from Albertans in southern Alberta, Edmonton, or Calgary. Indeed, I've spent the last couple of weeks in Edmonton. I've been talking to people that actually live in the city here about some of the bills that have gone through and some of the comments and the length of time we get to discuss them, and I can assure you that if you actually go out and speak to people in Edmonton and Calgary in your ridings, you're going to

hear the same thing. These bills need to have more time, they need to be put to committee, and Albertans need to have their say. There are experts out there. We're not all experts in economics. Passing a bill like this, that's going to affect future generations of Alberta, needs to be considered in depth and put to committee.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Games are exactly what we're playing here. The opposition is engaging in what they're actually supposed to do as an opposition, I would imagine, but we're rejecting the games they're playing because we believe the intent is not to forward debate in the House. What it is intended to do is to actually halt progress on debate. The Legislative Assembly of Alberta, this body, is the supreme committee to which legislation can be presented and debated. If the Official Opposition, the Wildrose opposition, would have spent the time debating this bill that they have in attempting to amend the bill by sending it to committee, we might have produced something . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I want to clarify. Are you speaking to 29(2)(a), or are you speaking to the amendment itself?

Mr. Dach: To 29(2)(a), I was hoping.

The Speaker: Thank you. Great. Keep going.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Therefore, the bill is necessary for appropriations, and the intent of the government, of course, is to have it debated in this House without sidetracking it and to ensure that it receives the full and complete attention of the Assembly rather than trying to obstruct its progress by sending it to committee. That's what we intend to do.

Mr. Hanson: I'd like to thank the Member for Edmonton-McClung. I believe . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, you're speaking to his question?

Mr. Hanson: Yes. Thank you.

I thank the Member for Edmonton-McClung for his statements, I guess, and for playing along with us. I really appreciate that. My question would be: could he possibly stand up when he has the opportunity and tell us what his constituents are saying? I don't believe that he's actually talked to his constituents about Bill 4; otherwise, perhaps he would stand up in the House and go on the record and tell us what his constituents think of this preposterous bill, that's going to affect them and their grandchildren and their mortgages in the future.

Thank you.

The Speaker: I don't believe you will get a second opportunity under 29(2)(a).

Is there anyone wishing to speak to the amendment itself? The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just do want to say that I believe it is important that we send this bill to committee. Schedules can be arranged. If we have to stay at night, I guess that's what we have to do. I don't know. I don't really want to do that personally, but this is an extremely important bill, and we do have to address this thing in a way that doesn't just push it through in a hurry.

Maybe I could just try to emphasize the reality of it a little bit for the hon. members across the floor. A little bit of sober self-reflection here would be extremely important because when you go

to vote for this bill, each and every one of you will be voting a billion dollars of debt on the Alberta people. Your vote is a personal vote for a billion dollars of debt. I wonder how many of you would be prepared to sign a personal loan guarantee on that. There is a need for sober self-reflection here, which is the whole point of committees. We need to think about that, and therefore I am voting in favour of the motion.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Just for clarification, the table reminded me that, in fact, contrary to my first opinion, you can speak twice under 29(2)(a), so my apologies to the member.

Are there any questions or comments under 29(2)(a) to the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka?

Is there anyone else who would like to speak to amendment A1? The member for Fort Macleod.

Mr. Stier: Livingstone-Macleod, sir, but that's quite fine. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I'm getting close.

Mr. Stier: Well, good afternoon. I see that the hour is approaching where we're all looking forward to taking a break, but I have to say that I have some comments to make on this amendment, Mr. Speaker, and it is to the amendment that I am speaking. I'd just like to say that this is one of the most important bills that has come before us in this Legislature for this session. This is one of those bills that talks an awful lot about debt and going into debt, and it is something where we're not only talking about going into debt to finance large capital projects and all that kind of thing, but this bill talks about having us actually go ahead and look at borrowing money to do our operations.

If we look at the simple homeowner, who usually and typically in our society today borrows money for capital expenditures like their home and their car and so on, we're actually with this bill going to exceed that idea and go to borrow on, say, credit cards or any other lending mechanism to buy the groceries, to buy the gas, to pay for the babysitter, to pay all of those normal expenses. That's what this bill includes, ladies and gentlemen.

This amendment is actually, I think, a great idea. This amendment speaks to taking such a serious situation and moving it to a larger group; that is, a committee. The committees in this legislative process are vital, and they're important to us. They provide an opportunity for various parties and participants in this House to look at something in more detail. It also provides, Mr. Speaker, an opportunity for these meetings to include the public and have some great, proper consultation.

When I look at some of the things that we are talking about today and some of the comments we've made earlier, I think it's something we have to be very conscious of. I mean, let's be clear. This bill is about enabling higher taxes and more debt because this government continues to want to spend. It allows the government to run operational deficits for decades, putting debt onto future generations. It's absolutely hard to imagine, having been here for the past three and a half, four years, seeing where we are now and what we're faced with. This is something that needs proper scrutiny, and I think that a committee would be the exact place where this should go, Mr. Speaker.

5:50

More debt means more servicing costs. These servicing costs could be used for so many things. In my earlier comments today on this bill I talked about what all these kinds of monies could be used for, vital components to today's society. When we're looking at all

of these things now in such a small manner today, why shouldn't we look at going and sending this bill to committee? I cannot find a valid reason yet from all I've heard here this afternoon.

We should focus on spending taxpayers' dollars more efficiently. We should look at how we're running up our credit limits every day. We should look at what some of the lending institutions around the world are saying about us now as compared to the past. We had what was talked about the other day; I think someone coined the term "gold standard." We had the gold standard in our society as far as our credibility in the world today in terms of the world markets. We do not necessarily have that any longer. The policies of this government have now suddenly tainted our reputation around the world. Just think about that: tarnished our reputation from what we had for years and years and years.

I think we should be creating legislation that's beneficial to us, Mr. Speaker, not detrimental, and I'm looking at this opportunity that we have tonight of going to committee with this very important bill and scrutinizing it in detail and looking at it on a page-by-page, section-by-section basis and ensuring it's the right thing to do.

Mr. Speaker, as you can see, I'm very much in favour of this amendment, and I will be voting in support of this amendment. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Are there any questions for the hon. member under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Fildebrandt: Just very briefly, Mr. Speaker. I remember that the Member for Livingstone-Macleod was on a committee that travelled the province to study bills that the NDP in particular, roughly two years ago, found controversial. The former government brought forward bills to reform government-sector pensions, and the NDP in particular found it extremely objectionable. I remember that the NDP fought for those bills, which were also considered urgent by the government of the day, to go to a committee and travel the province. I remember that the Member for Livingstone-Macleod was there at that rather excited meeting where I had a chance to testify as, may I say, an expert witness. Perhaps the Member for Livingstone-Macleod could talk about that experience and why the NDP's demand for that bill to go to committee was equally as important.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Stier: Well, thank you for the opportunity, and thanks to the Member for Strathmore-Brooks for the question. Yes, I did commit a lot of time over the past few years to some of these committee meetings. In fact, that one actually took me across the province. I remember spending one day on those ventures where I had to fly from Calgary and then I had to fly up to Fort McMurray, in fact, and later on I had to fly back to Calgary the next day so that I could get a hop up to Grande Prairie because we were offering . . .

Mr. Connolly: Do you have a biography that I can buy?

Mr. Stier: Yeah. I'll give you a biography if you want, sir, any time. I'll send it to you.

Mr. Speaker, sorry. Back to the point on the question that was posed to me. We spent an awful lot of time allowing the public to come to every one of those meetings and raise their concerns on a couple of very, very, very important issues to do with the pensions. I think it is important, in that same example that the Member for Strathmore-Brooks has raised, to understand that that is what this Assembly is about. It's about ensuring that we make the right decisions on behalf of Albertans. During that time many speakers came from the public and, yes, from the Canadian Taxpayers

Federation to ensure that the members of the committee had the most important, crucial, and detailed information they could have before they came back and made recommendations to the House on that matter.

With respect to what we're talking about today, the committee suggestion in this amendment is an important suggestion. It is something that should be seriously considered not only just for ourselves in this House, Mr. Speaker, but for all of the people that we represent in Alberta.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Any other questions or comments to the Member for Livingstone-Macleod under 29(2)(a)?

Are there any other hon. members who would wish to speak to the amendment known as A1?

Hearing none, I will call the question on amendment A1 on Bill 4, An Act to Implement Various Tax Measures and to Enact the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act.

[Motion on amendment to second reading of Bill 4 lost]

The Speaker: We are back to the original motion. Are there any other speakers to the original motion?

I hear none.

[Motion carried; Bill 4 read a second time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That being good progress today – the House has done very good work today – I'll move that we adjourn until 1:30 tomorrow.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:58 p.m. to Wednesday at 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, November 18, 2015

Day 19

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

First Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, November 18, 2015

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Hon. members, let us reflect. Help us to be mindful shepherds of this great province in a manner that protects and preserves it for generations ahead of us, represented by the schoolchildren who are in this Assembly this day, as was done by those generations and the first keepers of this land who preceded us.

Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you a group of 23 very bright young students, who are joining us here today, from Beacon Heights school. I had the pleasure of reading to the class this fall, about a month ago, and of course I'm always very excited to go back into the classroom, where I once came from. These bright young students are here today with their teacher, Ms Meryl Roberts, as well as three parent helpers, Mr. Karl Hammermeister, Mr. Scott Gudbranson, and Mrs. Catherine Roberts. I ask all of them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Ms Jabbour: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a pleasure for me to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly an honoured guest seated in your gallery. Mr. Don Tannas is the former Member for Highwood, and he served in this Assembly from 1989 until his retirement, in 2004. For three of his four consecutive terms Mr. Tannas also served as Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees, so we have a lot in common. Mr. Tannas is heavily involved in the Alberta Association of Former MLAs, being on the board of directors since its inception in 2006. Please give Mr. Tannas the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise on behalf of the hon. Premier to introduce to you and through you 28 students from Garneau elementary school. They are accompanied by their teachers, Ms Jesse Mackay and Miss Kristina Kuchta, along with parent helpers Mr. Bruce New, Ms Tracy Craig, Ms Lisa Lilycrop, and Mrs. Joan Emard-Wanner. I would ask them to please rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. members, it seems to be my week for lows and highs. The highs are that yesterday you recognized my aunt; today you see the other end of the generation. I'm pleased to say that my grandson is in that group, so it's a special day for me.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Hon. Government House Leader, is there another introduction that you need to make, under visitors?

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, it's my great honour to introduce, again on behalf of the hon. Premier, the ambassador of the republic of Ecuador, His Excellency Nicolás Fabián Trujillo. I would ask that he please now stand and receive the warm traditional welcome of our Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: The Minister of Advanced Education and Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly a group from Changing Together: A Centre for Immigrant Women. Changing Together operates a place for immigrant women to meet and work together in solving their problems and helping one another fully participate in Canadian life. The centre also assists immigrant women to acquire employment skills and work experience through their volunteer program.

They are accompanied by my mother, Dorothy Sigurdson, who teaches level 4 English as a second language, and my father, Barney Sigurdson. It was certainly in their home where I first learned about social justice, and to them I am very grateful.

Also attending today is the executive director of Changing Together, Sonia Bitar. They are seated in the public gallery this afternoon, and I ask that they all rise as I call their names, and I apologize ahead of time because some of them are hard to say: Dorothy Sigurdson, Barney Sigurdson, Sonia Bitar, Dilara Yegani, Taeko Kawasaki, Semsi Develioglu, Liam Yang, Coultoum Maaz, Noella Iriho, Viviane Rodrigues Mestre Ruiz, Rosalia Iopez Bastos, and Zoila Sifuentes. Please join me in giving them all the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Very good job, hon. Minister.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Legislature a long-term friend of mine, Joan Cowling. Joan's roots extend deep into this community. She was born, raised, and educated in Edmonton. Her father's family were pioneers in the area in 1880. She's a graduate of the University of Alberta and Queen's University. Joan has served four terms as board chairman and trustee of the Edmonton public school board, the best school board in the world. She was an advocate for the development of French immersion programs and was on the school board during times of significant change.

Joan is here today as chairman of the board of the John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights. She's joined by Norm McLeod, who is on the board of directors. The John Humphrey Centre is organizing a human rights award on December 13, and it will be awarded to Dr. Izzeldin Abuelaish, a pioneer in human rights globally. I would ask both Joan Cowling and Norm McLeod to rise and receive the usual warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a distinct honour today to introduce to you and through you to the other members of the Assembly a band that is truly a cultural icon in this province, the Emeralds. Many of my constituents in Edmonton-Decore are fans, but one of the biggest fans is sitting right here in this Assembly, right in front of me, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, a fellow accordion player himself and a pretty good one at that, too.

Joining us today in the gallery are Allan Broder, Wallis Petruk, Don Remeika, Terry Kole, Reiner Piehl, and Jason Broder. I would ask that they please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: This House could use an accordion player. Possibly the Opposition House Leader could sing along with him.

Are there any other guests, hon. members? The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Ms Sigurdson: Yes. I'm introducing on behalf of the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Service Alberta. It's an honour to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly 12 members from the Association of Alberta Registry Agents. They're seated in the members' gallery, and I ask that they rise as I call their names: Dave McNeill, Greg Lemay, Matt Toonders, Steve Cutting, Harry Woo, Robyn Young, Craig Couillard, Pam Wilson, and Michelle Collins. Please join me in giving them the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: I have the hon. minister of agriculture.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my sincere pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a couple of officials from the Alberta Institute of Agrologists. David Lloyd is the CEO and registrar of the Alberta Institute of Agrologists, and Dr. Ty Faechner is the director of the board. As a group the Alberta Institute of Agrologists is at the forefront of many critical issues such as food production, food safety, bioresource health, and environmental quality, matters that are of great interest to Albertans. This organization strives to assure the public of continued professional competence among agrologists in our province. I now ask our guests to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Farm and Ranch Worker Legislation

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I know how important safety is on family farms and how the loss of just one life or any injury can be one too many. I know that all farmers and ranchers would agree with me that our livelihood is one that goes beyond 9 to 5. Farming isn't a job; it's a way of life. Farmers and ranchers put the food on the table that Albertans and indeed Canadians eat each and every day. I am proud of that. There is no farmer in Alberta who doesn't want their operation to be as safe as possible. No one cares more about farm safety than the moms and dads who operate those farms.

Where I see the gap between the NDP's proposed farm safety legislation and common-sense Alberta farmers is in this bill's legislating first then consulting with those actually impacted later. Agriculture is a vital part of Alberta's economy. It's shocking that the government decided to introduce legislation this comprehensive without in-depth consultation from ranchers and farmers. Mr. Speaker, this government is also trying to implement this bill, with its wide-reaching impacts, in less than 45 days. This is making up rules on the fly, rules that impact peoples' livelihoods, rules that may have serious unintended consequences. At the very least this bill needs to go to a committee so that we can hear from actual producers and industry members, not just what bureaucrats in

Edmonton think should happen. We simply can't afford to put the cart before the horse.

This government needs to recognize the difference between a small family farm at Esther and a large commercial farm or operation in Spruce Grove. Our provincial neighbours have working models that make clear distinctions between large operators and family farms. Were these models even considered?

Mr. Speaker, what we need is time to make sure that we get this legislation right.

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

The Emeralds Show and Dance Band

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to actually ask the assistance of all Members of the Legislative Assembly in helping to nominate the Emeralds Show and Dance Band to Canada's Walk of Fame for the 2016 ceremony. In the 45 years that the Emeralds have been entertaining fans world-wide, they have celebrated many achievements but have yet to be inducted into Canada's Walk of Fame. This needs to change.

Mr. Speaker, the Emeralds are truly a Canadian treasure. We're proud of the fact that they call the province of Alberta their home. They have recorded over 30 albums, resulting in six gold, two platinum, and one double platinum award. Their international hit *The Bird Dance*, also sometimes known as the chicken dance, is widely recognizable and has appeared on several movie soundtracks, one about to come out. In 1997 the Emeralds were inducted into the city of Edmonton's cultural hall of fame. It's astonishing that they have yet to be honoured with the induction into Canada's Walk of Fame based on their numerous accomplishments, successes, contributions to Canadian culture and Canadian music. My office will be e-mailing every member later today, so I would ask each of the hon. Members of the Legislative Assembly to sign that letter, have it sent back to me. We will then forward it to Canada's Walk of Fame with the hope that the Emeralds Show and Dance Band will finally be inducted in 2016.

Thank you for all you have done for Canadian music and Canadian culture. You have made us very, very proud.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Provincial Election Six-month Anniversary

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Earlier this month Alberta marked the six-month anniversary of the historic election of the NDP as government. [some applause] Go ahead and pound away because you're not going to like the rest of this. Now, our PC Party caucus was relegated here to the corner, and I'm fine with that too, because, after all, I spent a good chunk of grade school in this same spot. The election result was a surprise to most Albertans. It was hard, in fact, to find people that even admitted to having voted NDP, and those few that eventually did admit to it said: well, we voted NDP only because we wanted the PCs to win a minority government. Now, there's some voting strategy that can only be described as baffling, but let's remember that these folks did vote NDP.

Over the summer Albertans witnessed the spectacle of a Premier campaigning against our environmental record for the federal NDP, who wanted to lock the oil sands in the ground, and telling out-of-work Albertans to settle down because we're just embarrassing cousins and expressing concern that she wouldn't have fun at the climate change conference. Well, Mr. Speaker, Albertans aren't

settling down, we're not embarrassed, and – I'm sorry – we couldn't care less if you have fun at the climate change conference.

Albertans are finding that while the last 44 years weren't perfect, things were a whole lot better than the last six months. Every day we hear this government complain about how hard it is to fix the last 44 years. Well, maybe you should quit trying to fix stuff that isn't broken. I'm a veterinarian, and I fix things, too, and when I'm done, the things I fix have certain key parts in deficit and are no longer able to pass things of great value on to the next generation. That sounds like the same approach the NDP is taking to our economy.

Mr. Speaker, most Albertans are holding their breath and hoping this government doesn't totally destroy the province in the three and a half years they have left in their mandate. Our party learned many lessons . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Edmonton-Whitemud Community Activities

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now for something more positive. It's an honour to be the representative of Edmonton-Whitemud, elected by a majority of the citizens, who voted NDP in the last election. Edmonton-Whitemud is historically significant and now epitomizes all the best characteristics of modern Alberta. Whitemud Creek, which is in Treaty 6 territory, was depicted over 200 years ago in David Thompson's journals and maps. It was key to the development of the Edmonton region as a trading centre as it provided ready access to the river valley from the south. David Thompson was one of several hundred new and old Canadians moving here from far and wide then. Nowadays it's home to Fort Edmonton, a re-creation of the history of the indigenous and settler activity. It's also home to over 40,000 people from all over the world.

1:50

Our residents have been attracted to the natural beauty of the North Saskatchewan and Whitemud Creek areas as well as the excellent public schools, recreational facilities, many fine churches, and the vibrant community league structure, led by the Terwillegar Riverbend Advisory Council. Edmonton-Whitemud has become a megahub of the multicultural fabric of Edmonton.

I want to highlight two initiatives in my riding. Firstly, I'd like to commend the St. Thomas More Catholic parish. Several months ago they fund raised with the goal of resettling 14 Syrian families in Edmonton. They've already welcomed one family and are expecting the rest shortly. They are being helped in the resettlement by Catholic Social Services as well as all of our community.

The other is Brander Gardens ROCKS, a collaborative effort by the public school Brander Gardens and many churches, community leagues, and the city of Edmonton. Brander Gardens ROCKS provides a community hub where new immigrant families and Riverbenders share meals, education, and recreation together. We learn about each other's cultures and support youth empowerment.

Edmonton began as a meeting place, and we continue to flourish as a multicultural dynamic mosaic.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Energy Policies

Mr. Jean: No one blames the NDP for the low price of oil, but people are pointing fingers at NDP policies that are making things

worse for Albertans. Today the Canadian Association of Oilwell Drilling Contractors announced that next year's drilling will drop by 58 per cent. Here is why, and I quote: an increase in taxes and an uncertain competitive landscape with respect to royalties and new environmental taxes have left a big question mark on the attractiveness of operating in Alberta. End quote. To the Premier. The evidence is piling up. Why doesn't she see the damage the NDP plan is doing to Alberta's economy?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Premier.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The job losses in the energy sector are serious and challenging to many Alberta families, and we share their frustrations. That's why we're doing things differently in Alberta. We will continue to improve the reputation by opening up new markets, and part of that means acknowledging that we have work to do on environmental protection.

We've also created a job incentive program which will encourage employers to create up to 27,000 jobs in each of the next two years, Mr. Speaker. That's progress. Albertans are confident that we're going to keep moving forward on this strategy, and we're grateful.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Jean: Here's what the president of Oilwell Drilling Contractors . . .

The Speaker: Hon. leader, until I recognize you, please be seated.

Mr. Jean: Sorry, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Please proceed. Thank you.

Mr. Jean: Here's what the president of Oilwell Drilling Contractors said on the depth of the current downturn, and I quote: the oil and gas services industry is facing one of the most difficult economic times in a generation, one of the worst periods in our history. Unquote. And it couldn't be clearer. NDP policies are making everything worse for the blue-collar working families who depend on this work. What does the Premier have to say to these Albertans who are hurting because of risky NDP economics?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The member opposite couldn't be more wrong about what's causing this downturn. We all know that the international price of oil is what's causing it. If he wants to pretend that by simply having a Conservative government, that wouldn't be the case, what does he have to say for those in Saskatchewan, who were down 50 per cent from their drilling at this same time last year? They have a Conservative government. What about North Dakota, in a similar situation? They have a Republican government. This has nothing to do with policy; it has to do with fearmongering. The price of oil will one day recover, and we're going to make sure that we're incenting jobs in the meantime.

Mr. Jean: Albertans see what the NDP are doing, and they're very worried. They feel like they can't trust the NDP to look after their best interests, and who can blame them? Companies are leaving the province, drilling is down, investment is fleeing, and everyone is pointing the finger to NDP policies as making a bad situation worse: risky royalty and climate change reviews, higher taxes on everyone and everything in Alberta, campaigning against pipelines. And the NDP are just getting started. How can the 65,000 out-of-work Albertans ever trust this government to look after their interests?

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is so far off the mark that he has no clue.

Mr. Eggen: How far off is he?

Ms Hoffman: He is so far off that when half of the drills in the United States are sitting idle right now, he blames Alberta for that. This is something that's happening across North America. We're working in a thoughtful way with industry to build jobs. The member opposite is doing nothing but fearmongering. When will the opposition stop beating up on Alberta? Albertans want a government that believes in them, and they have that.

Mr. Jean: The NDP can't continue to ignore Albertans. Albertans understand the devastating impact the NDP's high-tax, anti-jobs plan is having on the economy. Albertans are living it right now and are very worried. Today 30 municipalities wrote an open letter to the Premier on shutting down our coal industry saying that it "will have significant consequences for the economy, jobs, communities and all of the citizens of Alberta." I couldn't agree more. Higher power bills, fewer jobs, higher taxes: these municipalities are seeing the impact of risky NDP economics. Why can't the Premier see that?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What the government of Alberta is doing is working to make sure that we have 27,000 jobs in Alberta created over the next two years through our job incentive program. We are the only party that in the last election actually had a job creation strategy. Members opposite want to pretend they can keep doing what was done over the last 44 years and that, magically, there will be different results. We're in this situation because previous governments ignored the realities. We're working to ensure we have a diversified economy, and that means Albertans will have jobs.

Mr. Jean: The Premier seems more interested in impressing eastern elites than doing what's best for Alberta. The NDP plan is to raise a new carbon tax and shut down our coal plants. That will hit Albertans very, very hard. Municipalities get it. Their letter says, "It is inevitable that consumers will be immeasurably impacted through higher electricity rates." When Albertans are losing their jobs or seeing their wages cut, this Premier wants to raise their power bills. To the Premier: why, when so many Albertans are hurting, does she insist on making it worse for all Alberta?

Ms Hoffman: I think all members of this House can agree that one of the ways we're going to have good, long-term jobs is if we have a good, long-term international reputation, and the only way to make that happen is to take meaningful action so that Albertans can actually be earning an income so that they can pay their power bills, Mr. Speaker. We're working to make sure we have a strong international reputation. We're going to be taking a measured approach, working with industry, working with Albertans, to ensure that we can sell our products and that we can actually build the pipelines that the member opposite failed to do when he was in Ottawa.

Mr. Jean: A new report from Canada's Ecofiscal Commission makes it abundantly clear that a new carbon tax will hit Alberta the hardest out of all of Canada. Does the Premier care? No. Despite Canada having the best environmental record of all oil-producing countries, the Premier thinks that Alberta is an embarrassing cousin. For families around the kitchen table, they know the NDP plan

means higher power bills. For seniors on a fixed income it means lower quality of life. Premier, why are you determined to ram through these policies that will make every Alberta family poorer?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government is committed to making sure that we have a prosperous, sustainable economy that benefits Albertans, and part of that is ensuring that we have a strong environmental record and real results while protecting our economy. I know that some members may not believe that climate change is really a problem, but the world knows it is. They're looking to us for leadership, and we are going to bring it.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Farm and Ranch Worker Legislation

Mr. Jean: Since the NDP formed government, they have attacked our number one industry, energy. Everything they have done has made the problems of our energy sector much worse. Not happy with that, of course, the NDP have now turned their attention on our number two industry in Alberta, agriculture. Under the guise of safety Bill 6 opens up farms and ranches to all sorts of new regulations. This bill will raise costs and regulations on each and every one of Alberta's farms and ranches. Will the Premier stand up today and tell Alberta farmers what it will cost them to meet the requirement of this new, terrible bill?

2:00

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member should know he can't ask about a bill that's before the House.

Ms Hoffman: The point of order has been noted. I'm happy to answer it.

The Speaker: The point of order is noted.
The response?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, 60,000 Albertans have waited far too long to have the rights that they deserve. The Workers' Compensation Board introduced legislation in 1918, nearly a century ago, and labour relations legislation was introduced in 1938, just before the Second World War. Albertans have waited long enough to have the protections that have rightfully been owed to them, and we're going to move on those.

Mr. Jean: This government is politicizing farm safety for ideological reasons. This bill treats small family farms and ranches like any other commercial enterprise. Some of the aims of this bill are laudable, but it has major flaws. Other provinces recognize the uniqueness of family farms and ranches. This government does not. If ever a bill needed consultation and study, this bill does need it. Will the Premier commit to sending this bill to committee so that the government can hear the informed opinions of Alberta's farmers and ranchers?

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, it is clear . . .

Mr. Cooper: Point of order.

Mr. Mason: . . . they may not . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Are you making a point of order?

Mr. Mason: Normally they're dealt with at the end of question period.

The Speaker: That's exactly what I intend to do. I thought you were . . . [interjections] I understood your statement to be a point of order. I was incorrect in that respect, hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Farm and ranch workers should have the right to return home safe each and every day, and that's what this government is working toward. Just to reinforce that, here are some of the comments that we've been hearing about this: "This is encouraging. It proves Alberta can fix a glaring, unfair and probably unconstitutional social inequality in less than a century." Mr. Speaker, 98 years. We won't wait 98 more. [interjections] That's Don Braid in the *Calgary Herald*, and I'll be happy to table it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Jean: The other side seems a little rowdy today, Mr. Speaker.

I can't help but notice that there is no one on the government side who makes their living from farming or ranching, not even the agriculture minister. The NDP don't have a clue. Farming and ranching aren't jobs; they are a way of life. The Premier has told municipalities that the MGA will be sent to committee for consultation and study when it gets introduced. Why won't the Premier show farmers the same courtesy it is showing to cities and towns and send this far-reaching bill to committee for study?

Ms Hoffman: The members opposite are so out of touch with Albertans that they have no idea how important it is for them to have rights to be safe at work and for them to have rights to have confidence that they can move forward. I want to thank some members of the House for saying so. They've said that finally we're bringing Alberta into the 21st century. [interjections] Thank you to the Member for Calgary-Mountain View for acknowledging that. I wish members opposite cared as much about farm safety and the safety of workers.

The Speaker: I wonder if the hon. minister would please repeat her answer. I could not hear it. Would you please repeat your answer?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The people of Alberta deserve to come home safe each and every night, and the Member for Calgary-Mountain View acknowledges that. This isn't about one side of the House or the other. This is about working together to ensure the safety of farm workers. They deserve it. This is good for rural Alberta. This is bringing Alberta into the 21st century, said the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, and I thank him for sharing that view. Our government is working to make sure that we protect workers, and this bill is going to be good for Alberta.

The Speaker: The hon. member of the third party.

Vision Loss Services

Mr. McIver: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, nearly 53,000 Albertans live with blindness or partial sight. Of the \$4 million required by CNIB last year, a million and a half was provided by government. The environment minister is quoted as saying that these services ought to be brought under the umbrella of medicare. The Member for Calgary-Shaw introduced in this House advocate Phil Bobawsky, a friend of both of ours, who is a champion for the blind. To the Premier: will you keep your party's campaign promise to fund vision loss services for Albertans since this is one of the very few positive promises made?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We are committed to providing services that Albertans need. I know how

important it is for visually impaired Albertans to maintain their independence and quality of life, and that's one of the reasons why we've worked to make sure that medications that can help with that are more readily available. That's why I'm so proud of the RAPID program, which took out the copay as well as having to pay \$1,500 for each injection to having a fully funded government program for \$50 an injection for people who are suffering from macular degeneration. This is being supported by organizations like the CNIB, and I'm really proud of our record on this.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, CNIB will be not that happy to know that the government's answer is to provide unapproved drugs to the blind.

Given that the rehabilitation coverage for hearing loss is delivered through Alberta Health Services and, by contrast, that Albertans with sight loss say that they are unfairly treated, when will you address this discrepancy in support of the 53,000 Albertans who are blind or sight impaired?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. We currently provide the CNIB with, actually, \$2.2 million every year. As the Minister of Health I've met with the CNIB to discuss their concerns. I understand that they're proposing a phased approach to introduce new funding for new services, and we are certainly looking at that proposal. But I have to say that it's a lot easier to consider proposals when you're not cutting billions of dollars from the budget, which is what members opposite have been proposing. I'm really confident that we're going to work in collaboration to make life better for those who are visually impaired.

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, once again the government is demonstrating that they're not listening. The CNIB has asked for \$4 million.

I will try it again. To the Health minister this time since the Premier won't answer: given that CNIB Alberta has asked this NDP government to take steps towards fully funded rehabilitative care and has even provided a phase-by-phase solution to do it, can you commit today to say yes to this very reasonable request by the CNIB?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I find the irony of the member, who was part of a government that for 44 years failed to act and then all of a sudden expects us within six months to move swiftly, so over the top.

In my last answer I talked about how the CNIB is proposing a phased-in approach, which the member mentions. We are certainly considering that. We're going to do it in a reasonable way, and we're going to make sure that we have evidence to guide those decisions. I thank the CNIB for the services they provide to Albertans, and I'm proud of the fact that we are currently contributing \$2.2 million.

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

Climate Change and Royalty Reviews

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This morning I released the Alberta Party climate change strategy called Alberta's Contribution. We believe our province's contribution to the fight against global climate change comes from creating technologies

that will help diversify our economy, reduce emissions, and allow Alberta to continue to grow our energy industry. Now, the Alberta Party believes that our job is not just to oppose but to propose clear alternatives to government policy, and I challenge my opposition colleagues to release their climate change plans as well. To the Premier. Our plan calls for a modest, truly revenue neutral consumer carbon tax. If your government implements a carbon tax, will it be revenue neutral?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of environment.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question and also for his interventions in this matter. I was very grateful to read his interventions this morning, and I thank him for his contributions to these efforts. Of course, the panel is considering these matters. We are looking at the way that we currently price carbon and ensuring that it's the most effective way that we can. We are looking at how we phase in renewables, how we retire our coal fleet in a way that is fair for workers, for communities, and for the companies. We're also looking at the ways that we can bring in energy efficiency. I think that the hon. member will . . .

2:10

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, our plan taps into Alberta's greatest natural resource, the entrepreneurial spirit of our people. It creates opportunities for Alberta companies to drive innovation and develop technologies that allow Alberta to become a world leader in carbon reduction while continuing to grow energy production. To the Premier: will you continue to fund the Climate Change and Emissions Management Corporation, and will you use some of those funds to create a living lab, using Alberta carbon sources, to test innovative ideas for emissions reduction, and will you use the results of these policies to stand up for Alberta's energy sector to gain badly needed market access for our oil?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the hon. member for the question. Certainly, the Climate Change and Emissions Management Corporation is a large part of our technology and innovation investments that we make as a province, and those investments will continue. We are continuing to receive advice from the panel on this matter of research and development, technology and innovation and how we move towards a more carbon competitive economy. Those details will be shared with the House in the coming days and weeks.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to the minister for that answer.

Now, on Monday evening I asked the Minister of Energy if she would release all of the advice given to her by the royalty review panel. Now, transparency is very important. Albertans deserve to know that the royalty review and climate panels were worth while and not just cover for doing what the government wanted to do all along. To the Premier: will you commit to releasing all advice or recommendations made by the royalty and climate panels so Albertans have confidence you're not just picking and choosing the ideas that you like?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you for the question, Mr. Speaker. I think, as I mentioned the other night in estimates when you asked that question, there will be documents released along with the report and the findings in due time.

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

Legal Aid

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a family and criminal lawyer I know just how important legal aid is for all Albertans, and I know from the calls that my office has received just how important subsidized public legal services are for my constituents, especially for those involved in family dispute litigation. Constituents that need it are pleased with the continued responsible funding for legal aid in this year's budget. To the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General: what will this additional legal aid funding be used for?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to the member for this absolutely critical question. Well, of course, we as a government are committed to ensuring that services are available, particularly for the most vulnerable Albertans, and that includes legal aid. This funding was initially put through in the last budget and has been continued in this budget because it will provide an increase in the financial eligibility guidelines. In addition, we will be working with Legal Aid to ensure that going forward they are able to meet the needs of Albertans.

Thank you.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Legal Aid's federal funding has not changed since 2005 and that we've had 785,000 more people come into our province, back to the Minister of Justice: with the new federal government in power what actions are being taken to secure adequate federal funding for Legal Aid in this province?

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and again to the member for the question. I actually have had the opportunity to have a conversation with my federal counterpart on this issue, and we will be discussing it when the Justice ministers for the provinces, territories meet together. The province has significantly increased its contribution to Legal Aid whereas the federal funding has remained stagnant, and we are hoping – I am optimistic – that there will be some more help coming from the federal government so that we can make sure that we're protecting vulnerable Albertans.

Ms McLean: Mr. Speaker, given that thousands of Albertans in need depend upon Legal Aid's subsidized services, to the same minister: how are you ensuring Legal Aid can continue to operate in an effective manner in the future?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and again to the member for the question. Well, of course, this is a really important issue because it protects the rights of the most vulnerable Albertans. We've been working with Legal Aid on some short-term solutions, and we hope to have some announcements on that front very shortly. We're also moving forward looking at the overall service delivery of legal aid

to ensure that we're able to provide services that protect vulnerable Albertans in a sustainable way going forward.

Government Revenue Forecasts

Mr. Fildebrandt: Mr. Speaker, last week the Parliamentary Budget Officer in Ottawa released his economic forecast, projecting oil to be \$11.60 lower a year than the NDP's projections. Every \$3 drop in the price of oil equals a half a billion dollar shortfall in our revenues. That means an \$8 billion difference from the budget by 2018. Does the minister still believe that Albertans can trust his government's revenue projections, or will he revise them with more realistic projections before we vote on the budget?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The budget that was put before this House is a prudent, realistic budget. We believe that always, going forward, we'll take into account what the private-sector forecasters are saying about WTI and other commodities, and we will revise when necessary at the quarterly and at the annual updates. The annual update for the next budget is going to be coming shortly. That's in the spring of this year, and the next quarterly will be in February.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Mr. Speaker, right now is the time for realistic numbers. Given the seriousness of this issue, it shouldn't be brushed aside by the government for another day. So I have to reiterate a point, which is these romanticized numbers for oil. The government will have \$8 billion more in debt than they were already projecting by 2018. This is a serious issue that deserves more than talking points from the minister. Does the minister have a plan to fill this \$8 billion hole with higher taxes or even higher debt?

Mr. Ceci: The plan we've put before this House will bring us back to balance in 2020. So that's realistic. We plan to support jobs and the creation of jobs in this community so that the diversified economy can better take us off the oil and gas roller coaster. We're going to do that. We're going to balance in 2020.

Mr. Fildebrandt: The PBO doesn't believe this is a realistic plan, and Moody's doesn't think this is a realistic plan.

Given that the NDP could put lipstick on a pig or any numbers they like in the budget, it still doesn't change the facts, Mr. Speaker. Since beyond the first three years of the budget plan the minister has provided no data whatsoever to show how he expects to increase revenues by 16 per cent to balance the budget in year 5 and since during the estimates the minister refused to table his economic assumptions for those years, will the minister be honest with Albertans and table the data for years 4 and 5 of the budget now?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you. The member opposite can look in the overview section of the budget to see what we have built these budget assumptions on.

Mr. Strankman: Point of order.

Mr. Ceci: They're all there. We'll stick with this one as opposed to the pig.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted by the Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Hon. Minister of Finance, you have 15 seconds left.

Mr. Ceci: Sure. To conclude without holding this up, I will say that we built realistic assumptions into the overview section. It's all there if the member opposite wants to read it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North West.

Minister of the Status of Women

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On May 5 of this year only two women were re-elected to the Legislature in this province: myself and the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona, the Premier, which I guess makes us the veterans in a group of outstanding, new women legislators. Our opportunity to create change has never been better, and I applaud the government's efforts for making a gender-balanced cabinet. I applaud the introduction of a separate Ministry of the Status of Women and had high hopes for it, but the new minister has already been faced with apologizing to me for an unprofessional outburst yesterday in estimates, where she became aggressive and abusive. To the Premier: does she condone this kind of behaviour?

2:20

The Speaker: The minister of environment.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, emotions run high in estimates, and that went both ways. I certainly apologize to the member if she took my comments as impugning her record as associate minister. However, the fact of the matter is that we have a record from the previous government on women's issues, and we know we need to do better.

Ms Jansen: Mr. Speaker, the minister didn't apologize for the content of her diatribe, just for the fact that it hurt my feelings. So way to go for the bronze here on the apology.

Yesterday I was shocked to hear, Mr. Speaker, that the work of dedicated civil servants that I served with in women's equality and advancement was described as deplorable, lackadaisical, and disgusting. These hard-working individuals are part of the minister's current staff. To the Premier: will she apologize now for the minister's characterization of their work?

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, it's very unfortunate that the hon. member cannot accept an apology when it is offered. It seems that she wants her pound of flesh, too.

It's very clear that we have many hard-working officials throughout the public service, working in many departments under the political direction of the government of the day. They are, of course, bound by the policy direction set by the government of the day, and from time to time the people of this province decide that it's important to change that direction. That is what they have done.

Ms Jansen: Mr. Speaker, given that the minister has insulted her peers and denigrated her staff, it's clear that she has lost the moral authority to govern on this file. To the Premier: will you ask her to step down?

Mr. Mason: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that the tone of the question is really unfortunate in this place. It seems to me that this hon. member is attempting to exploit a difficult situation. I read the *Hansard* transcript of that, and this hon. member contributed as well to, I think, a sense of antagonism that shouldn't necessarily be there.

I believe the question was with respect to the Premier, but I know – I know – that all of us on this side have the utmost confidence in the minister of the environment and women.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Tax Policy

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Tuesday in estimates I noted in the business plan created by this government the statement: “Alberta’s government is moving forward with action to cushion the impact of the downturn on Albertans.” Perhaps, instead of our economy taking body blows, they should focus on making everyday life better for Albertans losing their jobs. To the Premier: do you think that increasing taxes on everything Albertans do, from getting married to going camping to enjoying a glass of wine to driving their cars, is a cushion, or is it a steel-toed boot in the rear?

The Speaker: The Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I’ll thank the member for the question. Our government is taking action on the current situation with low prices of oil internationally. We were the only party during the election that had a plan that looked at partnering with the private sector to create jobs as opposed to the opposition parties, that only talked about it. Our party is acting on it. The creation of my ministry focuses on partnering with the private sector to look at ways to enhance our market exports, our access to market, and jobs in this province.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the same document states that the government’s intent is to “develop a fairer, more balanced revenue base that will bring stability to public programs” and since the government’s plan seems to be implementing taxes on everyday Albertans while also proposing to pile on even more through a carbon tax, to the Premier: when will this government realize that their budget is anything but fair and balanced and that Albertans are downright worried?

Mr. Ceci: Actually, the truth of the matter is that 93 per cent of tax filers will not see a change in their taxes as a result of this budget.

Mr. Hanson: Mr. Speaker, given that “fairer” is banded about liberally by the government when talking about taxes and that to this government fairer seems to be equated with better conditions for bureaucrats, not the 1,500 Albertans a week that are losing their jobs, how can the Premier say with a straight face that Albertans should trust this government when protecting the bloated bureaucracy is all that they seem to have in mind?

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, I find it really rich that the Official Opposition’s solution to the fact that thousands of Albertans are losing their jobs is to lay off thousands more teachers and nurses and front-line workers. That alone would just exacerbate the problem. Now, as opposed to the Wildrose opposition, our government plans on working with the private sector to create more jobs, strengthen our public sector, and ensure that Albertans have the teachers in the classrooms and health care professionals when they get sick and also a path forward to a balanced budget.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Public Consultation on Land Use

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On September 4, 2015, the Minister of Environment and Parks made a staggering, sudden

announcement to convert the Castle area partially to a wildland park and a provincial park. This announcement. . .

The Speaker: Would you stop the clock for a minute? I could not hear the question.

Could you proceed again, hon. member?

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, assuming they heard the first part, this announcement was purposely done without key stakeholder notification. A long-time logging contractor was not consulted, nor were the officials for the three local municipalities. To the minister: why, prior to this sudden announcement, did you avoid discussing that decision with the company that had faithfully held the forest management agreement for decades plus the key elected officials in three local municipalities?

The Speaker: The minister of agriculture.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to the member for the question. Consultations with the sawmill that the member is referring to in Cochrane are ongoing. We respect the forestry industry across the province. There are 17 communities in Alberta that are very important to the forestry industry, and we’re committed to protecting that forestry industry, which is important to Alberta.

Mr. Stier: My question is still to the Environment and Parks minister. She made a sudden announcement regarding the Springbank reservoir, where once again key stakeholders, including landowners, were given no prior notification and the affected municipality was only notified the evening before. To the minister: given that your party had a campaign against that decision during the election then flip-flopped and given that you provided no notification, how can Albertans trust you when you’re always leaving them in the dark?

Ms Phillips: Well, you know, there’s a simple first piece to the answer, Mr. Speaker, which is: that is not true. There were ongoing consultations with affected municipalities on flood mitigation projects for some time. Now, the fact of the matter is that this Official Opposition would leave the entire city of Calgary with no flood protection and open to a \$6 billion flood event as we saw in 2013. We did the hard work of taking the tough decision, and we acted.

Mr. Stier: Well, Mr. Speaker, in fact, what the minister has just said is not true. She’s clearly not acting in the best interests of Albertans and cannot be trusted.

To the minister again: given that it is obvious that you, Minister, do not wish to notify key stakeholders or local municipalities on extremely sensitive and crucial issues, how can Albertans trust you now to represent their best interests on the international stage when you go to the climate change conference next month when you’ve broken that trust here at home?

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can say that the premise of this question is categorically untrue. As the Minister of Municipal Affairs at the time I did speak with municipal leaders in the region to look at the various options and get their input, which I then shared with the minister of the environment.

Thank you.

2:30 Environment and Parks Ministry Issues

Mr. Fraser: The environment minister has said that decisions around the environment should and will be made on the best

evidence, and, Mr. Speaker, our former government and this caucus agree that decisions should always be made on sound evidence. Minister, I don't intend to overwhelm you. I know and I understand that the portfolios of Status of Women and the environment are two very important issues for Alberta's families. These are legacies that we will leave our mothers, daughters, sisters, and the environment is something we'll leave for all future generations. Minister, with the conduct and the evidence you displayed yesterday in estimates, perhaps it's time you asked the Premier to split up these two very important ministries with separate ministers so that they can get the attention they deserve. Wouldn't you agree?

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That is a decision for the Premier, and I will not presume to speak for her, but I want to assure the hon. member that we have absolutely the greatest confidence in the minister to perform both portfolios.

Mr. Fraser: Now, given the fact that the Springbank dam was based on evidence – the evidence shows that a portion of the Springbank dam will flood to protect Calgary – and given the fact that now there are new mitigation talks to protect a subsection of homes along the Elbow River, Minister, if you mitigate that, the water is going to go somewhere. This was a contentious issue for this community in the last flood. Minister, what portion of Calgary or community downstream are you now going to tell that they will flood because of this decision?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of the environment.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the question. It's actually a really good question. That is why we have undertaken the flood hazard mapping studies that we have, the studies that the Auditor General prevailed upon the previous government to do and they did not do. We have undertaken that work, and we'll have that conversation this afternoon in estimates because there is a cost associated with it. That was part of the announcement that we made with the mayor of Calgary on how we move forward on mitigation for both the Elbow and Bow rivers.

Mr. Fraser: Well, let's be clear, Minister. The evidence showed that with the previous flood maps, the water went exactly where we predicted it to go.

Minister, you've talked a lot about your own community and how you want to protect your own headwaters, hence why you made the decision to shut down development in the Castle region. To avoid the appearance of your own political benefit, Minister, will you please table the report and evidence to this House pertaining to the headwaters in the Castle region showing the health of the headwaters before and after?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the question. You know, the Castle area: putting it under some form of legislated protection was a long-standing request of landowners, various people who hold grazing leases, municipalities, and others in southern Alberta. The fact of the matter is that the South Saskatchewan regional plan is a good plan, but in some ways it did not listen to the local communities, and on this Castle decision that was one of them, and we acted.

Agricultural Policies

Cortes-Vargas: Mr. Speaker, dry conditions and hail earlier this year were the grave conditions for many farmers across the province. While the constituents of Strathcona-Sherwood Park weren't completely impacted by these conditions, many Albertans worried that this year's harvest would be far lower than previous years. Many neighbouring areas and surrounding counties issued a state of agricultural disaster. To the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry: how did this government help farmers cope with the challenging early growing season?

Mr. Carlier: Mr. Speaker, early season conditions resulted in a significant increase in the number of claims for insurance compensation through the province's Agriculture Financial Services Corporation. As a result, this government declared an agricultural disaster, which allowed the AFSC to provide approximately \$350 million in support to farmers through premiums and reserves that were already in place to ensure producers with insurance are compensated for their losses in a timely manner. That said, this year's harvest overall was much better than anticipated.

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you to the minister for that answer. I know that many farmers were very appreciative of that support.

Given that early season conditions were so challenging and given that the experiences differed in different parts of the province, would the minister inform the Assembly of the status of the 2015 harvest?

Mr. Carlier: Mr. Speaker, more than 99 per cent of crops are now in the bin, so I'm happy to inform this Assembly of the provincial yields, which are higher than estimated earlier this year. Provincial average yields for spring and durum wheat are reported at 86 and 85 per cent of their five-year averages, with barley at 90 per cent, oats at 86 per cent, canola at 95 per cent, and dry peas at 80 per cent. Overall, this year's crops came in at about 87 per cent of the five-year average. The reason for this is better than expected conditions later in the crop season, improved seed genetics and farming practices, and good ground conditions during harvest.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Alberta farmers will continue to face difficult growing conditions and as the effect of climate change becomes more evident, to the same minister: what are you going to do to promote sustainable agricultural practices across Alberta to help ensure the success of Alberta farmers for generations to come?

Mr. Carlier: Mr. Speaker, this government takes the threat of climate change seriously. With innovation, diversification, and investments in technology Alberta's farmers can weather the storm. This government has established the Farm Stewardship Centre in Lethbridge to focus on research, development, and the implementation of best practices that will help farmers improve on farm stewardship, protect the environment, address important issues like climate change, while continuing to diversify the Alberta economy. This government will also ensure that the AFSC remains a crucial backstop for farmers and ranchers with a suite of financial and insurance supports available.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Infrastructure Funding

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The NDP government's strategic plan, with significant input from David Dodge, outlines their intentions for funding public infrastructure. It refers to a tool called a special investment vehicle, that would build and manage such infrastructure, borrow to finance it, and charge user fees to generate revenues. That sounds in layman's terms like a toll to me. Will the minister come clean and tell Alberta just exactly what the special investment vehicle means for Albertans? Are you introducing a toll?

The Speaker: The Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. No.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since the Dodge report discusses the use of electronic toll systems as an avenue of funding for bridges and given that we know there are bridges all across this province that are in desperate need of more funding, like the one in Fort Saskatchewan, what exactly is your government's plan when it comes to placing tolls on bridges in our province?

Mr. Mason: Nein, non, nyet tolls.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since municipalities in our province, like Edmonton and Calgary, are responsible for key arterial highways inside the ring roads and whereas motorists are frustrated by perpetual congestion and traffic lights stopping and starting traffic along these arteries and in the light of the Dodge report: is the Minister of Transportation planning to give tolling powers to municipalities through a new municipal charter? Yes or no?

Mr. Mason: Three guesses, hon. member. In whatever language the answer is no.

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

Fentanyl Use on First Nations

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is national addictions week, and I'd like to congratulate two Kainai physicians who've been honoured by the University of Lethbridge with this year's friends of health sciences award. Dr. Susan Christenson and Dr. Esther Tailfeathers launched several successful initiatives to save lives on the Blood reserve, where fentanyl has taken a terrible toll. To the Minister of Aboriginal Relations: given the success, leadership, and persistence of these doctors, what are you doing, specifically, to save the lives of Albertans on other reserves?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the question and to the member for raising it. Certainly, fentanyl is one of the most extreme drugs that we've seen in our time. Doctors are talking about the very extreme consequences of having as much as just two grains of fentanyl. We're working on a four-pronged approach. One piece is making sure that we have education and public awareness campaigns. One piece is working to make sure that we have naloxone kits in the hands of people who are likely to have an overdose and the people who care for them. We're also working to

address the manufacturing and trying to create greater barriers between it being brought into Alberta. Lastly, we're working to make sure we have this crisis centre in place as well as investing in detox opportunities.

2:40

Mr. Rodney: Thank you to the Health minister for the answer.

Again to the Aboriginal Relations minister: given that you committed last week to outline your department's efforts to ensure that the life-saving antidote naloxone is available on all Alberta reserves and given that any delay in setting up the system means lives lost, what are you doing specifically to ensure that all First Nations reserves have a ready supply of naloxone and that residents are trained to administer it at a moment's notice?

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to the member for the question. Well, of course, this is a critical issue for all Albertans because fentanyl is a very dangerous drug, and the antidote naloxone is one of our key pieces in addressing this situation. We have been working with policing agencies on reserves, we've also been working with First Nations directly, and we will continue to work with EMS as well as working on information because it's really critical that we work with our partners in Health to ensure that the information on the danger of this drug gets out so that we can prevent people from taking it in the first place.

Thank you.

Mr. Rodney: Again, to the same minister: given that the Blood Tribe Police Service launched an extremely effective on-reserve crime unit dedicated to gaining control of fentanyl distribution, what specific plans – and we are looking for specifics here, Minister – do you have to adapt the Blood reserve's successful state of emergency model on other reserves that are trying to get a handle on fentanyl abuse and distribution in their area?

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to the member for the question. Well, of course, we have a number of police forces throughout Alberta policing on First Nations. There are a couple of other First Nations that have their own policing forces, but a majority of it is done with the RCMP, so we are working with those partners to ensure that they have access to naloxone and that they have access to all the information necessary going forward to make sure that they can cut off the supply.

Thank you.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Mosaic Entertainment

Ms Woollard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The more I learn about the constituency of Edmonton-Mill Creek, the more aware I am of the rich diversity of businesses there, one of which I was fortunate enough to tour recently. Mosaic Entertainment is a television studio. Unprepossessing in its outward appearance, but much like Dr. Who's TARDIS, it has a much bigger inside than the outside suggests. Mosaic Entertainment is primarily a skit comedy company, and it has produced a variety of shows, among them is *Caution: May Contain Nuts*. The show currently being filmed, *Tiny Plastic Men*, is being shown on Super Channel.

Our tour began with us meeting the executive producers, learning how the studio works, then moving on to see how the creative inspirations grow into stories and finally a show, needing only a place to be produced and a cast and crew to bring it to life. After meeting the cast members, all well-known names in the Edmonton theatre scene, it was on to the wardrobe. In the midst of the racks of costumes, some ready to be worn and some needing to be refurbished and altered, there were sewing machines, piles of colourful fabrics, and components everywhere. The costume designer and her assistants have to be creative and innovative to produce the needed costumes on site.

Next was the props area. The props, ranging in size from furniture to small toys, were stored everywhere, even on the walls of the lunchroom, where boxes labelled with made-up toy company logos were stacked. Everywhere we walked, we saw people setting up equipment, rehearsing scenes, or carrying props to the sets.

Finally the moment came. We were provided with director's chairs, placed well behind the cameras, and we watched a scene from the show being filmed.

Touring this studio showed us Albertans creating a successful and creative business, employing many local people, and providing entertainment and new ways of looking at the world. We're very lucky to have them.

Fall of the Berlin Wall 26th Anniversary

Mr. Fildebrandt: On August 13, 1961, the Soviet Union built the Berlin Wall, an iron curtain that cut not just a city or a country but the entire world in two. For three decades the Berlin Wall stood as a global symbol of oppression and tyranny. For the west it stood as a symbol that our Cold War opponents would ruthlessly stamp out any yearning for freedom that loosened their grip on power. For free people around the world it stood as a physical reminder that while free nations welcome people in, slave nations keep them in.

For Germans: [Remarks in German]; a nation half free, half slave. It was a stone in their hearts, keeping families, friends, brothers, sisters, and countrymen apart. Most of my family escaped the east before the wall went up, but many families did not. Millions of families were trapped behind it, and some were even divided by it.

Twenty-six years ago, in November 1989, the people of East Germany overthrew the Socialist Unity Party and began to tear down the wall with their own bare hands. Within two years most of the socialist regimes in eastern Europe and Russia had fallen. As the colonized nations of the Soviet Union declared their independence, so too were the people of East and West Germany brought together again in unity and justice and freedom. [Remarks in German]

Let us remember this anniversary as a new symbol that the human need for freedom can be walled in and suppressed for a time but never extinguished. The world has never had a greater portion of its people freer than today, but there still remains millions oppressed or even enslaved in their own countries. As one of the oldest free nations in the world we have a duty as Canadians to fight for them. Let us pray for those around the world still not free. They will be in time.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 205

Persons with Developmental Disabilities Services (Public Consultation) Amendment Act, 2015

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being the Persons with Developmental Disabilities Services (Public Consultation) Amendment Act, 2015.

Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 205 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

Mrs. Littlewood: I would like to table the aforementioned *Calgary Herald* article written by Don Braid titled Alberta Farm Workers Win the Long Struggle for Basic Rights – I have the appropriate number of copies to table – as well as an article titled Farm Safety Breakthrough: Proposed Rules to Ensure Safe Workplaces, Protect Workers. That is also a *Calgary Herald* article, and I have the appropriate number of copies.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table the requisite five copies of a document called Alberta's Contribution: Alberta Party Caucus Climate Change Plan, a balanced plan reflecting our desire to address climate change and other impacts of energy development with the goal to continue the development and expansion of Alberta's energy industry.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table a document that my colleague the Leader of the Official Opposition referred to today, an open letter to Premier Notley from the mayors and reeves of over 30 municipalities in Alberta.

2:50

The Speaker: The Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. At this time I'd like to table the requisite number of copies of a letter that was just delivered to the office of the Premier requesting that the Premier relieve the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women from her duties.

The Speaker: Are there any other tablings?

Hon. members, I'm pleased to table five copies of the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Alberta 2014-15 annual report pursuant to section 63(1) of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act and section 95(1) of the Health Information Act and section 44(1) of the Personal Information Protection Act.

It's the appropriate time, I think, for me to deal with points of order. I think there were a total of three.

Government House Leader, on the first one, can you elaborate on the point of order?

Mr. Mason: I had three of them, and I actually have a fourth one.

The Speaker: Okay. This is the appropriate place to deal with them.

Point of Order Tabling Cited Documents

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, maybe I'll just give you the fourth point of order, and that is that during tablings today we expected the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills to table the survey of his constituents which he referenced yesterday in question period. It is customary that when a member refers to a document in the House, particularly during question period, they table it at the first opportunity. So I would hope that the hon. member would table that on Monday. That's my fourth point of order.

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, thank you so much. I'll have to beg for your forgiveness, good sir, as I did forget to bring that document today to the House. I'll be more than pleased to table it in the House tomorrow given that we will be here.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Government House Leader, the first.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Mason: I will do two together, and they have to do with the decorum in the House when government members are answering questions. It seems to me that the Official Opposition is acting in a way to try and disrupt the proceedings of the House when hon. ministers are trying to respond to their questions. The degree to which the catcalling, heckling, yelling, shouting, quite frankly, attempts to shout down ministers is unacceptable, and I would ask you to impose decorum. Clearly, some heckling has always been permitted in the House, but there seems to be a consistent attempt to drown out or intimidate ministers of the Crown in giving their answers. I think that this should not be acceptable to you, Mr. Speaker, or to the House.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. Government House Leader, the section specifically, if you could point that out.

Mr. Mason: It's 23(j).

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, thank you so much. I rise today to speak to the point of order under 23(j): "uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder." While I can accept that the opposition was boisterous today and was voicing some concerns, I personally didn't hear much use of abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder.

Now, Mr. Speaker, as you know, if you are uncomfortable with the decorum in this House, you are welcome to rise at any point in time and ask for a little bit of a softer tone or volume in the House. I think that you did have the opportunity to rise today, and it was when the government was doing the exact same thing that they've accused the opposition of today.

The Speaker: On this particular point of order, as I may have indicated on a couple of occasions, particularly this week, I have that issue under advisement myself, and I would prefer to deal with this as part of a bigger picture at a future date.

I would remind the House, though, as I think about that, that you choose to indicate that you want to use time efficiently and constructively. However, I note that on several occasions I've had

to actually ask the House to be quiet so that I could hear. So as I look forward to bringing a response on that matter in the future, I also urge all of the members, all of the party whips, those present, that we need – we had children in the Assembly today, as we often do, and they are looking to us as leaders. You are role models. All of us are role models, and I wish to remind each of you to use your best efforts, either as individuals or as caucuses, to make this place a more respectable place. I will defer my ruling until next week.

I think there was a point of order from the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Mason: I had another point of order as well.

The Speaker: I'll deal with this one first if I might.

Mr. Cooper: I rise to speak briefly to the point of order from my colleague from Drumheller-Stettler. There's a tradition in the House of not using props. He felt that there had been one used, but in the name of time I'll withdraw that point of order on his behalf.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Point of Order Anticipation

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that. During question period I believe the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills – and correct me if I'm not correct on that – attempted to ask a question with respect to Bill 6, which is the bill that deals with the health and safety of farm workers. [interjection] It was the Official Opposition Leader, yes. He attempted to ask a question to the Premier about Bill 6, the Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act, which stands on the Order Paper under Government Bills and Orders. I would note that our standing orders say – and this is clear – on page 16, 23(e): "anticipates, contrary to good parliamentary practice, any matter already on the Order Paper or on notice for consideration on that day."

Mr. Speaker, also, if you review *Beauchesne's Parliamentary Rules & Forms* at page 122, section 14, "Questions should not anticipate an Order of the Day although this does not apply to the budget process." Clearly, this bill is not part of the budget process.

Just to go a little further, Mr. Speaker, *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, edited by O'Brien and Bosc, quite rightly points out that this rule has been changed or modified in the Canadian House of Commons. Without going into it at length, the Speaker ruled there that questions in question period dealing with something that is on the Order Paper were henceforward okay except in a couple of instances, and I won't go into the detail of that.

However, that is not the procedure in this House or in our standing orders, Mr. Speaker, as you yourself ruled on June 17. At 3 o'clock in *Alberta Hansard*, June 17, 2015, you yourself said:

With respect to the point of order, it related to a question by the Member for Calgary-Cross to the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General about donations to political parties, which is the subject of Bill 1, which can be found on page 19 of the *Alberta Hansard* for yesterday, June 16.

Then you read the standing order, Mr. Speaker.

A Member will be called to order by the Speaker if, in the Speaker's opinion, that Member

- (e) anticipates, contrary to good parliamentary practice, any matter already on the Order Paper or on notice for consideration on that day.

Basically, the rule is what it says, that a part of the proceedings should not be on the same subject as something that is scheduled for later in the day. My investigation into the matter demonstrates that the rule is not necessarily strictly observed in relation to Oral Question Period. Speaker Kowalski stated on March 3, 1998, page 649 of *Alberta Hansard* that questions that were framed so as to ask if something was a matter of government policy “took it out of the realm of debate on a particular bill.”

3:00

I will note, Mr. Speaker, that that is not the frame used by the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition in asking his question as he specifically referenced the bill.

You went on to say:

I note that in a May 8, 2013, ruling on the same issue, page 2194 of *Alberta Hansard* for that day, Speaker Zwozdesky reaffirmed Speaker Kowalski’s ruling on the rule against anticipation not being violated by a question about the government policy in relation to a bill which was up for consideration that day.

Members may be interested to know that the Canadian House of Commons no longer applies the rule against anticipation during question period, as is discussed on page 561 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition. In this instance, the question asked what the government was doing about campaign financing, which is, of course, the subject of Bill 1. I think the Official Opposition House Leader had a valid point and a legitimate point of order although it could have been maybe brought forward to the Assembly’s attention at the appropriate time.

As we move forward together during this session, I am sure that we will now be more aware of the rule against anticipation.

Mr. Speaker, wise words.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to respond to the point of order in question today, from section 23(e). I think there are some very key points for consideration today when it comes to the question at hand. The standing order states “anticipates, contrary to good parliamentary practice, any matter already on the Order Paper or on notice for consideration on that day.” Mr. Speaker, there is no such bill that will be considered today. In fact, we will be rising here momentarily to go back into the estimates process. The department of agriculture or the Department of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour are not going to be debated today.

Having said that, *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* states that the rule was changed, that questions are no longer to be ruled out of order on the sole basis that they are anticipating orders

of that day. So there is a wide swath of precedent that creates an either/or situation and does not require the question just to be on the Order Paper but to be under consideration that day. It is very clear that we will not be considering it today. I think you’ll find that while the hon. member across the way brought some points when it comes to anticipation, for many of the questions that he raised today, the topic of discussion would be debated later that day.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, briefly on the rule of anticipation: this is one that is long standing, but the application of this rule, at least in Canadian Houses of Parliament, has certainly been significantly relaxed, and there is a very practical reason for that. Items are placed on the Order Paper as soon as they are introduced, and they remain on the Order Paper sometimes for a matter of days or even weeks. If during that entire period of time the members of the opposition are enjoined from asking questions with regard to those pieces of legislation, it certainly limits our ability as members to probe the government as to their intentions with regard to the legislation.

I understand fully the desire to not cause duplication or to waste the time of the House with something that could then be taken up during the course of debate. However, Oral Question Period is the most direct opportunity for members to directly ask the ministers involved what the state of government policy is on that, and the rule of anticipation, as has been previously stated on pages 560 and 561 of the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, has been appropriately relaxed in order to allow for that to happen. In this particular situation, Mr. Speaker, if we are not allowed to ask questions with regard to any matter on the Order Paper, we are in fact significantly hindered in our ability to fulfill our role as members of the opposition. I would ask that you rule this particular point of order out of order.

The Speaker: Hon. members, thank you for your comments. I choose to read the references identified by the various members and make a decision at a future date.

Having said that, pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(5)(b) the House stands adjourned until tomorrow afternoon at 1:30.

The legislative policy committees will convene this afternoon for consideration of the main estimates. Families and Communities will consider the estimates for Seniors in the Foothills Room, and Resource Stewardship will consider the estimates for Environment and Parks in the Grassland Room.

[The Assembly adjourned at 3:06 p.m. to Thursday at 1:30 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 59.01(5)(b)]

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Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday afternoon, November 19, 2015

Day 20

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

First Session

Wanner, Hon. Robert E., Medicine Hat (ND), Speaker
Jabbour, Deborah C., Peace River (ND), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Feehan, Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (ND), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Kleinstuber, Jamie, Calgary-Northern Hills (ND)	Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND)
Larivee, Hon. Danielle, Lesser Slave Lake (ND)	Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Littlewood, Jessica, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (ND)	Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)
Loewen, Todd, Grande Prairie-Smoky (W)	
Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (ND)	
Luff, Robyn, Calgary-East (ND)	
MacIntyre, Donald, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (W)	

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Kazim	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, November 19, 2015

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Let us reflect. As tomorrow is Universal Children's Day, let us all recognize the importance of teaching young people that their voices matter, and let us encourage them to speak and to be heard. Let us be reminded that these children are our future and that the work we do here today will set out the stepping stones for our future generations. Our reflections may make us all even more mindful of our responsibilities, especially for the children, not just for the children of Alberta but indeed for the children of the world. Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Mr. Piquette: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon I am very happy to introduce to you and through you grade 6 students from Boyle school, which is in not only in my riding; it's actually in my home community. In fact, the school is right across the street from me, and my son goes there, so I know lots of these students and their instructors. They are accompanied today by teachers Michelle Splinter and Jody Ergang, parent supervisor Jody Montague, and bus driver David Hague. If the students of grade 6, teachers, and supervisors could please rise and accept the customary warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Ms Jabbour: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very honoured today to rise on your behalf and introduce through you Ms Jody Magill, who is a constituent of Medicine Hat. Jody has been the manager of government and public affairs at Methanex Corporation since 2012. Methanex produces methanol at its plant in the community of Medicine Hat and employs approximately 125 employees. I would invite Jody to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two very special guests. Jan Lukas Buterman is the founding member and current president of the Trans Equality Society of Alberta. The society's mission is to be a voice for matters concerning trans Albertans. Since its inception in 2009 TESA has engaged in advocacy and education in areas of government outreach and community development.

I'd also like to introduce Superintendent Brad Doucette. He's a senior member of the Edmonton Police Service currently serving as a superintendent of the west division. He's also EPS's representative on the Sexual Minorities Liaison Committee in the community of Edmonton.

I would ask them both to rise now and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of our Assembly four guests from Eastglen high school, which is an important institution in my constituency: Christina Hamer, a teacher at Eastglen high school; Leann Thompson, the librarian and the GSA lead; Anna Lafleur, a student; and Vanessa Shultz, also a student. I would like to congratulate both Anna and Vanessa for their hard work beyond their school work on Eastglen's gay-straight alliance and for the support of Ms Thompson and Ms Hamer. I think you're clearly living up to your school's mission to work within our community and offer students the opportunity to succeed within a supportive environment. I'd like you all, please, to rise now and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Miranda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am delighted and proud to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Nancy Miller and Pam Krause, two remarkable Albertans. Nancy spent over four decades advocating for social justice, human rights, and reproductive choice. She has co-ordinated public education and lobbying campaigns to secure protection under Alberta's human rights legislation. A proud feminist, Nancy has served on various boards, most notably on the Calgary and the Alberta Status of Women Action Committee.

Joining her is her spouse, Pam Krause, president and CEO of the Calgary Sexual Health Centre. An active feminist, her work in the LGBTQ community spans a period of 25 years, becoming one of Calgary's strongest voices on issues related to sexual health in the LGBTQ community.

Mr. Speaker, I and at least two other members here owe a debt of gratitude to the work that these two women have done, that has made it possible for us to be here. I would invite them to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Cortes-Vargas: Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two very special women. In this Assembly in 2008 Marni Panas was the first person to represent the drag community in full regalia here in the Legislature, and she was introduced by our hon. Premier, the MLA for Edmonton-Strathcona. It is my honour to be here today because of the anniversary that it signifies. To this day it remains history that has not been repeated. Marni is also a transgendered woman who has been very transparent and public throughout her journey in the hopes of fostering acceptance through education and respectful dialogue. She has been acclaimed with many awards for her commitment to creating a community where diversity is not only accepted but celebrated, a community that is safe for others to be their authentic selves, something I'm very honoured to continuously talk with her about. I would ask her to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

I got a little bit ahead of myself. I need to introduce another person. Stephanie Shostak is here. She is a born, raised, and educated Albertan, a parent to two wonderful children and a proud transgendered woman. She is also a Volleyball Canada nationally certified referee and is currently serving as the president of the Volleyball Alberta officials. Stephanie is also a current board member with the Trans Equality Society of Alberta in her job to transition people into new management positions. I'd ask Stephanie to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

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

Mr. Connolly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two very dedicated and committed social justice activists in this province and friends of mine. Angela Reid is a board member of the Trans Equality Society of Alberta, or TESA, and advocates on a number of issues affecting transgendered and gender-diverse people. She's an electronics technologist by trade, coaches junior roller derby in Airdrie, and is co-captain of the Calgary All Stars derby team, which I know that the Minister of Environment is very happy to talk about.

Aria Burrell is a transgender rights activist and also a board member of the Trans Equality Society of Alberta. Aria spearheaded the first-ever raising of the transgender pride flag at Calgary city hall this year, encouraged the Voting while Trans website to support transgendered voters across Canada during the 2015 federal election.

Their combined hard work in the transgender community has gone a long way towards raising awareness and ensuring an inclusive Alberta where we can all feel welcome and proud. I would ask them to now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Anna Burn. Anna is a teacher at Lillian Osborne high school, which is in the beautiful constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud. She also serves all Albertans as a diversity consultant for sexual orientation and gender identity for the Edmonton public school board. I'd kindly ask Anna to stand and receive the usual warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's a pleasure and an honour to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly four students from Jasper Place high school in the wonderful constituency of Edmonton-Meadowlark. They are Zoya Plaizier, Grace Villeneuve, Julianna Bourbonnais, and Cassidy Harper. Accompanying the students is Kerry Maguire, who is a teacher and diversity consultant for sexual orientation and gender identity with the Edmonton public school board. They are here today in support of the proposed amendments to the human rights legislation, which will be read later today. I would like to thank them for being here today and invite them to rise and accept the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Seniors.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions today. First, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Mr. Richard Harpe. Just last week, at a ceremony in London, England, Richard was presented with a golden award for the best affordable over-50s housing project. This award was given in recognition of the Lakeview project in Clairmont, Alberta. This innovative project contains 150 units, including 78 independent living apartments for both individuals and couples as well as 72 lodge units, which also scale up to supportive living. This is the first not-for-profit project to receive this international recognition. As chair of the Grande Spirit Foundation and as county representative for over 20 years Richard has been part of this team and working on this project since 2008. Now the building is under way – concrete is being poured this

Saturday – and Lakeview is scheduled to open in late 2016. I'd now ask that Mr. Harpe please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain . . .

Ms Hoffman: I do have a second introduction, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I'm sorry.

Ms Hoffman: No. My apologies. This introduction to you and through you to all members of the Assembly is for the Canadian Diabetes Association. November, as we know, is Diabetes Awareness Month, which focuses attention on advocacy for those living with diabetes, on prevention, and on research for a cure. Our guests today are members of the Canadian Diabetes Association advocacy committee, who are accompanied by several staff from the CDA Edmonton office. This group is led by Emily Johnson, the volunteer chair of the advocacy committee. Over 200,000 people are living with both type 1 and type 2 diabetes in Alberta, and that number is growing. Diabetes advocates are a strong voice for helping to influence positive change in access to care, research, and treatment in Canada. Without the support of committed volunteers like these in the gallery today life would be much more difficult for people with diabetes and those who love them. I'd ask that our honoured guests please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a constituent of mine from Rocky Mountain House who is in the gallery today. Ms Laura Button is the editor of the *Mountaineer*, Rocky Mountain House's community weekly newspaper, that has been proudly serving our community since 1923. Ms Button, in addition to her work at the paper, is an active member of the Rocky Mountain House community both, of course, as the editor of the paper but also working to enhance our community through several things. Recently I ran into her working on physician recruitment. I would ask that Ms Button rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure and privilege to rise today to introduce to you and through you some friends of mine from southern Alberta. I have Gerald and Kathy Reimer. Gerald is a county councillor for Forty Mile county. He is a mixed farmer who farms both dry and irrigation land. Kathy is a nurse who works with mentally and physically handicapped Albertans.

We also have Steve and Sonja Wikkerink. Steve is a councillor with Forty Mile county as well. Steve and Sonja have four children and one grandchild. Steve and Sonja together operate an irrigation farm, growing sugar beets, wheat, durum, and beans. Sonja also finds time to be a teacher's aide with Prairie Rose school division.

Craig and Cathryn Widmer are here as well. Craig is a councillor for the county of Forty Mile and is also the chairman for our ag service board. Craig farms with Cathryn. He has a dryland mixed farm, growing wheat, canola, peas, and cattle.

They are partly here today, too, to raise awareness of our situation with HALO, our medical air ambulance. We are one of only two areas in the province that STARS can't reach, and we fund this

service entirely ourselves to the tune of about a million dollars a year. The economy has changed a bit, and we hope that this message of fairness will reach our new government. Can I please ask my friends to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I know that I share with the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat that we have people from all three parties from Medicine Hat, and it's always very important.

Are there any other guests or visitors?

Mr. Carlier: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you representatives from Agriculture Financial Services Corporation, including president and managing director Brad Klak; chief operating officer Merle Jacobson; human resources senior manager Karla Kochan; human resources supervisor Heather Leier-Murray; area manager for central Alberta Barclay Smith; product specialist Michelle Rigney; and area co-ordinator for on-farm, inspector Tom Penner. AFSC was just rewarded as one of Canada's top 100 employers, and they have been an important resource for producers affected by dry conditions this summer. I ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Point of Order Anticipation

The Speaker: Hon. members, I am prepared to rule on the point of order raised yesterday by the Government House Leader in response to the Leader of the Official Opposition's second set of questions concerning the subject matter of Bill 6, the Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act. The Government House Leader cited Standing Order 23(e), which states that a member will be called to order by the Speaker if, in the Speaker's opinion, that member "(e) anticipates, contrary to good parliamentary practice, any matter already on the Order Paper or on notice for consideration on that day."

1:50

Members may recall that I gave a ruling on anticipation on June 17, 2015, which can be found on page 50 of the *Alberta Hansard* for that day, as referred to by the Government House Leader yesterday. As I did in June, I find that there is no point of order here, as noted by the opposition House leaders. As stated in my earlier ruling, the rule is that a part of the proceeding should not be on the same subject as something that is scheduled for later that day. As members know, yesterday the House adjourned immediately following the Routine, so there were no items scheduled for debate. Accordingly, the questions regarding Bill 6 were in fact in order.

I also would point out that the questions posed were not dealing with the specific clauses of the bill, and the practice in this Assembly is that the rule against anticipation is not violated by a question about government policy in relation to a bill that is up for consideration that day.

I would refer members to Speaker Kowalski's ruling on March 3, 1998, at page 649 of *Hansard*, which was reaffirmed in Speaker Zwodzesky's ruling of May 8, 2013, at page 2194 of *Hansard*, and in my ruling of June 17, 2015.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: I recognize Her Majesty's Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's great to finally win one in this House.

Job Creation and Retention

Mr. Jean: Group layoff notices are rising across the province. Enbridge: 250 jobs gone. Enmax: 60 jobs gone. TransCanada is laying off people right now. The bleeding of jobs continues all across Alberta. The head of Calgary's Beaver Drilling knows the damage the NDP is doing in an already bad situation. The NDP is, and I quote, talking about changing the rules and increasing costs. They haven't instilled investor confidence. End quote. We're talking about the lives of working men and women across the province, trying to put food on their table. Premier, why . . .

The Speaker: Hon. leader.

The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We know that when layoffs are announced, we're not talking about a number; we are talking about real Alberta families who are suffering. That is why our government has taken a very careful and thoughtful approach to a number of different strategies for economic stimulation and job creation and also to ensure that we cushion the blow that is going to inevitably happen as a result of this dramatic and historic drop in the price of oil. What Albertans looked at and voted for in spring was a government that would take a stable hand forward and ensure that we could work together to come through this.

Mr. Jean: The jobs ministry received 10 group layoff notices in October. That's 1,400 Albertans without a job just in those 10 layoff notices. Oil well drillers are saying that it's as bad as or worse than the 1980s. Albertans are looking at the NDP government and wondering why the NDP is doing everything they can to hurt Alberta's economy. A new job subsidy program coming into effect in 18 months won't do anything at all if NDP policies are causing investors to flee the province right now. How many group layoff notices has the government received so far this month: 30, 60, 100? Tell us.

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I've said, our government is focused on trying to soften the blow of the drop in the price of oil. So what we have done is we've had a job-creation incentive program that we hope will create 27,000 jobs per year. To be clear, that will start next year, a month and a half from now. In addition, we've reinstated the STEP program, we've opened up over \$2 billion of financing for innovators, and we're going to create 8,000 to 10,000 jobs through our increased investment in capital infrastructure.

Mr. Jean: New numbers are in. The number of Albertans collecting unemployment benefits has doubled over the last year. Last month alone saw a 9 per cent increase. There are over a hundred thousand unemployed in Alberta, and raising royalties won't help them, a new carbon tax won't help them, and scaring investors away won't help them. The fact is that every policy the NDP has introduced has made things worse for Albertans. To the Premier: will you recognize the problems you're creating, or do you just not care?

Ms Notley: I would suggest that the biggest threat to investor confidence is the fearmongering that we're getting from over there. That opposition thinks that the way to address corporate layoffs in

the energy sector is to lay off thousands of doctors and nurses. They would privatize health care to fix hospitals, and they would deny climate change to open up markets for our energy industry. None of those sanctions will work, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

The Speaker: Madam Premier, could I have your last 10 words that you indicated, please? Ten seconds.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Not a single one of the Official Opposition's ideas will work at all for Albertans.

Mr. Jean: I hope I can get another 10 seconds on top to throw something else in.

Energy Industry Environmental Issues

Mr. Jean: It's absolutely shocking that at a time of massive job losses, all the NDP can do is talk about a new carbon tax like it's going to do something. Unemployment claims are up, companies are leaving Alberta, investment is significantly down, and jobs are disappearing at a record rate. That's not fearmongering; that's fact. The consequences are showing. TransUnion reports that consumer debt is on the rise in Alberta. By raising the price of everything from groceries to power bills, this carbon tax will only make things much worse for Albertans. Why does the Premier insist on hurting Albertans when they're down?

Ms Notley: You know, Mr. Speaker, the opposition just doesn't get it. Their plan to fire teachers and nurses will not increase the international price of oil, and Alberta's energy products won't see new markets if we continue to follow their denial, dinosaur approach on climate change. Alberta needs a balanced plan to protect services and build support for new market access so that we can actually increase the price of oil received by our manufacturers and producers here in Alberta.

Mr. Jean: Yesterday the new Liberal environment minister came into town. What I heard should make every Albertan very worried. She said that a new national climate change plan will be established 90 days after Paris and, I quote, we'll have a national target and each province is going to contribute its part. End quote. All reports indicate that this new carbon tax will hit Alberta the hardest by far of any province, but the NDP doesn't seem to care or be interested. To the Premier: why should Ottawa be allowed to interfere in how we run our industries?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As it turns out, there is a federal government, and they have certain rights under the Constitution. But one of the things that has made our government so focused on dealing with climate change is because we want a made-in-Alberta solution because under the regime of the federal government, if we do our homework, they'll stay out of it. So that's why we are doing that. We are doing our homework after those folks over there stuck their head in the ground and tried to pretend there was no problem.

Mr. Jean: A Trudeau government interfering with Alberta's oil patch: now, where have I heard that story before?

Here's the irony. At the same time that Albertans are being lectured by this NDP government and by Ottawa, the federal government is bailing out Quebec industry and rubber-stamping 8 billion litres of raw sewage being dumped into our waterways. Albertans are tired of hypocrisy, and they know that we are actually world leaders when it comes to the environment. Why does the

Premier continue to stand by and let Alberta be pushed around by Ottawa?

Ms Notley: What our government is going to do is we are going to make plans that make Alberta a world leader on the environment, and then we will open up new markets, Mr. Speaker, and then we will grow our economy, and we will increase the price of oil because we will take responsibility for something that has been ignored for far, far too long.

2:00 Farm and Ranch Worker Legislation

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, as I said yesterday, this government is politicizing farm safety for ideological reasons. Bill 6, which is not up for debate today, treats small family farms and ranches like factories. Some of the aims of this bill are laudable, but it has major flaws. The government would know that if they had actually, you know, consulted with farmers and ranchers, but of course they didn't. However, the Alberta Federation of Labour was ready to voice its support the moment the bill was introduced. Why did the government consult with labour unions on this particular bill but not ranchers and not farmers?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, first of all, (a) our government consulted with stakeholders across the board, and (b) the reason some stakeholders were able to respond on the issue when we finally took action is because Albertans have been waiting for 98 years for these workers to be treated fairly.

Mr. Jean: I found out about the bill two days ago.

Like I said yesterday, farming and ranching aren't jobs; they are ways of life. Farmers and ranchers don't punch a time clock and go home from work. They live there. If anyone on the government side made a living from farming or ranching, they would probably know that, but they don't. They would understand that getting these rules right is complicated and can best be done by listening to the opinions of those it affects, ranchers and farmers. Will the Premier stop the ideological haste on this bill and send it to committee so that the government can get the advice of the farmers and ranchers that it affects?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, first of all, the details around the application and the specific rules around employment standards, around health and safety will in fact be developed in consultation with people in the industry. But on the flip side, when a worker goes to work and they are told by their boss to do something that is unsafe, only farm workers in Alberta, just in Alberta, have no right to walk away from that. That is wrong, and we are changing that.

Mr. Jean: You're right, Madam Premier. It is complicated, so you should consult. The Premier and her cabinet know that you should consult on complicated topics. We know that they will release a new MGA Act next year and then spend months consulting before passing it. This is the right thing to do for cities and for towns in Alberta. Our farmers and ranchers in Alberta deserve nothing less. Instead, the government is content on passing this bill and putting it into effect by January 1, with absolutely no consultation with farmers whatsoever. Albertans have to wonder: is the haste related to union organizing efforts that the Premier's friends and backers are planning?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Only in the land of the Wildrose is a 98-year delay hasty. Only there. Only there. It is absolutely ridiculous. Moreover, I was first elected in 2008, and since 2008 there have been at least three or four consultations with industry by the previous government as they came up with excuse after excuse after excuse to remain the only province in the country that does not protect farm workers. Well, that is over. We are going to do the right thing.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Resource Industry Environmental Issues

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, this morning at AAMD and C the environment minister said, and I quote: access to water is the backbone of the economy. Previously she said that we can grow our economy on the backbone of the energy economy. This morning the Premier said at the same conference that public services are the backbone of communities. So far we're all agreeing. What I haven't seen yet is the backbone to stand up for Alberta jobs at the climate conference. My question to either one: will you have the backbone to stand up for Alberta jobs at the climate conference?

Ms Notley: You know, Mr. Speaker, here's the thing about backbone. When you've got a major climate problem that is impacting the ability of your producers to find a market, running away and hiding from the problem and failing to do the right thing is an absence of backbone. Moving forward on something that is long overdue, that is leadership.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, this morning the environment minister also said at AAMD and C that President Obama called Alberta oil dirty, and then she said that the Premier didn't say that. Later on the Premier said, and I quote: Obama called our oil dirty. And she continued with: that is not true. Music to my ears. The question to the Premier or the minister: what has changed for your government to finally see the light?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, what we know is that in order to get our product to market, we need to do a better job of improving our reputation, and that was our point. Whether fair or not fair – and it's a mixture of both – the fact of the matter is that our reputation has impinged on our ability to get pipelines built to tidewater. So what we are going to do is that we are going to work in consultation with industry leaders to develop a responsible plan that will earn us a good reputation and, hopefully, access to new markets.

Mr. McIver: Our environment minister again at AAMD and C said this morning that she met beef producers and learned about their sustainable plan to produce beef. She said that it was a good plan, and then she went on to say that we can do more, but did not say what that meant. If the industry has a good plan, can she tell the House what she needs from them, because government regulates them, so that they can protect their industry, keep their jobs, and go ahead? What more are you going to require of the beef industry, after they have a good plan?

The Speaker: The minister of environment.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks for the question. I'm pleased to update the House that, of course, our government is committed to sustainability for our grazing leaseholders on our public lands and on our private lands. We are working very closely with a number of industry groups. I was very pleased to hear about the Alberta Beef Producers sustainable beef program. I'm pleased

to work with them in the future on that and with all grazing leaseholders and other stock growers.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Medical Laboratory Services

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The medical laboratory is the heart of our medical system, and it's out of sight and appears to have been out of mind with Alberta Health Services in Edmonton for a decade. Quality results on time are essential for diagnosing everything from cancer to infectious disease. The Edmonton lab is now sitting in limbo after a second contract extension with DynaLife until early 2017. Even if construction started tomorrow, a modern lab would not be built before 2019. To the minister: Albertans and lab professionals need to know whether we will be hearing about a third extension of lab services to DynaLife in 2017.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and to the hon. member for the question. He's absolutely right that Albertans deserve access to high-quality lab services, and that's one of the reasons why very quickly after forming government we were considering what was happening and being proposed by the last government. We felt that their decision to move forward with expanding private delivery was not evidence-based and did not have proper consultation with front-line workers and with health care providers to ensure that we could be confident with the plan. So we stopped that RFP process, and we've taken the time to do a review. I look forward to updating this House, hopefully before the end of the year, and if not, very early in the new year, about what we'll be doing moving forward.

Dr. Swann: Given that the Health Quality Council is doing a review of the laboratory services here and will play an essential role in health care delivery in Alberta for decades, will the minister, in the interests of transparency and accountability, be tabling their final report when it's available to the public, before making decisions on the next laboratory plan?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. The format of the report hasn't yet been finalized. We've got them doing the consultation and doing the groundwork and pulling information together. Certainly, it would be my desire to share information publicly about what I've gleaned, and I'd be happy to do that in a way – I don't want to commit to tabling it prior to announcements, just based on the timelines. But I'd be happy to share information about rationale and next steps before I do make the announcement with members of this House, including the hon. member who just asked the question.

Thank you.

2:10

Dr. Swann: Moving from a private lab to a public lab, which I support, would add very significant new planning, complexity, and time for transitioning from Alberta Health Services and DynaLife to the new entity. Albertans deserve some clarity and an early decision. To the minister: will this be a publicly funded and operated lab? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. These are the types of questions that I've been wanting to make sure I have evidence on to be able to drive the outcomes moving forward. When decisions were made previously, without considering even whether or not a public lab expansion would be possible, decisions were being made about moving forward under a direction to move forward with privatization. I want to make sure that we've got evidence, that I'm grounding decisions on a significant investment for taxpayers as well as trusting in the confidence of their health care lab results. I'm certainly taking the information that's gleaned by the Health Quality Council into consideration before I do make a decision moving forward.

Seniors' Care

Mr. Schmidt: Mr. Speaker, many seniors in Edmonton-Gold Bar are telling me that they're concerned about being able to afford the appropriate care that they need in their later years. Many of these seniors have worked their entire lives and are now worried that they may not be able to afford the proper care that they deserve. What is my hon. friend the Minister of Health and of Seniors doing to ensure that our seniors can afford the care that they deserve in their later years?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: That's the first time I've been referred to as hon. friend.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and to my hon. colleague and friend as well. We believe in looking after our seniors and making sure that they can live healthy lives with dignity and self-respect. Of course, we are proud to invest in the programs and services that matter to Albertans. That's why we've committed to building 2,000 long-term care spaces throughout Alberta, to make sure that seniors can have the care that they need, living as close to home and community as possible. We're proud to be investing as well in the Alberta seniors' benefit, which helps Alberta's low-income seniors to be able to have a little bit of spending money at the end of the month and make ends meet.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that many Alberta seniors are faced with the choice of paying exorbitant and unfair prices at private care facilities or being forced to wait ridiculously long times to access public spaces, what is my hon. friend doing to ensure that we are creating more public spaces and beds so that our seniors have access to the care that they deserve?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and to the member for the question. We're investing and renewing and renovating seniors' housing throughout Alberta, and these projects will help seniors have safe, stable housing and improved quality of life. Our investments will add nearly 800 newly renovated units of affordable housing throughout the province as well as the commitment of around 2,000 long-term care spaces. The member is right that we have inherited over a billion dollars in deferred maintenance from the previous government. This problem won't be solved overnight. However, we will continue to invest in infrastructure and make sure that we make it as affordable as possible for Albertans throughout the province.

Thank you.

Mr. Schmidt: Mr. Speaker, given the desire of many Alberta seniors to age in place and to remain in their homes throughout their later years and given that there are currently numerous barriers that are preventing them from doing so, what is my hon. friend doing to support Alberta seniors when it comes to home care?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I know that home care is a serious concern for constituents in my riding and, I imagine, other people's in this House, so I'm glad that the question is being asked. Seniors helped build this province. We want to ensure that they can live with the right care, getting the right supports, and that means that it also happens at the right place. Home care is certainly one of the pieces that was a pillar in our platform. Our budget shows an increased contribution that we'll be making to home care through the Ministry of Health. We'll be investing \$30 million in the 2016-17 budget as well as an additional \$60 million in '17-18 to phase in a new and expanded model for public home care, which, of course, is fundamental to the success and well-being of . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, Madam Minister.

The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Farm and Ranch Safety

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every rural Albertan knows that farms and ranches are sometimes dangerous places and that safety is paramount. Farms and ranches aren't factory floors or office buildings. Farmers don't leave the workplace at the end of the day; they live in the workplace, and the workplace is their lives. Other provinces recognize the uniqueness of family farms and ranches. They have exemptions or special rules for them. Why doesn't this government recognize the importance of Alberta's 45,000 family farms?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Family farms are an essential part of Alberta. At the same time, every employee deserves safe and fair treatment, and we're working with employers to make sure that that's the case. We know that farmers, ranchers, and their workers want to work and come home safe at night. That's why we're meeting with them and discussing the specifics and working collaboratively.

Thank you.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, B.C. and Saskatchewan differentiate family farms from large, corporate farms. Given that the issue of farm safety legislation has been examined with real farm groups many times in the past and given that in all those cases the experts, who are the farmers and ranchers, always said that education was much preferred to legislation because of the uniqueness of farms and ranches as workplaces, why is the government insisting on pushing through a bill in this Legislature without consulting Alberta farmers and ranchers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Discussions have been going on for some time with farmers and ranchers, and we're having specific consultations in the next few weeks. We're very much working with industry, moving forward prudently. We know that calving season isn't a nine-to-five job. We know that harvest doesn't happen, you

know, when we want it to; it happens when the season is. We're working with them to plan specifics, to make sure industry is considered.

Thank you.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, farmers deserve more than 45 days on this issue. Every farmer and rancher that I talk to tells me that self-regulation . . .

The Speaker: Could you ask your question again, please? I could not hear you.

Mr. Hunter: It would be my pleasure.

Mr. Speaker, every farmer and rancher that I talk to tells me that self-regulation has been successful. None of them tell me that forcing bureaucratic approaches onto farms and ranches will work. Given that the government has no actual farmers or ranchers amongst their 54 MLAs, why is it that this government thinks that they know better or care more about farm safety than the moms and dads, farmers and ranchers on Alberta's 45,000 farms and ranches?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. I just want to really emphasize that this is about safety. Twenty-five people died on farms last year, and we are working with the farm industry, the ranchers, the groups, and we're doing education plus legislation. We're working ahead prudently on them. Farmers themselves say that it's going to make safety part of the conversation. That farmer in Gibbons welcomed our movement forward.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Energy Policies

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Energy. This government has contributed to greater job losses, decreased drilling activity, and decimation of servicing activity in Alberta through their ideological approach to taxes and carbon levies. Many have told me that they feel kicked while they are down, and confidence is at an all-time low, with rig count actually lower than during the NEP in 1983. Given that any increase in royalty rates would result in an additional financial burden at the worst possible time, further decimating the real backbone of our economy, have you instructed the royalty review panel to consider the financial load which has already been placed on the energy industry when determining . . .

The Speaker: The Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, absolutely, when we struck out talking to industry, we asked questions like: what are the challenges you face, what advice do you have for us for the royalty review, and how can we work best with industry to make that happen? We've been listening to industry. We have been asking them to tell us their costs, and we are considering all those costs.

The Speaker: The hon. member. First supplemental.

2:20

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Also to the Minister of Energy: given that the energy industry feels abandoned and given that a March 2015 business plan performance measure noting that

Alberta's combined royalty and tax rate will remain in the top quartile of investment opportunities has been removed from your business plan, by omitting this commitment upholding what we used to know as the Alberta advantage, do you seriously believe you're instilling confidence within the energy industry or the investment community?

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, when we talk to industry, we ask about the costs. We ask about the challenges. We are consulting and collaborating with them all along the way. We've promised no surprises, and we are in constant communication with them.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Minister of Energy: given that the oil field service industry is telling us that they are ready, willing, and able to assist with economic diversification through research and by exporting technology and best practices abroad and given that this would help an ailing industry while simultaneously diversifying the economy, seemingly a win-win, what are you specifically doing, apart from spending some time in China, to assist the industry locally and abroad in advancing such critical initiatives?

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, certainly, China was part of that activity. We took industry with us as part of it. We met with government, and we met with industry, and we talked about the technologies we can share because we are the best in the world in our technological knowledge. Alberta can be a leader in that as we move forward.

Urgent Health Care Services in Airdrie

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, I rose in this House two weeks ago to highlight the urgent need within my constituency for a 24-hour health care facility. I learned from my exchange with the Health minister why it's called question period, not answer period. Simply put, the Health minister's explanation was insufficient both to me and to the thousands of residents of Airdrie who have since viewed the exchange on social media. I'd like to try asking the minister again: what is the Health minister doing to ensure that Airdrie receives the 24-hour health care facility it clearly needs?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. I have been in consultation with a number of health professionals, including those in Airdrie, as well as the mayor of Airdrie and with the hon. member herself. I understand that there is a desire to have an urgent care facility in her specific community, as there is a desire to have urgent care in many parts throughout Alberta. We certainly have to make sure that we weigh the pros and cons of every situation. I'm not saying that Airdrie doesn't deserve one; we all deserve to ensure that we have quality care in all parts of the province. We need to make sure that we make decisions while at the same time ensuring that we are balancing our resources with the demands in our communities.

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, this week one of the strongest advocates for a 24-hour health care facility and a pillar of our community, Dr. Julian Kyne, was informed that his contract with the Airdrie urgent care centre will not be renewed. Given that this surprise announcement shows at least correlation if not causation stemming from my exchange with the minister on the 24-hour health care facility, will

the minister put an end to playing politics with a respected doctor's career and rise above petty politics to ensure that the people of Airdrie's health care needs are being met?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I understand that there is concern about this matter, but it is an HR matter. I would expect that all hon. members would treat HR contracts and HR negotiations and individuals' professions on both sides of the situation with the utmost respect and confidence. There is certainly a way to handle this in this House; asking specifics about an individual's reputation is not one of them.

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, you must admit that that sounds incredibly fishy, though, right?

As Dr. Kyne was being let go by AHS, he was also being recognized by his peers for outstanding work. Given that Dr. Kyne received the annual physician advocacy award by a Calgary medical organization just this week and given that the bureaucrats who work under this minister appear to be trying to silence any opposition to their vision, will the minister commit to re-evaluating the termination of one of the strongest advocates for a 24-hour health care facility and the expansion of services to my constituents?

Ms Hoffman: I have to say that I am very concerned with the tone that's being taken in this House and assumptions that are being made about the way HR is being managed. I have to say that this is not respectful of any of the parties involved. I have been having conversations with individuals to make sure that due process is being considered. Alberta Health Services has a reputation, as well as does the individual that is being referred to, and they deserve to be treated with respect as the employer and the employee.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Rural Health Care

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, when it comes to success stories in rural health care, the innovative nurse practitioner clinic in Okotoks is a prime example, but in January this vitally important service will be cut, leaving their 1,900 regular patients without access to primary care. The NDP government is allowing cuts to front-line services when there are many nurse practitioners ready and willing to work in rural Alberta. Will the Health minister commit to putting a funding model in place to ensure they can practise where they're needed?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. Nurse practitioners are a valuable component within our health care system. There have been many attempts throughout the years to expand their scope of practice, and I understand that there have been a number of barriers. Very recently I was at the nurse practitioner conference. We've been in conversations with CARNA and others because, of course, we want to make sure that they have a way of being supported in the long term. I know the outcomes of the Okotoks clinic, and this was the first I heard about there being terminations there, so I'd be happy to follow up with the clinic itself to see what the root causes are.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you for that.

Mr. Speaker, though this is far from the only challenge facing rural health care, given that we've also seen emergency response services reduced or cut in many smaller communities and given the recent life-threatening instances of code reds, where no ambulance is available to serve an area, I'd like to ask the Health minister: will you commit to providing meaningful performance measures so that we can get accountability for the billions of dollars that you and your bureaucracy spend?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. We very recently had a very thorough conversation around our budget. I enjoyed it very much, and we had an opportunity to dig deeper into the Alberta Health components of the budget, which is over \$19 billion this year all-in, so it's an important investment for Albertans by Albertans.

In terms of the Alberta Health Services budget and the specific line items, they will be discussing that very soon. The new board will resume its role I believe it's next week, and they will be having their meetings in public as well.

Mr. Barnes: Now, the minister may excuse her department's lack of improvement by saying, "Change is hard," but Albertans deserve better. Given all the talk we've heard about stabilizing health care, we're still seeing lack of access to rural health professionals, no improvement in quality of service, and the same old cost overruns in hospital construction. Why? Why must rural Albertans be subject to declining services while Alberta Health Services continues to swell with more bureaucratic bloat?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much for the question. Mr. Speaker, we are absolutely working diligently to make sure that front-line services are maintained and improved, and that's why we actually invested more money in health care as opposed to cutting billions of dollars, as is being proposed by members opposite. They want to cut \$9 billion from infrastructure investment. They want to lay off staff that would, of course, impact health care. Instead, what we're doing is working collaboratively with communities and with leaders to ensure that we are continuing to invest in rural health care and urban health care.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

2:30 Farm and Ranch Worker Legislation Consultation

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to see that this government has finally started to pay attention to Alberta's farms and ranches, but I am concerned about the method they are using to pass new legislation. As someone who has had a long-standing relationship with the farming community, I support farm safety legislation. However, I am concerned that this government is not adequately consulting with industry on how this may affect them and how quickly. My question is to the minister of labour: can you explain how you consulted with industry to create. . .

The Speaker: Madam Minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. We've been having discussions with farmers and ranchers and industry representatives for some time. The ministry staff have been working on this file for a long time, and the time is now that we actually move on farm and ranch safety. We're having specific consultations coming forward in the

next few weeks, and we're very looking forward to hearing more details about what will work in the farming and ranch sector.

Thanks.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this legislation is due to come into effect in 42 days and that Alberta's farms and ranches will have to make some major changes and spend a lot of money to comply, can the minister explain why they are rushing to implement this so quickly without vetting it through all the stakeholder groups it applies to?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. We have been working for a long time with the farming and ranching sector, and we've had discussions with them all along. We're going to talk about specifics. We're going to move ahead prudently and take into consideration the very unique aspects of farming and ranching. As I've said, calving season doesn't happen from nine to five. So we're absolutely working with farmers and moving forward prudently and slowly.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this legislation was introduced in the House on November 17 and that public consultations that are scheduled will occur around the same time as the bill is debated in the Assembly or even after the legislation is passed, will the minister admit that it doesn't really matter what the stakeholders say and that this government is going to pass the bill anyway? Is that what you call consultation?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. We are moving ahead prudently on this, and we're making sure that we hear from industry and know the specifics. The specific occupational health and safety code actually doesn't come into effect until 2017. We're very much working collaboratively with them so that we can have the right fit for this industry. We care very much about family farms, and we're working with them now.

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

Film and Television Industry

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's no secret that there are some strong ties between Alberta and Hollywood. In recent years we've seen some major film and television projects that have chosen our province as a backdrop, and in the last few months I've personally had the opportunity to talk with many of the companies and individuals that are involved in that work, tour some of their sets, and hear their interest in lot of the new streaming technologies that are demanding content, which we're providing. To the Minister of Culture and Tourism: what steps are you taking to draw new productions to and develop productions from Alberta?

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker, and thanks for that question. Certainly, our government recognizes that our television and film industry is in a period of rapid growth, and to further stimulate that growth, we have put almost \$37 million in this budget into our media fund, which is an increase of almost a third. As I travel around the province, I see lots and lots of growth interest in the television and film industry. It's a great investment for us, and it provides jobs and diversification that we really need at this juncture in our history.

Thank you.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that our government is also committed to working to diversify Alberta's economy, to the minister: could you tell us what the return on investment is that we actually see from these screen-based productions?

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In the last five years we've seen approximately \$400 million worth of investment from the television and film industry, and Treasury Board and other sources have calculated that a dollar of investment in film and television brings out a result of \$5 or \$6 into the general economy, so by any measure that's a very, very good investment. As I travel around the province, I'm seeing lots of new investment. With where our dollar is right now and where our reputation is right now, we have a chance to grow exponentially our film and television industry.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, given that these productions that take place here in Alberta sometimes vary in size – certainly, the Hollywood ones can be quite large; some of the local ones are smaller – could you give us a sense, then, of what that return on investment looks like in terms of actual job numbers?

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. You know, it's interesting. We're almost at capacity in terms of our professionals, technical professionals and so forth working at capacity at more than 3,000 full-time jobs. If you add in the part-time jobs and extras, we have more than 30,000 people employed in the industry right now. So it's a great time to see growth, as I said before, for the reasons I described. Quite frankly, this is a great way by which we can create jobs, diversify our economy, and shine a spotlight on the province of Alberta. There are lots of tourism opportunities that come from people who see movies that are shot in Alberta and then actually come to visit. I was at *Heartland* the other day and . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Rocky Mountain House Hospital

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, the 2009 evaluation of the Rocky Mountain House hospital made it clear that the facility was at capacity, at the end of its life, and that it needed to be replaced by 2014. The hospital was built when the community had a population of 3,000. Today there are over 32,000 people living in the town and surrounding area. This hospital is over capacity serving all the residents in the area, let alone the million-plus tourists that visit the region every year. What is the minister's plan to get Rocky Mountain House a proper hospital?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. I'll tell you the first step of our plan. We're going to invest in infrastructure, not cut \$9 billion. We've increased investment in infrastructure in our budget, over 15 per cent of what was planned by the previous government. We're doing a lot of that in the front end because we want to make sure that we have time to invest in a variety of projects, including health care facilities throughout Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Nixon: Given that the Rocky Mountain House hospital faces serious infrastructure issues and given that the 2009 evaluation

states that by 2013 components of the hospital's core infrastructure would either be at the end of their life or suffering significant deficiencies and that since the evaluation was published, there has been zero activity towards getting this community a new hospital, what is the minister's plan for Rocky Mountain House and ensuring this community has the health care they deserve?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Certainly, making sure that Albertans have access to the right care in the right place at the right time by the right health professional is a priority, of course, as well as making sure that we have the right investment for Alberta taxpayers. I thank the member for the question. We're certainly working through our infrastructure priority list in terms of the \$4.4 billion that's still in the capital plan and for pointing out the fact that the third party, when they were in government, ignored their own recommendations for six years.

Mr. Nixon: Mr. Speaker, given that this government campaigned on the promise to restore transparency and public trust to the prioritization of new schools and hospitals by introducing the infrastructure sunshine list, a Wildrose idea, by the way, and given that it's been over six months since they were elected and we still have not seen this sunshine list, the only thing that has become clear is that this government doesn't keep its promises. When will the sunshine list come to light so that Albertans can know where severely overdue projects like the Rocky Mountain House hospital fall on the priority list?

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, our government is taking the time to do thorough consultation, a thorough review of what our health care needs are. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. member, the tone and the volume of that last outburst exceeded even my expectations of your capacity. I would appreciate it if, when you're making remarks, you might not make it as loud and dysfunctional to the House.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government is taking time to make sure that we've got the right priorities and the right plans moving forward, which means that we base decisions on evidence. While members opposite might draft policy on the back of a napkin and pass motions to privatize health care at their last convention last weekend, we're investing in public health care.

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

Minimum Wage Increase

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government made an ideological campaign promise to raise Alberta's minimum wage to \$15 per hour, and I believe this was a well-intended initiative; however, it has unintentional consequences. For instance, businesses are saying that your decision to hike the minimum wage is creating upward pressure on all other wages. To the jobs minister: given that union negotiators have told me that they will use the minimum wage scale to further increase pay for other workers, what consideration have you given to the consequence of your minimum wage increase?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. This government made a promise during the election to make work fair for everyone, and that meant supporting an increase to minimum wage so that low-wage workers could be able to go home each day and be able to provide for their families. We've done that, and we're proud to that, and we know that this is still an amazing place for businesses to operate, here in Alberta.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the standard answer.

Given that upward adjustments in wages throughout Alberta will have an accompanying inflationary aspect that will force up prices for goods and services for all consumers and given that Albertans on fixed incomes will especially suffer because their earnings do not increase proportionately to inflation, have you given consideration to how these vulnerable Albertans will be negatively impacted by this ill-advised plan?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Unfortunately, Alberta had one of the lowest minimum wages in the country and the highest cost of living. I know that I'm happy to pay a little bit more to support people with low wages. This will help students be able to pay for university, to pay for their tuitions, and be able to care for their families. This is actually helping vulnerable Albertans, and I'm very proud that we're doing this as a government.

Mr. Ellis: After taxes the second highest in Canada.

To the same minister: given that business organizations have been telling you that their members expect to cut jobs in order to pay for all employees' higher wages and given that failing resource prices have already caused Alberta to shed 65,000 jobs in the first eight months of this year and given that introducing a measure that unnecessarily reduces jobs instead of creates them is the opposite of what Alberta needs right now, how many more jobs must disappear before your government at the very least slows down your plan?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of economic development.

Mr. Bilous: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the hon. member for his question. I would like to remind the hon. member that there was only one party in this House that had a plan to create jobs and help stimulate the economy, and that is this party, this government. [interjections] Already we have moved to create the job creation incentive program, which will create up to 27,000 jobs. We've also reinstated the STEP program, increased it by \$3 million, and opened it up to small businesses, which is going to give them access to STEP students. [interjections] As well, we've increased ATB's capacity to lend . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: I cannot hear what the speaker is saying.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We've also increased ATB's capacity to lend so that small to medium-sized enterprises have the access to capital they need to create jobs and to grow our economy. We're also looking at increasing market access.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Members' Statements

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

Transgender Day of Remembrance

Miranda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Tomorrow, November 20, is the annual Transgender Day of Remembrance. It is a day for the transgender community to raise awareness about the almost constant threat of violence faced by gender-variant people. If you do not know much about transgender individuals, today would be a good day to start. I invite you all to learn something about these wonderful Albertans because, by doing so, you will soon arrive at a very simple conclusion. Transgender people are just that: people. And people are more alike than they are different. Transgender individuals are everyday people. They are your co-workers and your friends, and either by choice or by blood they are also your family. They are government employees, health care workers, teachers, pilots, flight attendants, firefighters, and I hope one day even MLAs.

There is one thing that transgender people are not. Transgender individuals are not sick. Neither are they weak. They are strengthened by the courage to be who they are in a world that tells them who they cannot be. Like everyone else, they want to be loved and accepted for who they are. Sadly, around the world many still face bullying, harassment, discrimination, and violence because of their gender identity or gender expression, and this is wrong. But to be clear, their deaths are not always at the hands of violence. Driven to despair by hatred, cruelty, intolerance, and rejection, the greatest number of deaths are of those who take their own lives.

So as we mark Transgender Day of Remembrance and reflect upon the lives that have been lost to violence and injustice, I invite all members of this House and indeed every Albertan to recommit ourselves to ensuring dignity, equality, and justice for all.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Energy Policies

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since day one of forming government, the NDP has taken as many steps as possible to damage our energy sector: higher taxes, crippling regulations, and royalty and climate reviews. Now the environment minister is getting ready to take direction on carbon taxes from her friends in Ottawa, who generously told us yesterday that they would help Alberta to come up with a credible plan to add a carbon tax on top of existing provincial carbon pricing. The plan is to impose a national target, with every province having to do its part. Every Albertan's dream: a Trudeau Liberal government telling us how to run our economy.

Now, this would be funny if it weren't so scary. This Liberal federal government has almost no Alberta representation and is now pulling the strings of a provincial minister who has co-authored books on how to protest our oil sands.

While Alberta is becoming a target for Ottawa, things have never been easier for their friends in Quebec: 8 billion litres of raw sewage being dumped into pristine waterways and a federal government entertaining massive bailouts for Quebec's industry.

The NDP like to talk about their admiration for Premier Lougheed. At least he understood when to stand up to Ottawa. Albertans want Alberta-driven environmental solutions that do not compromise prosperity. Instead, the NDP's tenure so far has been like a fairy tale for radical anti-energy activists: 65,000 jobs lost and counting, energy investment fleeing the province, pipeline projects rejected. As one oil and gas organization put it yesterday, there is a big question mark on the attractiveness of operating in Alberta now. This plan imposed by Ottawa will only make things worse. The

NDP needs to refuse this plan and stand up for Albertans' interests. This plan will only deepen the recession and further drain investment from our energy sector. This is dangerous and irresponsible.

Albertans want leadership that will stand up and fight for them, not against them. The Wildrose will be there and with them every step of the way.

The Speaker: Hon. member, thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Not-for-profit Organizations

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our communities are made stronger by the many not-for-profit agencies that provide services to Albertans every single day. They are the glue that holds our system together and a big part of what makes Alberta such a tremendous place to live. It is an essential Alberta value that we look out for our neighbours, and nowhere is that more obvious than in our not-for-profit service providers. These organizations know what it means to do more with less because they have to. Their funding comes from the generosity of compassionate Albertans and often, although not always, from government. They are run by dedicated staff and thousands upon thousands of volunteers. They quietly go about their work solving problems, filling gaps, and helping vulnerable people. They don't expect praise or publicity; they do it to help their fellow Albertans.

2:50

Organizations like the Doorway, that helps teens find a way off the street and into a better life; E4C, working to end poverty in Edmonton; brown bagging it for Calgary's kids and I Can for Kids, helping to feed hungry children in school and throughout the summer; and the Central Alberta Women's Outreach Society, helping women and their children escape domestic violence are only a few of the more than 23,000 not-for-profit agencies helping Albertans every single day.

As the government sets out to address some of the big challenges facing our province, I implore you to look at what we already have in Alberta. Look first to partner with the agencies that are making a difference. Don't think that government always knows best. Don't build expensive and unnecessary bureaucracy, and don't build your own programs where so many communities have programs that already work. Alberta's not-for-profit agencies are a source of tremendous pride for our province. Let's acknowledge their contributions and help keep them strong.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

National Child Day

Mr. Hinkley: Mr. Speaker, thank you for today's reflection. Yes, tomorrow, Friday, November 20, is National Child Day. This year's theme is It's Our Right to Learn. National Child Day is celebrated in Canada in recognition of the United Nations declaration of the rights of the child. We can celebrate this day by learning more about empowering young people to use their voice and to raise awareness. Key messages of National Child Day include that all children have the right to an adequate standard of living, health care, and opportunity to play and that the views of the child are genuinely considered in all economic, social, and political decisions that impact them.

I am proud of our government's commitment to inclusive education and to ensuring that communities, families, and children in Alberta have the necessary resources to be successful. In

particular, I want to recognize and congratulate the Boys & Girls Club of Wetaskiwin, in my own constituency. I know there are many other organizations in Alberta; however, here are just some of the services the Boys & Girls Club of Wetaskiwin provides for children: summer day camps, out of school care, an early learning and child care centre, leadership development programs, native friendship clubs, social skills development and educational supports, personalized counselling, family support programs, and in-school mentoring.

On National Child Day and every day let's ensure that our children have the right to learn, play, grow, and thrive. Thank you.

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

Grey Cup Western Final

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to congratulate the Calgary Stampeders on their victory in the western semifinal against the B.C. Lions on Sunday. Because of this victory, they now take on the Edmonton Eskimos in the western final. The winners of the western final, of course, will go on to play in the Grey Cup in Winnipeg against the eastern final winner, either the Ottawa Redblacks or the Hamilton Tiger-Cats. But right now this means one thing: the battle of Alberta.

This is a historically fun rivalry in our province and within this Legislature. I'm here today to announce a friendly little wager I have with the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort. Both of us have a park in our respective riding that is either in the process of being built or in development. In my riding of Edmonton-Decore I have the Schonsee park and playground group, who have been working very hard to fund raise and build a park in Schonsee. Calgary-Fort has the Forest Lawn playground, which was opened in October but still has much more work to be done before that project is completed. With that, our wager is that if the Calgary Stampeders win, I will donate \$100 to the Forest Lawn park; if the Edmonton Eskimos win, the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort will donate \$100 to the Schonsee park and playground. You may even see a picture of the defeated MLA in the opposing winner's jersey.

One thing is for certain, Mr. Speaker. One team from Alberta will be going to the Grey Cup this year, and that is something, regardless of whom you cheer for, that this province can be proud of. May the best team win. Go, Esks, go.

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

Bullying Awareness and Prevention

Ms Luff: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As mentioned already in this House, the week of November 15 to 21 is Bullying Awareness Week. It was started right here in Alberta by parent and educator Bill Belsey and is now in its 13th year.

Online bullying is increasingly a problem. Research shows that teens who are subjected to cyberbullying are twice as likely to attempt suicide. However, there are many working to combat bullying, and often they are young people. I think of the students in the Forest Lawn high school GSA, who worked so hard last spring to raise awareness and influence legislators and to provide a safe place at their school for their peers. I think of all the children in my riding who are participating in the roots of empathy program in Marlborough school and Penbrooke Meadows school.

Sadly, adults are not always the best role models. I have heard from constituents who are victims of workplace bullying, and I myself have been subjected to online bullying. The things adults say to each other on the Internet can be appalling, and it bothers me

mostly because I think that as Albertans and humans we can do better.

I ask you to talk to people this week: friends, children, peers. Let them know that it's never okay to be hateful, profane, sexually explicit, or threatening in person, on the Internet, or in a letter, not for any reason. No one should be subjected to bullying because of their race, religion, sexuality, or gender. No one should be subjected to bullying because of ideas they have or opinions they hold. We should not have to grow thicker skin. The solution is not to feel less deeply.

This week with the recent attacks in Paris, Beirut, and elsewhere we have seen how the bullying of terrorism can be very destructive. The solution, I think, as it is so often, is education, empathy education. If everyone took a minute to think about where someone else is coming from, to ask a question, to understand a position, I think we'd be much further ahead. We are all far more similar than we are different, and by making this point clear to children early on through empathy education programs such as roots of empathy, we can build a kinder, more loving society. This Bullying Awareness Week is an excellent time to start.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, I rise to ask for unanimous consent to waive Standing Order 7(7) to extend Orders of the Day past 3 o'clock.

The Speaker: Hon. members, there's been a motion for a continuance.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Bills

Bill 7

Alberta Human Rights Amendment Act, 2015

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce first reading of Bill 7, the Alberta Human Rights Amendment Act, 2015.

Bill 7 proposes an amendment to the Alberta Human Rights Act which would add gender identity and gender expression as expressly prohibited grounds of discrimination. Mr. Speaker, this government supports the rights of all Albertans, which include members of the LGBTQ community. We recognize that trans and gender-variant community members continue to be a highly marginalized group within society. This amendment will ensure that the rights of trans and gender-variant community members are specifically reflected in the legislation and that this reflects the views of all Albertans.

Thank you. [Standing ovation]

[Motion carried; Bill 7 read a first time]

3:00 Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I alluded to this earlier this week, a letter to the Minister of Health from Shauna McHarg, with the appropriate number of copies.

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader. You have a report?

Mr. Cooper: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table a long-awaited document that I referred to a couple of days ago and that was the subject matter of a point of order yesterday. I just wanted to make sure that I made good on my commitment to table

the survey that I sent to businesses in the constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

The Speaker: Minister of economic development, did you have an introduction that you wish to make?

Mr. Bilous: Not myself, Mr. Speaker, but the hon. Minister of Justice.

The Speaker: Unanimous consent to revert to introductions?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests (continued)

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to all members of this Assembly. It was my oversight earlier today, apparently in the excitement of the announcement we were about to make. We have here today in the gallery with us the hon. Bob Philp, who is the chief of the Alberta Human Rights Commission and tribunals. The commission and tribunals have the mandate not only to enforce rights but also to bring education to people in the community, so I thank him very much for his service. I would ask that he rise and receive the welcome of this House.

Orders of the Day Government Motions Provincial Fiscal Policies

13. Mr. Ceci moved:
Be it resolved that the Assembly approve in general the business plans and fiscal policies of the government.

[Debate adjourned November 5: Mr. McIver speaking]

The Speaker: The leader of the Progressive Conservatives.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll continue on. I think I've got five minutes left to talk about the budget. I've talked to Albertans. They're starting to understand what's in this budget. I've talked to constituents, talked to family members and friends, businesspeople, neighbours. People who are strangers are stopping me in the grocery store, and they're very concerned about this NDP government budget. They are concerned that there seems to be a complete disconnect in the government between how Albertans make their living, how Albertans live their lives, and the way the government is not but ought to be supporting all of that. Since the budget was actually tabled in this House, there have been more layoffs, well documented, thousands and thousands. No one blames the government for the low price of oil, but almost everybody blames the government for making it worse.

Mr. Speaker, the confidence that the investment community needs to have in Alberta is eroded. We need investment all across Alberta. For example, today at the AAMD and C the Premier was talking about needing to make the economy more diversified, and she gave but one example. It was a good example. She said that she wanted more value-added food production, something that is already here, but it could be expanded dramatically. But I don't see a lot in this budget to support that.

I see the new minister – Mr. Speaker, I'm going to give the government credit. So far they have created one job, and the owner of that job is sitting in the minister's chair across from me. Congratulations. You are the only thing the government can actually point to for job creation, so congratulations. You're as

good as it gets. I mean, I know that the new minister will carry out his duties to the best of his ability as he is sworn to do. I have no doubt about that.

This government's budget will actually get in the way of Albertans being able to hang onto the jobs they've got now and get new ones in the future. Mr. Speaker, Alberta is unique in a lot of ways. The biggest industry that we have is the energy industry, and some of the projects that we need to get investment for are in the order of \$5 billion, \$10 billion, and more. Not everybody walks around with that in their hip pocket. Sometimes that money has to come from outside of Alberta, sometimes from people that love Alberta less than we in the PC caucus do. Sometimes they actually need a reason like profit in order to invest here so that those projects will go ahead.

Now, through the budget and things said, including the Finance minister – I don't think I can quote him exactly, but he said something to the effect of: when profits get better, we'll take that. Now, Mr. Speaker, if you were in New York or Los Angeles or Switzerland or Paris as one of those individuals walking this earth that has billions of dollars that they can invest in things, which I will never be, would you invest it in a place where the Finance minister said, "When profit gets better, we'll take that"? I don't think so. This budget is a symptom of that problem. If you add on to that all the uncertainty that this government has heaped upon business with the royalty review and the rail tax, which will make it harder for energy products to move – today, actually, the Premier said that Alberta's oil isn't dirty, and I thank the Premier for saying that. It just happens to be a lot different than what the Premier has been saying up till now. Nonetheless, being on the positive, let's thank her for doing that today.

The fact is, Mr. Speaker, that the government has done little of anything to get pipelines. The Premier herself said that we need to get pipelines to the east. She forgot about the north, the south, and the west. The shortest route is the west. In other words, if you're going to move energy products out of here, it's going to go by rail. Okay. Even with that, what has the government done? They've added a rail fuel tax. They've actually made that more expensive. They've actually made it more expensive to move our energy industry's products to market. They've made it more expensive to move lumber. They've made every consumer product more expensive.

Mr. Speaker, there's so much more to say, but I know you're cutting me off at my time.

The Speaker: I am. I am. I am.

Are there any questions under 29(2)(a) to the hon. member from Calgary?

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that the hon. leader of the third party was just in the midst of what was no doubt a compelling argument against the budget, I would certainly appreciate hearing the conclusion of that in the next four minutes and 45 seconds or so.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster for his interest. As I was saying, the rail fuel tax will make it more expensive and harder to get the main things that Alberta produces to market: energy, lumber, agricultural products. In fact, to make it worse, the government is going to now introduce a bill that – while keeping farmers and ranchers safe is a tremendous thing, they haven't actually laid out for the House how much more expensive they're going to make it to do business, and that needs to be considered.

Mr. Speaker, the other things that people care about are: how they make a living. Today again the minister of the Crown, the environment minister, actually, after hearing from the beef industry that they have a sustainable beef production plan, on one hand said: that's a good plan. Then, by the sounds of it, from what she said herself this morning at AAMD and C, she hardly took a breath and said: but they can do more. Maybe if government wanted to encourage industry to be more sustainable, more environmentally friendly, they might actually let industry take a breath while they're patted on the back. Maybe before the second pat, if they didn't say, "That's not good enough," that might indicate that the government actually wants that industry to grow and succeed.

3:10

The beef industry is one that's very important to Alberta. It's part of our heritage. It's part of our culture. It's part of what's on our breakfast, lunch, and dinner plates all the time. They've had more than their share of problems, Mr. Speaker, getting labour. In fact, getting labour into the plants in both High River and in Brooks – I know from my time being jobs minister that they cannot get the people they need. Most times each plant was short a hundred people. What gets cut short when you are short a hundred people? All the value-added beef products.

Well, I did spend 25 years in the meat business, and I know a little bit about this. I'm not quoting my knowledge on this; I'm quoting the people that run the plants because that's what they told me. They said: all you do is knock down the beef into primal or subprimal cuts, put it in a box, vacuum-pack it, and ship it out the door. You don't further process it down to where you could have cuts that you can cook, for example. That's when you make money. That's actual further value-added processing.

This budget is not going to help to get the people into Alberta to do those things. In fact, the confidence will be eroded. My big fear – it hasn't happened yet – is that people will stop coming. Alberta has always been the land of opportunity. It certainly was in 1981, when I moved here from southern Ontario, and in almost every year since then it's been the land of opportunity. Mr. Speaker, my fear and the fear of my constituents is that that is no longer going to be the case. We hear that people are getting laid off. The price of homes, people's biggest investment, is being eroded. Again, that's about confidence.

This government is not responsible. I'm not going to blame them for the low oil price – nobody does – but they are very responsible for further eroding the confidence that Albertans and people outside of Alberta have in this economy and in this time. I would hope that after today, when they all go back to their constituents, they will rethink what they are doing to Albertans and actually listen to what they're telling them in the aisles of the grocery store when they are shopping with their families or by themselves and actually look into the eyes of people that are losing their jobs. You know that there are thousands of them. You know that you're going to run into people like that. Ask them how they feel about the budget that your government has put on the table. I don't think you're going to like what they have to say. I don't think they're going to like what you have to say.

An Hon. Member: They're happy about the teachers, though.

Mr. McIver: Somebody chirped in from the other side about teachers, and, Mr. Speaker, it just reminded me that they're unhappy. The sunshine list legislation the government has put forward: I'm not sure that teachers are happy with that legislation. I'm not sure doctors are happy with that legislation. That's what they're telling me.

But we'll come back to the budget [Mr. McIver's speaking time expired] . . . next time I get a chance.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I would not in any way think at this point that I understand the procedures of the House nearly as well as the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster; however, my understanding is that 29(2)(a) is in fact a clarification or response to a question, and my sense is that the five minutes you used may not have actually achieved that. I would remind the House that in the future we all try to measure for that objective.

We are finished on 29(2)(a). The time has lapsed on that.

Would anyone else like to speak to Motion 13? The Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do sincerely appreciate the opportunity to respond to the budget released only a few weeks ago here in this House. I want to take my time here to express both my desire for the success of our province and my concern about the future based on what we see in this budget. Now, don't get me wrong. While I do certainly have some criticisms of this budget, there are a number of points where I agree with the government because I believe that they're in the best interest of Albertans, and I believe in finding solutions that are in the best interest of everyone in this province no matter what ideology they represent. One thing I want to be very clear about is that I will never cheer against Alberta. I want this government to succeed. I genuinely do. Unfortunately, much of this budget, I believe, misses the mark.

Now, I believe in a strong economy based on prudent fiscal management, and I believe in being proud of and supporting all Alberta industries both in good times and in challenging times. I believe in doing more with less, inspiring innovation, and serving the people of Alberta. This is why I agree with the government's plans to increase infrastructure spending. For far too long our schools, hospitals, and roads have not received the attention they deserve. Our province has grown quickly, putting increased pressure on the public services that we all rely upon. The former PC government saw this growth and chose a path which has left Alberta vulnerable to volatile commodity prices instead of investing in and planning for the future.

I support the government's plan to improve access to capital. Alberta is defined by our entrepreneurial spirit and our determination to succeed. By giving enterprising and risk-taking Albertans the resources they need, government can enable the innovation required for Alberta to remain a leader in many different areas.

However, access to capital is only one of the many things needed to create a culture of innovation. This is why I'm glad to see stability return to Alberta's education system. Whether it's primary, secondary, postsecondary, or trades education, learning is crucial to the future of this province. Alberta's ability to leverage our education into innovation, commercialization, and the encouragement of new ideas must be the pillar on which we base our global competitiveness. Now is the time to invest in Albertans and provide them with that opportunity to succeed.

I am fiercely proud to be an Albertan, and I strive every day to make this province even better. This is why, while I agree with the government's priority to invest in infrastructure while rates are low, I worry that their plans threaten future generations because of a lack of discipline and a lack of balance. Their ideological approach is based on a best-case assumption instead of being pragmatic and basing energy price assumptions on reality. This is a challenging time for our province as the price of commodities has dropped substantially and, unfortunately, continues to do so.

One of our most important industries, oil and gas, is an industry that Alberta relies upon, and we know that people in that industry are suffering. In times such as these the government needs to support, protect, and stand up for that key sector, the key employer for so many Albertans and a key supporter of their families. However, we haven't seen enough support. Instead, we've seen corporate taxes going up. We've seen uncertainty introduced through the royalty review. The Premier has not unapologetically promoted Alberta's products and Alberta's industries to the world. The impact of these actions is felt by every firm that's receiving less investment, every person who's lost their job, and every Albertan who has to dig a little deeper to get by.

I've heard it said repeatedly in this House that the NDs didn't cause the price of oil to go down. That's absolutely true. But what's also true is that the ND government has introduced uncertainty on top of already difficult market conditions. There's no question that the ND tax increases and royalty and climate panels have made the situation worse. That is a simple statement of fact.

Now the ND government is relying on overly optimistic projections for the future. Their plan of spending their way to surplus is risky at best. The budget relies on a 26 per cent increase in revenues by 2019 in order just to balance. This is simply not realistic given the plan proposed by the government. We know that people invest their money in the best possible option available at the time. The government's plan is increased costs and reduced return on investment. These actions have caused investors that normally have contributed so much to our economy to re-evaluate their priorities and choose different investments elsewhere, as any rational, reasonable person would.

In addition to this, the government is relying on a significant rebound in oil prices, with the budget predicting a price per barrel of oil that is 28 per cent higher than the market estimate in the 2017 fiscal year. That's barely 14 months from now. What does this assumption mean for the people of Alberta? Well, it means the government's revenue estimate could be off by more than \$2.5 billion. It means that every single person in Alberta may need to cover almost \$600 either in taxes or debt by the 2017 fiscal year alone if the government is wrong in its assumptions. That means all of us are at risk.

Now, the future price of oil is unpredictable. What is predictable, though, is the borrowing plans from this government. The 2015 budget outlines a borrowing plan which will see Alberta have a total liability of \$36.6 billion by the 2017 fiscal year and \$47.4 billion by the 2019 fiscal year. The amount of debt represents approximately 10 per cent of Alberta's GDP in 2017 and will only continue to grow from that point forward.

3:20

What's worse is that for the first time in decades this province is borrowing money for operational spending. Starting next year, the government is planning on borrowing over \$700 million for operations, and the year after that the figure jumps to a staggering \$3.1 billion for operations alone. That is simply not a responsible way to govern the province.

This discussion is not just a difference of opinion between political parties; this approach to governing is being noticed outside of our province as well. Recently Moody's placed Alberta on alert, saying that we are now credit negative. As well, the Dominion Bond Rating Service says that Alberta does not currently meet the triple-A threshold on three of their five quantitative factors used to assess a province's credit rating, with the other two factors at risk of being negative in the near future. Now, if our credit rating is downgraded, the increased amount of debt the ND government plans on

assuming will cost even more, raising our debt-servicing cost and leaving less to serve the people of Alberta.

What's the prudent thing to do in the face of uncertainty? Now, I look to the people of Alberta for this answer. Albertans everywhere are being forced to do more with less while the government seems willingly to want to do less with more. While Albertans are losing their jobs, taking pay decreases, and getting by with less, the NDs want to increase expenses systematically year over year without giving a thought to how they can find cost savings or enable the talented and skilled people within our public service to improve processes and increase efficiency in the government. Now, I agree that Alberta's public service needs to be respected and compensated appropriately, and the solution to the problem is certainly not more job cuts and wage rollbacks. However, spending more without a plan to improve capacity and productivity will only lead to wage inflation and cost Albertans more.

Now, the NDs tell us that these spending increases will stimulate the economy. This strategy is not always necessarily based on sound rationale. The Fraser Institute suggests that "efforts to eliminate large deficits by hiking taxes without material spending restraint rarely succeed." They go on to give an example of a government who was faced with an even worse fiscal mess than Alberta faces today. This government increased some taxes, but they also reined in spending immediately upon taking office. The spending discipline eliminated the deficit and placed the government on a stable fiscal footing, creating conditions that soon allowed for substantial tax relief.

Now, obviously, the government in this example followed sound fiscal policy and did the right thing in the face of an uncertain future. It observed the economic reality that it was facing and adapted to make the situation better. Now, this government might suggest they were elected with a mandate from the people to uphold their ideology of increasing taxes and increasing spending. That government may have said that they were given that mandate. Now, the government that I talked about was the 1990 Saskatchewan NDP government, led by Roy Romanow. It was the Romanow NDP that restrained spending and led their province back to prosperity. Now, that's an example this ND government should think about following, focusing on real solutions to our problems instead of dogmatically following ideology and risking our future.

We need to focus on practical solutions that will actually help Albertans. Presenting voters with an alternative plan is one of the primary responsibilities of any opposition party, and I intend to do just that. Our alternative budget would balance by fiscal 2018-19 without borrowing money for operational spending and without cutting badly needed capital spending. We would accomplish this feat through sound fiscal management policies as well as by focusing on capital projects which we know can be effectively deployed. The Alberta Party would constrain operational spending by conducting rolling zero-based audits of all departments to ensure that programs deliver value to Albertans. This will ensure that our public service does more with less, just like Alberta households and Alberta businesses. With this in place we could also mandate that operational spending only increase by no more than population growth plus inflation. This cap should slow the ever-increasing costs of running Alberta's public service.

Constraining Alberta's expenses, while important, is only half the picture. The other side deals with revenues and their effect on Albertans. Current ND tax policy has been a substantial increase to the burden placed on businesses, entrepreneurs, and innovators. To make matters worse, these tax increases had the opposite effect of what they originally intended. Instead of taking a larger piece of corporate profits, the ND policy has forced businesses to re-examine their value chain to deliver better returns to their

stakeholders and shareholders. It is a simple calculation for business to make, and it is simply revenue minus cost.

The government's increased taxes have increased costs for business to the point where there is no longer a strong incentive for those firms to be in this province, which is why the Alberta Party would immediately lower corporate taxes by 1 per cent on large and small business and simplify our personal tax regime to make sure that individuals with the capacity to reinvest in Alberta are not penalized for doing so. To further strengthen the incentive for innovators to make this province better, the Alberta Party would introduce an investor tax credit. This tax credit would replace the ineffective ND job creation grant, which has the potential for misuse, double-dipping, and creates new and expensive government bureaucracy.

In challenging economic times businesses need all the help they can get. Some businesses need help improving their capacities; some require land or a building or even another business. Others want to upgrade their technology. Some want to hire more staff. All of these things help a business grow, and growing businesses create economic activity, which creates jobs. Government does not know exactly what each individual business needs; businesses themselves know.

It's very important to note that the Alberta Party budget balances in 2018-19 while still using a more conservative energy price forecast than this government's forecast. While the future price of energy is absolutely unpredictable, as we all know, Alberta relies on these revenues for a significant portion of our government revenue. By estimating future prices using the most conservative projections, Albertans can feel confident that the risks their government is taking are well thought out and not going to jeopardize the future. Should the actual royalties received by the government exceed expectations, the overage would be used to pay off debt sooner and then provide extra funding to the heritage fund.

The funding of capital investment in our collective future is of great importance not only to me but to the rest of the province. Making sure that the government can effectively deploy the funds promised for capital spending is at the heart of this issue. Too many times in the past the people of Alberta have been promised facilities which are vital for the success of their communities just to have those promises broken, delayed, or altered.

Now, this is not the way to build sustainable communities. Instead, the Alberta Party would ensure that the only money being spent on capital projects goes towards those projects which can be deployed effectively and that bring the greatest value to those communities. These projects will bring a great deal of value to the province, so it's important to protect and maintain Alberta's strength. This means having policies which will not jeopardize the purchasing power of Albertans and also do not create artificially high costs by creating too much demand for trades.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, the ND government has gotten some things right in this budget but an awful lot wrong. Alberta is not better off with this budget today and in the future, and I'm afraid I cannot support it.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there any questions under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Regarding the debate on this very important budget issue, I'm just curious: does the Member for Calgary-Elbow feel that Albertans are being fairly represented by members opposite who refuse to stand up in this House and speak, whether they're for it or against it? They refuse to stand up and speak and tell us that they have consulted with their constituents

regarding this very important budget for Albertans present and future.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much. Look, what I can say is that our job in this House is to represent the people who have sent us to this place to do the work on their behalf, and I think that it's incumbent on each and every one of us, in particular the private members on the government side, to stand up and say what their constituents have told them. Now, it's important that we're in our communities. We spent a week last week, constituency week, and I talked to literally hundreds of my constituents. This speech I've just given here, I think, is a fair representation of what I heard from my constituents.

I think it's important for me to state that not every single thing in this budget is terrible. Not every single thing this government has done is terrible, but there's a lot of fear. There's a lot of concern. There's a lot of worry. A lot of people in this province either have lost their jobs or know someone who's lost their job, and they're worried. They are genuinely worried about the future. I will say that I think many are willing to give the government a chance, and I think I want to fairly reflect what I'm hearing in my constituency, but many, many are very worried and not just those in the energy sector.

So I agree. I'd like to hear from government private members. What are you hearing from your constituents? I'd like to hear what your perspective is. That's your job. Your number one job is to represent the views of your constituents. We don't know what those are if you don't stand and tell the House.

Thank you for the question.

The Speaker: Any other questions under 29(2)(a)?

Are there other members who would like to speak to Government Motion 13? Calgary-Mountain View.

3:30

Dr. Swann: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. An honour to reply to the government's first budget. These are difficult times for Albertans, and in these dire economic circumstances, after taking several months to prepare, it was this government's responsibility to bring forward a budget that would not only stimulate new growth in our economy but would also tackle the root of the problem and get us off our perpetual ride on the resource revenue roller coaster. But Albertans didn't vote for ideology. They voted for a thoughtful, evidence-based set of decisions around an uncertain future.

While there is some good and much that I support in this budget, including the infrastructure stimulus, this budget simply does not do enough to stimulate and diversify our economy, especially for small and medium businesses. After decades of PC mismanagement, with \$11.6 billion, more than any other province, given back to the richest corporations and individuals just last year, our economy and our budget have become so reliant on a single commodity that is ongoing with low oil price environments and constitutes a full economic crisis.

We've seen more than 40,000 job losses from the energy sector alone. The lack of vision and discipline and a fair tax regime by the PC government has left us in this mess we are seeing first-hand as residents of this province. I dare say that each of us has a friend, family member, or neighbour who has been seeing their job affected in the ongoing crisis. I know I've been hearing a great deal of concern, especially from small business. These job losses are not mere statistics. Each represents families trying to put food on the table, employment opportunities for young people trying to get started and paying off student loans, and these prospects appear to

be fading. This is the context in which this new government has brought forward this first budget and asked for the approval of the House.

[Mr. Feehan in the chair]

As a physician, Mr. Speaker, I know the difference between treating symptoms and treating the cause, treatment that cures a disease. I'm afraid that in looking at this budget through this lens, it simply manages our overreliance on oil revenues. It does not cure it. That is crystal clear in this government's plan to get back to surplus. It's based on hope and prayers that the oil prices will rebound. So we shouldn't be surprised that the government has had to change its balanced budget prediction twice. Their prediction depends entirely on their ability to successfully predict the future of the price of oil. I dare say, with the greatest respect to the Finance minister, that his crystal ball is no clearer than mine or our colleagues' in the opposition parties here or our predecessors'. Nor, by the way, is it any clearer for any of the opposition parties. Unless we fix the overreliance on oil, we are just shooting at moving targets in the dark.

To stimulate and diversify our economy, the Liberals called on the government to take action in four key areas: one, a responsible increase in infrastructure spending; two, real help for small business; three, incentives for the private sector to create new green technologies; and four, avoid borrowing for operating costs through a rigorous review of the public sector and all public spending and ensure that we're getting value for money, including collaborating with nonprofit organizations, nongovernment organizations, planning and budgeting with that sector to improve our effectiveness in public services. This government has not properly addressed these key areas while increasing taxes and fees in a way that will add to the burden of our middle class and our lower class.

Our children also deserve the stability of a growing heritage fund rather than the ongoing pilfering, which we have criticized the PCs for over the years, leaving the heritage fund worth even less than it was in 1982, when Peter Lougheed left office.

With respect to infrastructure stimulus and diversification there's absolutely no question that now is the time to build. Interest rates are low. After decades of neglect and years of rapid population growth the need has never been greater. By any estimate, Alberta has tens of billions of dollars in infrastructure needs, including roads, schools, hospitals, housing, and public transit. We need a new hospital in west Edmonton and a new, modern medical laboratory desperately.

We need hundreds of new schools throughout the province and upgrading in many. We are a decade past needing a cancer centre in Calgary. It looks like we'll have to wait another decade for that. Our major cities are waiting to see if the province will pay its share on badly needed public transit projects like the green line in Calgary and the west leg of the valley line here in Edmonton so that we can avoid gridlock.

We also require thousands of new, affordable seniors' housing units, that will offer seniors and those with disabilities a dignified way of life and take pressure off our health care system. As many of you know, I've been hearing from the mental health and addicted caregivers in our society and those suffering from mental health and addictions. Housing is the number one issue that keeps people on the street. There's no question that this has to become a higher priority at all three levels of government: federal, provincial, and municipal. We must start planning and budgeting together at these three levels if we're going to deal with this ongoing sore in our society that is costing us billions of dollars by not addressing it effectively.

In addition, our existing infrastructure continues to crumble and requires an ongoing maintenance budget. These are huge challenges for a new government that has been given no budget to work with. This is why I was prepared to support the government's debt financing with new infrastructure projects to get Alberta companies and Albertans back to work building the projects we know we need. Sadly, the government has presented a plan that's too vague to be considered responsible, and there is no clear debt repayment plan to outline how and when the government would repay the necessary debt we're taking on. In fact, the government rejects such a plan until they hit their ever-moving, resource-reliant balanced budget target. We can't support that, Mr. Speaker. It can make good financial sense to refinance your mortgage to do renovations but not without a plan for repayment.

The government is also refusing to release an infrastructure priority list to demonstrate that spending is really based on need and not on political interest or timing. We look forward to that public sunshine list of priorities. My friend the Minister of Infrastructure has been in this place a long time, I think since the beginning of the Legislature. [interjections] I was just checking to see if anybody was listening. He knows full well that the public interest is not served by political timing and politically prioritized infrastructure projects. That's why he promised an infrastructure priority list.

Right in the middle of the session this government is making new infrastructure announcements every other day. Why no open list of infrastructure? Clearly, the government has prioritized these projects for announcement, so let's see it. Without these additional details, I can't support, in all confidence, an infrastructure spending plan.

With respect to small-business support the government is simply not doing enough to help. With respect, grants of \$5,000 per new employee are a business subsidy. They are not sustainable, and they do not create new jobs. A tax break, on the other hand, would be a sustainable stimulus for small businesses and help get a long-term commitment to innovation and jobs and economic growth.

To their credit, this new government has taken some positive steps, directing ATB to provide more loans and providing funds for start-up investments where the risk is low in terms of the public interest. This makes sense, but these steps won't do enough to help small businesses that are struggling today. Over 85 per cent of businesses in Alberta are defined as small, having less than \$500,000 profit in a given year. They are the key to diversifying our economy and creating jobs, but they are struggling hard in this economy.

At the same time, the government is pushing their costs up with a higher minimum wage, whose rate of increase surely needs to be tied to our economic reality, not simply dictated on the basis of a number that projects well into the next three years without any basis for assessing the impact of the earlier increases in the minimum wage. We need to take that into consideration.

These businesses also face higher insurance costs. When you're a small entrepreneur whose revenues are going down and whose costs are going up, it's difficult to stay afloat today in Alberta. Fear is a vicious cycle and will add only more burden onto a group that's trying to get a new business off the ground. We have to look at that, listen to that, and make sure ideology doesn't trump evidence. That means monitoring with small businesses what's happening across the province and making decisions annually on the basis of new information.

3:40

Albertans are looking for real leadership from the government to create an environment for job creation. Instead, they're getting a convoluted tax credit scheme that David Dodge, the Calgary

Chamber of commerce, the Economic Development Corporation of Edmonton, and the Canadian Federation of Independent Business all are doubtful can work. Surveys by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, in fact, indicate that as many as 1 in 5 small businesses will be forced to lay off staff this year.

The report also noted that tax and regulatory costs are a major area of concern for small-business owners. That could be alleviated without significant harm to our budget. This is why we've asked, argued, and begged to either lower or even eliminate the tax burden on small businesses. Let them do what they do best, create jobs and diversify our economy.

With respect to incentives for new clean, green technology the oil sands sector is among the most innovative, research-oriented, and technologically advanced sectors on the planet. These are companies that have shown time and again that the impossible can be done. We have supported a carbon levy if revenue neutral, and extra money goes to clean technology, with extras going to a predictable base for infrastructure funding across the province. Companies and residents will benefit financially in the longer term from directing funds to new clean technology, energy conservation, and will strengthen Alberta's energy sector for decades to come.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, in the final analysis the budget has much potential to address the needs of Albertans and cure our over-reliance on volatile resource revenues. What's missing is a serious commitment to a debt repayment plan and to a review of existing spending for real opportunities for efficiency. As someone who has worked in the health care system, it's clear to me that in the planning for health care – shifting to early intervention, primary care in the community, home care in the community – there are millions of dollars to be saved by getting people out of the hospital and investing more in community and primary care. Sadly, the opportunity has been missed, and we'll remain on the resource revenue roller coaster for years to come.

I cannot support the budget as it is today. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Would anybody like to respond under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the hon. member for his words. I absolutely agree with what he was saying at the end of his speech, and it's what I'm hearing from my constituents in Cypress-Medicine Hat. They're absolutely amazed. They absolutely feel it's unfair that the government hasn't been looking for efficiencies and cost/spending reductions at a time when so many of them or their neighbours are laid off, taking 30 per cent pay reductions. So I agree with that point.

You mentioned that your other concern was orderly debt reduction. I'd like you to comment for a second on the fact that my constituents are very, very concerned about the accumulation of up to \$47 billion in debt over the next three years. That's concerning my constituents a lot more than the payback. They're concerned about what this will do to their level of services and the cost of the interest over the years.

If the hon. member could take a second, a lot of my rural people are very, very concerned with the almost quadrupling of the tax on diesel for locomotives from 1 and a half cents to 5 and a half cents. It is clearly just going to be passed on to suppliers and then consumers. What are your thoughts on what this is going to do to our seniors population, our lower income population, the removal of choice in what they can afford and what they can afford to buy?

You might have some extra insight as the Liberal leader. I was talking to my chartered accountant the other day, and he says that Albertans' marginal tax will now be 48 per cent – 48 per cent – once

the new Liberal government puts in their change after our New Democrat government put in their change.

Hon. member, if you could talk about how you think those four things will affect your constituents and Albertans, I would appreciate it.

Dr. Swann: Thank you to the member for the questions. Let me preface my remarks by saying that there are many different kinds of debt. The PCs have left us with a huge social debt, a huge infrastructure debt, a huge environmental debt, and now an economic debt, so I think it's important to say where the debt belongs. After 44 years of government I think we expected better in terms of vision and planning and investment in our future, a longer term investment that would provide some buffering from what we have known for decades is a roller coaster on oil and gas revenues. Yes, this government has inherited this. Let's be clear on who's responsible for getting us into this mess.

With respect to the long-term debt repayment I think your understanding of debt repayment is the same as mine. You have to find the money from somewhere. We have to find it from either increased taxes, increased fines and levies and fees, or we have to find it from new investments that come out of our existing funds. We also have to find it from new resource developments, new technologies that we can market and sell across the world. We have to invest in postsecondary education and ensure that we have the brightest minds coming here and developing the newer technologies that will get us both off the old resource revenue racket and into a more prosperous, independent economy that would leave all of us, including our children, in a more stable situation.

I don't know of any other way to face the future except to acknowledge that we are all in this together. If we don't start working more constructively together across this Legislature, I don't think we're going to get where we want to go. I find it difficult – the partisan shots, the bitterness from this side of the House, and in some cases the retaliation on the other side – when we realize what's at stake here: our children's future, our environment, our social stability, an economy that actually works for everybody. I think it's going to take the best from all of us if we're going to find a better way forward because if this was easy to do, it would have been done by the PCs. They couldn't do it. They wouldn't do it. We have to find a way to work together more constructively. I find it very difficult to hear the bitter, noisy reactions, just like schoolchildren, and I think schoolchildren who come in here are pretty upset with us when they see what's happened. I think we can do better, folks, and I want to see that from all of us.

There's too much at stake, and I'm hearing it in spades from people on the streets who aren't getting the care they need. Their addictions are not being addressed. First Nations are not in a helpful way managing to heal themselves and to build community. The symptoms are all there. If we're not prepared to give everything we've got to this project of working together, then we're not going to get to where we want to go for us and for our children.

Thanks, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Would anyone else like to speak? The Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: I rise, Mr. Speaker, as the Deputy Government House Leader, and I rise to adjourn debate on Government Motion 13.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Consideration of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

Mr. Connolly moved, seconded by Ms Kazim, that an humble address be presented to Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows.

To Her Honour the Honourable Lois Mitchell, CM, AOE, LLD, the Lieutenant Governor of the Province of Alberta:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank Your Honour for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

[Adjourned debate June 23: Mr. Jean]

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition is not here, so we'll be going back and forth, then, in response to the Speech from the Throne.

We'll begin with the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is truly an honour to rise in this Legislature as the representative of Grande Prairie-Smoky. The effectiveness of democracy like ours lies in the ability to bring representation from all areas of the province and come together. Sometimes we come together with competing voices. Yes, sometimes we come as opponents, but most importantly, Alberta representatives gather in this House as solution seekers, people coming together to find answers to the concerns that Albertans have.

3:50

Again, I am honoured and humbled by the opportunity to represent the constituency of Grande Prairie-Smoky. Quite simply, I cannot imagine calling any other place my home. I need to thank the constituents in my riding for lending me their trust to be their voice in this Assembly. An election is a one-shot deal, but continuing to earn that trust and respect of the people I represent is a job that does not end. I have to admit that I'm a bit nervous about the job ahead of me because earning that trust is such an important task. I'm also a bit nervous because everything I say now is on the record. That means my wife can track all my mistakes and have written proof of everything I say.

I do hope my background and roots in the area help me qualify enough to speak for the area. As a small child I moved to Grande Prairie with my family in 1967. In 1971 my father fulfilled his dream of homesteading in the Peace Country, and we moved to a homestead in the Valleyview area. At the time of this move we lived in a tent but soon graduated to the luxury of a 12 foot by 12 foot granary. I would say that housing has improved considerably since then, but my parents, Paul and Verna, still reside on that homestead. Upon graduation from Hillside high school in Valleyview I joined the workforce and five years later started my own small business and bought a farm, both of which I operate to this day. But, like almost everyone else in the Peace Country, what's most important to me is family. My wife, Teena, and I have five children and now twin grandchildren. You wouldn't know the true meaning of a hard day's work until you spend a day with the pair of them.

But I don't want to spend any more time talking about me. After all, electing MLAs to this Assembly shouldn't mean electing people or personalities. Instead, it's about representation of principles and values that particular regions hold and making sure that those voices are brought to the provincial table.

I want to take a few moments to talk about what's important in Grande Prairie-Smoky: the people, their families, and the communities that they have built. Grande Prairie-Smoky is a diverse constituency of small hamlets, urban centres, and vast rural

tracts that provide jobs in everything from forestry and farming to tourism and oil and gas. There are over 56,000 people across almost 20,000 square kilometres in this constituency. There is a long history of this area that goes back to the trappers referring to the area as the grand prairie as early as 1854. The Hudson's Bay Company established a trading post here in 1881.

Grande Prairie is the hub of the Peace Country. It's one of the largest cities in the north and one of the fastest growing in all of Canada. It is a centre of industry, which has also translated into it being one of the youngest cities in our country, where workers and young families have gathered in droves. To the immediate north of Grande Prairie are the small communities of Clairmont and Sexsmith. Clairmont has almost doubled in size in the last decade and is an excellent place to raise children because of its community projects, recreational facilities, and housing affordability. Meanwhile, Sexsmith, once known as the grain capital of the British Empire, reached town status in 1979. It was named after David Sexsmith, one of the first trappers of the area, and today it still boasts a population made up of outdoorsy, rural people, which has produced a tough high school football team that is regularly among the best in northern Alberta.

Some of the smaller communities in the riding include Teepee Creek, Crooked Creek, DeBolt, Ridgevalley, Little Smoky, and Sunset House. Teepee Creek is best known for the Teepee Creek Stampede, which began in 1916 and now draws several thousand visitors each time. Not bad for a population of about 20 people. Crooked Creek is an unincorporated community that has a post office, a gas station, and a general store that many say has the best donuts in Alberta. Near that are Ridgevalley and DeBolt, the latter of which has been around since 1919, when the DeBolt family from the state of Washington settled in the area and set up a stopping place for weary travellers. Ridgevalley has Mennonite roots and is one of those unique Alberta hamlets that doesn't appear to have many people but draws all sorts of farming families and students to its facilities and school. Sunset House, Sweathouse, and Little Smoky are small, down-to-earth agriculture communities where the residents are industrious and community minded.

Finally, on the east side of the constituency along highway 43 lie the communities of Calais, Valleyview, and Fox Creek. Calais is home to the Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation. It is a vibrant, community-focused population with about 1,500 people living on the band's land and another 1,500 or so living off site. This summer I was able to attend a powwow there, a great opportunity to experience the culture and heritage of these people.

Valleyview, my wonderful home for essentially my whole life, has usually been known as that fork in the road for highways 43 and 49. Now it's still known as that fork in the road but with a Tim Hortons and a Subway and, of course, many other dynamic businesses. Hillside high school also has a strong football team that the past two years has won the Athabasca Bowl. I have to mention that because my oldest son is a teacher and coaches the football team, and my youngest son played on that winning team in his final year.

Finally, Fox Creek sits on the south edge of the constituency. It is another community largely driven forward by the oil and gas industry and is growing in leaps and bounds because of its attractive job prospects and viability as a permanent home for young families.

All these cities, towns, and hamlets, all with different histories and different makeups, are bound together in the values that underpin them. At the heart of the Peace Country communities is a focus on family, faith, and quality of life. Community halls and recreational centres are found everywhere. Churches and charities are numerous and held in great respect by the communities they are a part of. People work hard for their money and take deep pride in

the jobs they hold. After all, industriousness and work ethic are values engrained in every Peace Country man and woman.

We do have issues that need to be addressed. We have a severe lack of doctors. Waiting times in the emergency are extreme. We lack seniors' facilities. Our highways and roads are dilapidated, and we have large volumes of commercial traffic travelling on an insufficient road system. It will be my priority to work towards solutions for these problems and others as I represent my constituents.

Again I want to return to the idea that I hope to be a mere servant and messenger for the Grande Prairie-Smoky constituents, and after listening to the throne speech and budget, I am certain that my constituents aren't comfortable with much of what's on the agenda of this government. Peace Country families balance their books and live within their means, so why is it so unreasonable to ask our government to do the same? Already spending has rocketed even higher than the previous government's commitments, and there doesn't seem to be any kind of plan to get the provincial books in order. I don't think I speak for just my constituents when I say that there is something inherently wrong about accruing debt and making our kids and grandkids accountable for our generation's mistakes, waste, and unsustainable wants.

It appears that this NDP government is following in the footsteps of the previous government, which is to raise taxes on Albertans with no regard at all for the slumping and fragile economy. Most alarming is a complete lack of desire to reduce waste and inefficiencies in government. That has to be the first step and first discussion in any budget considerations. I understand some government members are still so young that they haven't finished their university degrees, so I would encourage these members to take a few economics courses while they still can and then pass on what they learn to their cabinet ministers, who don't seem to fully grasp the financial consequences of their decisions.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to speak to this House about the riding I represent and love and bring forward a few of its residents' present concerns. Now, if you had told me even five years ago that today I'd be an MLA speaking to this Assembly, I would have laughed at you, but here I am, proud and humbled to serve, enjoying every minute of it, and looking forward to representing the constituents of Grande Prairie-Smoky. I look forward to coming together with members in this Assembly to be solution seekers for the sake of our province.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a).

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I listened with great interest to what the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky had to say. Not just today but through all of our time here in the Legislature I know that he and his party have really focused on waste, which is really why I found it so surprising that his maiden speech failed to mention that the Valleyview Shell station was nominated for having Canada's best washroom in 2013. I would just like to give the member the opportunity to correct that omission in his maiden speech.

Thank you.

4:00

Mr. Loewen: Thank you to the member for the question. Yes, we have several businesses in our community that are world class, and of course being known as having the best bathroom in Canada is definitely a source of pride for our community. Of course, there are other things, too, that we have in our community that are world

class. Again, I'm proud to represent the members of my constituency.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members who would like to respond under 29(2)(a)?

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky for a very illuminating presentation. I really want to ask him about his comments about economics training, and I wonder what his economics training has been, particularly in, for instance, Keynesian economics, which promotes contracyclical investment and was actually responsible for Franklin Delano Roosevelt slaying the depression of the 1930s. I also wonder what his comments are on the economics of Mr. David Dodge, the ex-governor of the Bank of Canada, who has also strongly recommended the same approach.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks for the question. Yes, actually, I myself graduated from high school, and of course I worked in the workforce for five years and then started my business, just like I mentioned in here. I've had the chance to operate a business and gain some life experiences about balancing books and living within my means. In my businesses there have been times when the economy has really taken its toll on it because it depends a lot on the U.S. economy and the U.S. dollar, and, yes, I've been able to keep that business going. It's supported my family since that time. I think there's a lot to be said about having real-life experiences and balancing books and keeping the economy in my home in order and my business, too. I thank the member for the question and look forward to more if they so please.

The Acting Speaker: Any other responses under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Nixon: Just wondering if the hon. member could expand a little bit about the role debt played in his business or did not. As well, if he was returning home today – I think he is going home today – if his wife informed him that she was borrowing to keep the lights on, would he be concerned?

Mr. Loewen: Thank you for the question, Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. Yeah, of course I would be alarmed if I was to arrive home and find out that we were actually having to borrow money for the day-to-day operations in our home. That would be alarming. During my lifetime, of course, I have borrowed money, but I've paid the money back, and I carry on with my business and my life appropriately. I've always been able to do it within the means that I have. Of course, like I said, with my business there have been ups and downs, and sometimes the cheques are smaller than in other years. Of course, it's only proper and it only makes sense that you live within your means and that you develop a budget that's reasonable, that will get you to the place you need to be.

Of course, I think most Albertans would love to see a government that lives within its means and has a plan for the future that involves balancing the budget and paying off debt and actually being able to save money. Of course, this Alberta government, even at a \$100 barrel of oil, has never been able to balance its budget in the last seven or eight years, and that's actually quite alarming. With a \$100 dollar barrel of oil, the highest incomes ever for the province, it's still not balancing a budget. Of course, the new government has taken over and hasn't done any better.

The Acting Speaker: Would anyone else like to address the Speech from the Throne? The Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am honoured and it's with great humility that I respond to the Speech from the Throne. To be honest, the first time I was ever in this Chamber, I sat up there, and the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood sat over there, so times have kind of changed a little bit.

Like the Member for Calgary-South East, I too grew up in Marlborough Park, which is a community rich in culture and hard-working individuals. I want to open by thanking the Member for Calgary-East for the great description of her constituency. It is a neighbourhood where we take care of one another, and I am proud to have a person so bright and hard working representing my mother and father's riding.

Seven years ago my wife and I decided to buy a house. We almost ended up settling in the north end of Calgary. However, we fell in love with a house in the south Calgary community of Millrise, in Calgary-Shaw, and I'm glad we did. Calgary-Shaw is a vibrant, strong community with a huge sense of pride, who are willing to stand up for what they believe in. I saw this during the election. Students at Centennial high school took an activist role by leading a save-our-schools campaign. They fought for better funding and reduced classroom sizes. They protested in the right fashion. They asked critical questions without taking a partisan approach. They held us elected officials accountable and will continue to do so. They even protested at city hall during a Flames playoff game. Now, I have to say that that's commitment.

My community encompasses more than a dozen public and private schools, including two high schools, many of which are over capacity and some of which have been overlooked for modular classrooms during the 2014 by-elections in Calgary. At the doorsteps I heard from people in my riding who were tired of MLAs who wouldn't listen to Albertans, whether it was floor crossing or Albertans wanting to get a better tax system that's more fair for all Albertans. However, my constituents were heard loud and clear on May 5, and that is why I stand here with you all today.

My constituency encompasses the communities of Millrise, Shawnessy, Shawnee Slopes, Somerset, Sundance, and the historical community of Midnapore, which was one of Calgary's earliest settlements and was incorporated into the city of Calgary in the 1970s. In the north boundary of my constituency is Fish Creek provincial park, which encompasses a huge amount of reclaimed green space. It is preserved by the hard-working members of the Friends of Fish Creek, who have worked hard to educate people about wilderness in my beautiful community. This park is a prized gem of the people of Calgary-Shaw. The people appreciate it so much that if a shovel even touches the ground, I get a dozen phone calls to my constituency office.

I see an active community in my constituency, whether it's the people in Somerset who upkeep the town square's water park or the people who meet at and maintain the Shawnessy Barn or the volunteers that manage the Zamboni at the community rink in Millrise or those in Midnapore and Sundance who have worked hard for a community centre upgrade, which services people of all of south Calgary.

The people of Calgary-Shaw work hard to take care of one another. I saw this during a devastating condo fire in Millrise in 2010, where many volunteers went to the Southview Alliance church to give their support and donate whatever they could to help out their fellow neighbours. During the 2013 flood the Fish Creek recreational centre became a relief centre for those impacted by the flood and an area where many residents in my constituency sent their support.

I see a sense of community when I visit St. Mary's University, one of the fastest growing postsecondary institutions in Alberta. Its humanities 101 program brings in vulnerable and homeless

Calgarians, provides them with free tuition, meals, and even child care while they attend studies. This program is supported in part by fundraising from students and faculty at the university. Under the previous government they were going to lose 16 per cent of their funding next term; however, our government has reversed those cuts. I am proud to work with the faculty, under the leadership of Gerry Turcotte. They are building bridges with the First Nations community to allow them to create an inclusive space in this university, and they have been doing this for years, Mr. Speaker.

Myself, I was born and raised in Calgary and am a second-generation Calgarian, which is a rare breed, if you will. My grandfather was born in Slovakia and immigrated to Alberta when he was a child to work on a farm. When my father was a child, my grandfather refused to teach him Slovakian because he was discriminated against as a child. Now, Mr. Speaker, I stand here with a caucus of an almost 50-50 ratio of men and women, people from many ethnicities, languages, and sexual orientations, and I'm happy to see us having passed the first reading of Bill 7 as well. I can say to my grandfather that we are even closer than we have ever been to living in an inclusive society in Alberta although there is still some work to be done.

When attending school, I had troubles learning to read and write. The turning point in my challenges, however, was a caring teacher named Mrs. Coxon. She gave me support, taught me confidence, and never gave up on me, even when I felt like giving up on myself. I lost touch with her after I finished school until I was sworn in, when she e-mailed me to congratulate me. I often worry about my children and if they will face the same challenges that I did. I often wonder if they will receive the same level of support. It relieves me to no end, Mr. Speaker, to know that our government is committed to protecting and improving public education.

4:10

I stand here a proud former restaurant manager. The people whom I worked with dealt with many issues, including inadequate access to health care, issues with social services, high tuition increases with cuts to programs, and I am happy to see that our government is working hard to improve these issues. The people I work with were full of passion and generosity. In the 2013 flood they mobilized only days after and helped raise close to \$10,000 with help from the Calgary Stampeders. I have to say that I'm rooting for the Stampeders this go-around as well.

I have to thank my associates for believing in me even when it seemed like very few people did. They had quite a bit of confidence in me, and I'm grateful for that. As a business operator, Mr. Speaker, I want to make it perfectly clear: if I thought the NDP was bad for business, I would not have run as an MLA for the NDP. In the restaurant industry I've seen increases in costs of wines due to drought, increased food costs by 50 per cent, heavy taxation increases in liquor, increased service charges due to high prices of oil and gas, and heavy increases due to rent due to supply and demand. Any time things like this happen, we adapt our business to make it work, and the same will apply for the increase in minimum wage.

As I stand here, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the members who represented my riding before myself, from Jim Dinning, who, I want to recognize, is receiving the Order of Canada this year, to Jon Havelock to Jeff Wilson to Cindy Ady. They have all made sacrifices to represent their constituents, and I am grateful for their service. After spending over an hour chatting with Cindy Ady after my election, she spoke to me about not losing sight of my family and my constituents in my riding. She wanted to remind me of the importance of balancing one's family life and their work within the constituency.

As I stand here, I want to represent those family members who held political office before myself: my mother, Debbie Dean, who sat on the University of Calgary senate with, actually, the Speaker of the House, not yourself but the other Speaker; my cousin Tracy Douglas-Blowers, who sat on city council for the city of Lloydminster; my mother-in-law, Carol Bazinet, who served as a public trustee in Calgary for over 10 years; my great-great-uncle Thomas John Bentley, who served as a Member of Parliament and served in the Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly as minister of public health under Tommy Douglas's CCF government in 1950.

In his maiden speech, while addressing the opposition, my great-great-uncle said:

I would like to congratulate all those who have spoken before me; however, that would be presumptuous on my part. They all did well. They expressed the opinions they felt. Some expressed opinions that I am going to heartily disagree with before I sit down, but, nevertheless, they were opinions they had a right to express and they were properly done so in this House. The rest of us had a right to hear them to know what the various opinions are.

I think this truly reflects the open dialogue that we are hoping to achieve with our opposition over the next four years, and I look forward to working alongside our counterparts on the other side of the floor. Though we may disagree on something, I hope to maintain the respect with my friends across the floor. May they continue to challenge us properly to ensure that this province is the best one possible.

I think my great-great-uncle would be proud of what our government has committed to in regard to restoring public health care here. He dreamed for all Canadians to have access to public health care, and we as a government must ensure we do what we can to repair and maintain it here in Alberta.

During the election I received a heartfelt endorsement from my Aunt Rae and Uncle Paul Douglas. In a letter they sent me during the campaign they both said: Graham, you will do very well because you have a heart that will guide you through all of your challenges. Sadly, my uncle passed away two weeks before the election after a long battle with cancer. I was told he was watching this campaign with a lot of interest and excitement. My uncle shared a lot with me and my sister. I think the greatest thing that he shared with me was to give back to your family and your community. Funnily enough, the first thing my aunt did when seeing me at my uncle's funeral was to introduce me to the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster. It was important for her that I learn to respect your fellow counterparts regardless of our differences.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my mother and father, Don and Debbie, and my sister Melanie for always supporting my dreams. Words cannot convey how you have positively contributed to my life. To my wife, Monique, and my children – Alex, Ben, and Lily – I want to apologize for the burden that this job is going to have on you. I want you to understand that my colleagues and I are here to work to make Alberta a better place, and I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for the sacrifices you're making for Alberta.

Thank you very much.

The Acting Speaker: Would anybody like to respond under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw talked of his love for the Stampeders. As another Calgary MLA I am definitely rooting for them as well.

Now, the hon. member spoke of a dedicated teacher helping him when he needed some assistance with his learning while in school,

and I know the hon. member also has kids in the current school system. I was wondering if he would be able to, you know, elaborate on the impact that that teacher had on him and sort of contrast it with his children's current experience and how he as an MLA would be supporting that in the House.

Mr. Sucha: Well, thank you, hon. Member for Calgary-Currie. You know, at the time when I went to school it was in the early '90s, and we had a lot of support that was going into the public education system. So my teacher had the time, because the classroom sizes were smaller, to really support me in these efforts. The challenge that my children have had going to school in south Calgary is just the capacity issue.

You know, it's great to see that our government is committed to working towards building new schools in the south end of Calgary. I personally will not see any in my riding, but that's a good thing. All of the students coming in are from out of my riding, and they need a place to go to school. A lot of them are going in there, and it will really help alleviate a lot of the pressures that we see. I think that as we move forward with open transparency, when it comes to building and moving forward with things like modular classrooms, the fair choices will be made for the people of Calgary and for the people of Alberta as well.

The Acting Speaker: Any other comments under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, would anyone else like to respond to the Speech from the Throne? I will invite the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour to rise today. While certainly not for the first time in this Assembly, it's most definitely the first opportunity that I've had to respond to the throne speech. I am both humbled and privileged to represent my constituents in this Chamber. I am humbled and privileged by the opportunity that my constituents have given me to serve on behalf of the good people of Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

To begin, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my family. My wife, Tiffany, is the love of my life, as I mentioned to you when I was introducing her earlier this week in this Chamber. We started dating when I was about 16 years old, and we've now been married happily for 15 years. She is my moral compass, and every day I strive to be the man that she thinks I am. I also want to thank our son Markus, who is 19 years old this year, and our eight-year-old twins, Austin and Chyanne. The lessons I've learned in life are dwarfed by the lessons I have learned in fatherhood. I love being a dad. To me it is my most important job, and it will always be my favourite job. I know that for my family the time I spend working away from them is hard. I thank them for their steadfast support. I want them to know that I am working hard to leave this province a better place for them, and I want them to be proud of me.

I firmly believe, Mr. Speaker, that families build strong communities and that strong communities support families. These are the values that I was raised with. Almost 40 years ago my father, Pat Nixon, arrived in Alberta, a homeless teenager. At the time my father was so deep in the prison of addiction that he would not even have dreamed about seeking the same opportunities that have drawn so many to this province.

However, he did find his opportunity, absolute and life changing, in serving others. In launching what would become the Mustard Seed, one of Canada's most respected not-for-profit homeless organizations, my father not only reaffirmed his faith in the basic goodness of mankind but set about changing lives for the better.

Together with my mom, Lise, they dedicated their lives to living out their faith and helping the homeless population of this province. Along the way they taught me and my five brothers – Jeremy, Daniel, Ryan, Tyler, and Shane; that’s what they’d have to do, say it fast like that to make sure that we were all in the van – the true nature of service, introducing us to a much larger world at a very early age.

4:20

Looking back at my father’s journey, Mr. Speaker, for me it really emphasizes how truly amazing Alberta and Canada are. My father went from being an involuntary guest of the Attorney General at times to eventually being a distinguished guest of the Governor General of Canada and the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta, receiving the Order of Canada and the Alberta Order of Excellence.

He and my mother’s unwavering dedication to helping their neighbours has always inspired me. To help those in need in our community is something we all should strive to do each day. My over 30 years of involvement working with the Mustard Seed has had a profound effect on my life, whether serving soup as a boy in the meal line or serving as the executive director as a man. For me, growing up at the Mustard Seed meant learning the difference between helping others and helping others help themselves. Both are vital, Mr. Speaker.

I look forward to applying this principle as a member of the 29th Legislature. I also want to assure you, Mr. Speaker, that I come to this House fully aware of the primary responsibility to which I have been entrusted: representing the good people of Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre to the best of my abilities. I pledge to be a strong advocate for a region which includes over 40,000 of the province’s most honest and hardest working citizens, spread across 25,000 square kilometres of the finest country on God’s green Earth.

Our communities are proud communities, with a long history of electing strong, uncompromising leaders. Premier John E. Brownlee represented this region as did the first woman appointed to Alberta’s cabinet, Irene Parlby. Over time our region also elected long-time Official Opposition leader Bob Clark and my good friend Ty Lund, who served this Assembly for over 20 years. And who can forget, Mr. Speaker, democratic reformer and Member of Parliament, my good friend, Myron Thompson, who continues to serve the people of Sundre as a town councillor to this very day, almost 50 years of community service.

We are also home to a proud First Nations people, including the O’Chiese, the Sunchild, and the Stoney.

However, the fact is that our communities, like many across rural Alberta, have gone ignored by successive governments that have turned their backs on the conservative values that make Alberta strong.

The largest urban municipality in our riding is Rocky Mountain House. It serves a regional district of more than 30,000 Albertans, with over a million Albertans visiting a year. Expanding medical service in this region is long overdue. Rocky Mountain House has been promised a hospital for many years and has been told for many years that they are at the top of the priority list. But, sadly, it still has not happened, Mr. Speaker. It needs to happen. Rocky Mountain House needs a new hospital.

Meanwhile in Sundre local citizens have experienced the devastating effects of flooding on several occasions yet remain at the end of the line every time mitigation projects are considered.

When it comes to basic infrastructure, all municipalities in our constituency and across Alberta would greatly benefit from the

certainty of long-term, predictable funding. Certainly, nowhere would that be more appreciated than Rimbey, where the community continues to depend on wooden pipes. Mr. Speaker, wooden pipes. Politics needs to be removed from infrastructure funding, and it needs to happen now for the long-term success of our communities.

For the first time in 44 years we have a new government here in Edmonton, and I truly had hoped this government would take a different approach. However, if the recent throne speech and the government policies are any indication, it seems I will have my work cut out for me helping this new government to understand rural issues.

Communities like Rocky Mountain House, Caroline, Nordegg, and Sundre are significantly supported by Alberta’s energy industry for employment and economic activities. The government’s promised royalty review, which is taking place now, is already damaging confidence and killing jobs in my communities. I hear from people daily, both employees and employers, about unemployment and the effects of this government’s policy on our industries. Meanwhile Alberta’s second-largest industry, agriculture, remains vital for communities like Bentley, Rimbey, and Eckville, yet this vital industry was completely ignored in this government’s throne speech.

As a representative for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre I consider it my privilege to provide this government with a robust education on rural concerns. In addition, as both the Official Opposition whip and the critic for democracy and accountability I am dedicated to advocating for the long-overdue changes Albertans deserve. For far too long successive governments have diminished the role of the individual Member of this Legislative Assembly. Over the better part of a decade the previous government tied itself in knots to avoid democratic reform, sometimes going to great lengths to prevent the systematic change necessary to ensure true accountability.

In the case of fixed election dates the previous government implemented a faulty half measure, then broke the spirit of the law at the first possible opportunity. In the case of implementing the public right to recall failed MLAs, several previous administrations rejected the notion outright. All the while MLA compensation increased, citizen frustration increased, and voter engagement dwindled. Rather than truly address the democratic deficit, previous administrations chose to further centralize the power in the executive under the misguided belief that it would somehow increase the government’s capability to operate quality services more efficiently. History has proven this line of thinking to be patently false.

Without accountability to the public, those managing our province led us to a place where our province spent 20 per cent more than the Canadian average while providing below-average service. Deficits have increased, debt is increasing, and bureaucratic red tape is increasing. Rather than a new birth of freedom, Albertans were ignored in favour of a government of the cronies, by the cronies, for the cronies.

If I could offer one piece of advice to my fellow members, it is this. Alberta is a business, and all indications are that our company is in trouble. The time for listening to managers is over, Mr. Speaker. The time for listening to our customers has arrived. It’s time to get back to the representative democracy principles that have made Alberta strong. We as MLAs were elected to represent the people and the interests of our constituencies first.

This means giving voters more opportunity to engage in our democracy and ensuring that governments are held accountable not just on election day but every day. It is not enough to simply call

for reform; we need to implement it in a practical sense. We need to show a new generation of Albertans how great debate can be used to bring people together for a common cause. We need to demonstrate for all Canadians that empowering citizens makes our democracy stronger. Like previous generations, we need to verify for the world that democracy and freedom are entwined for all time and that freedom is not a weakness; indeed, it is our greatest strength.

In this regard I commend the government for passing legislation to ban corporate union donations. I was proud to vote for that bill. This is a good first step, but it is only one step. We need to continue to work to preserve our democracy and improve accountability in government. I look forward to working with all members of this House in bringing about change and standing up for all Albertans.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, I ask for unanimous consent of the House to revert for a notice of motion.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Notices of Motions

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, I rise to give notice of Bill 9, the Appropriation Act, 2015.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Consideration of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

(continued)

The Acting Speaker: Would anyone like to speak under 29(2)(a) with regard to the last member's address?

Ms McKittrick: Mr. Speaker, I am really delighted to have learned more about the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, his work with the Mustard Seed, and his dedication to people in need in his communities and throughout Alberta. I really want to thank him. Sometimes we don't see this side of people in this Assembly. Knowing his background and the background of his family and his dedication to, I know, a very, very difficult and challenging work setting and opportunities and raising funds and so on, I'm really honoured that he has shared his story with us.

Thank you.

Mr. Nixon: Well, with the small time we have left, Mr. Speaker, I'll just thank the hon. member for her words. The homeless population in Alberta is something that has been near and dear to my family from the day that I first arrived on this planet. I think that we are judged by how we treat the least fortunate amongst us, and I think that's something that both sides of this aisle can agree on.

The Acting Speaker: Noticing the time, the House stands adjourned until Monday at 1:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 4:30 p.m. to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 29th Legislature - 1st Session (2015)

Activity to November 19, 2015

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 1 to 200 are Government Bills. Bills numbered 201 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills numbered with a "Pr" prefix are Private Bills.

*An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If a Bill comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel, Alberta Justice, for details at (780) 427-2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned chapter numbers until the conclusion of the Fall Sitings.

1* An Act to Renew Democracy in Alberta (Ganley)

First Reading -- 9-10 (Jun. 15, 2015 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 30-38 (Jun. 16, 2015 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 85-94 (Jun. 17, 2015 eve.), 152-157 (Jun. 22, 2015 eve., passed with amendments)

Third Reading -- 157-159 (Jun. 22, 2015 eve., passed on division)

Royal Assent -- (Jun. 29, 2015 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 15, 2015; SA 2015 c15]

2 An Act to Restore Fairness to Public Revenue (Ceci)

First Reading -- 104 (Jun. 18, 2015 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 161-162 (Jun. 22, 2015 eve.), 183-193 (Jun. 23, 2015 aft.), 201-213 (Jun. 23, 2015 eve.), 213-227 (Jun. 23, 2015 eve., passed on division)

Committee of the Whole -- 242-257 (Jun. 24, 2015 aft.), 259 (Jun. 24, 2015 eve., passed)

Third Reading -- 259-271 (Jun. 24, 2015 eve., passed on division)

Royal Assent -- (Jun. 29, 2015 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force January 1, 2015, with exceptions; SA 2015 c16]

3 Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2015 (No. 2) (\$) (Ceci)

First Reading -- 77 (Jun. 17, 2015 eve., passed)

Second Reading -- 107-114 (Jun. 18, 2015 aft., passed on division)

Committee of the Whole -- 145-152 (Jun. 22, 2015 eve.), 159-161 (Jun. 22, 2015 eve., passed on division)

Third Reading -- 182-183 (Jun. 23, 2015 aft.), 213 (Jun. 23, 2015 eve., passed on division)

Royal Assent -- (Jun. 29, 2015 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 29, 2015; SA 2015 c14]

4 An Act to Implement Various Tax Measures and to Enact the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act (\$) (Ceci)

First Reading -- 331-32 (Oct. 27, 2015 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 379-81 (Oct. 29, 2015 aft.), 501-522 (Nov. 17, 2015 aft., passed)

5 Public Sector Compensation Transparency Act (Ganley)

First Reading -- 448 (Nov. 5, 2015 aft., passed)

6 Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act (Sigurdson)

First Reading -- 501 (Nov. 17, 2015 aft., passed)

7 Alberta Human Rights Amendment Act, 2015 (Ganley)

First Reading -- 548 (Nov. 19, 2015 aft., passed)

201 Assuring Alberta's Fiscal Future Act (Fraser)

First Reading -- 104-105 (Jun. 18, 2015 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 128-139 (Jun. 22, 2015 aft.), 302 (Oct. 26, 2015 aft., defeated on division)

202 Alberta Local Food Act (Cortes-Vargas)

First Reading -- 105 (Jun. 18, 2015 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 303-313 (Oct. 26, 2015 aft.), 401-404 (Nov. 2, 2015 aft., passed on division)

- 203 Election (Restrictions on Government Advertising) Amendment Act, 2015 (Strankman)**
First Reading -- 349 (Oct. 28, 2015 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 404-410 (Nov. 2, 2015 aft., adjourned), 474-477 (Nov. 16, 2015 aft., passed), 477 (Nov. 16, 2015 aft., referred to Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee)
- 204 Residential Tenancies (Safer Spaces for Victims of Domestic Violence) Amendment Act, 2015 (Drever)**
First Reading -- 448 (Nov. 5, 2015 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 477-484 (Nov. 16, 2015 aft., passed)
- 205 Persons with Developmental Disabilities Services (Public Consultation) Amendment Act, 2015 (Renaud)**
First Reading -- (Nov. 18, 2015 aft., passed)
- Pr1 The King's University College Amendment Act, 2015 (Schmidt)**
First Reading -- 377 (Oct. 29, 2015 aft., passed)
- Pr2 Bethesda Bible College Amendment Act, 2015 (Nielsen)**
First Reading -- 377 (Oct. 29, 2015 aft., passed)
- Pr3 Rosary Hall, Edmonton Repeal Act (Shepherd)**
First Reading -- 377 (Oct. 29, 2015 aft., passed)
- Pr4 Canadian University College Amendment Act, 2015 (Orr)**
First Reading -- 377 (Oct. 29, 2015 aft., passed)
- Pr5 Concordia University College of Alberta Amendment Act, 2015 (McLean)**
First Reading -- 377 (Oct. 29, 2015 aft., passed)
- Pr6 Covenant Bible College Amendment Act, 2015 (Fildebrandt)**
First Reading -- 377 (Oct. 29, 2015 aft., passed)
- Pr7 Living Faith Bible College Amendment Act, 2015 (Nixon)**
First Reading -- 377 (Oct. 29, 2015 aft., passed)

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Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, November 23, 2015

Day 21

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

First Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, November 23, 2015

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Let us reflect. Each of us reflects in a different manner, some of us with a prayer based on our faith belief, others in a manner of self-contemplation. In whatever manner you choose, please remember the victims of the horrendous events in Mali and the incidents in the vacant streets of Brussels. Please continue to consider how we in this little corner of our globe might make this world a safer place and one not controlled by fear.

Hon. members, we will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Mr. Robert Clark. I would invite you to participate in the language of your choice.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
 True patriot love in all thy sons command.
 Car ton bras sait porter l'épée,
 Il sait porter la croix!
 Ton histoire est une épopée
 Des plus brillants exploits.
 God keep our land glorious and free!
 O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
 O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Thank you. Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The Minister of Economic Development and Trade and Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly His Excellency Pavel Hrnčič, ambassador of the Czech Republic. His Excellency is accompanied today by Mr. Jerry Jelínek, the Czech Republic's honorary consul in Calgary. I'm pleased to say that there is great potential to build on the Czech Republic and Alberta's strong relationship, which includes ties in trade and investment, education and culture. Albertans value our relationship with the Czech Republic, and this visit is a great opportunity to explore new areas of collaboration in energy, renewable energy, agriculture, information and communications technologies, and other innovative industries. We will continue to work together to strengthen our existing ties and foster new ones to ensure continued growth and success for both of our jurisdictions.

His Excellency Mr. Hrnčič and Mr. Jelínek are seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker. I would now ask our esteemed guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly MLA Jane Shin, who is an ND member visiting us today from the B.C. Legislature to see the great work that we can accomplish here with an ND government in Alberta. I had the pleasure of being introduced by her in beautiful British Columbia, and I'm honoured to return the favour. Jane was first elected as the MLA for Burnaby-Lougheed in May 2013 and currently serves as the opposition

spokesperson for small business and deputy spokesperson for trade and multiculturalism. Prior to her election, she was actively involved in community service organizations such as the Canadian Red Cross and the Multicultural Society of B.C. She is the first Canadian of Korean descent elected to the Legislature of B.C. I kindly ask her to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Are there any school groups to mention today? The hon. member.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of home-schoolers and their parents and chaperones from my constituency of Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock. As I say their names, I would ask them to rise and please stand: Ina Hofstede, Felicia Wierenga, Rianne Viersen, Andrew Viersen, Sharon VanAssen, Kevin Tiemstra, Beatrice Tiemstra, Fettje Viersen, Helena Kruidhof, Eric Kruidhof, Rebecca Hofstede, Esther Hofstede, Mark Wierenga, Leanne Wierenga, Rachel Wierenga, Kelvin Viersen, Thomas Viersen, Daphne VanderZyl, Doug VanderZyl, Wesley VanderZyl, Ian VanAssen, Andrea VanAssen, Esther VanAssen, Saralyn VanAssen, Jayden Tiemstra, and Graham Tiemstra. I would ask that they please receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Good job with the pronunciation, hon. member.

Are there any other school groups? The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly three family members of one of our current pages, Erin de Kleer. Joining us today in the Speaker's gallery are her father, Rob de Kleer, and her oma and opa, Tina and Pete Meyer. While Rob and Erin reside in the constituency of Spruce Grove-St. Albert, Tina and Pete reside in my constituency of Airdrie. This year actually marks their 60th wedding anniversary. They're here to observe Erin in her role as a page at the Legislature. I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Minister of Seniors.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a group of delegates from Japan being hosted by Alberta Innovates: Health Solutions. They are here sharing ideas about a variety of subjects related to health research, training, and innovation. They include Dr. Suematsu, president of the Japan Agency for Medical Research and Development; Dr. Saya, professor in the Institute for Advanced Medical Research at Keio University; Mr. Noda, managing director, department of international affairs, AMED; Dr. Michalak, as well as Dr. Valentine, who is the interim CEO of Alberta Innovates: Health Solutions. I ask that my honoured guests rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Rodney: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am very honoured to introduce Jackie Manthorne, president and CEO of the Canadian Cancer Survivor Network. This is a national organization of patients, families, survivors, friends, community partners, and sponsors. Its mission is to promote the very best standard of care, support, follow-up, and quality of life for patients and survivors of

cancer. Prior to joining the Canadian Cancer Survivor Network, Ms Manthorne was, for 12 years, the CEO of a national health care charity working in the area of breast cancer. She currently resides in Ottawa with her husband. Good luck to the Redblacks. They have an adult daughter and are foster parents to teenagers.

The Cancer Survivor Network is in Alberta this week to talk about survivorship and the challenges that cancer survivors face after treatment ends. Jackie is in the public gallery. At this time I'd ask her to stand and receive the hearty welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

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

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure indeed to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly three outstanding members of our incredible caucus operations team led ably by director of operations Kelly Bickford, joined today by Caitlin Pettifor and Saira Wagner. The operations team supports our caucus and staff to ensure the smooth functioning of the day-to-day actions and tasks that are so important to our success here as a team. They do a fantastic job. I'd ask that they stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a second introduction for you today. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly several guests joining us from the Edmonton Korean Canadian Association. I'm pleased to note that we have a large contingent representing the association today who are excited to watch the proceedings this afternoon. I'd ask them to rise as a group and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my distinct pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly some of the members of our caucus communications team. Led by Director Murray Langdon and ably supported by Reakash Walters, Eric Rice, and Leah Orr, the communications team works hard to support our caucus in media engagement and overall communications work. It is work that is near and dear to my heart, and I appreciate what they do for us. I'd ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Mr. Orr: Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to present to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the family of the late Rolf Reiner Albert. Mr. Albert first came to Alberta in 1953 with his wife, Elisabeth, and their first child, Sigrid, who join us today in the gallery. For just over 30 years, 1957 to 1987, Mr. Albert served our province as a photographer for the Public Affairs Bureau. Over this long and dedicated career he photographed visiting dignitaries, local culture, important events, and the beautiful landscape of Alberta. Specifically, he was the official photographer for several of the royal visits from England and several of our Premiers and their cabinets during that time. Several thousand of his pictures are actually preserved in the Alberta archives, and some are on the walls of the Legislature buildings. It is my honour and privilege to introduce to you Mr. Albert's wife, Elisabeth Albert – they were happily married 39 years – his son Reverend Fred Albert and his wife, Gina; his daughter Ms Sigrid Albert; and a friend, Bruce Mohacsy. I ask our guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this House a home-schooling family from my constituency of Stony Plain. As part of their curriculum focusing on government this year, Gaylene Layden brought her two children to my office. The questions they asked me were thoughtful and provoked good discussion. Gaylene, Kayla, and Adam, please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly my incredible constituency staff. Since joining my office shortly after the election in May, Maria Vicente and Denis Sidlin have proven invaluable not only to me but also to my constituents in Edmonton-Decore. Also joining us today are the proud parents of Maria, Cosima and José Vicente. I would ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. member, aren't you fortunate that you don't have to wear a certain coloured shirt here today in the House?

Are there any other guests for introductions today? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and to the Assembly my constituency assistants, Emily Springer and Colette Fluet-Howrish. Emily joined my office in June and Colette joined in September, and since that time they have become an indispensable part of my life as MLA for Edmonton-Gold Bar. Whether it's preparing for a budget consultation session, accommodating my completely outrageous demands, helping someone with their AISH or WCB files, or patiently explaining why we can't personally pay out of pocket for a constituent's eyeglasses, they provide dedicated service to the constituents that I represent every day. They do it all with smiles on their faces, or if they absolutely can't smile, they at least grit their teeth so it looks like a smile. I ask that they please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly some friends of mine and absolute leaders in the sector of disability services, Paul Fujishige and Jamie Post. If you would please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Ms Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of guests to introduce today. First, I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly several stakeholders from harm reduction based organizations, who are here to witness the debate in the House later this afternoon. Joining us today are Jennifer Vanderschaeghe, Karen Turner, Tia Smith, Sue Belcourt, Maggie McGinn, and Jessica Daniels. Could you please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Proceed.

Ms Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd also like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Jackie Loewen and John McDonald. Jackie is a constituent of Red Deer-

South and was born with congenital cataracts and developed glaucoma at the age of 13. She is an active volunteer, dedicating her time recently as a CNIB champion, one of the many advocates throughout the province advocating on behalf of those living with vision loss. John is the executive director and regional vice-president for CNIB, who is launching a new campaign today that encourages Albertans to share their wish for a better future for those living with vision loss. I'd like to ask both of them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Leduc No. 1 Energy Discovery Centre

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta is a province rich in history and represents the cultures of many working together to build a prosperous future. My beautiful constituency of Leduc-Beaumont is no different. Currently there are many groups working hard to preserve this history. Today I'd like to just recognize one of those places, the birthplace of the modern-day oil industry, Leduc No. 1 Energy Discovery Centre. It's not over in your riding; it's in mine. It's situated on the corner of highways 19 and 60 among some of the most beautiful farmland in the county.

Leduc No. 1 offers the opportunity to learn about the history of oil and energy exploration in Alberta. This history began in 1947, when Imperial Oil, after many failed attempts, successfully drilled for crude oil in Leduc, and this discovery undoubtedly changed all of our lives. The discovery centre has exhibits, including the world's largest drill bit, displays on the oil sands, pipelines, and the Canadian Petroleum Hall of Fame, and is one of the only sites in the world where visitors and tourists can safely explore an operational oil rig. Visitors will find incredible pictures from the original exploration – I suggest that you guys go because it's quite incredible – and an art exhibit showcasing perspectives on the industry from some of the finest artists in Alberta. There's even a belt buckle display, donated by the hon. Minister of Energy's late uncle Gordon McCuaig, which is quite a thing to see.

1:50

It's not just about history there, however. The interpretive centre has become a place to learn about alternative energy sources, including solar arrays, interactive kinetic energy displays, and some exciting, upcoming new green energy projects. The site is a fantastic example of how to honour and showcase our history and still look to the future to learn new ways of doing things.

Not along ago our government announced that it would increase funding support for tourism, heritage, the arts, and nonprofit organizations. This is fantastic news for organizations like Leduc No. 1 and the other hard-working heritage and cultural societies in the constituency.

I encourage you all to visit it because it's an incredible place.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Official Opposition.

Carbon Tax

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, Albertans are worried about their jobs. More of them are hurting than ever before, and now this NDP government has broken trust with them. At no time during the election did the NDP tell Albertans that they would introduce a \$3

billion-a-year carbon tax on everything made in Alberta. That's on top of the \$1.5 billion in tax increases that the NDP did campaign on. To the Premier: why should Albertans trust her government on anything when she is saddling them with billions of dollars in new taxes when they can least afford it?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to the member for the question. During the election our platform said that we will phase out coal-fired electricity generation to reduce smog and air pollution, and this is exactly what we're doing. We're moving forward, and we've done so with workers. We also have a job-creation strategy. When we've been working with workers and employers, they told us that it was really important that we address our international reputation. That's why CNRL, Suncor, Shell, Cenovus, CAPP, TransAlta, and Capital Power are all coming and saying that this is good for Alberta and good for Alberta jobs.

Mr. Jean: Yes, they did, but I don't work for big oil; I work for Albertans.

This new tax on everything will hurt Alberta's economy and put more Albertans out of work. By the way, it won't actually reduce any emissions. Every product that is exported from Alberta requires electricity or fuel. This new tax will make everything we export much more expensive and less competitive. This tax on everything will hurt the export of energy products, forestry products, agricultural products, and manufactured products. Why is this government trying to cripple our export sectors, which create most Alberta jobs?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, just to continue with the list: Grand Chief Alexis, the Calgary Chamber of commerce, the leader of the Alberta Liberal Party. Employers are telling us that they need to have a better international reputation so we can actually get the pipelines built that the member opposite failed to do when he was in Ottawa. This government has got a plan to address the environment, address climate change, and create jobs, and the member opposite knows it.

Mr. Jean: The NDP should stop sticking up for big business. [laughter] This carbon tax will be a job killer. Exporting industries will lose out and employ fewer people. But this tax will also take money out of the pockets of every Albertan, and you should stop laughing about that. Every single one of us will pay more to drive vehicles, heat our homes, turn on the lights. Every Albertan will pay more for products produced in Alberta or goods transported to Alberta. The Premier never campaigned on any of this. What makes the Premier think she has a mandate to kill jobs and raise the prices of everything for normal, everyday Albertans?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We did campaign on taking leadership on the climate change strategy, and that's what we're doing. Leadership is bringing forward a variety of different stakeholders, including environmental NGOs as well as job creators, industry, and coming up with a plan that's going to help build Alberta jobs and build pipelines because we need to make sure that we've got an opportunity to invest, to be leaders. The world is looking to us for that, and so are stakeholders from throughout Alberta. They've come forward. They've said that this a strategy they can get fully behind and that it will create jobs.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Jean: The media release on the carbon tax says that it is "revenue neutral." Not only is the NDP hurting our economy, but

now they have decided to change the meaning of words. A new tax which brings in new money and which takes more money out of Alberta's economy is not revenue neutral. Albertans will pay \$3 billion in new taxes thanks to this NDP government. The government will spend the new money. No one will have any of their existing taxes go down. Can anyone over there explain how this is revenue neutral?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to the member for the question. Our government is working with leaders throughout Alberta to come up with a reasonable way to move forward, and this has been seen as being very moderate. Albertans want to be able to pay their bills, and they will be able to pay their bills if they have jobs, and they will only have jobs if they have a strong international reputation. We're really proud of the fact that we're moving forward with this plan. Albertans are proud, and we're going to move forward, and we're going to have a reputation that can make us all hold our heads high.

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, revenue neutral means that the increases in the new taxes are offset by decreases in other taxes. The whole point is that you use people's inclination to avoid taxes as an incentive for them to reduce their emissions. Good idea. That is not happening here. This is a new, added tax. Nothing is getting reduced. The government is taxing more and spending more. Albertans will lose jobs, and they will become poorer. Will the Premier admit that this is nothing more than a tax grab on the backs of Alberta's hard-working people?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our plan is fully focused on making sure that we support Albertans and that we take leadership on the climate. To make that happen, the revenue that we collect will be put to work here in Alberta. We're not going to wait for Ottawa to tell us what to do. We came up with and built an Alberta strategy that will invest money back into Alberta businesses and the economy. People who are emitting at a higher rate will be discouraged from doing so by having a price on that carbon. We're also going to be making adjustments to how families make ends meet and in support of small businesses, First Nations, and people working in the coal industry, and we're really proud of that.

Mr. Jean: British Columbia has a revenue-neutral carbon tax. In B.C. the government is required by law to prove that carbon tax revenues are offset by other tax reductions. When they created their carbon tax, they reduced other taxes to keep government revenues at the same levels. Business taxes went down; personal taxes went down. None of that is happening here in Alberta. In fact, taxes under the Alberta NDP only go one way: way, way up. Why is the government telling Albertans that this new tax on everything is revenue neutral when it is clearly not?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, we're taking the revenue that's being generated from this and investing it back into Alberta's economy. When the member opposite was asked this morning if he was proposing a plan like B.C.'s, he said that he wouldn't introduce a carbon plan. He would wait three and a half years until the next election before he came up with a solution. We're working to protect our environment and protect our jobs today.

The Speaker: Third question.

Mr. Jean: Three billion dollars in new taxes is not the solution Albertans want. Mr. Speaker, the rollout of this new tax on everything was a rushed affair, and it has to lead to questions. Some of what the Premier said yesterday doesn't match what is in the actual climate change report. Yesterday, after telling us the whopper that this tax is revenue neutral, the Premier said that in the future the carbon tax could be used to pay down debt, but the word "debt" does not appear anywhere in the climate change report. How exactly will a revenue-neutral tax ever generate extra money to pay down debt?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, this strategy has been endorsed by a variety of stakeholders, including Brian Ferguson from Cenovus: "We fully support the Government's new climate policy," Lorraine Mitchelmore from Shell: "Today's announcement sets Canadian oil on the path to becoming the most ..." [interjections] – would you like to hear the answer? – "... environmentally and economically ..." [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. minister, could you please finish your statement?

2:00

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. "Today's announcement sets Canadian oil on the path to becoming the most environmentally and economically competitive in the world." We need to make sure that we have a strong international reputation. To make that possible, we need to take action in Alberta, and we're doing just that.

Mr. Jean: Standing up for big oil. What a shock.

It isn't a surprise that the Premier's spin doesn't agree with the report. In fact, the report doesn't actually agree with the report. In one place the report says that the carbon tax will cost families \$500 a year more for fuel, electricity, and natural gas. Our calculations using the numbers from the report suggest that tax increases just for fuel and natural gas are over \$590 a year. Can the Premier tell us exactly how much more the average Alberta family, not corporations, will pay for fuel for heating their homes and for electricity under this new NDP carbon tax?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, we're absolutely open to hearing feedback from Albertans on how we can continue to invest the money that's generated through this fund, but it's important that we have a strong reputation. Part of that is having a realistic price on carbon, and the heads of CNRL, Shell, Cenovus – members opposite say that people endorsing this are extremists. Would he say that those members are extremists? I don't think so. They're employers that create jobs in Alberta, and we're proud to move forward in partnership.

Mr. Jean: I mentioned that the word "debt" isn't in the climate change report. Another important topic that isn't mentioned is oil pipelines and market access. This carbon tax will take at least \$45 billion away from Albertans by 2030, not Alberta corporations but Albertans. It will kill jobs and make every product we buy more expensive. Everyone will feel it. But maybe, just maybe there's some good news here somewhere. Can the Premier name any opponents of Alberta's pipelines who will now support our efforts at market access because of this great, new, NDP carbon tax?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the question. I am really proud of the fact that we had environmental NGOs join industry and say that they're in support of this. For example, the former vice-president of the United States Al Gore came out publicly in support

of this, and we know that he was one of the people that . . . [interjections] You asked for an environmentalist. He was absolutely not keen on moving the pipelines forward under the previous model. He thinks this is a balanced, fair model moving forward and . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: I was having some difficulty hearing the minister. Could you please proceed? [interjections] Hon. members. Could you start again, Madam Minister?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's nice to hear people who often refer to climate change denial in a way that acknowledges the environmental role that environmental NGOs play in our nation and in our industry. In Alberta we're really excited to work in partnership with environmental organizations as well as industry to move forward with having the strongest reputation we possibly can because a strong reputation is going to mean good results for the climate and good results for jobs.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Climate Change Strategy

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, just yesterday the NDP government unmasked their climate tax policy. If other energy producers in large economies are not subject to the same standards that Alberta is, it will put Alberta workers at a huge disadvantage, and it won't help the climate. You know what? Albertans want to do their fair share. In this light, what assurances can the government give Albertans that China, India, the U.S., and other oil-producing countries will adopt the same standards so we're not at a disadvantage?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. We're really proud of having a built-in-Alberta strategy that's going to absolutely help our international reputation. Obviously, today the first ministers are meeting in Ottawa. It's really important that Alberta be a leader instead of being the one that everyone looks to for blame. We're really proud to be moving forward to Ottawa with a made-in-Alberta strategy that will also be brought forward to the international table in France later this month. We're absolutely willing to do our part. I know Albertans are. We do want the rest of the world to do their part as well.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, I didn't hear any assurances there.

Given that the Premier has said before that she's not picking winners and losers, this policy shows otherwise. The losers are anyone involved in the coal industry. We've been told that we're transitioning out of coal, but there's no news about what we will transition into. Can you tell those people in Drumheller, Wabamun, Hanna, and Wainwright that you are taking their jobs away? When will you replace them with new jobs, and what will those new jobs be?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. The local MLAs have absolutely wanted to make sure that everyone's understanding what an important industry it is in their communities, but we also know how important our air is. Every single Albertan breathes our air, and we need to make sure that we're doing everything we can to keep it clean. We're working with communities and the businesses that they rely on to develop adjustment plans that make sense for each individual

community. Absolutely, it's important to us to make sure that we have new jobs created, and we're working in partnership with those industries to make sure that we can help transition away from coal.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, given that the NDP job losses are now and for sure and the job gains are later and completely uncertain, Albertans deserve to know before this Premier takes away their livelihoods, especially those who are losing jobs where coal plants are shut down: when are the plants shutting, what will the compensation be for the employees, and what liability will the taxpayers have for closing things down that are operating legally today?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There was a plan to phase out coal under the previous government, and as the member opposite just asked the question, I'm sure he's well aware that it's important to have negotiations with the communities, with the employees, and with the employers to make sure that we have a fair system. Here, for example, is what TransAlta said. "The Premier has committed to an orderly transition that ensures system reliability and price stability for our customers, given that it is now certain that coal-fired generation will be phased out by 2030." It's going to be a transition. It's going to be a 15-year strategy, and they want to make sure that they can continue to move forward with a reputation they're all proud of, and so do we.

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

Seniors' Housing

Ms Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During some of my meetings with my constituents many seniors in my community have expressed concerns over housing. Many of these constituents are on fixed incomes and cannot cope with higher housing costs. I have constituents who are well into their 70s who are working full-time, living paycheque to paycheque. Their housing costs equate to 60 per cent of their income. To the Minister of Seniors: what programs are available to seniors to assist them with independent living?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to the member for the question. All Albertans deserve to live in a safe and secure home no matter what their income, and this year our investment will add more than 800 new social housing and seniors' lodge units across Alberta, something we can all be very proud of. We also provide an Alberta seniors' benefit to 150,000 low-income seniors every month, which means that more money is in their pockets to ensure that they can have their finances meet their needs.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister: given that your performance measures for the budget state a target of lowering the percentage of housing facilities in poor condition in order to raise the percentage of those in good condition, why has the percentage of housing facilities in fair condition, 62 per cent, remained stagnant?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. We are making investments in affordable housing, but we have inherited over a billion dollars in

deferred maintenance costs from the previous government's failing to maintain their current stock. This is an important problem, and it's going to require significant investment, but it won't be solved overnight, and it certainly wouldn't be solved by cutting \$9 billion in infrastructure spending, as proposed by the Official Opposition.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Drever: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Given that Alberta is forecast to reach 1 million seniors by year 2030, which will represent 20 per cent of our population, what infrastructure investments is this government making in order to meet that forecast? What investments are being made in long-term care?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. We are absolutely committed to ensuring that we build 2,000 long-term care beds. This was a commitment we made in the election and that we're thrilled to be moving forward on. It's really important to us that everyone has the right care in the right place at the right time, and that includes long-term care in a variety of communities as close as possible to where seniors currently live. The opposition parties want to allow for cuts in the budget; instead, we're absolutely committed towards moving forward in a reasonable way, increasing investment in infrastructure, and ensuring that seniors can live with dignity and respect.

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

2:10 Pipeline Development

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's energy industry supports the government's plan to address climate change, but it knows we need to increase market access, and pipelines are a safer path to achieve this. No new pipelines were created under previous governments here or in Ottawa, leaving the industry without the infrastructure they need. To the Minister of Energy: what are you doing to support new energy market access, creating much-needed new jobs?

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you for the question, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, our climate leadership plan is a good first step. We've engaged industry and environmental groups to move forward to get that new market access that we need to tidewater, both east and west.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that pipeline safety continues to be a concern for many Albertans, to the same minister: what are you doing to address concerns around pipeline safety and spills to ensure that these pipelines are safe?

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, Alberta enjoys some of the toughest regulations, not just in Canada but in North America, with the AER. We are continually working with them to make sure our pipelines are safe. We also have been looking, when there are spills, at what we can do to make things better and get a great environmental record moving forward.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this government has committed to consulting with and learning from indigenous

people, again to the Minister of Energy: what are you doing to ensure proper First Nations consultation around pipeline projects?

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you for the question, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, in all our departments we are working under the Premier's direction to look at our processes in working with First Nations groups. In my case our department is looking through policies to see where we can strengthen processes, and we're also working with the AER in their part to see how we can strengthen processes in working with our aboriginal partners.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Energy Policies

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Quote: we can't wait for others to act; we can't wait for others to determine Albertans' future. End quote. Does this sound familiar? That was a former Premier. He put a price on industrial emissions. He started the building of government-subsidized carbon storage facilities, but it wasn't enough for radical activists. Greenpeace is still demanding that the oil sands be shut down, and politicians in America still call our oil dirty. How does a new \$3 billion tax on everything do anything else besides make every Albertan poorer?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. You know, Albertans are not followers. Albertans expect us to lead. This is a made-in-Alberta plan that takes action before plans are imposed on us. That is why this plan led to such historic co-operation between oil sands and environmental groups. It is time for Alberta to lead again.

Mr. Loewen: No answer there.

Given that NDP MLAs themselves have called our oil dirty and given that now the same people who contributed to our image problem are now saying that they're going to fix it and since the NDP strategy is to tax everyone and everything, raise power bills, and keep more of our oil in the ground and since the NDP bragged that this \$3 billion tax will help us get our product to market, will the Premier now start advocating for the Northern Gateway pipeline? Will she start advocating for the Keystone XL pipeline? Or does she prefer that the oil stay in the ground?

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, this climate leadership plan will be put to work right here in Alberta, making sure that all revenue builds our economy and creates jobs and reduces pollution, promoting greater energy efficiency. Let's just go through a little tour of the validators on this matter, shall we? Steve Williams of Suncor:

Today we reach a milestone in ensuring Alberta's valuable resource is accompanied by leading carbon policy. It's time that Alberta is seen as a climate, energy and innovation leader. This plan will make one of the world's largest oil-producing regions a leader in addressing the climate change challenge.

This from one of the largest employers in the Leader of the Official Opposition's riding.

The Speaker: I hope the hon. member doesn't take us on too wide a tour next time because time is very valuable.

Second supplemental.

Mr. Loewen: Again no answer. No surprise.

Mr. Speaker, Wildrose cares about the environment and our economy. Given that this new carbon tax will be nothing short of a

massive experiment with Alberta's economy, with no guarantees that it will reduce emissions, does the Premier know what the total cost of these climate change initiatives and creating a massive new bureaucracy will be to government, to consumers, and to the industry?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. You know, the Official Opposition is really the only voice speaking out against the leadership that Alberta is taking on climate. The Official Opposition is out on an island alone, and I would suggest that without action on climate change, the sea levels are going to start to rise around that island.

You know, the chairman of CNRL shared with Alberta his thoughts on this matter: Alberta wins with today's announcement. "The announcement is a significant step forward for Alberta" and for the industry. It was a historic display of co-operation yesterday.

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

Air Quality in Alberta

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's climate change strategy was announced yesterday, and I want to acknowledge the government's effort to move Alberta forward on this critical file, that touches many ministries. Now, your focus on methane raises concern amongst Alberta farmers. Cattle, sheep, goats, elk, and bison are all ruminants, and they produce methane. Now, the only way to reduce these emissions would be to legislate reduced livestock production or to legislate a change in ruminants' digestive physiology. To the agriculture minister: are either of these measures being contemplated by your government?

Ms Phillips: I would like to thank the hon. member for the question, Mr. Speaker. Of course, this climate change plan does come with a methane reduction program within the oil and gas sector. It is a product of collaboration, again, between environmental groups and industry. The fact of the matter is that, yes, in agriculture we have certain inputs, certain outputs. Moving forward, we will work together with the agriculture sector on this matter, but this plan contains within it a robust approach to methane reduction in the oil and gas sector.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that improved air quality is one of the stated objectives of the climate change strategy and given that the Health minister today trumpeted how the measures announced would improve Alberta's air quality and respiratory health, to the Health minister: is it your position that breathing Alberta air is hazardous to the health of Albertans?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Of course, I have jobs to make sure that people who have asthma, which about 10 per cent of Albertans do, have resources available to help them access supports when they need them. There's nothing scarier than not being able to breathe. It's also our responsibility to make sure that we have a plan to make our air cleaner moving forward, and that's why I'm so proud that we're moving to a phase-out of coal within 15 years.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that questions over air quality have been raised by both the environment minister and the Health minister, suggesting that breathing could be a health hazard, and given that Travel Alberta's award winning tourism brand slogan is

Remember to Breathe, is the Culture and Tourism minister working with Travel Alberta on a new slogan?

Mr. Eggen: No, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the question as well. In fact, we are using Remember to Breathe. It works very well in places around the world that have serious air pollution issues, and certainly it's one of the most successful advertisement plans that we've had in the history of Travel Alberta. We're expecting another record year for tourism internationally and locally here in the province of Alberta, and they're going to come to see our wonderful new climate change plan, too.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

2:20

Carbon Tax (continued)

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government has introduced a \$3 billion carbon tax grab under the pretense of reducing carbon and mitigating climate change. There are jurisdictions around the world that are 30 to 40 years ahead of us on carbon reduction and energy efficiency. To the minister of environment: where's the empirical evidence, the statistical evidence, or case studies showing that these kinds of measures introduced this fast and this extensively do indeed demonstrate an effect of reducing carbon emissions?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of environment.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. Of course, this climate leadership plan will ensure that all revenue is recycled back into the economy for purposes of adjustment to support small businesses, making sure that families have the supports they need to make ends meet, and to invest in First Nations communities with municipalities and others. We know that these efforts taken together will bend the curve on emissions, which is exactly what our trading partners have been asking for.

Mr. MacIntyre: Mr. Speaker, it should concern us all that they do not have the evidence to back up their plan. This is a \$3 billion carbon tax grab and nothing more, being levied against a tiny population of only 4 million people. For this tax to be truly revenue neutral, we should be seeing it coincide with a proportionate decrease in income tax. When is the minister going to admit that the government has no intentions of implementing a truly revenue-neutral tax? This is nothing more than a tax grab.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the hon. member for the question. You know, there are really two ways to deny the science of climate change. One can do it outright as the Official Opposition has done in the past. That didn't work out so well, so the new, more clever way to deny the science is to suggest that we should do nothing at all.

Mr. MacIntyre: Mr. Speaker, I asked for empirical evidence so that the people of Alberta could have confidence in what this government is proposing, and given that we do not have this empirical evidence, I can only assume that this increase is going to hit the price of every good, every service in the same manner as a PST. Will this government admit that this is their way around the referendum required for a PST, a referendum this government hasn't got the political capital to pass?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, the message from Alberta's job creators yesterday was loud and clear. It couldn't have been more clear. For example, the Calgary Chamber of commerce: "Pleased to see our provincial government take a strong stance on climate leadership today. Important for business." Is the hon. member of the Official Opposition seriously suggesting that Alberta's job creators got it wrong in their support for our climate leadership plan?

Mr. Fildebrandt: I've been asking the Minister of Finance for weeks now where he is going to get a 16 per cent boom in revenues for years 4 and 5 of their budget. Yesterday we finally got an answer: the equivalent of a 3 per cent PST on Albertans in the form of a carbon tax. If this tax was truly about the environment and not a cash grab, the government wouldn't have announced it during church and Sunday morning football. Is this a carbon tax intended to protect the environment, or is this a backdoor PST intended to fill their budget hole?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and to the member for the question. We are absolutely proud of the plan we brought forth. It has support from industry throughout Alberta and environmentalists as well. In terms of the timing of the announcement, we planned on making the announcement today, and then the first ministers were called to Ottawa today. We wanted to go to Ottawa with everyone knowing what our plan was, not with Ottawa telling Alberta what their plan is, so the made-in-Alberta strategy was announced yesterday.

Mr. Fildebrandt: The same mindless talking points over and over. This carbon tax was advertised as revenue neutral, but it is clearly just a backdoor cash grab from a government with an insatiable appetite for more taxes and more spending. This government has already raised dozens of taxes on Albertans, and this carbon tax will raise the price of virtually everything in the province, an ND PST, if you will. Does this government believe that families really have another \$900 a year to feed their insatiable spending addiction?

The Speaker: The minister of economic development.

Mr. Bilous: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the member for the question. Our government is focused on protecting Alberta's economy, creating good jobs, and stabilizing our core services. What the opposition fails to recognize is what the previous government failed to do. If we do not address climate change, if we do not improve our environmental standards in this province, we are hurting ourselves, and we aren't going to gain that market access. So I'll tell you what we are doing. We're taking leadership; we're showing leadership. We've come out with a most strong environmental climate change strategy, and through our initiatives we are going to be enhancing our economy and creating jobs.

Mr. Fildebrandt: They're not taking leadership; they're taking Albertans' money.

Given that B.C.'s carbon tax was revenue neutral because they actually lowered business and personal income taxes to compensate taxpayers, if this was truly about the environment, this carbon tax would be revenue neutral so that taxpayers would break even, but it's not. This is a greedy tax grab in the guise of helping the environment. Will the government scrap its ND PST and come back

to this House with a plan for a revenue-neutral reduction in greenhouse gas emissions?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's nice to see the hon. member is allowed up from the Fildebench every now and then.

Now, we know that members opposite don't want to talk about a plan. They don't want to talk about a plan for at least three and half years, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Point of order.

The Speaker: Do you have a point of order? Noted. Keep going, please.

Ms Hoffman: We know members opposite don't want to talk about a climate change plan for at least three and a half years. They said that they wouldn't talk about it until the election because they don't want to get out of bed in the morning, Mr. Speaker. But Albertans want to get out of bed, and they want to go to work, and the way they're going to make that happen is by having a good reputation and making sure that they can afford to pay their bills. That's exactly what this plan will do.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Forest Industry Issues

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government says that it's committed to economic diversification. This diversification is supposed to support industries outside of oil and gas; however, this is not seeming to be the case as another forestry company has been negatively affected. Millar Western just announced that they'll be closing the Boyle lumber mill by February 2017 and that another 91 Alberta workers will lose their jobs. My questions are to the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry: what is this government doing to protect forest industry jobs in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of economic development.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the hon. member for his very pertinent question. Obviously, our government takes very seriously any job loss that occurs in any sector in our province. We recognize that forestry is a critical sector, with over 15,000 hard-working Albertans in forestry, and that the industry is a key economic driver in at least 70 communities. This is exactly why we are moving to diversify our economy, to support our forestry sector, looking for opportunities to add value to our existing sector and partnering with industry to do that.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Spray Lake Sawmills and the Boyle Millar Western operations have suffered from this government's decisions and given that this government has not even placed the member from this industry on its economic advisory panel, can the minister explain what they are doing to include forestry in the economic diversification conversations to enable success for the forest industry in Alberta?

The Speaker: The minister of economic development.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the member again for his question. First and foremost, there isn't a greater champion of the agriculture and forestry sectors than the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry. I can tell you right now that he is heading to Japan next week to look at opportunities to increase our exports,

to improve our market access and continue to build on our very healthy and robust relationship with Japan. The high amount of value-added processing activity in Alberta's forestry sector is a success that we need to maintain and build on, and that's exactly what we're going to do.

2:30

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this government just increased the tax on fuel by 4 cents and will increase that tax by an additional 7 cents with their climate change rollout and given that lumber mills such as the one in Boyle rely on competitive fuel prices to transport their fibre supply, can the minister explain how an 11-cent increase on fuel is helping forest companies like this in Alberta to sustain and diversify their business?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll thank the member for the question. First and foremost, our climate leadership plan is focused, again, on supporting Albertans and also on being a leader when it comes to climate. All revenue collected will be reinvested to work here in Alberta, building our economy, creating jobs, reducing pollution, and promoting even greater energy efficiency. I can tell the hon. member that we have an adjustment fund that will help families make ends meet, that will support small businesses, First Nations, and people working in the coal industry.

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

Public Transit

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Some of the opposition's questions today have been enough to turn a cow's stomach into knots. Hopefully, my question will illuminate rather than ruminate the province's climate leadership initiatives.

Alberta has launched exciting plans to reduce our impact on the environment. Public transit in our cities will support these endeavours. Alberta has grown by 785,000 people in the last 10 years, and the mayors of Edmonton and Calgary promote transit's importance in helping our cities address growing populations. To the Minister of Transportation: what funding is currently . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I think you're going to have to be a lot quicker or shorter on your preamble, more on the question. Does the minister wish to respond?

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I just heard, before the member trailed off, about public transit. Public transit is a major priority for the government. It's going to continue to be so. We've got some money leftover in GreenTRIP, about \$415 million – \$130 million is left for the Calgary region and \$285 million for other municipalities other than the two biggest cities in the province – so we'll be announcing a third call for applications for GreenTRIP shortly.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that my constituents want to know about LRT in our neighbourhoods, to the Minister of Transportation: what updates do you have on LRT funding in Edmonton?

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As a matter of fact, I had a very productive meeting with the mayor of Edmonton this

morning, and LRT was very prominent among the items that we discussed. So far we've allocated \$274 million of GreenTRIP funding to the valley line LRT project in Edmonton. This is in addition to a \$200 million interest-free loan and \$150 million in funds to match the federal government's contribution to the project. We know that moving people in the big cities is critical, and our government is here to support those cities.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that we have a new federal government, to the same minister: how is your ministry communicating with your new federal counterparts about the transportation infrastructure needs and priorities of Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, as the hon. member may know and some members on the other side of the House may know as well, there's a new federal government, and I'm very much looking forward to continuing my ongoing dialogue with my counterpart, Minister Sohi, the infrastructure minister in the federal government. We know that the Liberal government in Ottawa has promised \$60 billion over 10 years for infrastructure, and we're going to look very closely at how we can co-operate to leverage as much of that money as possible to improve the . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Carbon Tax (continued)

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents in Bonnyville-Cold Lake are joining thousands of Albertans who are worried about the government's reckless announcement of a carbon tax. One thing is clear. This is a carbon tax that is taxing everything. Prices on goods and services are bound to increase while families in my ridings are losing their jobs. It will hurt seniors on fixed incomes, it will hurt families, and it will hurt our most vulnerable. How is this government going to offset the pain felt by this new carbon tax at a time when they are already hurting?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of environment.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. As the Premier said yesterday, every penny raised through the carbon price will be put to work here in Alberta to build our economy, create jobs, and reduce pollution through research and technology. We will ensure that we are helping families and others make ends meet through an adjustment fund. We'll support small business, indigenous peoples, municipalities, and others to make this adjustment. We will ensure that families will not have trouble making ends meet as a result of these policies.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, no answers from over there.

The fact remains that the cost of living is bound to skyrocket thanks to the NDP carbon tax. Given that it is a fact that cost of transportation of goods is going to continue increasing because of this NDP policy, through the increase in the carbon tax, which will in turn result in a cost of hundreds of dollars each year for each and every family, to the minister: how will implementing a carbon tax on Albertan

families to pay for corporate welfare programs help Albertans who are out of work?

The Speaker: The minister of economic development.

Mr. Bilous: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again I'll remind the member, as we've stated before, that there is an adjustment fund that's intended to help small businesses, First Nations, people working in the coal industry, and families make ends meet. I'll remind the member as well that that's exactly why the Premier created this ministry, and through it we have increased ATB's capacity to lend to help small businesses. We have a job-creation incentive program, which will create up to 27,000 jobs over the next two years, and we've invested \$50 million in the Alberta Enterprise Corporation. Our government is taking action and showing leadership.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again the answer is more corporate welfare.

But let's talk about revenue neutral. That's what the government is promising. That is what they're selling as this new carbon tax to the public. Given that we know this isn't true, that this is a new tax on everything that's going to nickel and dime Albertans at every corner and since there is no reduction in taxes, why is this government deceiving Albertans by saying that this tax on everything is revenue neutral while attacking our most vulnerable Albertans?

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, I'll say it again and hope that the hon. member and his colleagues listen. All revenue collected will be reinvested into the Alberta economy to ensure that we're creating jobs and reducing pollution. Our climate change plan will invest in new technologies and help to diversify the economy, something the previous government failed at doing and something that the Official Opposition would have us do nothing about and instead hope and pray that a pipeline will get built when instead what's needed is action. We are taking action, and through our climate change leadership strategy we will work with . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During the election the NDP promised that it would not impose a provincial sales tax. It did refer to developing an energy efficiency strategy and a renewable energy strategy, but it never even hinted at a province-wide carbon tax. To the Premier: 6 out of 10 Albertans did not vote for your government, and those who did believed you when you told them that you would not be introducing a PST, so how can you now blindsides the people of Alberta with a carbon tax that will pick their pockets in the same fashion as a provincial sales tax?

The Speaker: The minister of economic development.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the member for the question. Right from the get-go we were the only party during the election to have a climate change strategy, and I applaud the Premier and this government for implementing that strategy within six months. Our climate leadership strategy is actually going to help diversify the economy and gain us access to markets that previous governments failed to do.

Mr. Rodney: Since we didn't get an answer there, let's try the environment minister.

Given that one of the goals of imposing a carbon tax is to encourage Albertans to actually change their lifestyles and become more emission conscious and given that hundreds of thousands of Albertans are already adhering to a green lifestyle by driving fuel-efficient vehicles and retrofitting their homes to increase energy efficiency and using public transportation and more and given that Albertans will suffer under the same tax regime as those whose behaviour you're really targeting, how is it fair to impose a punitive tax measure on Albertans who are already doing their best to address climate change?

2:40

The Speaker: The minister of environment.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the hon. member for the question. With this plan we will ensure that low- and middle-income families and households do not have trouble making ends meet as a result of these policies through the adjustment fund. You know, the fact of the matter is that we will also have approaches to energy efficiency and so on so that families can reduce their own price on carbon expenditures. Over time that is exactly what will happen as we implement the policies right here in Alberta with our made-in-Alberta plan.

Mr. Rodney: Let's try this a different way. Given that Alberta's environmentally responsible citizens will feel the same financial pain as those whose behaviour you want to modify through this carbon tax on fuel and electricity and natural gas and given that these environmentally responsible Albertans deserve credit, not punishment, are these citizens just part of the collateral damage of your new tax, or will you provide them with compensation for the fuel efficiencies that they've incorporated into their daily lives? And, oh, by the way, while you're at it, Minister, where do we find this in your budget, exactly?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of environment.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. Of course, the hon. member read the climate change panel and our response to it and read the whole report. I'm sure the hon. member took the time to do that before asking the questions, so he will know that the price on carbon is to be phased in as of January 1, 2017, and with it will come with an adjustment for families in order to make ends meet.

Members' Statements

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Climate Change Strategy

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, we have a climate action tax plan now, so let me share with you what I taught my students at NAIT in energy management master planning, which I'm sorry the opposite members didn't attend. It's a discipline with over 30 years of proven strategy, and the single most important pillar of success in energy management requires a plan that reduces energy consumption, reduces energy cost, increases productivity, and increases product quality. Any plan that fails on any three of these is actually a threat, and this plan is a threat to our quality of life and does not achieve our shared goal of encouraging sustainable

energy development. Let me be clear. That pillar is not achieved in their plan.

Punishing every Albertan for turning the heat on in the winter is not an acceptable solution to climate change. The NDP carbon tax compromises our competitiveness as a jurisdiction, it threatens jobs, it undermines the financial security of every Albertan, and by their own admission the plan is going to cost Alberta families \$900 a year by 2030, and that does not include the added cost to every single good and service consumed by our citizens from this flow-through carbon tax.

This plan strives to replace, apparently, two thirds of our province's 44,000 gigawatt hours of coal generation with renewables. Let me give you a visual. Think nine times our existing wind capacity to be built within the short span of 15 years, or with solar we're talking about tens of millions of solar panels installed in just 15 years. Now, what happens when the wind doesn't blow and the sun doesn't shine, Mr. Speaker? There is no energy storage plan in this entire strategy. We will have to overbuild with natural gas to compensate for the inevitable off-times of renewable energy sources or face even more costly and pervasive power outages. Let's be clear. I'm a renewables guy. This is my field, and I love renewables, but I also know their limitations. The secret to success for any energy strategy is to go slow, but instead this government has a plan that is massive, disruptive, and costly, and it hits Albertans the hardest.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Climate Change Strategy

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the NDP government announced its climate tax policy. We're looking forward to reviewing the entire plan in detail and talking with people, industry, and communities before we make our final comment. At first glance there are a couple of positive aspects. However, there are some things we are concerned about. Number one, we know the government only received the climate change panel's report in the past few days. The government's policy seems to have been developed well in advance of that report, so we're concerned that the panel's work is only window dressing for the changes the government wanted to make anyway.

Number two, we disagree with the economy-wide carbon tax. Alberta was the only and first jurisdiction in North America to put a price on carbon and then only paid by high emitters. We are concerned that this carbon tax is going to hit low-income Albertans at a time when many are already losing their jobs and struggling to make ends meet. This tax is estimated to take more than \$3 billion a year out of Alberta's pockets and into an expensive government economic intervention. Alberta households will pay over \$500 per year for their heating, electrical, and gasoline bills.

Number three, goodbye Alberta advantage. We believe the Premier broke her promise to Albertans before the budget that there would be no provincial sales tax. A tax this broad by any other name is still a tax. This carbon tax will affect every Albertan, not just higher income earners.

Number four, we have not seen any plan for transitioning communities and Alberta families who will be affected by the early phase-out of coal. We're concerned that Albertans continue to lose their jobs, and this government is still without a plan to address this. A mediator will not bring those jobs back. Albertans want to do their part for the environment. They always have.

Here is the bottom line, Mr. Speaker. The NDP job losses are now, and they are certain. The NDP economy is years or decades

away and uncertain and probably part of a fantasy economy, which may never exist.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Central Alberta AIDS Network Society

Ms Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Fourteen cents: the cost of one condom. This condom can prevent down-the-road health costs of \$1.3 million if it prevents one case of HIV positive.

In my constituency of Red Deer-South we have a remarkable 27-year-old charity called the Central Alberta AIDS Network Society, which is responsible for sexually transmitted and blood-borne infection prevention and support in Alberta Health Services' central zone. The society's mission is to foster healthy responses to HIV and related issues through support, education, and research. In doing so, they undertake a broad range of rural and urban work, including prevention efforts and community outreach supports to those experiencing homelessness, gay and bisexual men, people living with HIV or hepatitis C, the street-involved and pregnant women and girls.

Twelve cents: the cost of one needle. That 12-cent needle could prevent a case of hep C, which could cost us anywhere from \$52,000 to \$327,000 if that person ends up requiring a liver transplant.

Since 1998 CAANS has been running an evidence-based harm reduction program, working to support sex workers and people who use drugs to reduce the risk of contracting an STI or hep C. This well-respected program distributes safer injection and inhalation supplies to over 450 active clients.

Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise today and acknowledge the tireless work of the Central Alberta AIDS Network Society in strengthening our community's response to blood-borne infections through prevention and support.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

County Clothes-Line Foundation

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The County Clothes-Line Foundation is proud to be celebrating 30 years in Sherwood Park. In that time they have contributed \$1.6 million in grants and scholarships to local charities, community groups, and individuals within Strathcona county. They accept donations of gently used clothes, toys, games, books, and all small household items, then sold to the public at reasonable prices. Clients referred from local agencies are allowed to shop free in times of emergency.

Unlike some used merchandise stores, the profit from sales of the goods from the County Clothes-Line store goes back into the community through the County Clothes-Line Foundation. As these two entities work hand in hand, the generosity of people in the community continues to enrich the lives of the residents of Strathcona county. The County Clothes-Line Foundation grants funds generated by the County Clothes-Line store to Strathcona county nonprofit groups and individuals to assist them in initiating or supporting ongoing innovative projects or programs which contribute to a higher quality of life for the residents of Strathcona county. I know many seniors' homes have used these grants in order to address some of the needs that are coming up.

Applications for funding are submitted to the board of directors for consideration. Each application is judged on its individual merit and the perceived ability of the organization to meet its objectives. The County Clothes-Line Foundation strongly supports education and culture, local social agencies, and the concept of reduce, reuse, recycle, and repurpose.

2:50

The County Clothes-Line Foundation awards apprenticeship scholarships annually. The recipients are chosen by the Alberta apprenticeship board, and they must be training or living in Strathcona county. Their support has been ongoing to many local groups, and they have granted money to the Robin Hood association, the Strathcona Food Bank, A Safe Place, and the Saffron Centre, just to name a few. The continual contribution that they have in our community is something that we're extremely grateful for, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Carbon Tax

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. During the last election this NDP government ran on raising a lot of different taxes, but a carbon tax was never one of them. However, yesterday when Albertans were going to their places of worship, spending some time with family, watching the football game, the NDP announced a new carbon tax, which will increase the cost of everything for every single person living in this province: gasoline, groceries, electricity, you name it.

Mr. Speaker, this tax on everything will steal hundreds, possibly thousands, of dollars away from families at a time when they need them the most. Yesterday anti-oil activists celebrated the news of this NDP carbon tax. These groups have no jurisdiction in Alberta or interest in seeing us succeed. One organization even tweeted an image about how this new plan will keep over six million barrels of oil in the ground each and every day.

Shame on this government for rushing through this disastrous idea just to impress their friends in Paris. They say that this tax will be revenue neutral, but the revenues it generates will go straight back to the government and not back into the pockets of families who paid the tax in the first place. That is not revenue neutral, Mr. Speaker. That is a cunning tax grab. This is dramatic interference in the marketplace by an ideological government bent on risky ideas and economic experiments.

The Wildrose knows that there is no better social program than having everyday people having more money in their pockets to feed and support their families. The NDP has no mandate to bring this tax in. This government continues to kick Albertans when they're down. The Wildrose is the only party that will stand up for Albertans and fight against this government's carbon tax, which will make every family in this province poorer. We will be there for families every step of the way.

Thank you.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The Minister of Transportation and Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to give oral notice of a motion for tomorrow's Order Paper, that motion being:

Be it resolved that notwithstanding Government Motion 16 the Government House Leader may notify the Assembly that there shall be no evening sitting that day by providing notice under Notices of Motions in the daily Routine or at any time prior to 6 p.m.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the appropriate number of copies of tablings for the written responses to the questions from my Health estimates from last week.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to also table the requisite number of copies of written responses to questions I committed to follow up on in my budget estimates debate of November 16, 2015.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would also like to table the requisite number of copies in response to outstanding questions arising from the Standing Committee on Families and Communities, November 19, 2015, meeting in consideration of the main estimates for Human Services.

Thank you.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Ms Larivee, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Minister of Service Alberta, pursuant to the Government Organization Act the Petroleum Tank Management Association of Alberta annual report 2014. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Ceci, President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance, responses to questions raised by Mr. Fildebrandt, the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks; Mr. Cyr, the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake; Mr. Bhullar, the hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway; and Mr. McIver, the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, at the November 3, 2015, Ministry of Treasury Board and Finance 2015-16 main estimates debate.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I believe we are at the point of my dealing with some points of order. The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Point of Order

Referring to a Member by Name

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise on a point of order raised by a member present under 23(h) and (j), please, if you would: "makes allegations against another Member" and "uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder." The reason I use (j) is that the hon. minister knew full well that using that naming at this point would indeed cause or create some disorder in the House.

I refer you to *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, pages 613 and 614, and I'll quote from that. "During debate, Members do not refer to one another by their names." The minister actually did indeed use the member's name. On page 614: "The Speaker will not allow a Member to refer to another Member by name even if the Member speaking is quoting from a document such as a newspaper article." It goes on to say that "remarks directed specifically at another Member which question that Member's integrity, honesty or character are not in order."

I believe that under 23(j), indeed, it's been discussed in the House, it's caused disorder in the past, and the minister knew full well that using that statement would cause disorder in the House,

and I stand on that. We would ask that the minister apologize, and we can carry on.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The minister of economic development.

Mr. Bilous: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to this, that there is, in fact, no point of order. As members know and as the hon. member just pointed out, we cannot refer to members of this Chamber by name. What's interesting is that the member himself has used the term "Fildemath." I'll quote from *Hansard* on October 29.

The secrecy behind this announcement is concerning. The minister announced that of the 31 projects on the list, 25 were approved, meaning that six were not. If they're following the Fildemath, maybe they can know what's going on. The minister seems unwilling to tell us what the criteria were. Maybe she has good reason for cutting these projects; maybe she doesn't. Would she tell us why these projects were not approved?

At that time the hon. member did not raise a point of order against himself. You know, clearly, if that was not a point of order on October 29, then there is no point of order here today.

I do want to point out, Mr. Speaker, that the minister did not use the member's name. She did nothing other than what he has done in the past.

While I'm on my feet and we're talking about unparliamentary language, I'd also like to point out that the very member referred to the Minister of Health as mindless today. All members of this House are honourable, Mr. Speaker, and I think that language is close to the line of what is acceptable and what is not.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. member, do you have additional information to add?

Mr. Hanson: Just something I'd like to add.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I don't believe you get a second opportunity.

Is there another member who would like to speak to it? Is there another member that would like to speak to the discussion?

I have looked, very quickly, at the points being raised. I would point out to the hon. minister of economic development and to the member that I think I would be hard-pressed to say that when an individual member of the House chooses to use certain language, he or she owns it and has the responsibility of that. We all have that responsibility, so I'm not sure the argument that you're putting forward applies in the situation you're suggesting.

I would also suggest that all the members of this House realize that these kinds of words do have at times, depending on how they are used, an inflammation to the sore that already exists. I would very much like the members to please be much more conscious of these words. This is not a schoolyard. You have schoolchildren here, but that does not make this floor a schoolyard. I would ask each of you to not only respect each other but to respect the House and its traditions.

3:00

Notwithstanding those comments, the word that was used was not an actual reference to the individual member named. [interjection] I'm making the ruling right now, hon. member. Please. I would rule that there may be other times, but I do not believe that in this instance there's a point of order.

Orders of the Day Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 202 Alberta Local Food Act

The Chair: Would any hon. member choose to speak to this bill? The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you, Chair. I actually have an amendment to present, and I have the required copies to distribute. Should I just read through them or read them out?

The Chair: If you want to just give it a moment for the pages to distribute the amendment. We'll call this amendment A1.

Great. Hon. member, go ahead. Thank you.

Cortes-Vargas: Okay. Thank you. The amendments proposed were made from the lens of narrowing the focus of the bill and addressing the concerns that were discussed in the debate here in the Legislature and through consultations I've undertaken. As the list of amendments is long – it's two pages – I will make comments on the amendments by section.

Section 1 is amended in clause (e) by striking out subclauses (iii), (iv), (v), and (vi). Amendments to the definition of public-sector organization would narrow the focus to the advisory committees and would thus be for developing a realistic strategy that would recommend to schools, postsecondaries, and government.

Section 1 is amended in clause (f) by striking out "and Agriculture." The removal of "and Agriculture" throughout the document is done in an effort to narrow the scope and clearly identify the purpose of the bill, which has always been to be a driver for the local food economy by creating food security and improving, maximizing return on local food infrastructure. The striking out of "and Agriculture" will be seen throughout the document and will remain consistent, and I will no longer mention the strikeout.

Section 2 is amended by striking out clause (b) and substituting the following:

- (b) to improve and maximize economic return and food security by maintaining agricultural land for the purposes of farming;
- (b.1) to support the development of local food infrastructure for processing and distributing food.

The amendment divides and clarifies these two purposes, which the advisory committee will focus on.

The heading preceding section 3 is amended by striking out "and Agriculture."

Section 3 is also amended by striking out "and Agriculture," and "remuneration" is substituted for "renumeration." It's just a spelling error. They're pretty straightforward.

The heading preceding section 4 is amended by striking out "and Agriculture." Again, this is a change to emphasize the focus of the bill.

Section 4 is amended in subsection (1) by striking out "and Agriculture"; in subsection (2) by adding to clause (b) "recommendations for creating" before "long-term, mid-term and annualized targets" and by striking out subsection (c) and substituting the following: "(c) a public website including all recommendations included as part of the strategy"; in subsection

(3)(b) by striking out “, and” at the end of subclause (ii), by adding “and” at the end of subclause (i), and by striking out subclause (iii); in subsection (4) by adding to clause (a) “, organizations or groups” after “agricultural associations,” by adding to clause (b) “, organizations or groups” after “organic farming associations,” and by adding the following after clause (e): “(e.1) retail food associations.”

These changes have been made to reflect the actual intent of the advisory committee. The advisory committee will be struck with the duty to develop a strategy that improves our local food system, much like we saw with the climate change panel. That would facilitate this by adding recommendations for creating a committee that will be able to suggest viable options instead of mandating the public-sector procurement. Ensuring that public websites include all recommendations included as part of the strategy allows the committee to draft reports and collect data, but the local food sector is small enough that sharing the raw data itself will be limited to alleviating the concerns that a release of data would infringe on producers’ and processors’ right to privacy. As the committee is charged with consultation, “organizations and groups” include informal groups that we would often see. The inclusion of retail food associations is identified as important as they are an essential group in the local food system and its growth.

The heading preceding section 5 is struck out and the following is substituted: “Annual report.”

Section 5 is amended in subsection (1) by striking out “shall publish a report every 2 years” and substituting “shall publish a report annually”; in clause (a) by striking out “targets and”; in clause (b) by striking out “recommendations and targets during the preceding 2 years” and substituting “any recommendations for that year”; and in clause (c) by striking out “and targets in the next 2 years” and substituting “for the following year.” As the committee would be coming up with the plan, I believe that the progress should be available yearly, and accountability is essential to success.

Section 7 is struck out and the following is substituted:

Local Food Awareness Week

7 To promote the purchase of local food in Alberta, the Advisory Committee shall designate a week that shall be recognized each year throughout Alberta as Local Food Awareness Week.

Through the consultation process this change would charge the committee with identifying the best date for local food week to happen during the year so the effectiveness of the week is maximized.

Section 9 has been changed to define the act as coming into force on proclamation. This change is pretty standard, and it will allow for further consultation and public dialogue before it becomes law.

Thank you.

3:10

The Chair: Does any hon. member wish to speak to amendment A1? The hon. member for . . .

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. Yeah. It’s actually Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. They keep beating me up because we keep forgetting Sundre, so I don’t like to forget the guys back home.

There’s basically a lot in this document, and I’m not really sure how any member can in good conscience vote on this this quickly and actually know what is going on. I mean, this is pretty close to a rewrite of the entire bill, so I would suggest to the hon. member that she refer this to committee so we have some time to discuss this appropriately. If not, I can’t see how this caucus could vote on it in good conscience.

Thank you.

The Chair: Anyone else to speak to amendment A1? The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Yes. Thank you. I just want to echo my esteemed colleague from Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre; there are an awful lot of amendments here. We do have a parliamentary process in place called the committee, and I would very much like to see this bill go to committee so that we can discuss these amendments and the whole bill at length, go through it in a more fulsome manner than just ramming it through the House. So I would encourage the hon. member to refer this to committee so that we could have a good look at it and take a look at all of these different amendments that are in here. Indeed, in committee there may be some other amendments for improving this bill even further. I would ask the hon. member to do the honourable thing and make use of the legislative committees that we have in place for these things.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Yes, Madam Chair. I didn’t even receive a copy of this till after the presentation was over, so I haven’t even had a chance to read it yet. I don’t see how I can vote on it without time to consider it. I do think it needs to go to committee, or at least give us some time to read it since I didn’t even get a copy of it till after it was presented.

Thank you.

The Chair: Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Madam Chair. The two full pages of amendments that we’re seeing here in the short period of time since Bill 202 was first introduced show us that, you know, the bill itself was incomplete and deserves further study. It would be very unfair to ask us or any reasonable person to vote on an amendment of this complexity with this short notice. I use that term “any reasonable person,” okay?

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Any other hon. member wishing to speak to amendment A1? The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms McKittrick: Madam Chair, it’s really my pleasure to speak to the bill and especially to the amendments. I think the Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park has listened and has consulted widely not only with the constituents in her community but throughout the region, in Alberta. The amendments were written based on the feedback that she has received, so I would really like to urge the Assembly to support these amendments.

Thank you.

The Chair: Anyone else wanting to speak to the amendment? The hon. minister of economic development.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Chair. It’s my privilege to rise and speak in favour of this amendment. I appreciate some of the comments that the opposition has brought forward.

A couple of things. Much of this amendment is actually house-keeping in nature and cleaning up some language. There are a couple of points, though, that are a little more substantive, but I want to assure the members opposite that this amendment, that the hon. sponsor of this bill is putting forward, is based on feedback that they’ve garnered from engaging with the different industry

players, small and mid-size. This is something that they were asking for themselves.

I recognize that this can be a little bit of a challenge as far as getting an amendment and trying to flip back through the bill to go through it. I can tell you it's a challenge that we rose to for a number of years, in fact 44 years, going through different amendments that the government of the day put forward.

I do want to just highlight the fact that in part F, when it's talking about section 4, instead of mandating the targets, this is making recommendations for annualized targets, again coming at it from the point of view of targets that will be derived, that should be realized but that aren't being obligated to be met, so providing a little more flexibility in there.

The other section that I will highlight. In section 5 it's talking about reporting I believe it's yearly as opposed to every two years, which, again, just means that information will be more readily available.

Again, when I'm looking through the amendment, much of it is housekeeping in nature. Of course, section 9 is on the act coming into force upon proclamation.

I urge all members of the House to support this amendment, but I encourage further discussion with the mover of the bill should there be any. Thank you, Madam Chair.

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

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Chairperson. I just want to put a couple of things on the floor. First of all, again, I thank the member for her work. The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park and the hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade talked at length about having fully engaged Albertans and people in Alberta involved in the food industry.

My goodness, are we having a different experience with this bill. Alberta producers I talked to have clearly – clearly – told me that Alberta's extraregulatory framework, Alberta's extra regulations, have already put us at a definite competitive disadvantage to other provinces. They feel absolutely strongly that with a system now where entrepreneurs and Albertans want to have independence, have had strong independence and absolute proper and prime supply of all kinds of local foods, from beef production to bees and honey to farmers' markets, which has worked so well to provide excellent pricing, excellent supply, this kind of thing is going in absolutely the wrong direction.

How sure am I that these people are easy to engage? Again, I'm surprised by what the hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade and the hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park have indicated about this great discussion and communication with stakeholders. I already understand that in Lethbridge the government's first chance to communicate with farmers and ranchers about the bill changing occupational health and safety labour standards and workers' compensation is sold right out. People cannot get in. That's how eager this group is to be involved in the stakeholding.

I will say that my colleagues have adequate and real good reason to complain or to state that the intent of this bill is off, is missed on a strong industry that doesn't need help from the government, that doesn't need more government interference. I think, as one quick example, of abattoirs in my constituency that always talk about how many more there are in Saskatchewan, how much more competitive the industry is there, how much easier it is for the competition and the market mechanisms to hit the consumer in Saskatchewan than it is in Alberta. Guys, we're falling behind.

3:20

The intent of the bill is wrong. Some side of seven or eight amendments are thrown on our desks with no time to even try and make it more productive and more efficient for many, many of our good providers, many of them that are in their sixth generation of providing safe, quality, competitively priced food for all Albertans, all 4.3 million of us now. So I, too, will not support the amendments as I don't support the original bill.

When I had a chance to speak to this earlier, I talked about contrasting our food system. I talked about how you can walk into a farmers' market or how you can walk into a Safeway, a Superstore, a Costco and see such great selection, great variety, great prices. I ask the government to consider the comparison of that to Alberta Health Services, where it takes three years to get a semi-elective surgery. This is the area we're going down. You started down the wrong road. Now you're going down the wrong road way too fast. I ask that you consider what my colleagues said, and if you absolutely insist on passing this, let's at least move it to committee. These same people that are going to Lethbridge in record numbers to speak against your bill, your changes on occupational health and safety, workers' compensation, and labour standards without full consideration of the family farm, without full consideration of what these people have been doing for six generations, are easy to engage.

In the spirit of working together, I ask you to consider what my colleagues are saying. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other member wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Taylor: Yes. Some of these seem to me to be more kind of technical errors than feedback. I'm looking at it, and, you know, if in the two weeks' time since this was introduced, you've come up with this many errors or changes, I think this really kind of speaks to the point that we need to have a chance to take this to committee and review it further, in depth. If we take this and bring it up to some of the experts in the field and have them have a chance to look at it, I think we might be able to find a few more things that would be required to make a better bill. You should have more consultation on this before it gets passed.

I would just say that I would move to have this brought to committee rather than having it done this way. I can't support this amendment as it sits.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other member wishing to speak to the amendment?

If not, then we'll call the question on amendment A1 as proposed by the hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:24 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, S.	Gray	Nielsen
Babcock	Hinkley	Payne
Bilous	Horne	Phillips
Carson	Jansen	Piquette
Connolly	Kazim	Renaud
Coolahan	Kleinstauber	Rosendahl

Cortes-Vargas	Larivee	Sabir
Dach	Littlewood	Schmidt
Dang	Luff	Schreiner
Drever	Malkinson	Shepherd
Eggen	McIver	Sucha
Feehan	McKittrick	Turner
Fitzpatrick	Miller	Westhead
Ganley	Miranda	Woollard
Goehring		

3:40

Against the motion:

Aheer	Hunter	Pitt
Barnes	Loewen	Schneider
Cyr	MacIntyre	Starke
Drysdale	Nixon	Strankman
Ellis	Orr	Taylor
Gotfried	Panda	van Dijken
Hanson		

Totals: For – 43 Against – 19

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Chair: We are back on the bill. Are there any members who wish to speak to Bill 202? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Chair. I'll just be brief. I supported the amendment because I think it makes the bill less bad. If there was a further amendment to refer this to committee, I would also support that. But the bill as it is I couldn't possibly support unless it gets referred to committee.

The Chair: Any other member wishes to speak? The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise today to speak about Bill 202. It would be, I guess, correct to say: the amended Bill 202. I find it kind of interesting that in many places this government sought, in their absolute distinct efficiency as many times as they could, to take the word "agriculture" out of the bill because that is part and parcel of the heritage of this province and is very important to the economy. A prominent Drumheller radio broadcaster likes to use the words: if you eat, you're involved in agriculture. I find that to be quite an interesting, common-sense statement in many ways.

Madam Chair, as you know, I have been involved in agriculture and farming all my life. It's a subject that is not just a job, but it's a way of life. I'm confident in saying that I have some, if not a lot, or a considerable amount of experience in this matter. My other job, though, is representing my constituents, and as their MLA I find that an onerous responsibility. It's actually my second term, and with that they report to me mostly on a daily basis. My cellphone certainly gets the brunt of that. There are many things about being an MLA that are puzzling, and one such instance occurred to me, similar to this situation, when my private member's bill was sent to a form of committee. It was actually initially voted down in the Chamber and then brought back. At the time I felt that it was a straightforward piece. The only amendment, effectively, was to quash the bill or to take it to another form of activity not in the Chamber. We could have achieved that discussion here and now in this Chamber. It's kind of a *comme ci, comme ça* situation. I think that in some ways this bill and some of the writings in it and some of the amendments may have many unintended consequences as we go forward.

The intentions of Bill 202 – and I've spoken to the member from Strathcona-Sherwood Park presenting this. Some of the discussions that we had unfortunately didn't make it to the amendment. I find that kind of interesting. I presented those changes with no malice and with as much openness as I believed there could be. So I find it interesting that there are other changes that we discussed, actually, in regard to the valuation of land, the description of land, going forward here, that are not in the amendment.

Sometimes generalities go off, and the gaps are then filled in by regulations. I'm anxious to see what this committee could bring forward, this advisory-only committee, which I find troubling, Madam Chair, in many ways.

Madam Chair, I'd like to advise yourself and the Chamber that there are many various types of farming operations that utilize this type of market with positive results. Local, small farms, year-round greenhouses, and, indeed, full-scale farms are all able to sell their products directly to consumers and retailers, but in some cases they have different standards. This situation has no allowance for traceability, and I'm concerned with that.

How do we determine the scale and what type of agricultural operations fall under this legislation? Do local community gardens and backyard beekeepers and commercial farms or, indeed, Hutterite colonies qualify? Hutterite colonies, Madam Chairwoman, are actually family farms on a completely different scale. They operate on a large scale. With that, I wonder how future legislation – there are bills that are going to be in front of this House that may or may not affect those scales of operation.

One of the major questions that remains unanswered by this proposal is exactly what segment of agriculture this act is being designed for. What, exactly, is the definition of an agricultural producer under this bill? Is it simply the growers? What about the livestock producers? Will there be an exemption for poultry, for beef, for commercial poultry, for commercial beef, for volunteer beef production, for volunteer poultry production? We have that in our legislation, and it talks about the potentiality of conflict going forward here.

Madam Chair, how can the government ensure food stability without product safety and product traceability? In this situation people that sell their goods – and in some cases the pretense, if you will, of the bill is to have government agencies procure all their food for this, whether that be hospitals, whether that be schools, whether that be seniors' care, whether that be penal institutions. They have to have a method of traceability for their food for safety going forward. I don't see that in this bill, and I'm anxious to see how this can be brought forward with an advisory committee. There's no definitive methodology to bring this forward. Under the agricultural producers act there is. I don't know how this can all be actually brought forward in a form that can create steady annual production or steady annual income for those people.

3:50

If it is required that numerous producers are needed to meet these public-sector needs and there is an issue with an agriproduct and an illness or issue arises, how will this act ensure that the traceability of supply is guaranteed? We don't have that in this situation. Traceability and safety of the food chain is paramount. How does this government propose to ensure that local producers meet the same requirements current commercial producers have in order to have their products enter the supply chain? There are no definitive requisitions within this act that would allow that. Having people produce food on open city blocks, that are open to the public or public vandalism, not unlike with commercial producers, there is no way and no methodology for the regulation of the chemicals that

are applied. There is no soil testing to the soil that the food is being grown on. So there is an unreliable methodology of the food that comes from that source.

Madam Chair, the processing act of this has implications as well. Processing of local food: how, for example, will local producers deal with the regulations and requirements regarding the slaughter and/or processing of livestock? I have spoken to the minister of agriculture on this very subject, and we have several small producers threatened by litigation by marketing boards even now as it is. They are voluntarily and, if I could say, Madam Chair, cooperatively coming together to market their own eggs, and they are facing the full brunt of the egg producers' marketing boards. Sometimes it's a good thing, and sometimes it's a bad thing. We need to know. If this is as successful as the member purports it to be, how could it actually possibly fit into the agricultural marketing boards' laws and acts that we have in the province?

I have discussed in this House previously the example of food supply. For the past four to five years the Canadian beef industry has not had cattle numbers large enough to supply Canada with our own ground beef. We, therefore, import trim to make into ground beef. For example, A & W imports Australian trim to mix with Canadian hormone-free, antibiotic-free, 50-50 trim that is obtained from grain-fed Canadian cattle. Public-sector organizations' ground beef purchases will almost always have an offshore component due to existing regulations. The rules and regulations governing slaughter and inspection will make the processing of small producers' livestock cost prohibitive.

That's the issue with the small producers marketing act. It's not the bent of the bill; it's the actual physical regulations that come into play in regard to food safety and liabilities that relate to that. Will the government be forced to mandate these processing plants to take in small batches of livestock in order to allow sales under the Alberta Local Food Act? These are some of the things that come forward. Or will the government open its own facilities to make sure all producers comply and compete under equal and fair rules?

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Does any other hon. member wish to speak on the bill? The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and don't feel bad when you miss it. Try saying that over and over in a speech several times in an evening; it can be awkward.

First of all, I'd like to congratulate the member for stepping forward and showing an interest in a rather interesting agriculture initiative. The overlying goal outlined by this bill, to encourage growth in one sector of our larger agrifood industry, certainly seems noble. I'm sure we all would enjoy increased access to affordable, fresh, locally grown food. However, as my friend and colleague from Drumheller has previously pointed out, the methods outlined by this bill leave many more questions than answers. The legislation seems to indicate that government is considering giving public bodies a mandate to buy local. It naturally begs several questions. Who is local? Who decides what should or should not be purchased from whom? Are the food producers in power to seek the most economical options? If not, who will pay the additional costs? The questions, Madam Chair, are endless while the answers are in short supply.

The fact is that there is no way to implement this legislation without creating a new bureaucracy and opposing additional reams of regulations and red tape. I know this government has staked an ideological position on this issue, but the truth is that you simply cannot regulate an economy into growth. However, if you want agriculture growth, there's a better place to start. Try asking

farmers. When you do, they will tell you that the number one barrier to selling their food locally has always been regulations. Whether it was the Canadian Wheat Board, CFIA regulations, or Alberta Health Services' periodic hunts on church bake sales, the number one obstacle between local food producers and consumers is government. The fact is that all Alberta farmers are local farmers and all the food they produce is local food.

Madam Chair, do you know who excels at finding markets for their products? Once again it's our farmers. The proof is readily apparent. Many of the socialist naysayers predicted absolute doom when western Canadian farmers were given the ability to market their own wheat. Instead, the agriculture sector grew like never before. It is no coincidence that the most effective system our farmers have for connecting with local consumers is also one of the least regulated, farmers' markets. If this government wishes to get serious about encouraging local food, it would focus on reducing regulatory barriers rather than imposing new ones.

Unfortunately, this has not been the NDP government's approach to agricultural issues to date. On Bill 6, for instance, which is comparable in some ways to this, the government has chosen to regulate first and consult later. Not only does charging ahead with bills like this and Bill 6 without consultation fly in the face of this government's pledge to do business differently, but it directly impacts the growth and long-term viability of smaller farms, the same farms that currently provide honey, vegetables, and other in-demand raw food. In fact, when it comes to ensuring growth in our local food sector, Bill 6 will do more harm than any good that can be accomplished through Bill 202. When it comes to debating Bill 6, I hope the government will remember this. All farmers are local farmers, and all the food they grow is local food.

Now, Madam Chair, I would like to turn my attention to another matter, efficiency. One of my chief concerns with this legislation is that it seems designed to encourage farmers to embrace less efficient production methods and reject modern innovation. Taking one of the largest sectors of Alberta's economy back a generation may make fine socialist policy, but it ignores some inconvenient truths. Like it or not, we live in a globalized world. The wheat, barley, canola, and livestock grown here sells to markets around the world at a global price. Reducing production here not only holds back Alberta's economy but also raises the price of food in developing countries.

This is not a hypothetical argument. Increased production will be vital. Global population is expected to reach 9.3 billion in 2050. Leading experts tell us that the world will need 70 per cent more food by 2050. As a leading agriculture producer, the world will be looking to provinces like Alberta to help meet the growing demand. We won't meet this demand by embracing less productive agriculture projects. Rather, I suggest we look at history.

In the mid-20th century the war-torn nations of Pakistan and India were experiencing widespread famine despite the availability of vast tracts of arable albeit poor land. At the same time an American with a PhD in plant pathology and genetics was conducting research in Mexico. Concentrating on boosting wheat production, he led a team that would work with nitrogen-based fertilizers to improve poor soil. The wheat varieties grown there had tall, thin stalks unable to carry the weight of plum grain grown with fertilizer. To counteract that, the team put its effort into refining a variety that had shorter, thicker stems. The new variety was particularly well suited to the Asian subcontinent and set a revolution off in food production, saving millions of lives in India and Pakistan. The variety was called dwarf wheat, and the man who gave this gift to the world was Norman Borlaug. He was awarded the Nobel peace prize in 1970.

There have been several agriculture revolutions since that time, each time giving us the ability to increase production and ensure that food remains affordable for all. Turning our back on this innovation would have been short sighted and sends a dangerous message to the world: it's our land, it's our food, and we don't care about you. Madam Chair, sending such a message is not in keeping with our values. From the time of Confederation Canada has always been a trading nation, and in times of world calamity we have stepped forward to help feed the world.

Let's not stop now even if it means taking further time to study this well-intended private member's bill. I say "well-intended" because I believe that is exactly what Bill 202 is insofar as it was drafted with the intention of encouraging growth in an albeit small sector of our large agrifood industry. However, the bottom line, Madam Chair, is that the bill seems designed to create more bureaucracy, more regulation, and encourage farmers to adopt less efficient production practices. The goal may be noble, but the methods are naive in numerous respects. Let's not call this progress. There is nothing progressive about this legislation, and it should be defeated.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Do any other members wish to speak? The hon. Minister of Economic Development.

4:00

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to rise and speak in favour of this bill. I'd like to clarify a few points that both the previous speaker and the Member for Drumheller-Stettler articulated a few minutes ago. First and foremost, this bill is about food security. I mean, some of the members opposite are trying to equate this bill to previous policies in other countries and talking about how this is going to have a hurtful effect on the Alberta economy. Not at all, hon. members. This is about, again, improving food security but also about striking an advisory group to come back with a strategy to government, to all of us, actually, within 12 months. I appreciate the fact that maybe you're trying to speak to your constituents, but, you know, interpreting this bill for what it's not is not helping anyone.

I do want to mention that the hon. member who is the sponsor of this bill did have numerous conversations with the opposition and actually not only took into account some of their recommendations, but they were in the amendment that we recently put forward. I find it interesting that the Member for Drumheller-Stettler spoke about how we removed the word "agriculture," yet that was his request, to remove the word "agriculture" in order to focus the bill and provide a little more clarity. I mean, at first we take his recommendation, and now we're being criticized for taking his recommendation. I don't understand. You can't have it both ways, hon. members.

The other thing that I want to clarify is that I believe it was the same member who asked for – under section 4(3)(b)(iii), "an examination of valuation of agricultural land" has been struck out. Again, it was the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler's request to the sponsor of the bill that that be removed. We, in fact, did that.

We listened to opposition comments in order to strengthen this bill, which is something that we've talked about numerous times as a government, that we want to work with all members in this House, and again this is proof of doing just that. So you can imagine my surprise and confusion when members opposite are – well, I don't want to use the word "attack," but you are criticizing us for doing exactly what you've asked us to do. You can imagine that that's quite confusing from this point of view. Again, I'll save the political comments.

The purpose of this bill, again, is really about empowering a group to come up with a strategy to enhance Alberta's food security. This is not about limiting access. This is not about telling farmers what they can and cannot grow or where they can or cannot sell their products. This is about encouraging local food production for local needs. We completely appreciate the fact that much of the food that is grown in our province is used for export, and we want to continue to work with our agricultural sector and our farmers to do just that. Again, market access is one of my priorities, and looking at ways to enhance that within Canada but also internationally is a priority. So I just wanted to get up and clarify a few of these points.

You know, what the hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park has put forward is really a bill that empowers, again, our own local producers. This is focused more on a strategy moving forward, not on forcing certain action. The other thing, too, is that some of the amendments, like I said earlier, were recommendations from the opposition that we in fact took, and the hon. member included them in her amendment, again showing that we're looking for best ideas, not which party they come from.

I urge all members of the House to support this bill. Let's move it out of committee. There's been great debate thus far, but I'd love to move this into third reading and continue our dialogue at that point.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's another opportunity to talk about local food production and agriculture in Alberta and to talk about how it specifically would be impacted by Bill 202, the Alberta Local Food Act. You know, what I would say is that what we have here essentially is a difference of opinion as to the best way to promote something.

On the side of the government we have the opinion that the best way to promote something is by creating a committee and then going ahead with some government intervention. On this side, for the most part, I think that what we're saying is that those measures should only be used when it is demonstrably effective to in fact implement those measures. If any argument was offered during the course of this debate in second reading that would indicate that government intervention or stepping in with an advisory committee, with a report, with measurements, all of which cost money – all of which cost money – that should happen only if indeed it can be demonstrated that the sector needs assistance and that, in fact, the objectives that are stated are not being achieved because of a lack of that committee or that action.

Well, I would argue that the hon. member that moved Bill 202 provided in her opening comments the strongest possible indication that Bill 202 is, in fact, not necessary. I quote once again – and this is directly quoting from her speech in *Hansard* – "95 per cent . . . of Alberta households are using or want to [use] food grown or made in Alberta." That's pretty hard to improve upon. If you're already hitting 95 per cent, you know, to achieve an incremental advantage in getting those last 5 per cent of Albertans convinced that they, too, should join the crowd, I would suggest to you, is going to be very difficult. In addition, some of the other statistics that were quoted: the number of farmers' markets is up 27 per cent since 2010; the market value of products marketed through farmers' markets is up 64 per cent; with people involved in local food enterprises, there's a 77 per cent increase in investment in business, a 94 per cent increase in sales growth, a 78 per cent increase in profitability, and a 96 per cent increase in gaining new customers.

You know, Madam Chair, this is a great increase, and it's all happening, if you'll forgive the term, organically. It's happening without government intervention. It's happening without a committee, without reports, without targets being set. It's all happening and being driven naturally by Albertans. It concerns me when we have a government that feels that that process has to be somehow interfered with or that there has to be some sort of government intervention in that process. I'm not saying that I don't necessarily trust it, and I'm not saying that government intervention is wrong in all situations, but I'm concerned when there's government intervention in something that clearly is already working pretty well.

In my speech on Bill 202 I outlined a number of areas of local food initiatives that I'm familiar with in my constituency. Really, you know, these are scattered throughout constituencies all around our province. We saw it during the course of Alberta Farm Days, and this is the kind of thing that I really think is a very strong argument against the need for this sort of thing happening.

You know, one of the things that is a fundamental property during the course of any debate on any issue is: is there a need for change? Is there a demonstrable need that the current situation must be changed? I would submit to the members of the Assembly that there is no demonstrable need for change in this situation, that a great deal of success is already occurring.

With regard to the comments by the hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade with regard to consultation, I found them rather interesting because our caucus – we're still here – raised a number of issues that we had with regard to this piece of legislation, but we were not consulted on any suggested amendments. Specifically, in my speech I indicated that I had a great deal of difficulty with the latitude that was allowed to the Lieutenant Governor in Council – in other words, cabinet – under section 8, entitled Regulations. Indeed, section 8, regulations, gives an incredible amount of power to cabinet. In other words, regulations can be developed in cabinet without any further consultation, without any further debate here in the Legislature. Specifically, clause 8(c) – and I'll state it again – allows for the making of regulations “concerning any additional matter or thing that is necessary or advisable in connection with the implementation of this Act.”

4:10

That is an incredibly open-ended statement that, I submit – and I'm not a lawyer – could be interpreted in a way to allow such a broad degree of powers, depending on what the implemented measure was, that I simply do not entirely trust the regulatory power that this bill will ascribe to cabinet. I just think that it is overreaching, and I think it's especially overreaching in a situation where things are already happening and happening quite well.

This bill has failed to demonstrate a need for change. This bill has failed to demonstrate that intervention is required. Finally, it has failed to demonstrate that the measures that are being recommended – the committee, the recommendations, the targets, and all the other things that are recommended in the bill – will in fact improve the situation. None of those things have been satisfied in the case of this bill. If those things cannot be satisfied and especially given that this is a private member's bill, on which we can vote freely, and that there is no whipped vote – or at least theoretically there is no whipped vote – I would mention to my colleagues and I would state to my colleagues that this bill should not be passed in its current form.

Now, if we want to see it passed, if we can understand the idea behind it or if we can support the basis behind it, one way to do that is to take it out of the methodology of consideration within private members' business, which has very limited timelines, and move it

to committee and allow committee to delve into some of these matters more deeply. At that point we could possibly come up with the wording of a bill that would then be acceptable across the House, and we could move forward. But in its current form and even with the amendments that were passed, which, I would suggest, are relatively minor and don't really change the bill that much, the egregious parts of the bill are still present. They have not been removed from the bill, and they don't demonstrate in any way, shape, or form that the bill is in fact going to accomplish the goals that are stated.

For those reasons, Madam Chair, I will be voting against this bill.

The Chair: Any other hon. members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Madam Chair. While the idea of local food is, in fact, a truly great idea, which I don't think anybody would be opposed to, obviously with the number of amendments that have been presented, the bill has not been thought through carefully. It was not well presented, which has created some of the reaction to it, quite clearly, and it does cause me to fear. If thinking about farm issues are that quickly rushed forward without even clearly thinking them through, what's going to happen with the WCB farm safety bill? We all know we need farm safety, but are we going to see 20 or 30 or 40 or 50 amendments on that one as well, because there was no consultation prior to actually presenting the bill? Those are my problems with it primarily.

Does anyone actually plan to talk to producers or processors or marketers – and all three of those are essential to any kind of food marketing, any kind of food production – with regard to this bill before enacting it? An urban, Birkenstock version of farming just doesn't really do it in the real world; quite frankly, Birkenstocks aren't WCB-approved anyway, so they wouldn't fit in the field. Anyway, I do have concerns about the way this thing has been just haberdashed together and then immediately rewritten, and I wonder if it'll be rewritten again.

Especially in a year that's been extremely difficult for Albertans, with as many people unemployed as we have seen, who've lost their jobs, now we have a government that's not only increasing taxes on almost everything but also creating bureaucracies on almost everything that they can. I do agree with much of what my colleague from Lloydminster has just finished saying about the additions of bureaucracies not really going to the results that are required. I just fear that this government is proving again to be a disappointment in regard to overreaching into the Alberta marketplace, a marketplace that they fundamentally don't understand or have the knowledge or the experience to deal with well.

The intention of the bill is to create a stable market through public-sector food purchasing, which, in fact, contradicts a lot of economic realities. The bill outlines wide-sweeping goals but doesn't really express much in terms of how these vague definitions will be achieved. I rise today to ask the government: exactly how will this bill affect Albertans, and what can Albertans realistically expect from this conversation?

To begin with, I think we would all like to know how this government will decide, for instance, which public-sector entities will be making purchases and what the process is to decide which farms will be able to act as vendors. Is the government going to work to create another delayed sunshine list of producers, of who will be picked and who will be missing out? Is it going to be sole-sourced contracting of some kind? There are so many unanswered questions here in this whole thing.

As has already been said, a lot of this kind of producing, processing, and marketing is already taking place in very, very real

ways. The reality is that the advent of Internet communications has made it possible for farmers all over this province to be marketing directly from their farm gate, and they are, so I don't understand what the value of bureaucracy is going to accomplish. I have my doubts that the government really understands the complexities of the food industry. As has already been said, there are a multitude of factors that affect producers and everything that they do, the whole processing aspect of it, and then the marketing aspect of it. There are three stages there in the value chain for food, and food does not get to your plate without actually going through all of those three processes. The reality is that very, very few individuals can have a completely vertically integrated market and successfully do all three of them at once.

Moreover, the agriculture sector is interwoven into the fabric of international trade deals in this country, whether we like it or not. I fear that this legislation may ultimately be impacted by that, because whatever the recommendations are that are brought forward, then the next step is going to be to want to act on them, and that may throw us up against the issue of international trade deals. By giving government bodies the mandate that they have to buy local, will the NDP be opening up the government of Alberta to an endless stream of lawsuits from our trade partners? They've already shown that they are more than willing to do that. Agrifood issues are often on the forefront of international trade negotiations. Nations that are viewed as too protectionist often lose out on signing new deals, which destroys the prospect of increasing their trade network. While I think the government pays a lot of lip service and has good intentions for the economic diversification of our food industries, actions like these show that the priorities sometimes are quite the opposite.

If the NDP is really serious about helping out smaller scale farms, why are they continually pushing for policies that make Alberta a harder place to do business? Year-round greenhouses contribute significantly to the production of local food, and they do it without subsidies or bureaucratic intervention, quite frankly, but economically these businesses have a very high input cost due to the amount of natural gas needed to heat a greenhouse in minus 40 weather. Are we really to believe that the new carbon tax is going to help these small producers be more competitive?

What about the example of meat-packing facilities? These facilities carry a very large overhead in regard to their electrical bill due to refrigeration. Keeping an animal cold for 21 days, which is standard practice, consumes a lot of electricity, especially with the volumes. What is the NDP's plan to help with this value-added step in the local food industry? Is shutting down power plants ahead of schedule and increasing the cost of electricity supposed to make it so that more meat producers can do business in this province? Clearly, there's a lot of homework to be done on this issue.

We've also learned that the government intends to be policing thousands of acres of farmland as well. How will these inspectors realistically help local food production when they're out there performing their inspections? This bill calls for an advisory committee, which will be handed a blank cheque from the minister's office.

4:20

Recently we've seen the NDP's version of accountability when making appointments. Well, I'm not allowed to use the name, so I won't. Someone was recently appointed to the Manning centre, but there was no appropriate consultation on that. The advisory committee will just be another soft landing place for NDP candidates. How is the minister going to decide who sits on these committees?

Clearly, in my mind, the bill has not been thought through. All of the amendments prove that. It does nothing more than increase the bureaucracy and the obstacles to small business and local food production that this government continues to pile on Albertans. We need less bureaucracy, not more bureaucracy, and food will flourish.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to rise and speak to Bill 202, which on the face of it makes a lot of sense for Alberta. I don't know what the proportion of local food consumption and sale is. I hear statistics that it's increasing. That's good. I think that anything we can do to improve the access of people in this province to local food production is good for business. It's good for the environment. It's good, I think, for nutrition if we know and have control over what kind of exposures to chemicals our own local food has. We are not entirely sure because only a sampling of food that comes across the border is tested for various contaminants. Anything we can do to promote local food, I think, is a good thing.

I like the amendments that the hon. member has put forward, and I certainly think that there's an opportunity here that we shouldn't throw out of hand. If we're going to create a committee that's going to actually examine the market system, communications around local food, how we can enhance, perhaps, efficiencies in local food production, if there are some ways that government can facilitate through regulation greater access to local food and promote the growth of local food, especially organic foods, it seems to me that this is an opportunity not only to diversify our economy but also to improve the business climate for small-business people, especially, obviously, food producers, trucking agencies, wholesale and retail markets.

While I appreciate the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster's concerns about giving too much power to put in regulations through an order in council or whatever, I think that's a little far fetched given that all we're doing here is creating a committee to actually examine the benefits and opportunities and how we can actually help, in a way, facilitate what is already growing, to be sure, but could be growing faster, could be benefiting Alberta more, and could be helping us to move into a stronger position economically. I'm not as concerned as my colleague. If we're promoting the purchase of local food in Alberta and adding value and adding potentially safer food, I'm very anxious to support that.

Thanks, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Chair. My family many years ago decided that we would like to eat a little healthier, and my wife convinced me of being able to eat locally grown food. I think it's a great idea. I think it's a fantastic idea, that I personally support. I guess the question that I've come to is: does this need to be a government initiative versus a private initiative? This is something that the free market will automatically promote and that individual consumers will automatically promote. I think that there is education that could be done on this issue, and I do believe that there's actually already education being done. I think that some of the information that I received a couple of years ago, as I said, came from just local individuals saying that the health benefits of eating locally produced produce is valuable.

Really, the concern for me is not that this isn't a good thing. I believe it is a very good thing, and I think that it will help promote the healthy practices of our families. I guess the concern that I have is that when the government gets involved, what is the outcome? What are the consequences to that?

There are some real concerns that I have as I kind of look through the purposes of this act, the first purpose being "to ensure a resilient, sustainable and strong local food economy and agricultural land base in Alberta." Now, the first question that I have is: how do you ensure that? I think that's something that some governments have tried to accomplish, with very little success. I would have to say that probably one of the worst examples of not working are the Communist countries of the Soviet Union. They did try to ensure a stable, resilient, strong local food economy, and they shut the borders. They were hopeful to be able to accomplish that, and it didn't work there. Now, I know that this is more of a microeconomic model that we're talking about, but the principle still stands. If it doesn't work on a macro scale, most likely it won't work on a micro scale.

The other thing that I question is that promotion of local consumption is something that is not just practised by provincial governments but also by the federal government in terms of trade. I'll give you an example of supply chain management. With supply chain management farmers in certain farm sectors, such as with cheese and milk products, have created trade barriers that stop us from being able to buy from outside sources. That was an initiative, I think, to be able to buy locally. Unfortunately, the cost of that to us is three times the cost of cheese. You can buy cheese for three times less across the border in the United States than you could in Alberta. Is this the kind of outcome that we want from this kind of legislation? Is this another measure of supply chain management, which is a federal issue? On a provincial issue do we need to exacerbate this kind of a problem?

You know, one of the things that it says here in terms of purposes is "to increase public awareness of local food in Alberta, including the diversity of local food." I actually applaud that as a purpose. I believe that that's very important. We should be promoting local producers and diversification in our food, and I think that that is a very good role the government can facilitate. That again goes back to educate versus legislate, and it's something that I think needs to be the mantra of this House on many other bills as well. The education of people, I do believe, happens from people in general, amongst each other, through social media, and through the value of eating locally. Is it really something that needs to be done on a provincial level by the provincial government? I question whether that's the reality.

The other thing. It says here: "to promote sustainable farming practices." I think the reality is that sustainable farming practices are best identified by farmers who are successful. That's the best sustainable farming practice that I can think of, and it would probably be the best for this House to recognize. Sustainable means that it's going to last in that it has a proven track record, that it's capable of being able to carry on, not just now but in the future. Usually when the government gets involved, what I've seen is that they get it wrong because they're not in the industry. We don't know everything about every industry. So allowing the industries to be able to make the choices and to determine their course of action is really what Adam Smith taught us about hundreds of years ago. He taught us about the invisible hand, with the invisible hand being the market forces, and how supply and demand and the equilibrium price work. That decides for us how markets should ebb and flow.

4:30

Usually when the government gets involved, it messes up that supply-and-demand equilibrium price. This is a classic example of the supply chain management on the federal side, where we are paying three times what it costs for cheese or double what it costs for milk. If we start to try to micromanage an economy, there are too many nuances involved in an economy that we get it wrong. This is the reason why – even as much as I, personally, in our family, on a microscale follow this already. We've already bought into it a few years ago. We believe that this is something that we need to do, that we need to eat more locally grown food, that it's a healthier product, healthier for our families. But in terms of the application of this from a provincial level, I am not in favour of this, and that's why I'll be voting against this.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Are there any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Madam Chair. Just a couple of small items. I'm happy to speak to the amended Bill 202. Speaking of the amendment, it was brought forward by the Minister of Economic Development and Trade. A couple of comments made by the Member for Drumheller-Stettler regarding the amendments and how he had – actually, some of the amendments corrected some of the discussion that's been had by the member with the member proposing. Now, it kind of brings me to my point, the fact that we were delivered this amendment, two full pages, a lot of legalese, and given about 10 minutes to look at it. Now, had the member had maybe 24 hours to discuss and go through and strike out the sections before he made his speech, he may not have mentioned those two points. I guess it's very important that – you know, that's a good lesson to everyone in the House, that maybe if there is an amendment, we should be given a little bit of time to digest it before we start to discuss it.

The other thing is the concern that I have when it comes to delivering goods and services to an institution. We've struck out quite a few of them: "a facility within the meaning of section 1 of the Mental Health Act," the Hospitals Act, or the Nursing Homes Act. But we've still left in quite a few sections: "a department, branch or office of the Government of Alberta," "an agency, board or commission of the Government of Alberta." Then it follows with "a school or post-secondary institution in Alberta the enrolments of which . . ." and it goes on.

Now, my concern is that after the year that we've had in Alberta, with very unpredictable whether – we have drought conditions. You can have pests. A lot of the farmers up in our area are dealing with an issue with clubroot. That's to do with canola. You know, that stuff with the yellow flowers on it. At the point where a farmer or a group has made a commitment to an institution to supply them with, let's say, carrots or potatoes, and they have a drought or a disease come through and wipe out their crop or significantly wipe out their crop, who then becomes responsible to fulfill those contracts? It could be very, very expensive and almost to the point of breaking a local supplier if they had to all of a sudden start fulfilling contracts for a year or on a yearly basis that they've made with one of these huge institutions. That's a concern.

The second one is when it comes to what's already taking place in the province. We've already got, you know, associations that deal with the large greenhouses. I had mentioned Sunshine Food. They supply Sobeys. They supply Extra Foods with locally grown foods. They can buy up anything that a greenhouse can produce. As a matter of fact, I had a proposal with a group from Two Hills that was going to produce five acres of cucumbers, lettuce, carrots,

happens every Friday at 1 o'clock. I'll tell you what. It's the quality of produce, how clean it is, and its price. Those folks in there work that out in a hurry. If you want to sell your produce and get home, it's good quality, it's clean, it's packaged, and the price is right. Now, if we take that away from them by infringing legislation on them and competition with larger groups, it's only going to serve to hurt the small producers. Again, I stress that my main concern is fulfilling contracts. There's a lot of legality here, and I don't think that a lot of these smaller producers can afford to get into a legal battle with an institution where they've said: "Okay. You're going to supply us with carrots every week." "Well, we have a crop failure. Now what do I have to do? I have to go out and buy carrots from Mexico or South America to fulfill my contract." So I guess that's my concern.

The other part of it is that after a mere two weeks on a six-page document, we've got two pages of amendments. Now, I understand that some of the amendments are just verbiage and that they were discussed with our shadow minister for agriculture, and a lot of these things did make sense and were passed. We thank you for considering those. My concern is that if we can find within two weeks two pages of amendments to this document without any chance to discuss it, what are we going to do in further bills that are a lot more complex, that just try to get rushed through the House in a matter of a couple of days without any discussion or going to committee? On those grounds themselves I think the bill is not bad. It could use some tweaking, and with a little bit further discussion we could probably have something that's more workable to the common small producers in Alberta. On those grounds alone I'll be voting against this bill.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other hon. member wishing to speak?

The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Madam Chair. At this time I would like to propose an amendment to Bill 202.

The Chair: This will be known as amendment A2.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Madam Chair. In light of the discussion with regard to this bill, the Minister of Economic Development and Trade referred to it as a food security bill only. I see that there are many different aspects of this bill that I would question the validity of. But when we talk about a food security bill, I see that in section 6, public sector procurement of local food, "the Minister, in collaboration with the Advisory Committee, shall consider ways to increase the procurement of local food by public sector organizations as part of the strategy."

In my opinion, this bill is becoming more than just a bill on food security. It is also implementing a strategy to increase the procurement of local food by public-sector organizations without really putting any guidelines into the description of that. I would propose that if we truly are concerned about food security and that food security is the basis of the formation of this bill, we would consider, then, to amend Bill 202 by striking out section 6.

The Chair: Any others wishing to speak to amendment A2? The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

4:40

Cortes-Vargas: Okay. I think there needs to be clarity brought forward that one of the amendments in the previous one is to create recommendations, not to mandate public-sector procurement but to create recommendations of what is feasible. The strategy would

address what barriers are faced by public-sector procurement so that they could possibly decide – not mandated, decide. If they want to access local food, they can do it. Are you discouraging public sectors from accessing local food? I really don't think that it's necessary. I think that the amendment provided a circumstance and a way for it to have flexibility and to evaluate the feasibility, and it addressed the issues that you had brought forward. You know, what are the things that make it difficult for the public sector, the contracts? All of those things need to be brought forward in a strategy to answer those questions. That is what this bill is asking for. It's asking to strike a committee that would evaluate the feasibility for the public sector for local food systems to be improved – what are the barriers addressed? – to create a committee that would be voices for the local food system.

Now, I don't think the concept of the amendments that I brought forward was really understood. There is no longer a mandate for the public-sector procurement. To take this part out is to discourage any progress, so I discourage voting for this.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment A2?

Mr. Hanson: I'll speak to that one.

The Chair: Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd just like to point out that, under purposes, under section 2, "the purposes of this act are as follows," under section (c), "to provide an increased and stable demand for local food through public sector organization purchasing." To me, that speaks to legislation when we're talking about government. Okay. I mean, we go through the process, under definitions of the act, of listing which departments or branches of the government of Alberta will be involved in this. We've gone through the motion in the amendment to purposely strike out four different types of organizations, but we still left three in. Then we go and say again in (c), "to provide an increased and stable demand for local food through public sector organization purchasing." Now, to me, that tells me that you're going to legislate and force these organizations to purchase locally.

Cortes-Vargas: The act doesn't give that power. The act is asking to strike a committee.

Mr. Hanson: An act is law. An act is law.

Cortes-Vargas: No; I understand.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Madam Chair. The hon. member who's proposing this bill made a statement a moment ago that said that this is nothing more than a recommendation. Frankly, we don't need a law to make a recommendation. The government of Alberta doesn't need a law to make a recommendation. Bill 202 is a law. It's not a motion urging the government to do something. Perhaps what's really going on here is that this should have been a motion and not really a bill. When you enact a law, this is a law. That's where this bill is headed, to be a law. We don't need a law telling the government to recommend things. It's just silly.

The other thing I have a problem with is that we don't need a law to strike an advisory committee either, yet here we have another advisory panel. I just went through Sunday, and the outcome of one of this government's advisory panels just hit the people of Alberta with a \$3 billion tax bill, so I'm a little bit gun shy when it comes to this government's proposing that we need another advisory

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There are already mechanisms within this Legislature to act as advisory panels to government. They're called standing committees, legislative committees. I am very concerned that this government is so fast to call for advisory panels but is not making use of the legislative mechanisms we already have in place, which are the standing committees, who could then call on Albertans to come and consult and to speak to these bills, have expert witnesses come. This is the consultative process that our forefathers thought was a good idea, so they created these standing committees, which are not being utilized by this government. Instead, you're going time and again to advisory panels, which are expensive, which do not make use of the legislative process we have in place. Is it that you don't trust legislative committees? Is it that, you know, there are people out there you're trying to support by putting them on your advisory panels? What is exactly the problem with having these bills go before the legislative committees that are in place to do this kind of work, to bring people in to give testimony? If we went before a legislative committee, we may find that there are other errors, other omissions, other things that could be included in this.

I agree with my colleagues who have come before me and have said that the intent of this is fine but that it needs help. Quite frankly, you know, when it comes to public-sector purchases, there is already no barrier that I'm aware of hindering the public sector from buying things anywhere that they want to. It is known, for your education and elucidation, as free-market enterprise. We have the freedom to buy wherever we want to buy, and the public sector can do the same. I don't need someone legislating to me where I can buy carrots or not buy carrots, thank you very much. I don't believe that we need to be legislating this kind of a thing. In my opinion, it is a waste of legislative process, especially when you are already not making use of the legislative process that's in place to consider these things. They're called committees.

I cannot support this bill, and that's all I have to say. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other member wishing to speak to amendment A2?

Mr. Hanson: Just a note. The member who posed the amendment: is he not able to close the amendment?

The Chair: He can speak again, but there is not a formal closing of the debate.

Mr. Hanson: So he can speak again? Sorry; he didn't realize that.

The Chair: He could speak again if he wished.

Mr. Hanson: Can we let him go? Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. van Dijken: Sorry for that, Madam Chair. I thought I would be asked to stand to speak.

The Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park stated that the amendments brought forward today, in striking out from section 1(e) items (iii), (iv), (v), and (vi), would essentially accomplish the

intent of my motion to strike out section 6. When we have as one of the purposes within our proposed bill purpose 2(c), "to provide an increased and stable demand for local food through public sector organization purchasing," I would have hoped that if that intent was clear, that would have been struck out also.

I would encourage everyone to consider striking out section 6 in the interest that this would be then a food security bill more so than a food procurement bill.

The Chair: Thank you.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Chair: All right. We are back on the main bill. Any further comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to Bill 202?

If not, then we will call the question.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 202 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

4:50

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I move that the committee rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Feehan: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 202. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 205

Persons with Developmental Disabilities Services (Public Consultation) Amendment Act, 2015

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

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm incredibly happy to rise today and commence second reading of my private member's bill, Bill 205, Persons with Developmental Disabilities Services (Public Consultation) Amendment Act, 2015.

On December 3, 1992, the United Nations established observance of an international day of disabled persons. The United Nations declared the need for active participation of persons with disabilities in the planning of policies and processes that affect their lives. The motto that came out of that was Nothing about Us without Us.

The goal of this bill is simple in its wording and complex in terms of how the end result will be achieved. This bill is about changing the trajectory of the current supports for persons with disabilities in Alberta. This bill is about changing the way that we do things, and it's about truly endorsing the phrase: nothing about us without us.

Madam Speaker, as I'm sure you know, Alberta has a long and sordid history of supporting people with developmental disabilities. The segregation of people with developmental disabilities has been long documented in this province. Although I think we've taken huge steps to correct things, we still have much work to do. It's beyond just geography. It's beyond just where they live or how they live. When people are segregated and not consulted, they become objects of pity and not true participants in their communities. They become passive recipients of charity and not fully contributing members of their communities.

Like all movements, people with disabilities rallied to change things. Until very recently I was a pretty active part of those rallies, and I never imagined that I would be inside of this House speaking to the issue that I was always outside speaking about. The gains that people with disabilities have made in Alberta and in Canada are a direct result of the work they have done. The community living movement is a direct result of the work done by people with disabilities. Independent living is far more than living independently. Inclusive education is far more than being included. It's about education both ways. It's about students with disabilities, any form of disability, having relationships with students that are not labelled with disabilities, and it's about all students learning from each other. When we have true inclusive education, we all win; inclusive employment, we all win.

Alberta Works is one of the programs undertaken, actually, by the previous government that is still functioning today. Although I disagree with the way that it was born and that it was without real consultation from stakeholders – and by stakeholders I mean people with disabilities – it was an important step in recognizing the skills and attributes of people with disabilities.

Unfortunately, we have far too many examples of the previous government getting it wrong. There were changes from the top-down sort of model to community governance, which was in place for years, which had community boards, appointed boards. Those were removed and replaced with the idea of community engagement councils. Those were also removed, and then there was nothing.

When you don't have something between the bureaucracy and the ministry and the people in the community, you lose something in translation, and I think that in the last few years we've seen that. Examples of that include movements to regulate the way people live their lives, not just where they live but how they live. In an effort to keep people safe, the previous government introduced regulations that looked at keeping people safe, but instead of actually keeping people safe, what they did was create homes that were small institutions. They removed choice, and they segregated people once again because they started to remove options.

Other examples of that were tools that they used to try to level the playing field, but these were assessment tools. One example is the supports intensity scale, which is a needs-based assessment that looked at meeting an individual with a disability and determining what they needed in terms of support. I don't think it's fair to ever assign a number and a level to a person to determine what they need to live successfully in the community.

Those are just some of the examples.

In my life before coming to this House, I worked much of my adult life with people with disabilities in the community, and I learned a great deal. I often had some wonderful ideas and some visions. I've been told that I'm a dreamer, and I don't think I'm the only one. I thought I had the answers for people, and I learned very early on that I was wrong. It was only when I actually consulted the people that I was hired to make decisions with that they worked.

I think it's time for us to not only move towards change in terms of the language that we use and the policies we endorse and the

paths that we take, but we have to focus on giving a voice, giving the decision-making power as much as possible to the people that the decisions we're entrusted to make involve. That means real consultation. That means bringing in the stakeholders – people with disabilities, their families, their friends, their supporters, the organizations that do the work on the ground every single day – not just special-interest groups and not just people that are interested in making decisions for them.

I'm hopeful that we can all together agree on some common things, and that is that people with disabilities have the absolute right to determine what is important for them and for their lives, for their families, and for their friends; where they live, how they work, when they work, where they work; how they're assessed, what supports they get. It's vital. I think it's vital to our communities. It's only when everybody is included that our community is most rich. Inclusion is not a buzzword, should never be a buzzword but should always be a verb and always be something that we work towards.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I look forward to hearing what the other members have to say as well.

The Deputy Speaker: The time limit for consideration of this item of business has concluded. We are moving on to the next order of business.

5:00 Motions Other than Government Motions

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Harm Reduction Policies

505. Ms Miller moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to review how best to integrate harm reduction policies throughout Alberta's public health care and human services systems with the goal of amending and incorporating these policies in related legislation and regulations.

Ms Miller: Thank you, Madam Speaker, for the opportunity to rise today and bring this important motion to the floor for debate. Harm reduction is and should be an integral part of Alberta's response to the negative effects of drug use. Often we hear about prevention, treatment, or enforcement, all of which fall under the umbrella of harm reduction, but often we miss the conversation about what harm reduction really means in terms of day-to-day action.

It's important that, first, we define what we mean when we talk about harm reduction as this is key to the overall understanding of this important policy tool. Harm reduction includes policies, programs, and practices that aim to keep people safe and minimize death, disease, and injury from high-risk behaviour. Harm reduction recognizes that the high-risk behaviour may continue despite the risks.

The cornerstones of harm reduction are public health, human rights, and social justice. Harm reduction benefits people who use drugs or engage in other risky behaviours, families, and communities as a whole. There already is a lot of great harm reduction work going on throughout our province that is supported by both AHS and by front-line nonprofit organizations. In fact, I was pleased to see that included in the recently announced AHS board of directors was Marliss Taylor, an expert with years of experience in harm reduction. This shows the continued importance of this issue and how serious our government takes the idea of harm reduction.

The motion was formed in part by the work going on in the city of Red Deer, which has committed to integrating harm reduction policies locally to great benefit so far. The city has incorporated part of the renowned four-pillar strategy to respond to alcohol and drug

use, which focuses on prevention, treatment, harm reduction, and community safety. The success of this strategy is something my colleague from Red Deer-North and I are both very excited about, and we commend all of the constituents involved in making this so effective.

I am also proud to say that Red Deer signed on to the Vienna declaration in 2011. The Vienna declaration is a statement seeking to improve community health and safety by calling for the incorporation of scientific evidence into illicit drug policies. The declaration was drafted by a team of international experts and initiated by several of the world's leading HIV and drug policy scientific bodies and was prepared through an extensive consultative process involving global leaders in medicine, public policy, and public health. The declaration was the official declaration of the International AIDS Conference, AIDS 2010, which was held in Vienna, Austria.

We recognized then, as we do now, that incorporating scientific evidence into drug policy is imperative. But with any harm reduction strategy it's important that we work within the law and with communities to make sure they are safe for everyone involved. This government cares about the health and well-being of all Albertans, including people with addiction and mental health needs. We are supportive of interventions that save or improve lives.

AHS currently does have a harm reduction policy in place, so this motion supports the good work that is already being done across Alberta. The Harm Reduction for Psychoactive Substance Use policy states that

- Alberta Health Services recognizes the value of harm reduction as an important component in the continuum of care required to effectively serve individuals that use psychoactive substances.
- Alberta Health Services may directly, or in partnership with community agencies, provide a range of harm reduction programs and services that assist individuals, families and communities to reduce the risk and adverse consequences of psychoactive substance use.

Programs and services are provided directly by AHS harm reduction teams. Alberta Health currently supports many harm reduction programs and policies throughout Alberta. Most notably, AHS provides harm reduction supplies distribution such as needles and condoms through AIDS service organizations.

The Central Alberta AIDS Network, CAANS, is a local community-based charity located right in my constituency of Red Deer-South, and it's a great example of an organization incorporating harm reduction policies into their programs. CAANS is responsible for sexually transmitted and blood-borne infection prevention and support in the Alberta Health Services' central zone.

But CAANS isn't alone as an organization using harm reduction techniques. CAANS has sister charities across Alberta that all use this approach: HIV North, with offices in Grande Prairie and Fort McMurray, serving the northern zone; HIV West Yellowhead, serving Hinton, Edson, Jasper, and area; Streetworks in Edmonton; Safeworks in Calgary; Lethbridge HIV Connection; and HIV Community Link in Medicine Hat. These organizations all provide exemplary services rooted in a harm reduction approach. We need to continue to invest in addiction and mental health programs and services that have proven to be effective at helping Albertans.

It's also important to note that most of these organizations are working within their main city and that rural outreach is still rare. We know that addictions can be present in communities of all shapes and sizes. That's why I'm so pleased that our government has undertaken the mental health review currently being led by the members for Calgary-Mountain View and Lesser Slave Lake. The mental health review will help inform our strategy for addiction and

mental health services going forward. In anticipation of its release and its recommendations Alberta Health has budgeted \$10 million.

We all know that one of the biggest issues facing many Alberta communities right now is the issue of fentanyl addiction and overdose. This issue has hit Red Deer especially hard. My constituents and nonprofits working to combat this were extremely pleased with the minister's efforts on this issue and the expansion of the community-based, take-home naloxone kits across the province. This action has saved lives, and I thank the minister for her action on this.

It's also important to note that AHS recently launched a fentanyl harm reduction website to coincide with the provincial campaign, www.drugsfool.ca. This campaign targets recreational club users with messaging in environments of potential use and also in online environments. Additionally, the campaign will . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Excuse me, hon. member. Can I just interrupt you for a moment? I want to remind the members that we are not in committee and that you must all be in your seats during this portion of the proceedings. Thank you.

Proceed, hon. member.

Ms Miller: Additionally, the campaign will see dissemination of wallet-sized harm reduction materials for the entrenched user population through all partners in Alberta's new take-home naloxone program. I know this program will benefit my constituency, and I know other members of this Assembly can expect the same benefits from this program to be seen in their own constituencies as well. In recognition of fentanyl concerns associated with some aboriginal communities in Alberta, the campaign will also roll out awareness messaging to several aboriginal communities across AHS's five zones. This campaign is exactly the type of action this motion today hopes to support and see expanded.

The study and integration of harm reduction policies will continue to save lives and make a difference in the lives of Albertans facing addiction issues. Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to have the opportunity to bring this important motion to the floor today. Harm reduction ensures that people are treated with respect and without stigma and that substance-related problems and issues are addressed systematically. Alberta is already doing a lot of great work in regard to addictions and mental health, and I hope this motion will help to further that work today. I sincerely hope that all members in this House will join me in supporting this motion today.

Thank you.

5:10

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd like to thank my colleagues on both sides of the House for their contributions to this discussion and their compassion. I'm going to start with a little history. You know, many years ago during the Troubles in Ireland the British Home Secretary remarked that the situation had been kept to an acceptable level of violence. This comment was widely regarded as a terrible gaffe at the time. It was a cynical calculation that just didn't sit right with most folks.

I think much of the public debate around harm reduction strategies comes down to how we view the calculation at the very heart of harm reduction. Let's make no mistake here. When it comes to the use of narcotics, there is no truly and completely safe way around it. We can see this with the recent fentanyl crisis in this province. The difference between life and death can come down to a single milligram.

Now, I don't think anyone here would disagree that we must try to mitigate the harm done by these dangerous and damaging drugs, drugs that have robbed so many of their friends and family members. However, there needs to be acknowledgement that these hard-core drugs also rob the living of their health, their vitality, and their livelihoods. The ideal – the ideal – should always remain the elimination of these destructive forces in their lives.

The long-term elimination of narcotics in our society is by no means an easy goal. As members of this Assembly we all know how drug use has impacted our own constituencies and our province. Nobody will claim that removing these tentacles of illicit narcotics that have crept into our communities is a simple task.

I'd now like to paraphrase a great leader from years ago, with whom I'm sure many will be familiar. He was speaking in a different context and delivered it better than I can, but I believe the sentiment stands.

We choose to . . . do [these] things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard, because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one which we intend to win.

Now, clearly, there is a spectrum of harm reduction policies out there. Many, in fact, are already being used in Alberta. I mentioned fentanyl earlier, and I think it's important to note that many places around North America have expanded access to naloxone, which is the antidote for opiates. Here in Alberta we also offer methadone substitution treatment for addicts to try to help get them off these harmful substances.

That, again, is the key point here. The end goal is getting people off these substances, that cause so much pain, grief, and misery. We must show compassion to those affected. We must reach out our hands to help them out of these cycles of dependency and do everything we can toward that goal. My concern is that a focus on harm reduction has the potential to crowd out treatment and proper support. It is my sincerest hope that we continue to offer every support to those who need it and strive towards the health and well-being of all Albertans.

While there are certainly successes within the harm reduction model, there are also successful alternative models that we should look at. We could examine a nation like Sweden, that has taken a firmer approach to the elimination of drug abuse within their borders. The United Nations notes that the Swedish strategy has yielded positive results in the form of reduced drug use and abuse, even lower than European averages. Keep in mind that they do not use a particularly heavy-handed or overly punitive approach. Their prisons, in fact, have far fewer occupants from drug crimes than many comparable nations.

They do however see an emphasis on drug reduction and the ultimate goal of elimination of these dangerous and addictive substances as part of a broader perspective on health and wellness policy. The alternative to harm reduction is not an increase in harm, and an alternative can have the same public health objectives accomplished a different way. I find their goals admirable. They advocate for a drug-free society, and with compassion, treatment, and adequate supports for those in need they are working towards that each and every day.

Let harm reduction successes be a bridge to treatment and overall harm elimination. Nobody would expect any less for their own friends or family. I dearly hope that we do not see harm reduction as merely a second-best or good-enough solution while treatment and detox supports are neglected. It would be a true tragedy, Madam Speaker, to see treatment options reserved only for those with the means to access them. I earlier mentioned the cynical

calculation of an acceptable level of harm. Interestingly, one law enforcement officer from downtown Vancouver remarked in the *National Post*, "The rich get treatment, the poor get harm reduction." I hope to see a system where all people are given every chance to reclaim their health, vitality, and dignity.

To conclude, I do support some harm reduction strategies as interim measures preventing mortality and improving health outcomes, but I also know and believe that we are already doing many of these things in Alberta. This motion, as written, is also too vague while many of the possible approaches require far more discussion and debate than the very limited time here.

Finally, I would like to see a much greater emphasis on proper treatment options and an eye always – always – toward a laudable goal of harm elimination.

Madam Speaker, for these reasons, I don't believe I will be supporting this motion as written.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Cross.

Miranda: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am pleased to rise and speak in support of this motion, and I thank the hon. Member for Red Deer-South for bringing it forward. The concept of harm reduction is supported by research showing that many drug-related problems are not just the result of the drugs themselves. In fact, there are many compounding and contributing factors such as the unregulated manufacturing of drugs in addition to existing policies and laws that do not deal with the root causes of the problem. We know that expenditures for law enforcement related to illicit drug use, while very important, often have limited success in the overall reduction of consumption. We know from history that a prohibition-type policy approach does not work.

Madam Speaker, we need to recognize that high-risk behaviour often continues despite people being informed of the risks or being jailed for drug-related offences. Harm reduction strategies ensure that people who use psychoactive substances are treated with respect and without stigma and that the substance abuse related problems and the related issues are addressed systemically. This will include a recognition that there is a mental health component to this issue. I hope that the mental health review currently taking place will help us reformulate our current strategy for addiction and mental health services going forward. I look forward with anticipation to the recommendations.

I would encourage all members to be supportive of this motion and to support an approach that can save and improve lives and improve the health and well-being of all Albertans because this is a community issue that impacts all of us. We all need to be part of the solution.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

5:20

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm rising today to speak in support of this motion. Members of this House can have honest disagreements about the intent of it or the outcome of it. Perhaps it is vaguely worded, as motions typically are. The Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat spoke before me for my caucus and listed the reasons why we should not be giving up on people with addictions and not be focusing on harm reduction to the exclusion of recovery from addictions. But there is still a role for harm reduction, and I don't believe that this motion excludes recovery from addictions.

Too many of us – and I've probably been guilty – look down on people with addictions, condemn them, think we're better than them, but people with addictions are not just the lowest rungs of

society. They're everybody: they're middle-class people, they're powerful, they're rich, they're poor. It can happen to anybody. It doesn't just happen to one social class or one ethnicity. We're all susceptible to it, and we have not done the job we should be doing as a society to help people recover. We haven't done the work we need to do as a government, as a province in helping those with addictions minimize the harm to them.

There are right ways to do this, and there are wrong ways. I once lived in Victoria, B.C., and the government had opened up a needle-exchange program beside my home. Well, doing that in a neighbourhood that did not have those kinds of problems was harmful. It created a crime wave in a neighbourhood that had previously not had that level of crime. It exposed children to danger, with needles on sidewalks.

But that isn't to say that there is not a real place for harm reduction. It's not to say that we shouldn't be doing everything we can to help those who need it. This is one of the roles of government. This is one of the reasons why we are here. Not everybody is going to be cured of addiction. Perhaps I'm a bit defeatist, but not everybody's going to be cured. Not everybody's going to be clean, but we can make life better for them, and we can make life better for those not addicted. Many of the drugs people are addicted to have public risks for those not addicted themselves, be it needles left in parks or crime that comes from people who are willing to do anything to get their next fix.

We can have honest disagreements about how the motion is written, but I read it as not excluding addictions treatment. I read it as promoting harm reduction. Now, the specifics of that are to be seen in the details. We have to wait and see, if this motion passes, what the government comes forward with, and I'll judge that particular bill on its merits. But the motion as presented right now, I think, is in the best spirits of why we're here, to help those who desperately need it, some people who need it and want it, some people who don't even know they need help yet. As long as this motion is not coming at the expense of addictions recovery, then I can support it.

While I will understand why some members here won't – I think we have a legitimate difference of opinion on the interpretation of the wording – I know that all members, regardless of how they're voting on this issue, have the best interests of those that need help at heart. So I encourage all members of this House to support the motion from the Member for Red Deer-South.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to speak in favour of Motion 505. This past summer I had the opportunity to tour the Boyle Street Community Services, one of the many dedicated social agencies which are located and operate in Edmonton-Centre. As part of that tour I had the opportunity to meet an amazing woman, Marliiss Taylor, who co-ordinates one of their most important programs, Streetworks.

For over 20 years, under Marliiss's direction Streetworks has been working with injection drug users and participants in the sex trade to provide them with the skills, knowledge, research, and support they need to remain safer and healthier. This support is provided without judgement and instead focuses on creating relationships of trust, that allow Streetworks staff to provide crucial education about the health risks that these individuals face, which many members have noted here today, health risks such as hepatitis B and C, HIV, or drugs such as fentanyl. Streetworks arms these individuals with the means to protect themselves and helps them access treatment centres or medical care. Their services are available at six locations across our downtown core and through the Streetworks van, which

operates six evenings a week responding to calls from individuals in need and supplying them with clean needles, condoms, and basic medical care on the streets where they live.

On my tour of Streetworks at Boyle Street Marliiss also introduced me to the HER pregnancy project, which with funding from Alberta Health Services provides intensive outreach to street-involved pregnant women who would likely not otherwise access or receive prenatal care. A recent social-return-on-investment case study found that for every dollar invested in the HER pregnancy program, there is a return of \$8.24 in social value created by the program.

But more importantly, Madam Speaker, through this outreach more than 130 street-involved pregnant women were able to access previously out-of-reach health and social resources and services, leading to 60 recorded births, of which HER staff attended 13. Because of this program 32 children were able to remain in their mother's care and another five were taken in by family or friends. That's 37 children who have a brighter, healthier future. Evaluations have also shown that the women who received assistance also exhibited positive behavioural changes related to their substance abuse and sexual practices and felt more empowered to stay safe and be involved in decisions about the care of their babies.

I'm incredibly happy to say that just one short month ago the woman that headed that program, the woman who's been the driving force behind Streetworks and the growth of harm reduction services here in Edmonton, Ms Marliiss Taylor, was appointed as a member of the new Alberta Health Services board of directors. Now we as a province have the opportunity to benefit greatly from her deep knowledge of and experience with implementing harm reduction as well as her deep compassion for Albertans caught in the vicious cycle of addiction.

These services help people and save lives. They reduce the need for costly health and social interventions by helping individuals in need make safer, healthier decisions. Let's be clear, Madam Speaker. The ultimate objective of harm reduction services is to see individuals empowered to cease the activities that cause them harm. Harm reduction services help people to do so without the judgement and stigmatization which have traditionally accompanied social policy. Organizations like Streetworks support individuals in need to access treatment by first building relationships of trust, by assisting those in need, offering them small amounts of help, and then over time helping to guide them towards treatment and, hopefully, one day being free of the activities that caused them and others harm.

As noted, I recognize that there have been many important first steps that have been taken by Alberta Health Services to support and implement harm reduction services. I'm very grateful to see those having been taken. I believe we have the opportunity now to do much more. We have an opportunity now to benefit not only those Albertans in need, these vulnerable populations, but all Albertans across the province. For that reason, I will be happy to vote in favour of this motion in the hopes that both the availability of and the support for these services will be expanded across Alberta.

Thank you.

5:30

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other hon. members wishing to speak to the motion? The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I appreciate the opportunity to rise in the Assembly today to speak to Motion 505, put forward by the hon. Member for Red Deer-South. First, let me

express my sincere appreciation to the member for bringing this motion forward. I believe wholeheartedly that the member is bringing forward this motion in an effort to help the most vulnerable amongst us, and I salute the member for this.

As I have said before in this Assembly, I believe that as a society we are judged by how we treat the most vulnerable among us. I believe – and I trust that members on both sides of the aisle agree with me – that we should strive each day to help those most vulnerable in our society. We might not always agree on how to do that, but I truly believe that all members of this Assembly do want to help.

I spent a good portion of my previous life working as the executive director with the Mustard Seed. I have worked for many years with homeless individuals suffering from addiction. I had the privilege of growing up in a family that has been dedicated for decades to caring for Alberta's homeless population. It's an issue that I care about very much, and it is at the core of who I am.

There are many reasons why people end up homeless, but with the limited time that I have here today, I would like to focus on the fact that addictions are very common among our homeless population. Some individuals are homeless because of their addictions, some became addicted after they were homeless, and of course, some homeless people are not suffering from addictions. But without a doubt, if you spend any considerable time working on the streets with homeless people, you quickly learn that addictions are a major issue.

With that in mind, I want to make clear to this Assembly that I am all for reducing the harm to those suffering from addictions. I want to ensure that we are helping the most vulnerable in our society, as I have said, Madam Speaker. However, I have some concerns, though, that sometimes harm reduction strategies that I have seen in the past – their focus often unintentionally becomes not about helping people get better or about helping people become productive members of society or helping them overcome the prison of addiction they find themselves in.

I believe wholeheartedly that we need to provide avenues for individuals to not only reduce harm but to truly eliminate harm, to try and fix the situation and to help individuals escape the pit of addiction that has been destroying both their lives and the lives of people around them. We need to make sure that while focusing on reducing harm, we are not just taking the individual and hiding them from the world. Simply hiding the problem from the view of the day-to-day public is not a solution. We must not relegate these individuals to areas that are essentially palliative care and say to them: "Here you go. Here's a safe place. You're not in an alley any more. We're reducing harm from your addiction. You're still harming yourself, but you're just doing it slower and out of sight." Instead, we need to ensure there are places and programs in place to provide support to these individuals and services not only to reduce harm but to eliminate harm, enabling them to get better and to have better lives.

I do not want to see people in the streets, suffering from addiction, placed in what amounts to palliative care, where, yes, the harm from their situation is being reduced, but it is not being eliminated, and they are still suffering from the pain and severe consequences of addiction. I know I have been to more funerals for addicts than I can count and more than I care to count. I have worked with many addicts who are homeless. Some have been able to escape the prison of addiction; some have not. I can tell you that the ones who have escaped the prison of addiction are living happy, productive lives in our society. The ones who did not are still on drugs, living in despair. Many have been shuffled off to housing units somewhere. Some are even no longer with us.

One of my favourite success stories in my career belongs to a young lady who I will not name, Madam Speaker. She realized that she had had enough, that she wanted help. She was severely addicted to methamphetamines for many years. She called an uncle and begged for help. He, of course, did not know what to do, as family often does not, but he started calling everyone he could to help this girl. He called dozens of agencies. All were full or had waiting lists that were weeks or months long. He ended up calling me, and when I answered the phone, he started telling me the story. I had to say the same thing as everyone else: "Sorry. I'm full. I'm beyond full. Every bed is full." He pushed me passionately for this girl. He knew he had no options left.

My gut told me to do something, Madam Speaker, so I talked to our staff, and we ended up putting her up in a motel, and we found her some treatment programs focused on beating her addiction. She arrived at our facility less than a hundred pounds, looking as near death as I have ever seen somebody walking. Within six months she was unrecognizable, sober, and learning the skills she needed to cope. She would eventually become my executive assistant and would go on to college. Just last year she graduated with an accounting degree and has never looked back.

I know dozens of stories like that. They're what made the job worth doing. That is important for two reasons. The reason this girl got treatment was because we managed to squeeze her in. Our donors generously provided enough resources so that we could go outside the box and get her the help she needed. Secondly, from the moment she arrived, we focused on getting her the help she needed, not reducing the harm that came from the behaviour but, instead, giving her the tools and the support to overcome her addiction.

I've seen other street people that I have known through the years, that came into our facilities to eat or sleep on the mat. They stayed on the streets or entered programs that were not focused on getting resources to help them overcome their addiction. Many of them are dead now, Madam Speaker, more than I care to remember.

Addictions are terrible. Of course, we want to see harm reduction, but we do not want to see out-of-sight, out-of-mind policies: you, go sleep here; continue your behaviour. This is less risky, but you're still doing what is killing you. That is basically palliative care for drug addicts. I do not want to push to have the problem become out of sight, out of mind. Putting them in this corner makes it a little more comfortable for us and safer for them to do their behaviour, but the behaviour is still killing them, prolonging the inevitable. To me that is the avenue of no hope. That is the road of giving up. I instead would prefer to help people overcome their addictions, overcome their burdens and have great lives.

I spoke in this Chamber before about my dad. My dad is my hero. Here is a man who was homeless at 12 years old. He became addicted to every substance under the sun. He drank Lysol and other terrible things just to fuel his addiction. The RCMP in his hometown became so sick of him that they decided to go with the out-of-sight, out-of-mind approach. They picked him up passed out in a park, because they were so sick of dealing with him, and they threw him on a bus. He woke up in Calgary, where he continued to live on the streets and slowly kill himself.

If it was not for a group of men who saw him and took pity on him, fed him, clothed him, housed him, taught him how to face his demons, I shudder at the thought, Madam Speaker. If it was not for them, I would not be here, my brothers would not be here, my kids would not be here, the Mustard Seed certainly would not be here, and the tens of thousands of people that my dad helped through his work at the Mustard Seed would not have been helped. The girl I told you about would not be a sober accountant living a successful life. You see, those men chose to invest in my dad. The RCMP that

day – and I’m not ragging on the RCMP – chose out of sight, out of mind.

I ask you, Madam Speaker: which option was the better option for my dad, for our society? Clearly, the path to getting my dad sober and free from demons was the better path. The path of supporting the girl I worked with, who is now an accountant, was the best path. The critical thing for her was that the resources were in place that were needed to get her help. We need to ensure that we get the funding to those who can help the people in need, that we make clear that we can face these terrible problems with people and help them overcome it, that we choose to invest in people rather than put them out of sight, out of mind.

I’m all for harm reduction. I know that we cannot help people who are dead from overdosing on a bad fix. I know how terrible it is to see somebody get an incurable disease from sharing needles. I’ve seen it. I get it. But I’m not in favour of the sort of harm reduction that focuses on the palliative care model, which provides no avenue of hope to overcome the streets or the prison of addiction.

For me this motion is vague. It does not fully spell out what we are trying to do. I cannot vote for a motion that does not make clear that we as a society, as a province, and as a government are not only focused on reducing the immediate harm; we must remain focused on eliminating that harm and helping people out of the prison of addiction. As such, I cannot support this motion. I feel obligated to always vote on the side of investment in individuals. I want to ensure that we are not just reducing harm but that, instead, we are providing hope and making lives better.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, and thanks to the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundry for his very honest and powerful statement supporting, I think, harm reduction in addition to the many other ways that we have to show real commitment and compassion to people who have a disease called addiction and who cannot make good choices as a result of that addiction.

I hesitated to get up because I am involved in the mental health review with the hon. Member for Lesser Slave Lake. But it’s a well-established, well-shown, well-proven approach to reducing risk. It is only one aspect of a comprehensive care that includes housing and counselling and detox and many approaches to cognitive and behavioural therapy and all manner of things: for some, meditation; for some, acupuncture. There are many different traditional treatments in the First Nations community that have been shown to help.

5:40

Nobody is saying that harm reduction is the be-all and end-all treatment of addiction. What we’re saying is that there’s been ambiguity not only in this province but also federally by the Conservative Party of Canada about whether they support it or not. They’ve given a little bit but not sufficient. They have not been clear about what they do not – and it is a subtle issue, to be sure. Some people can argue that you’re enabling drug abuse by giving a substitute, for example Suboxone for fentanyl or methadone for blocking . . .

An Hon. Member: Heroin.

Dr. Swann: Heroin. Thank you.

It is only one of an array of care that has to do with really helping a person to take that next little step to freedom.

While I can’t indicate recommendations before the committee commits to its recommendations, I can say that as a public health officer, someone who’s been involved with addictions over many years through the public health system, I’ve seen the benefit of limiting the spread of HIV with condoms. I’ve seen the benefit of methadone in people who reach the point where they suddenly say: “I think I can do this. I have the supports I need. I have a house. I have the mental capacity now. I see what I’m doing. I’m going to make the tough decision. I’ve been given these extra few weeks or few months as a result of the methadone I’ve been on. I’ve had a good counsellor for the first time. Somebody has demonstrated their commitment to me, and I suddenly feel like I believe in myself.” All these things come together, and harm reduction is just one piece of that, which allows them to take that big leap to say, “This is it; I’m going to get off” whatever the addiction is.

There’s no question that it’s a little big vague. It’s a general principle, but it’s a general principle that we haven’t had the confidence of the federal government. Even the provincial government hasn’t sustained and seriously committed to and educated the public to reduce the stigma and to reduce the sense that this is enabling drug addiction or that it’s enabling promiscuity or whatever they want to argue about the other side of harm reduction. I just wanted to say that from a public health perspective, from somebody who has worked with high-risk individuals in the past, there’s no question in my mind that the evidence is there. I will certainly be supporting this, and I’m hoping that my committee – I’m only one of three who are heading up this review committee – will also support it clearly and strongly.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other hon. members who wish to speak to this motion? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Dr. Turner: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I really want to acknowledge the wisdom and courage that’s been shown by many of the speakers across the aisle as well as on our side. I’m rising, actually, just to augment and echo what the Member for Calgary-Mountain View was saying. As a physician I’m very aware of the medical consequences of not doing harm reduction. Some of you may know that for many years I was the medical director of a blood transfusion service in this city. I can tell you that the failure of our medical system back in the mid-80s to recognize harm reduction as a means of preventative health led to one of the greatest medical tragedies that this country has ever experienced. Whether or not we can deal with mental health issues with medication or with counselling or with better genetics, we are still left with this problem of needing to deal with the consequences of this, and certainly this motion would help our society deal with the realities of the effects of mental health.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other members wishing to speak?

Then the hon. Member for Red Deer-South to close debate.

Ms Miller: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I’m very pleased that I had the opportunity to bring this important motion to the floor today. I really enjoyed the thorough debate and appreciated many of the points made from all sides of this House.

In closing debate, I’d like to reiterate that there already is a lot of harm reduction work going on throughout our province that is supported by both AHS and by front-line, nonprofit organizations. I’m proud that this government cares about the health and well-being of all Albertans, including people with addiction and mental

health needs. The minister's work on this file shows this. We are supportive of interventions that save or improve lives. Harm reduction ensures that people are treated with respect and without stigma and that substance-related problems and issues are addressed systematically.

Madam Speaker, I hope this motion will be able to help further that work, and I thank everyone for their contribution to this important discussion today. I sincerely hope that all members in this House will join me in supporting this motion today.

Thank you.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 505 carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Bilous: I thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I am seeking consent to adjourn the House until tomorrow at 10 a.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:47 p.m. to Tuesday at 10 a.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday morning, November 24, 2015

Day 22

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

First Session

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Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (W)
Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (ND)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
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Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (W)
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New Democrat: 53 Wildrose: 22 Progressive Conservative: 9 Alberta Liberal: 1 Alberta Party: 1 Independent: 1

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Babcock	MacIntyre
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Dang	Stier
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Kazim	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta**10 a.m.****Tuesday, November 24, 2015**

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Hon. members, this is a sad day. The strengths of this Assembly are our diversity and the commitment to public service that all of us share. The Member for Calgary-Greenway lost his life in public service. I thought it fitting that today we might have a prayer that was of his faith. Please bow your heads.

What do I know? How will I die? What sort of death will it be? If I do not forget the Lord Master from my mind, then my death will be easy. The world is terrified of death; everyone longs to live. By Guru's grace, one who dies while yet alive understands the Lord's will. O Nanak, one who dies such a death lives forever.

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the prayer.

I would seek unanimous consent from the House that at the beginning of tomorrow morning's sitting we begin with a prayer and then move immediately to Ministerial Statements.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, if you seek it, I'm sure you will find unanimous consent in the House to stand adjourned till tomorrow morning in honour and in remembrance of a great Albertan, a great man, a man with an even bigger heart than his stature, our friend and colleague Manmeet Bhullar.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[Unanimous consent granted; the Assembly adjourned at 10:04 a.m. to Wednesday at 9 a.m.]

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Horne	Woollard
Kazim	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta**9 a.m.****Wednesday, November 25, 2015**

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers**The Speaker:** Good morning.

Let us bow our heads. Fellow members, today and for the next few days and weeks this will be a difficult time for all of us and particularly for some of our peers. Today we are also remembering the tragic events of Holodomor, that resulted in so many lost lives in the past. As we close our eyes and think about our former peers, a former MLA and our most recent brother who we've lost, we might think about what those members would be saying about events such as that that have taken place in our world and the need

for us to continue our fight for greater freedom for people around the world and for democracy and to ensure that those events might never happen again as they demonstrate our collective need to fight for democracy and freedom.

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I would like to inform the House that following discussions with all parties Ministerial Statements will not take place this morning but rather in the normal fashion, during Routine proceedings this afternoon.

Mr. Speaker, I would also move that the House adjourn to 1:30 this afternoon.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 9:02 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.]

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Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., Calgary-Buffalo (ND)	Shepherd, David, Edmonton-Centre (ND)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (ND)	Sigurdson, Hon. Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (ND)
Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (PC)	Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (W)
Gray, Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (ND)	Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC), Progressive Conservative Opposition House Leader
Hanson, David B., Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills (W), Official Opposition Deputy House Leader	Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (W)
Hinkley, Bruce, Wetaskiwin-Camrose (ND)	Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (W)
Hoffman, Hon. Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (ND)	Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (ND)
Horne, Trevor A.R., Spruce Grove-St. Albert (ND)	Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Hunter, Grant R., Cardston-Taber-Warner (W)	Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (ND)
Jansen, Sandra, Calgary-North West (PC)	Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (W)
Jean, Brian Michael, QC, Fort McMurray-Conklin (W), Leader of the Official Opposition	Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (ND)
Kazim, Anam, Calgary-Glenmore (ND)	van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)
Kleinstuber, Jamie, Calgary-Northern Hills (ND)	Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND)
Larivee, Hon. Danielle, Lesser Slave Lake (ND)	Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Littlewood, Jessica, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (ND)	Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)
Loewen, Todd, Grande Prairie-Smoky (W)	
Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (ND)	
Luff, Robyn, Calgary-East (ND)	
MacIntyre, Donald, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (W)	

Party standings:

New Democrat: 53 Wildrose: 22 Progressive Conservative: 9 Alberta Liberal: 1 Alberta Party: 1 Independent: 1

Officers and Officials of the Legislative Assembly

W.J. David McNeil, Clerk	Stephanie LeBlanc, Parliamentary Counsel and Legal Research Officer	Brian G. Hodgson, Sergeant-at-Arms
Robert H. Reynolds, QC, Law Clerk/ Director of Interparliamentary Relations	Philip Massolin, Manager of Research Services	Chris Caughell, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms
Shannon Dean, Senior Parliamentary Counsel/Director of House Services	Nancy Robert, Research Officer	Gordon H. Munk, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms
		Janet Schwegel, Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>

Executive Council

Rachel Notley	Premier, President of Executive Council
Deron Bilous	Minister of Economic Development and Trade
Oneil Carlier	Minister of Agriculture and Forestry
Joe Ceci	President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance
David Eggen	Minister of Education, Minister of Culture and Tourism
Kathleen T. Ganley	Minister of Justice and Solicitor General, Minister of Aboriginal Relations
Sarah Hoffman	Minister of Health, Minister of Seniors
Danielle Larivee	Minister of Municipal Affairs, Minister of Service Alberta
Brian Mason	Minister of Transportation, Minister of Infrastructure
Margaret McCuaig-Boyd	Minister of Energy
Shannon Phillips	Minister of Environment and Parks, Minister Responsible for the Status of Women
Irfan Sabir	Minister of Human Services
Lori Sigurdson	Minister of Advanced Education, Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Ms Miller
Deputy Chair: Mr. Nielsen

Cyr	Sucha
Ellis	Taylor
McKitrick	Turner
Renaud	

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Miranda
Deputy Chair: Mr. Schneider

Anderson, S.	Hanson
Carson	Hunter
Connolly	Jansen
Coolahan	Piquette
Dach	Schreiner
Fitzpatrick	Taylor
Gotfried	

Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee

Chair: Ms Gray
Deputy Chair: Ms Payne

Anderson, W.	Miranda
Clark	Nielsen
Cortes-Vargas	Nixon
Cyr	Renaud
Jansen	Starke
Loyola	Swann
McLean	van Dijken
Miller	

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Sweet
Deputy Chair: Mr. Smith

Hinkley	Pitt
Jansen	Rodney
Littlewood	Shepherd
Luff	Swann
McPherson	Westhead
Orr	Yao
Payne	

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Cortes-Vargas
Deputy Chair: Ms Sweet

Bhullar	Nixon
Connolly	Shepherd
Cooper	van Dijken
Horne	Woollard
Kleinsteuber	

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Wanner
Deputy Chair: Mr. Schmidt

Cooper	Nielsen
Fildebrandt	Nixon
Luff	Piquette
McIver	Schreiner
McLean	

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Ms McPherson
Deputy Chair: Mr. Connolly

Anderson, S.	Kleinsteuber
Anderson, W.	Littlewood
Babcock	McKitrick
Drever	Rosendahl
Drysdale	Stier
Fraser	Strankman
Hinkley	

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Mrs. Littlewood
Deputy Chair: Ms Fitzpatrick

Carson	McPherson
Coolahan	Nielsen
Cooper	Schneider
Ellis	Starke
Hanson	van Dijken
Kazim	Woollard
Loyola	

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. Fildebrandt
Deputy Chair: Ms Gray

Barnes	Malkinson
Bhullar	Miller
Cyr	Payne
Dach	Renaud
Gotfried	Turner
Hunter	Westhead
Loyola	

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Ms Goehring
Deputy Chair: Mr. Loewen

Aheer	Kleinsteuber
Babcock	MacIntyre
Clark	Rosendahl
Dang	Stier
Drysdale	Sucha
Horne	Woollard
Kazim	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, November 25, 2015

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Please be seated.

As we all know and feel, this is a very solemn time for this Assembly, members, family with the recent passing of a former member and a current member.

Hon. members, as is our custom, we pay tribute to former members of this Assembly who have passed away since we last met.

Mrs. Weslyn Melva Mather
October 2, 1945, to November 22, 2015

The Speaker: Former member Weslyn Melva Mather was born on October 2, 1945, and was with us to November 22, 2015. Mrs. Mather served this Alberta Legislative Assembly as the Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods from 2004 to 2008. Trained as both an educator and a chartered psychologist, after years of teaching, she became an adjunct professor at the University of Alberta's faculty of education. During her term in this Assembly Mrs. Mather tirelessly advocated on behalf of children's issues. She received many awards over the years, including the Alberta achievement of excellence in education in 1984 and the YMCA woman of distinction for education in 1997. In a moment of silence I ask you to remember Mrs. Mather as you may have known her.

Hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, I would call upon you to say a few remarks and introduce the guests.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and to the House for the opportunity to pay tribute to my former colleague and friend Weslyn Mather. Today is an especially sad day in the Legislature. I was heartbroken to learn of the death of my friend and former colleague Weslyn Mather, who served in this House from 2004 to 2008 for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

I was elected alongside Weslyn, and she's been a stalwart of the Liberal Party in Alberta. I'm proud to have watched her champion causes and fight for a better, more accountable government. In particular, Mr. Speaker, what stands out most in my mind was her passionate advocacy for children and her long and eventually successful efforts to make the Child and Youth Advocate independent and reporting to the Legislature, which improved accountability and has helped so many since then. Weslyn, we will miss you.

With your indulgence, Mr. Speaker, allow me to introduce to the House the members of Weslyn's family who are seated in your gallery. I'll ask them to stand as I call their names: first, Christyann Olson, sister – welcome – Ava Morasch, sister – stay standing if you will – Dale Morasch, brother-in-law; Alexis Holstead and Larry Holstead, sister and brother-in-law; Mary-Jo Woolgar, sister; Kiza Trentham, niece; Stu Trentham, nephew; also Richie Mather, Weslyn's grandson. Thank you for joining us today. Let us give you the warmest welcome from the Legislature.

The Speaker: Prior to Introduction of Guests, given the unique circumstances we are in today it is my sense that we will reach 1:50 prior to Ministerial Statements. I would therefore seek unanimous consent from members now to continue with the Routine until after all ministerial statements are complete.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: I would call on the Minister of Economic Development and Trade to introduce.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly honoured guests from Alberta's Ukrainian community. In 1932-33 Ukrainians were subjected to a horrific, callous, and sustained act. The Holodomor was a government-imposed famine in the Ukrainian SSR that took the lives of millions and scarred the lives of millions more. Today I am humbled to introduce two survivors. Pani Natalia Talanchuk and Pan Leonid Korownyk are with us today, and Mr. Korownyk is also joined by his wife, Pani Anne Korownyk. No words can describe what they endured, and their stories of survival and courage are an inspiration to us all.

Mr. Speaker, today they are joined by the president of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress, provincial council Olesia Luciwi-Andryjowycz; as well as past president Daria Luciwi; treasurer, Romana Latenko; provincial co-ordinator and the child of a survivor, Slavka Shulakewych; as well as Bishop Ilarion of Edmonton and the western eparchy of the Ukrainian Orthodox church of Canada; and from the Edmonton eparchy Most Reverend Bishop David Motiuk.

They are seated in your gallery, Mr. Speaker, and I'd ask our honoured guests to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Minister of Transportation and of Infrastructure and Government House Leader, I understand you may have some guests to introduce.

Mr. Mason: I do, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a distinguished guest and former Member of this Legislative Assembly, Jim McPherson. Mr. McPherson served in the Alberta Legislature from 1982 to 1986 as the Member for Red Deer, leaving public service after the 1986 general election. Mr. McPherson joins us today as part of the delegation from Advocis, the Financial Advisors Association of Canada. There are nearly 60 members of Advocis that may be in the gallery, so I hope they'll forgive me if I don't name them all. I would ask Mr. McPherson and all members of Advocis to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you a group of special guests in the Legislature today on Gurpurab, which marks the birth of Guru Nanak Dev Ji, the first Sikh guru. Equality of all human beings and wand ke chhako, which means share your resources with others, help those in need, are the fundamental teachings of the guru and Sikhism.

1:40

These individuals are members of the Sikh community, Manmeet's community, which represents 27 million Sikhs around the globe. They include Balwinder Kahlon, Manjit Suri, Dr. Yadwinder Cheema, Parshotam Dass Bhardwaj, Manjit Singh Piasa. I would like to mention that these individuals are all members of Drug Awareness Foundation Calgary, which helps to raise awareness of the dangers of substance abuse in youth. I also have Chand Sadioura, Joginderpal Singh, Arundeeep Sandhu, Harinder Sandhu, Mahan Judge, Gurdev Plaha. In partnership with Canadian Blood Services these individuals helped organize blood drives in 80

cities across Canada. I attended one such event two weeks ago to commemorate the anniversary of the indiscriminate killing of Sikhs in Delhi in 1984. I would ask my guests to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The Minister of Advanced Education and Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly members of the University of Alberta Students' Union. In attendance are all members of the five-person student executive as well as members of student council, the highest governing body of the students' union, all of whom have been democratically elected by the student body. The organization's mission is to run and maintain a building built by students for students, create a sense of community on campus between all students through programming and events, operate relevant businesses on campus, and advocate on students' interests to the University of Alberta, government, and the general public.

They are seated in the members' gallery this afternoon, and I'd ask that they all rise as I call their names: Dylan Hanwell, Cody Bondarchuk, Vivian Kwan, Fahim Rahman, Charles Lewis, Donald Ademaj, Sandy Xu, Ben Angus, Matthew Ryan, Sam Cheng, Jane Yu, and last but not least is Bo Zhang, who's also my constituency assistant. I would ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Mr. Speaker, to you and through you to the members of this Assembly I will introduce Team Lethbridge, and I will do so by beginning with: I love Lethbridge and this wonderful coalition, and I hope that you will, too. This evening all MLAs are invited to a meet-and-greet hosted by Team Lethbridge to learn more about the many strengths, opportunities, and progressive work being undertaken in our city, and many of my colleagues have said thank you for the mugs. I will now introduce the first 23 members of Team Lethbridge, followed by my colleague: Councillor Liz Iwaskiw, Councillor Bridget Mearns, Mayor Chris Spearman, Jenn Schmidt-Rempel, Don Lacey, Angela Zuba, Cheryl Gilmore, Donna Hunt, Ken Tratch, Melody Garner, Brad Cook, Diane Kotkas, Erasmus Okine, Kim Gallucci, Michel Béchar, Cathy Maxwell, Chris Smeaton, Erin Low, Kurt Schlachter, Carol Roessler, Danny Ponjavic, Harry Gross, Marnie Brown.

Now my colleague Minister Shannon Phillips.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks and of Status of Women.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the additional members of Team Lethbridge from the city that I have the honour to represent: Tom McKenzie, Mike Mahon, Mike Schmidler, Nathan Neudorf, Nikolaus Wyslouzil, Ryan Westerson, Patricia Epp, Paula Burns, Richard Westlund, Councillor Rob Miyashiro, Rudy Friesen, Sacha Johnson, Sandra Mintz, Shilpa Stocker, Simon Griffiths, Sonny Zgurski, Stuart Cullum, Susan Eymann, Suzanne Lint, Trevor Lewington, Wendy Kalkan, and Wes Carroll. I would ask that all of you rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome, neighbours.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a group from Edmonton-Decore, the North Edmonton Seniors Association. It was formed in 1978 and provides over 600 programs annually to more than 2,000 seniors in northeast Edmonton, with supports from long-term partners like the Northgate Lions Club and the city of Edmonton. Here today from NESA are Sharlene Wyness, Ken and Elaine Berg, Hugh and Shirley Newell, Robert and Pat Carpenter, Randy Tomy, Louise Ertman, and Sharon Johnston. I would like them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to this House two people who work tirelessly every day to make Fort Saskatchewan an amazing place to live and raise a family. Please stand as I call your names: Mayor Gale Katchur, mayor of Fort Saskatchewan; and Heather Boonstra, executive director of Families First Society. Both of these women teach me all the time about how to be a better representative and how to effectively reach into the community. I ask the House to join me in extending the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there any other members who have guests to introduce today? The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of our Assembly representatives from the Lung Association, Alberta and Northwest Territories; the Canadian Pulmonary Fibrosis Foundation; pulmonary specialists; and patient and caregiver advocates. They are here today in the Alberta Legislature to educate us about lung disease and its impact on Albertans. There are many in attendance, so I'm going to name one – that's probably in bad form – Kyrell Gayle. If Mr. Gayle and the representatives who are also here in attendance could please rise. He's the youngest one in attendance. He is here with his mom and a whole team of people to advocate on behalf of clean, good air and good lungs.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On this otherwise sad day it is a pleasure to introduce to you and through you to the House two former Alberta Liberal colleagues, Reverend Bruce Miller, former MLA for Edmonton-Glenora, and Kevin Taft, former Leader of the Official Opposition, Liberal, and MLA for Edmonton-Riverview for 11 years, almost as long as me. He is a consultant and a bestselling author, as many of you will know. They join us today in memory of our friend Weslyn Mather, and I ask them to rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: Allow me, hon. members, on behalf of all of you to acknowledge to each and every one of you and particularly the party caucuses that in spite of the differences of opinion that get discussed in this Legislature, I've had a real sense of the loss that you've all shared, and your co-operation has been quite exceptional.

I would therefore call upon the hon. Premier to make some remarks.

1:50 Mr. Manmeet Singh Bhullar
March 1, 1980, to November 23, 2015

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On another day I would be happy for an occasion to rise in the House and shower a member with praise. Today I wish with all my heart that there was no need to do such a thing. I'm deeply saddened by the loss of Manmeet Bhullar. We have all lost a dear friend to a tragic accident, and we can only pay him the tribute he so richly deserves in his absence.

Today we remember our colleague the late Member for Calgary-Greenway. I count myself lucky in that I had the pleasure of his acquaintance for seven years. He and I both became MLAs in the same election, as part of the class of 2008. He was a lot younger than me. He was just 28, the youngest MLA ever elected at that time, and he already had an impressive history of public service behind him. He'd organized a youth group in Calgary. He'd volunteered generously to raise money for community and youth causes. His community leadership had attracted recognition that led to his receiving the Alberta centennial medal, the centennial medallion, and the Athabasca University leadership award. He came to public life with a determination to do even more for his community.

As new MLAs we had a lot to learn about this Legislature, about our new responsibilities, and about each other, and it wasn't long before I grew to appreciate his good humour, his sense of duty, his sharp intelligence, and his powerful compassion, fuelled by his faith. He served the people of Calgary-Greenway and all Albertans as an MLA and as a minister of the Crown always with utmost integrity and dedication. Clearly, he was always meant to accomplish great work.

As Minister of Service Alberta he acted to protect Albertans from unscrupulous contractors while homeowners were rebuilding after the southern Alberta floods. That protection went as far as laying charges. His special passion was advocating for the vulnerable in our province, especially children. That passion found its expression when he became Minister of Human Services, responsible for children in care. He led the move to greater transparency and reporting on fatalities of children in care. He led it with an unprecedented openness born, I believe, out of a confidence that, he felt, it was simply the right thing to do.

Whether in government or in opposition Manmeet was accessible, authentic, committed, and very capable. He had a special place in his big heart for people trying to escape discrimination and threats of violence and death, especially for practising their religion and their faiths. He learned of the discrimination first-hand on a recent overseas trip and urged the federal government of the day to lift restrictions under Canada's private sponsorship program for refugees. Just two weeks ago he spoke passionately in the Legislature on issues of human rights in Pakistan, India, and Afghanistan.

Manmeet was also very gracious, and just last week, as we ended our estimates debate on Executive Council, he offered up his very generous and personal praise of and directly to public officials for the work that they do both now and when they worked with him. He saw the good in everyone around him, and when confronted with hurt, his first instinct was to do whatever he could to put it right. It was typical of the Member for Calgary-Greenway that he would stop to help someone in need, stepping from the warmth of his vehicle in the midst of a heavy snowstorm. For him there was no other way to live. He thought of others before himself. With his energy and his youth and his passion I truly expected to see Manmeet in public life for decades to come, and I believe without question that Albertans are worse for the fact that we will not.

My thoughts continue to be with his family, his friends, and his colleagues. A family has lost a son and a husband, Calgary-Greenway has lost a champion, Albertans have lost a strong voice, the Progressive Conservative caucus has lost a loyal member, and this House has lost a colleague, a good and decent man.

His passing is a reminder that the members of this House are a family despite the differences between us and the disagreements they sometimes provoke, and we will do what every family does when it loses a loved one: we will grieve together, we will draw strength from one another, we will help each other to heal, and most of all we will never forget the person we lost, the Member for Calgary-Greenway, Manmeet Bhullar.

The Speaker: The Leader of Her Majesty's Official Opposition.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A fitting day is the birthday of the first Sikh guru. [Remarks in Punjabi] Greetings. [As submitted] Namaste. It is with great sadness that I rise today to speak on the passing of the Member for Calgary-Greenway, our dear friend and colleague Mr. Manmeet Singh Bhullar.

Death will always carry with it an incredible sense of pain. In all of mankind's endeavours to understand the deepest mysteries of the world, nothing has remained more elusive or out of reach than comprehending the meaning of death. It touches us all. As families, as different communities of faith, as a society we have all learned that there is simply no easy remedy, no tonic, no invention that can mend the grief and brokenness we all feel in our hearts with such a sudden loss of life. So we look to each other, we turn to our individual faiths, we pray for one another, and we remember in our own way this man. We take comfort in seeking and understanding a simple truth. That truth is that we were put on Earth with a meaning and for a purpose, a purpose to love one another, a purpose to serve one another and our fellow persons, and a purpose to make a positive difference in our world for others.

We stand in this Chamber where giants have truly stood, where the dedication of men and women who, with far-reaching vision, have sought to see Alberta be the very best it can be. We are known around the world as a refuge and as a place to be. Manmeet Bhullar brought part of that reputation here. The dedication of men and women from Alberta, people with far-reaching vision, is known. This week we have lost one of our finest, friendliest, and kindly giants – I don't mean in stature although that is true; I mean in purpose, vision, and accomplishment – a man who, with a deep sense of patriotism and commitment to his province and country, sought to bring people together, a man who, in deep commitment to his Sikh heritage and faith, always sought to be the champion of the needs of the afflicted, the needy, and the vulnerable. We could take a great example from him, and we should.

Manmeet accomplished much in public life. Before he became an elected official at the age of 28, he served as an adviser to our former Premier Jim Prentice. Upon his election he promised to be an MLA who bridged people together, and, in my opinion, his ability to stay true to this pledge is among his greatest accomplishments. As Service Alberta minister he made some important reforms. As Infrastructure minister he proudly championed new schools and other important projects right across the province.

But I believe that in the eyes of history he will be most fondly remembered for his work and accomplishments overseeing the Department of Human Services. There is perhaps no ministry in any provincial government that requires such empathy, compassion, and humanity. During his time in office there was perhaps no one who better exemplified these particular traits. Lifting the veil for families and our most vulnerable children will always, without question be one of his crowning achievements. But it is the love he

felt for those without a voice that we will all remember in our hearts. He truly felt it and lived it.

In opposition his service continued. His most recent advocacy work, to help refugees and at-risk minorities in Afghanistan, was just the sort of project he would champion and talk about frequently to his friends.

To his family, friends, caucus, and all of his colleagues here today, our deepest condolences. To his father and mother, Bill and Sukhvir Bhullar, and to his wife, Namrita, my personal sympathies: no greater loss than a son. We all hope and pray for a comfort that is beyond understanding and that will surround them all, all of us, during this difficult time.

2:00

Manmeet truly had limitless potential in what he had to offer our province. We will always be a little less for the silencing of such a large, towering individual. But his family can be reassured; Alberta will forever hear his voice. Mr. Speaker, we are all saddened here today, but the work of this place must continue. He would want that. Manmeet Bhullar's work will continue. We must do that. Let us all strive every day to be like Manmeet and do all that we can to help Albertans, to help Alberta be the best it can be, especially those in need. That would be what he would want.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would seek the unanimous consent of the House so that the leader of the Progressive Conservative party, the Member for Calgary-Mountain View, and the Member for Calgary-Elbow be able to respond to the Premier's statement and that in the case of the leader of the Progressive Conservative party the customary three-minute limit be set aside.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: The hon. member, the leader of the third party.

Mr. McIver: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. The PC caucus would like to thank all other members of the House for your understanding. As we gather here today, there's a hole in our close-knit caucus. It's not just a physical hole. You can see the flag-draped desk here amongst us. It's a reminder that one of our family members is missing and is missed. There's a hole in our hearts. The Member for Calgary-Greenway, Manmeet Singh Bhullar, was not just our colleague; he was a son, a husband, a brother, a friend, a confidant, a community leader, and the heart of the PC caucus. His death on Monday has left us heartbroken.

Manmeet, Manny or Meeta if you prefer, was first elected to this Legislature in March 2008, but many of us in this House knew him long before. In the hours following his leaving us, we heard from some hon. members who told us that they played sports with Manmeet, they went to school with him, they served on a community board with him, or they campaigned with him long before he ran himself. I knew him when I arranged with him and the then mayor Bronconnier to declare the first-ever Sikh Awareness Week in Calgary. Even then, years ago and not far removed from his teenage years, Manmeet was inspiring young immigrants to dream big and to be part of the solution. He passionately lectured them – believe me: passionately – to embrace Canada and recognize the rule of law, the only thing that protected their quality of life.

At the same time, he was a fierce defender of the underdog and would not stand for the bullying of minorities. I remember him talking about getting taunted for switching from his turban to his

helmet when he was playing high school football. Now, he did crack a bit of a sly smile when he thought about how he could settle his own scores on the football field. Lord help those who brought on Manmeet's ire, but he needed to clear the way for more modestly proportioned athletes to follow.

In the Alberta Legislature the MLA for Calgary-Greenway served on numerous committees and served as the Minister of Service Alberta, Human Services, and Infrastructure. At the time of his first election he was the youngest caucus member. Even then he knew it.

Manmeet the advocate and MLA accomplished more in his short years than some will fulfill in a long, long lifetime. He was involved in helping so many people and organizations, and his philanthropy and advocacy knew no borders. Manmeet was not bound by the borders of Alberta or even Canada. Recently he was on a personal mission to south Asia to find ways to protect persecuted Afghan minorities and refugees. Sometimes – heck, most of the time I didn't even know where he was, and he made this trip at his own expense. We learned yesterday that two families from Afghanistan are now safe in the Punjab thanks to Manmeet's efforts.

I'd like to share some remembrances from our PC caucus members. The Member for Calgary-Lougheed will always remember Meeta as a, quote, spiritual mountain of a man. He loved him like a brother, a very much younger, bigger brother with a much more impressive beard. He particularly notes working side by side with Manmeet to secure assistance for the people of Nepal after its devastating earthquake.

The Member for Calgary-North West laughs when she remembers how often he liked to point out that he watched her on TV since, as he said, he was a very young child – and she joked that this was his way of pointing out how much older she was than him – and how he always wanted her to sing the channel 2 and channel 7 theme songs. She has now admitted that she has never had the heart to confess to him that she didn't know all of the words.

The Member for Calgary-West remembers Manmeet advocating fiercely for him when he decided to enter politics, and he remarked on the way that Manmeet had such a profound effect on any room that he walked into, including this one. Manmeet Bhullar never went anywhere unnoticed.

The Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti remembers two years of sitting beside Manmeet in this Chamber and listening to him belt out *O Canada* with his powerful lungs. He says that Manny was great at many things; singing was not one of those things, and he smiles at the tone-deaf version of our national anthem that he endured on the front bench during that time.

The Member for Calgary-Fish Creek said that he had the honour of working with Manmeet in the community for just causes and through the mutual engagement in the rich fabric of diversity we're all blessed with in Alberta long before he was honoured to serve literally elbow to elbow with Manmeet as a legislative colleague, and he's grateful for the time he has shared working closely with him over the past six months.

The Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster remembers being told that his Movember mustache didn't compare to Manmeet's facial hair when Manmeet was 12 years old.

Dr. Starke: And it's true.

Mr. McIver: Yeah, it's true, too.

He loved Manmeet's sense of humour and admired his energy.

Finally, a message from the Member for Calgary-South East: Manny, I will miss our chats, your quiet wisdom, and your smile; it was so nice to Manmeet you. We have heard that line a lot in the last few days. It was a hash tag trending on social media, and it gave

Albertans a place to share some wonderful memories of our friend. I have picked out just a few.

Since the news broke of Manmeet's passing, we have heard from current and former colleagues, members of the press gallery, constituents, family, and many members of this House. The PC caucus is most appreciative of all the kind words and wonderful descriptions of Meeta, the anecdotes of precious memories of him and the insights into his character that we have seen and heard: a big man with a big heart and, even then, larger than life, a brother, best friend, hero, a passionate advocate for Alberta, a humanitarian. And, apparently, Manmeet gave the very best hugs.

Yesterday our caucus went to pay our respects to the Bhullar family, and it wasn't hard to see where Manmeet got his strength, his pride, and his courage. As they grieved, they told wonderful stories about the boy they loved and the man they were so proud of.

2:10

As Manmeet would say: I've got this.

His grandmother talked about how he always wanted her to tell her stories. He could never get enough of his grandmother's stories. It was only a week ago when he had to leave before one of her stories was finished, and she told us now that they will never get to finish it. His unfinished story is perhaps the saddest thing in our hearts.

Farewell, Meeta. Thank you for the time you gave us. Thank you for the inspiration. We love you, and now it is up to us to continue the great work you have always done.

[Standing ovation]

The Speaker: Hon. member, I'm pleased to say that one of my first remembrances of your peer was in my very novice days in this House. Apparently, he had stood to ask a question, and I saw a shadow come over the room. I wondered where it came from. I then said: Hon. member, I'm sorry; I didn't see you. He looked at himself. He said: we really are going to have trouble with this new Speaker from here on in.

Our condolences to you and your peers in your party. I know that these members are with you.

The hon. leader of the Liberal Party.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To the Sikh community gathered here today: namaste. I appreciate this opportunity to add a few words and comments on this sad occasion. Like everyone, I was deeply shocked, saddened to hear of the death of our colleague Manmeet Bhullar. Manmeet was a passionate, hard-working, good-hearted servant of the community. This House has lost one of our most respected members. We will feel his absence every day.

Although I did not always agree with Manmeet, I never doubted he was working for what he thought would be the best interests of Alberta. In particular, I'll remember his hard work in making public the names of children who died in government care.

To the Bhullar family: the people of this province extend our deepest thanks for so generously lending Manmeet to public life for these past years. Indeed, everyone in this Chamber knows all too well the sacrifices our families are asked to make so that we can serve here. As you so beautifully described, we understand that with Manmeet and the Bhullar family – the light has gone out of our lives. It's my sincere hope that you know that his light also helped make our province brighter.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the Alberta Party.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a sad day but a tremendous honour to stand here today and speak about a great

man. The last time I had a long discussion with Manmeet was after he gave his moving speech in celebration of Diwali. The Legislature rotunda was absolutely captivated, and there was silence as he talked about the persecution of Sikhs. Despite the anger that this persecution rightly generates, he spoke of the fact that it is only light that can fight darkness. Now, he was a big man, as we've heard today, and his stature got lots of attention, but much more than that I remember his words. His words were tremendously powerful, passionate, intelligent, meaningful.

A lot has been said about the work he did in this House and the very public way he supported his community and stood up for vulnerable Albertans, but what many don't know, of course, that we've now talked about today, is the work that he did quietly all around the world, helping those people badly in need, not for glory or for personal reward but because it was necessary and he knew that he could help. Manmeet worked tirelessly behind the scenes trying to help Sikh and Hindu families living in Afghanistan who faced constant discrimination and the inability to fully practise their faith in the face of threats of violence.

He spent his own money travelling the world in order to help those who needed his aid, using his significant personal charisma and experience to insert himself into conversations with officials in Brussels, India, and other parts of Asia in order to advocate for his community, and I think it's important to note that he inserted himself into those conversations whether they liked it or not. He stepped in to help because he could, because he knew it was needed, and there really is no more fitting tribute to Manmeet Bhullar than to recognize his work helping others. He is exactly the sort of person we need in public office, and the world needs more Manmeet Bhullar, not less.

His loss is absolutely devastating, and I can't imagine what his family is going through, nor his community, nor his colleagues in the PC caucus and your staff. My team has connections to yours, as I'm sure you know, and on their behalf I offer our sincerest condolences and offer any support you need at any time.

This absolute tragedy has brought members of this House together, though, in a way I think we wouldn't have otherwise. On Monday night we cried together, some prayed together, and we built bonds that cannot be broken.

Manmeet said that politics is still comprised of human beings. We all seem to forget this; Manmeet's legacy means that that is no longer true.

Rest in peace, my friend.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of Her Majesty's Official Opposition.

Provincial Fiscal Policies

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, this question, like all of our questions today, is based on one that was asked by our dear friend Manmeet Singh Bhullar. I'm going to talk about the government's least favourite subject, the economy and jobs. Premier, there are many things that you cannot control in the economy – for example, the price of oil and other countries' oil production levels – but you can control your policy responses to the economy. Do you really think now is the right time to implement tax hikes, that can result in massive job losses?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, first of all, the economy-wide carbon price, which our government announced

that it would be implementing as part of its climate change strategy, a strategy which I believe is long overdue and a strategy that will make Alberta a leader not only on a national stage but on the world stage, will be completely recycled back into the economy because it is those very issues that we are very concerned about. We understand that the economy is vulnerable, and therefore we are committed to ensuring that that carbon pricing is recycled back in and, in fact, will almost inevitably create more jobs, not less.

Mr. Jean: We are already number one in the world of oil-producing countries with our environment.

Again, from the Member for Calgary-Greenway on June 22: "I represent the people of Alberta, and I'll fight to make sure their jobs are looked after, Madam Premier." Will the Premier please tell us what her plan is to find thousands of Albertans new jobs when their employers pick up and move to Saskatchewan or to British Columbia because of her government's new taxes and bad policies?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think it's really important to understand that even with the implementation of the climate change leadership plan, that I was proud to announce on Sunday, Alberta overall remains the lowest taxed jurisdiction in the country, to the tune of about \$8 billion, and that's not actually going to change. So the fact of the matter is that we're not particularly worried about jobs leaving, nor are we worried about emissions leakage because we worked very hard with industrial and economic leaders across the province to put together this plan. We have the endorsement of many leaders within those communities because they see that this is actually a good way forward for our province.

2:20

Mr. Jean: The Premier forgot to ask the people that pay the tax how they felt about the \$3 billion tax, which is the citizens of Alberta.

Again based on a question from Manmeet Bhullar:

Madam Premier, it is your opportunity now to protect the economic interests of hard-working Albertans. How, ma'am, are you going to protect a dry cleaner, how are you going to protect a pizza shop owner, how are you going to protect your neighbourhood florist by raising their [business] taxes by 20 per cent

or by saddling them by a carbon tax? I added the last part about the carbon tax, but he would've if he was here today.

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, indeed, when we introduced our climate leadership plan on Sunday, one of the things that we talked about was different models for rebating the economy-wide carbon price to particular parts of the economy, and one of those parts is the small businesses that were just outlined by the member opposite. You can anticipate that we will actually be reaching out to small businesses to ensure that any negative consequences from the plan will be addressed and, in fact, that they would be able to benefit from a number of incentives to bring about the kinds of emissions reductions that all Albertans and our children need us to make real.

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

International Humanitarian Aid

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hon. Bhullar truly lived the spirit of namaste, and one of his final projects was the protection of vulnerable minorities in Afghanistan. When the world's attention

was rightly focused on the Syrian crisis, Manmeet did not forget the critical needs of the 2,500 remaining Afghan Sikhs and Hindus out of over 200,000, most of whom had fled or perished during almost four decades of festering violence. Now, this summer he undertook a personal mission to south Asia, drawing upon his rich, world-wide network of relationships to acquire homes and jobs, medical care, and schooling for asylum seekers abroad. To the Premier: how will humanitarian efforts like these held dear by hon. Bhullar be supported by the government of Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've always found the advocacy from the Member for Calgary-Greenway for religious minorities incredibly commendable, and a number of the organizations that he thought were important, whether it be Women for Afghan Women, the World Sikh Organization, the Organization of Human Welfare, and a number of different government officials and volunteers, undertake incredibly valuable work in our province and abroad, and our government will continue to support the work of these innovators as they work to promote human rights and as they work to promote effective settlement because they reflect the values that I think all Albertans want to see lived every day.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Premier. While meeting with Afghan minorities who had fled the country, hon. Bhullar discovered that many of them had been systematically prevented by locals and sometimes by government from practising their religion, obtaining education for their children, and accessing basic health care. He also learned that Afghan authorities could not protect Sikh and Hindu women from forced marriage and religious conversion. Manmeet expressed his passion for helping those most in need through a promise to help Afghan minorities that the world has forgotten. Again to the Premier. Please tell us: what can the government of Alberta and indeed all Albertans learn from Manmeet's commitment to safe and supportive social environments, which will enable Albertans to truly realize their dreams?

Ms Notley: Well, I think that it's fair to say that Manmeet Singh Bhullar's ideas about how we need to reach out and make sure that the fundamental human rights of people all over the world are respected are one of the reasons why people are so moved by and troubled by what happened on Monday. He was a person who spoke for values that are held deeply in many of our hearts, values of inclusion, values of freedom, values of respect for people regardless of their religion and indeed sometimes in respect of their religion. We are a strong and free province because of the diversity we have in this province. Mr. Bhullar knew that, and we will do everything we can to continue that legacy in the work that we do.

Mr. Rodney: One of hon. Bhullar's greatest passions was striving to ensure that all Albertans are treated with the dignity and respect that they deserve, and that includes everyone: citizens, permanent residents, and those seeking to become Albertans. Manmeet sought to bring Afghan refugees to our province with the hope that they would experience and enjoy an environment in which they had the opportunity not just to survive but to thrive and in which they were afforded protection from basic human rights violations and systemic discrimination. Finally, to the Premier: what can the government of Alberta do to ensure that refugees, new Canadians from Afghanistan, Nepal, and all over the world will have the opportunity to live in an open and welcoming environment in the future regardless of where they're from?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The member's question underscores the importance of our province doing its part to help those from war-torn areas who face violence, oppression, and poverty every day. The thriving communities that we already have in Alberta demonstrate that our province welcomes people from many faiths and many countries. It also underscores the need to reach out to those people when they come to our province, to include them in our communities, to include them in our institutions, to help them with language support, and to ensure that they are genuinely quickly part of our family. That's the way to make sure that they live in the way that the member has so eloquently described and that Manmeet Bhullar was seeking to have happen.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Openness and Transparency in Government

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Member for Calgary-Greenway was a tireless champion for openness and transparency in government. During his time as Minister of Infrastructure he oversaw the creation of a website that tracked the progress of school builds in all communities around the province. This system was designed to show Albertans when and where they can expect new spaces for students. The member said that the interactive website "was a very powerful tool by which people could see regular progress on projects." To the Minister of Infrastructure. In estimates you outlined that this website would be restored as soon as the updating of information is complete, and we applaud that commitment. When will this happen?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much for the question, Mr. Speaker, and to the hon. member. The website that was created when the hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway was Minister of Infrastructure is a great tool to see progress on the development of schools in the province, and I share the member's desire for more openness and transparency. We expect that updated school build information will be loaded on the site in coming weeks. A full list of the schools can be seen at infrastructure.alberta.ca, and we're working with school boards to confirm remaining details and aim to relaunch projects.alberta.ca very soon. I would also like to announce today that we will be expanding the site to include progress updates for all capital projects.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for the response. Again to the minister: given that the last motion submitted by the Member for Calgary-Greenway urged the government to accept this policy, the practice of disclosing any relevant legislation and policies upon which it bases decisions affecting Albertans, will your government commit to ensuring that this measure of transparency is followed through by making public this type of information?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. I know that the Member for Calgary-Greenway was a believer in transparency and accountability. He could always be counted on to put forward creative ideas to solve problems. The motion that he put forward is an example of that approach. I want to tell the member and the House that we believe that this is an

interesting idea that is worth consideration as we move forward with our work to strengthen transparency and accountability in government.

2:30

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister, for the response. Again to the minister: given that the Member for Calgary-Greenway was most passionate about child welfare and youth vulnerability and given that the member's vision was to push for continuous improvement of supports for vulnerable children and their families, how is this government ensuring that the Member for Calgary-Greenway's five-point plan is being implemented and strengthened to continuously improve the child intervention system?

The Speaker: The Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. Our government agrees in principle with the five-point plan, which highlighted the need to address the root causes of many issues that affect the safety and well-being of children such as poverty, addiction, sexual abuse, mental health, and family violence. Our government will continue to fund sexual assault centres and will invest in preventative measures and programs such as FCSS, family and community support services, and the like to address these important issues.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

Legacy of Former MLA Manmeet Singh Bhullar

Mr. Fraser: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank all the caucuses for their care, their grace, and their understanding during this difficult time. It means a lot.

Mr. Speaker, in speaking with Manmeet Bhullar's father last night, he spoke a bit about how he raised Manmeet. He referenced Monday's tragedy and said, and I quote: no matter what the circumstances, you must stop and help someone in need. You have to stop and help. End quote. So it's no surprise that Manmeet was such a caring, diligent, and effective advocate for his constituents. To the hon. Minister of Human Services: what improvements have been made in recent years to the ways that this government provides services to Albertans as a result of the many constituency cases Mr. Bhullar had brought to this government's attention?

The Speaker: The Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. We know that Manmeet was a passionate person and that he was passionate about helping others. He served in three different ministries, and because of this he was very skilled at helping his constituents navigate the government system to access supports. While he was Human Services minister, as the hon. Premier and other members of this House mentioned, there were a number of changes that he made to support Albertans to receive and navigate those services, including opening two new Alberta sports centres in Edmonton and Red Deer, the launch of a province-wide mental program, and a welcome to parenting initiative.

Thank you.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Bhullar helped dozens of families establish themselves in Calgary and Alberta, including young doctors, nurses, dentists, engineers, accountants, transportation professionals, day home operators, labourers, researchers, and the list goes on. To the same hon. minister: which government programs have been improved to help attract and retain new Albertans to become established in Alberta based on the amazing work that Manmeet did?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. As many of us shared here today, Manmeet was about helping others, and till the last moment that's essentially what he was doing. If I speak specifically to my department, the Department of Human Services, he made many important changes to this department. Specifically, I can talk about what everybody mentioned today, the publication ban around the deaths of children. There are many initiatives that we can see government-wide that he did when he was minister that will help Albertans, and there are many initiatives which he embarked upon as a community leader, as a member of his Sikh community, that will always be remembered and will set a path for future generations.

Thank you.

Mr. Fraser: Mr. Speaker, I have to say that I didn't realize there were this many people over there. Now that our good friend is gone, there's clearly a void.

You know, we all have a minute in time on this planet, and in that minute that Manmeet had, he did so much for so many. It's been referenced by the Premier and the caucuses and countless Albertans, the work that he's done. We have honoured previous advocates for people in their own right such as the hon. Grant Notley. To the Premier: would you so graciously consider naming the federal building after the hon. Manmeet Singh Bhullar?

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We absolutely believe that there should be an appropriate and ongoing tribute to the Member for Calgary-Greenway. We are beginning that, of course, in this House today, and we'll be talking more with the member's family about what future tributes might be appropriate. We welcome any and all ideas about how to appropriately pay tribute to the member and his dedication to Alberta. We've just been presented with this idea, and we will definitely give it some very vigorous consideration to honour a memory that must be acknowledged.

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

International Postsecondary Students

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Manmeet Singh Bhullar was a passionate advocate for his constituents and for Alberta. In the October 20 meeting of the Public Accounts Committee Mr. Bhullar asked about the operations of international student recruitment. Typically international students pay up to 3.5 times as much in tuition as domestic students because the government of Alberta does not provide them with base grant funding. This incentivizes institutions to heavily recruit international students. To the Minister of Advanced Education: are budget shortfalls in your ministry being filled through international student recruitment?

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Of course, it was the priority of our

government upon being elected, and in our first session right away we put money back into postsecondary education to make sure that it's accessible and affordable and stable for all Albertans. That's been our priority. You know, enrolment is up. Many students are really taking advantage of this, and institutions are grateful for the new funding.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Now, with respect, I was asking about international students. Mr. Bhullar thought that increased revenues to the system from international students certainly felt like a commercial enterprise. In fact, international students were left out when the government reversed the post-secondary market modifiers and instituted a tuition freeze. Even more, some programs have increased international tuition by up to 30 per cent in this academic year. To the minister: why didn't the government's policies apply equally to all students studying in Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We don't have jurisdiction on controlling international tuition. Institutions do this. We are in the process, though, of very quickly rolling out the adult learning review. This is something that we have heard, the concerns about international tuition fees. We're looking at that, and we'll be listening to the community and others who are concerned about this, but right now we don't have jurisdiction over internationals. We did want to make it stable and affordable for our students here in Alberta, and that's why we moved forward very quickly to put back \$133 million in the postsecondary system.

The Speaker: Hon. member, second supplemental.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Obviously, there's a discrepancy here between how we treat certain groups of students in this province, a discrepancy that Manmeet and his constituents were very concerned about. To the minister: will you commit to regulating international student tuition so that Alberta students are entitled to fair treatment regardless of where they come from?

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said, we are going ahead with the adult learning review, and this will be one of the things that we're looking at. We welcome people's ideas around this. At this point we're just gathering that information. It's very important for us to hear from all groups regarding this. We look forward to reporting back after that's complete.

The Speaker: Hon. Government House Leader, I understand you may have a motion.

Mr. Mason: Yeah. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would ask unanimous consent from the House to continue the daily Routine past 3 o'clock today.

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

Violence against Indigenous Women and Girls

Miranda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're all very familiar with the statistics that show that indigenous women and girls are three

times more likely to experience violence than nonindigenous women. Earlier this month in my own constituency of Calgary-Cross we lost Janel Squirrel to such violence. She was 26 years old and a mother of three. This needs to change. Can the Minister of Aboriginal Relations tell us what the government is doing to ensure that indigenous women are safe?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to the member for the question. We know that too many indigenous women are going missing and being murdered. Each one of these women deserves to be honoured and mourned and has a family in need of healing and a community in need of answers. Alberta was proud to join these families and other provinces in the call for a national inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women. I have had the opportunity to speak to my federal counterpart in Prime Minister Trudeau's new government, and I'm eager to get started on this important work.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Miranda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We can call for a national inquiry, but we need to see action now, and we need to see the dollars that are going to be invested in programs here in Alberta. Can the Minister of Aboriginal Relations tell us what initiatives are already under way that take a stand against violence towards indigenous women and girls?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to the member for the question. Of course, I'm proud to see so many people today in this Legislature wearing the moosehide swatch in support of this important issue. The Moose Hide campaign was launched a year ago by the Alberta Native Friendship Centres Association, one of our community partners. This powerful campaign asked indigenous and nonindigenous people to wear the swatch to show their commitment to standing up against violence to indigenous women and girls. We know we can be a part of the solution, and this is one way to show that commitment.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Miranda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Moose Hide campaign was launched a year ago, and I truly believe in its power. We want to know what the government is doing now to show our commitment to keeping indigenous women and girls safe. To the same minister: what are we investing in today?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to the member for the question. Well, this campaign was started a while ago. As we know, many of our friends across the House, including the hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway, were advocates for minorities. Certainly, our government has recently provided funding for an additional campaign. We provided \$125,000 to support the I Am a Kind Man program in nine communities across Alberta. The Alberta Native Friendship Centres Association is leading this initiative, which is based on traditional teachings, to help restore and repair family relationships in the indigenous community.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North West.

Human Services

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to my colleagues today for all your kind words. My friend the Member for Calgary-Greenway was someone who had a great passion for fighting injustice. He fostered a sense of hope wherever he went, asking the difficult questions, holding everyone to account, and making sure that the attention of the government was always squarely focused on the lives and needs of Albertans. When he saw a problem or someone who needed help, he would act. It's an example that we in this House should all strive for. To the Premier: how will you ensure that your government and your ministers remain focused on accountability and achieving the best possible outcome for Albertans, as Manmeet Bhullar did?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. As has been mentioned before but I think bears repeating, Manmeet Bhullar, of course, took a very major step forward in terms of releasing the publication ban and moving forward in terms of reporting and the scope of reporting of fatalities and injuries that occurred to children in care or receiving services. That information is the first part of accountability, so I think that we need to remember that and, of course, move on from that, which we will do and I'll talk about more in another question.

But I'd like to just say one thing, which I didn't have a chance to say before. When we talk about Human Services – you know, back when I was in opposition, it was a critic area for me, and it is arguable at the time that I had more access to front-line workers and information from front-line workers than those in government at the time might have had. I think it's important for all of you to know that I heard from most front-line workers that there was a tremendous level of respect for the work that Manmeet Bhullar did at that time. He was very much seen by the people who worked for him as a champion for their cause.

Ms Jansen: Thank you to the Premier. One of the great successes, as the Premier just mentioned, of Minister Bhullar's tenure was the ending of the publication ban on children who died in care. The Member for Calgary-Greenway moved immediately to take action to open up the system to Albertans. To the Minister of Human Services now: what steps will you take to build on those accomplishments?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. As has been mentioned in this House, removing that ban was a huge achievement and a huge step forward in Human Services. Building on that, we will try to improve those services to take it another step forward by bringing in an independent mechanism to independently investigate all deaths of children in the care of the province.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Finally, in February of last year the Member for Calgary-Greenway announced that the government would be putting up \$5 million to ensure that children facing mental health issues can get help as quickly as they can. Again to the Minister of Human Services: given the rising issues we have seen with addiction amongst our young people, can the

minister assure this House that the plan and the funding committed by the Member for Calgary-Greenway are still in place?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member. We know that children involved with the intervention system are at higher risk to develop mental health disorders, and the funds committed by Manmeet Bhullar will continue within the children intervention division of Human Services. We have also added \$37 million back into the intervention system, which will also help us improve the lives of these children and youth. We have also launched a mental health review, which will also help us assess our needs and determine the path forward.

Thank you.

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

Diversity Initiatives

Mr. McIver: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, Mr. Bhullar was Mr. Community Initiatives. Some members and staff remember accompanying Manmeet on one of his many mid-session trips between Edmonton and Calgary to unveil a facility in Calgary in the morning, attend question period, a community fundraiser in the afternoon, and back to Calgary for a community event that night. Many of us remember Manmeet – and he has some fame – as the first turban-wearing Sikh minister in the Alberta Legislature, and who can forget his emotional address during the recent Diwali celebrations here in the Legislature. To the minister of culture: what can you do to assist MLAs in this House and their staff to learn to best support Alberta's increasingly diverse population to establish success and, in so doing, strengthen all of Alberta?

2:50

The Speaker: The hon. minister of culture.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker, and thank you so much for the question. I know that Manmeet was a tireless community advocate and had an amazing capacity to – I saw him, at one point, appear in two gurdwaras in two different cities in one single day. I know that he worked very hard to not just access the community development funds that we have through the ministry of culture for northeast Calgary but for the whole province as well, and you can see his work made manifest on many plaques around the province and you see where he's got the money for the important community work that he does. This year, for example, in northeast Calgary there was \$50,000 at the Cornerstone Youth Centre, which, I think, is very, very well done.

Mr. McIver: Again to the same minister. Given that Mr. Bhullar and the respective leaders of dozens of cultural and religious organizations – he supported them and helped troubleshoot their efforts to establish applications to the government. Mr. Bhullar along the way frustrated several Alberta agencies, boards, and committees by demanding that they treat ethnocultural organizations with the same due consideration as anyone else. In what ways is this government making sure that agencies, boards, and committees and government departments, for that matter, become open to Alberta's many diverse community organizations?

Mr. Eggen: Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, I think it's a very fitting tribute to the continuation of Manmeet's work that we look to ensure that we have cultural diversity in agencies, boards, and commissions and that we look at the grant structure. Of course, we have a long history of grants and institutions going in a certain

way, but to move and to expand past some of the Eurocentric tendencies to invest in certain cultural institutions and look to having our investment as a government reflect the diversity of Alberta in 2015: certainly, all of us endeavour to do so.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, Manmeet Singh Bhullar didn't always wait for government policy to do what had to be done. He helped many young Albertans learn about and enter into the community development policy worlds in health, health care, law, public service, justice, and other careers, including using the STEP program, which the government is going to bring back, and sometimes, lots of cases, worked with parents in children's cases, that he helped resolve in the system. How will this government continue to support Mr. Bhullar's passion for fostering diversity and supporting Albertans who don't necessarily fit into the current government programs?

The Speaker: The minister of culture.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, Manmeet's tenacity and capacity to advocate for not just his constituents but for all Albertans is a good example to many of our new MLAs, to simply not take no for an answer, for one thing. If you perhaps didn't quite equal the physical stature of Manmeet, you could certainly work to have that tenacity in your heart. For all Albertans and for vulnerable Albertans especially, you know, I know that Manmeet would not stand down. I always like to lead by example, so I will endeavour to do so in my own personal life.

Thank you.

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

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to preface my comments by stating that, certainly, the PC caucus and Manmeet's family have been greatly appreciative of the support that they have received outside of this Chamber, but I also want to say that the PC caucus is highly appreciative of all of the support we've received from inside of this Chamber, particularly from the House leaders from government, from the Official Opposition, and also from our independent members, to modify the rules under these extraordinary, exceptional circumstances – we appreciate it – and especially to the Official Opposition caucus for affording us four additional questions so that we might be able to all ask questions.

Midwifery Services

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, amongst Manmeet Bhullar's many passionate causes – and there were many of them – one that is perhaps a little bit less known is that he was a passionate advocate for midwifery. Midwifery has been recognized under Alberta's Health Professions Act since 1998. One year after Manmeet was first elected, midwifery was funded by Alberta Health Services. He was a passionate advocate for the expansion of midwifery services in Alberta. He understood that a good life began with a good birth, and he knew that skilled and compassionate midwives would provide these services to women across Alberta, the women he so affectionately called his mothers and his sisters. To the Minister of Health: what expansion of midwifery services has Alberta seen since 2008?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and to the member for the question. The number of midwives in Alberta in the initial year, 2009, when it became publicly funded, was a 37 per

cent increase in that year alone. Now there are approximately 90 midwives and midwifery staff appointments through Alberta Health Services, which is great. You know, in the very first year it was funded, my niece, Anika, is proud to say that she was helped out by a midwife. It's certainly impacted our family in a personal way, and I want to say thank you for the contributions.

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, one need only speak with Manny's mother and his sisters or his beloved wife to know how much he honoured and valued the role of women in our society. Now, his love for children is also very well known, and the fruits of his efforts as a role model and mentor to hundreds, if not thousands, of young people will be seen for many years to come. To the Minister of Health. In September additional funding for midwifery services was announced. How many additional courses of care will be provided this year, and how will women be able to access these expanded care courses?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much for the question. More than 2,700 families will be receiving midwifery care in the coming year. That's an expansion of more than 400 supported midwifery births. There's actually a centralized database now through the midwifery website, and there are a number of communities that it's been expanded to. Some, actually, are still accepting new registrants this year. So good news: we haven't totally exceeded our capacity yet. Obviously, the demand is going to continue to grow with the expansion of this great service.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, Namrita would want to see us to continue expansion of midwifery services, not just in the number of courses that we offer, courses of care, but also in the opportunities for training new midwives in Alberta and for expanded availability of midwifery to all geographic areas of the province, including rural and urban areas. Could the Health minister share with Albertans her plans for fulfilling Manmeet's vision?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to the member for the question. We are certainly working closely with Mount Royal University and with the College of Midwives of Alberta to understand their needs and ensure that they understand the needs of women throughout Alberta. The expansion of midwifery services: I'm really proud to say that just this November we expanded to the community of Plamondon. That's great news. Additional midwifery services have also been recently added in other communities in addition to Edmonton and Calgary, which are the two where we currently have the greatest demand. We also have expanded services in Cardston, St. Albert, Medicine Hat, and underserved communities in northeast Calgary and surrounding areas as well.

Thank you.

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

Registry Services

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When he was Minister of Service Alberta, Manmeet Bhullar oversaw many services, including those offered by more than 200 registry agents. He always sought to ensure Albertans received efficient services while providing fairness to private-sector partners. To the Minister of Service Alberta: given that many rural-based registries are providing services at a loss to ensure rural residents have convenient access to them and given that these agents were slated to receive a dollar

fee increase on July 1st, how is your government assuring the stability of rural-based registries, and will you be establishing a formula-based model for future increases?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. I know that the Member for Calgary-Greenway believed that Service Alberta needed to continually move forward in providing quality services to the people of Alberta at the best value. Like him, we certainly value the role that registry agents play in delivering those services on behalf of the government. So we continue to work productively with registry agents to ensure that Albertans do receive the quality services they deserve, and we continue to be committed to ensuring that rural Albertans have access to the quality government services that they need.

3:00

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Minister, and thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that the province plans to offer more services online and has built the MyAlberta e-services portal to do so and given that Alberta has a proven partner which continues to offer convenient services to all citizens, will your government commit to offering registry agents the ability to participate in the government of Alberta's future plans for expanded online services?

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you once again to the member for the question. I certainly know that the Member for Calgary-Greenway recognized that our world is changing rapidly, and it's important that our government services keep up with the opportunities and demands that come with that. So we continue to seek opportunities to strengthen our registry services, including expanding our online services so that Albertans who choose to access services that way will have the convenient access that they are looking for. As we move forward, I can commit to proceeding with the option that will best meet the needs of Albertans, that they have convenient services at the best value.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Same minister: given that the number of registries has not increased since 1993 and given that in estimates you indicated to Manmeet that you are looking into issuing requests for proposals for new registries when your ministry issues the new RFPs, will you guarantee that the government of Alberta is provided with the best value possible by ensuring the highest bidder is awarded the contract?

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks to the member for the question. The procurement process that the government of Alberta established is open, transparent, and committed to ensuring that Albertans get the best value possible. So in terms of any possible changes to registry services I certainly can guarantee to follow that process to ensure that we can continue to serve Albertans efficiently and effectively at the value that they expect and deserve.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to start out just adding to some comments by my colleague by thanking not only all the members of this House but you, Mr. Speaker, and all of the LAO staff for accommodating us in the House but also on the committee level as well. That's been very deeply felt by us. Thank you.

International and Local Relationship Building

Mr. Gotfried: Born in Calgary, Manmeet grew up in an environment where the value of social and cultural fluency, in both the local and international contexts, was instilled in him at an early age. Former Premier Prentice recently mentioned meeting Manmeet when he was just 10 years old, following closely behind his father as he worked tirelessly to build a gurdwara in Calgary. His parents' example of hard work and community leadership stayed with Manmeet through his life, leading to his negotiation of a memorandum of understanding and further bridge building between the government of Alberta and the state of Punjab in India. To the minister of economic development: in what ways was this agreement to facilitate trade, enhance relationships and socioeconomic partnerships important to both postsecondary education and agriculture between the two jurisdictions?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the hon. member for the question, recognizing that today has been quite an incredible day of learning about all the different successes that the hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway had and all the ways he touched Albertans' lives and those of the international community as well. I know that Alberta and India both share a co-operative and mutually beneficial trading relationship, and they are an important international partner for us. This agreement that the hon. member speaks of was announced in January of 2014, and it focuses on the aspects of agriculture, animal genetics to help increase trade in the areas of dairy production and swine genetics. It also established an agricultural working group to encourage communication between our jurisdictions. Our government is focused on looking at ways to increase market access and trade, and this trade agreement was made with a very similar focus, and I thank the member.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you. Again to the minister: given that relationships with a wide variety of people from Alberta, Canada, and beyond were critical to Manmeet's success at home and abroad on topics as diverse as improving government services, domestic violence, and local entrepreneurship, what are the most important improvements this government is planning to ensure that its network of local and global relationships is grown and sustained in the broadest context?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the member for the question. Currently Alberta has 11 international offices, with one that is located in New Delhi. I'm working with my department to look at all of our foreign offices with an eye to efficiency, effectiveness, and productivity. We are very supportive of diversifying Alberta's economy and expanding new and existing markets, which includes a strategic and cost-effective international presence. These offices are key to sustaining these global relationships, and, again, I know that the Member for Calgary-Greenway

was a very strong advocate and had a very strong hand in getting this office set up, which I look forward to adding to in my next response.

Thank you.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you again to the minister, with our deepest appreciation. Given Manmeet's long-standing passion for community-building based on mutual respect and understanding and given that his success in this area was an integral part of the successful signing of the aforementioned MOU with the state of Punjab and given the importance of postsecondary education and agriculture to both Alberta and Punjab, in what ways have residents of the two provinces benefited from the improved trade and partnerships, and how do you see those being strengthened in the future by this government?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the member again for the question. Our strengthened ties and MOU with the state of Punjab that Manmeet worked so hard to see signed have had many benefits for the people of Alberta and Punjab. Again, I don't want to understate the role that the Member for Calgary-Greenway played in building the relationship between the state of Punjab and the government of Alberta, and for that we thank him. Punjab has benefited from an increased export market for agriculture. Approximately 72 per cent of India's population lives in rural areas, with 65 per cent employed in agriculture. The Indian agrifood industry is estimated to be worth about \$180 billion and is expected to grow to \$310 billion by 2020. Agriculture currently accounts for 17.4 per cent of India's GDP. These ties will be strengthened as we continue to utilize our international offices to diversify Alberta's economy through expanding and existing markets.

Thank you.

[Standing ovation]

3:10

The Speaker: Hon. members, I would make this observation, and I will be referencing it in my years ahead in this House. In my mind, it's going to be called the Bhullar phenomenon because today I heard people speaking, and it is a wonderful, wonderful event that we ought to repeat yet again many, many times. If you hear me mention his name in the future, you will know of what I speak.

Hon. Government House Leader, I understand that we may have a motion.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I hope you don't get too fond of this.

I would like to ask for unanimous consent that, notwithstanding Standing Order 7(4), the Member for Calgary-McCall be allowed to participate in Members' Statements today.

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

Members' Statements

Mr. Manmeet Singh Bhullar

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in the House today to pay tribute to our beloved friend and colleague Manmeet Bhullar. He was a shining star of Alberta. Manmeet was a dedicated public servant. He went to work day in and day out representing the great

people of Calgary-Greenway. Manmeet exhibited the core principles of Sikhism, the faith he practised and the religion that grounded him.

Mr. Speaker, today is Prakash Purab, birthday of Guru Nanak Dev Ji, the first of the 10 Sikh gurus. He was the founder of Sikhism, and his birthday is celebrated world-wide as Gurburab. [Remarks in Punjabi] What this means is that when Guru Nanak was born, the darkness all around vanished, and there was amazing light everywhere. His main message of Sikhism is to spread the message of kindness and peace and to promote the equality of all human beings and for equal rights for women.

Manmeet Singh Bhullar was able to live a life that Guru Nanak Dev Ji called for, and all of us should be proud of this. His educational background, character traits, and his personal appearance always gave the comfort and confidence anticipated from an authentic and brave sardar ji.

When Sikhs and Hindus were persecuted in Afghanistan, the ones that could afford to managed to get out. The poor and the weak remained stuck there. Of late Manmeet had been working tirelessly to get them out also and to settle them in a safe country.

Looking at what he accomplished in his brief 35 years, it is not difficult to understand how much potential was taken away so soon. Although he is not physically with us anymore, that star will forever be enshrined in this province's history. Sir William Osler once said, "We are here to add what we can to life, not to get what we can from life." Manmeet Bhullar died doing what he always did, helping others.

In closing, I would like to extend my deepest condolences to Manmeet's family and friends here and all over the world. Our thoughts and prayers are with them. I hope that they'll find comfort in knowing that their loved one made all the difference to his community, to his province, and to his country. He served this province, and for that we are forever grateful. May he rest in peace. [Remarks in Punjabi]

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Holodomor Memorial Day

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On this sad day I also rise on another sad occasion, on Holodomor. The word "Holodomor" comes from the Ukrainian words for "hunger" and "plague." In Canada the fourth Saturday of every November is marked as the official day of remembrance for the people who died in the Ukrainian famine, known as Holodomor. An estimated 10 million men, women, and children died of starvation in this famine. To put that in perspective, this is more than double the population of all of Alberta. It was truly a horrific period in Ukrainian history.

Mr. Speaker, more than 300,000 persons with Ukrainian ancestry call Alberta home. Many of them are constituents of Stony Plain, the riding that I represent. Many of them are descendants of those who suffered or are survivors of the famine itself. The Ukrainian community makes up an integral part not only of my riding but of Alberta. They are our teachers and doctors, our MLAs and our ministers, our neighbours and our friends. The stories they share of the horrors that occurred must be remembered. They remind us of the courage and strength of the human spirit and inspire us to continually promote the acceptance of all people and all cultures. We must work every day to ensure that crimes like Holodomor never happen again. We must work hard to respect and honour the memory of those who died in this senseless famine.

Mr. Speaker, I would encourage every member of this Assembly to honour the memory of those who suffered by redoubling our efforts to fight persecution, racism, violence, and discrimination.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Manmeet Singh Bhullar

Mr. Ellis: Thank you. As Manny would say: don't worry; I've got this. Mr. Speaker, this has been a hard one. For us, losing Manmeet is like losing a partner in the line of duty. When we're up here in Edmonton, we spend more time with each other than we do with our own families. One of the reasons Manmeet and I got along so well was because the doors of both our constituency offices are always open to the people, and Manmeet listened to the people. He did not hear; he listened. And after listening, he tried to find a solution, and that's why he was so beloved. Regardless of who they were or what their background was, Manny knew that the people knew that they could go to Manmeet and that he would listen and that he would try to find a solution for you or for your people.

His work at the Legislature was equally impressive. Manmeet was the first turbaned Sikh to hold a ministerial position in Alberta and, although I don't have confirmation of this, in Canada, I've heard. The symbolism of that appointment was not just significant for the Sikhs and other ethnic communities; it was important for all of us. He became Canada's most visible minority, and in doing so, he inspired anyone and everyone. For youth he was a particularly powerful symbol because they saw that in growing up in Canada, they could be who they are and could still achieve greatness.

He was a man of influence in his community, and he took that responsibility to heart. Because of his physical stature – let's face it; he was a mountain of a man – we never expected the gentleness that we saw. Within moments of meeting this gentle giant, he won you over with his warm smile and his huge heart. That doesn't mean that he was a pushover. Manmeet was a force of nature, with a strong will to match his big heart. He took charge of his ministries, and he was passionate about ensuring their work was ethical and efficient. He led by example, had high expectations of the people that worked for him, and he was a natural leader. Public consultation was the hallmark of every initiative he prompted.

Along with his ministries Manmeet was passionate about other causes close to his heart. He was an advocate with regard to violence against women. In fact, on the day of his passing he had spoken on that very same subject in Calgary. I've already mentioned his constituency work, which set a fine example for all of us. His constituency office was a champion for all cultures. He had a level of understanding of a person's struggles no matter what background they came from.

Now, as a former police officer I have to take a moment to address the people involved in Monday's accident. Please don't carry the burden of guilt for the events that unfolded on that day. You've got to know that Manny would not have wanted that because he was a generous soul, and he was doing what he loved. He was helping people.

I will leave you with one final quote. As I embraced his father yesterday and we hugged and we cried, he said to me: God needed him more. But it was nice to Manmeet you. We love you, and we miss you.

Thank you, all.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First off, I just want to commend my colleagues in the PC caucus. The way that you're honouring your colleague today is really remarkable.

3:20 Violence against Women

Ms McPherson: I'm committed to a world where women and girls can walk alone without fear, free from fear of harassment, free from fear of assault, free from fear for their personal safety. I'm wearing an orange scarf today for a brighter future in honour of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. This day, proclaimed in 1999 by the United Nations, commemorates the Mirabal sisters, who were political activists from the Dominican Republic assassinated in 1960 for their opposition to the dictatorship.

We are all diminished by violence against women, and we all lose out when half of the population finds it necessary to walk alone at night with their keys gripped in their hand like a weapon in the futile hope that they can fend off any would-be attackers, when women need to develop the skill of avoiding angering a man in order to keep ourselves safe. All women have ignored offensive comments, laughed off inappropriate invitations, and swallowed their anger at being belittled or talked down to because they don't know what might happen if they object.

World-wide 1 in 3 women has experienced physical or sexual assault. That means nine members of this Legislature, including me. In Canada indigenous women are seven times more likely than nonindigenous women to be killed by serial murderers. Alberta has the second-highest rate of self-reported sexual violence in Canada.

Violence against women is a human rights violation. It happens in our province every day, and it is up to all of us to change that and to take a stand. Raise awareness. Challenge the behaviour and the language that keep violence hidden. Speak up when you see harassment. Give generously to those groups that are working to end this violence. Wear an orange scarf, a moosehide swatch, or a white ribbon to show your support. Let us take care of one another.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Manmeet Singh Bhullar

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, colleagues, for allowing me to speak. It is with a sad heart that I rise today to speak about the untimely passing of a fellow member of this Legislature, Sardar Manmeet Singh Bhullar. A life that was dedicated to public service, to helping others, and to representing the constituents of Calgary-Greenway has been cut tragically short. Mr. Bhullar had a drive to do better for Alberta, which he showed during his seven years as a member of this Assembly and in his capacity as a minister of government, including the portfolio of Human Services, that I hold today. Manmeet wanted to make a difference in people's lives, and that's what he was doing at the time of Monday's tragic incident.

Mr. Speaker, I met Manmeet recently at various events, where he shared with me very passionately his work around Afghan Sikh refugee resettlement. In his remarks at the Diwali event here in the Legislature rotunda and at the Genesis Centre in Calgary he discussed the symbol of lights from the Diwali festival – and I paraphrase – as a metaphoric reference to stress that light must be shone in all dark corners around this globe against all oppression and against all violations of basic human and democratic rights. He certainly has shone light on many lives and worthy causes, and his work will live on in our province. His efforts will be remembered by Albertans and all those whose lives he touched.

It's beyond imagination to think of the devastation of Mr. Bhullar's family. I would just say that my thoughts and prayers go to Mr. Bhullar's family and to all those who knew and loved him, and I will join all my colleagues here to offer my heartfelt condolences to all of them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Families First Society

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am reminded today of what a privilege and honour it is for me to be able to stand and speak in this House. Today I speak about the Families First Society, located in my home of Fort Saskatchewan, and recognize the efforts of the executive director, Heather Boonstra, and staff.

"Through improving the lives of our children, youth and families today, we help create a resilient healthy community for tomorrow." Founded in 1998, Families First has been using this foundational statement to grow the many ways they serve and educate the community. Serving more than 950 families last year alone, Families First became a parent link centre, providing evidence-based parent education programs to Fort Saskatchewan and Sturgeon county. They also provide family support programs, including community kitchens, home visitation, and the angel whispers program for couples suffering the loss of a child. They also staff a family violence prevention co-ordinator thanks to the support of Fort Saskatchewan's mayor and council.

The community they serve continues to grow. Fort Saskatchewan has a population that grows as much as 6 per cent year over year, with a 20 per cent increase in five to 14-year-olds and a 37.5 per cent increase in children aged zero to four. This growing demand has meant that Families First was looking for a new home. With leadership from Mayor Gale Katchur and councillors that advocate for the health of their communities, Fort Saskatchewan city council agreed to lease their former RCMP building to Families First for \$1 per year.

The new space will provide them with the ability to grow and meet the needs of a broader community of parents seeking safe, strong, and happy families. Families First does an amazing job fundraising through community events such as the Touch-a-Truck event and the Take Back the Night walk. Taking to the streets in support of the White Ribbon campaign – I wear the ribbon today – aims to end violence against women. On Monday morning the hon. Manmeet Bhullar was speaking about the role that our men and boys play, that important role, in ending violence against women. I thank him for his efforts.

Again, I just want to thank these women in my community for mobilizing their community to help make it a better place, and I look forward to seeing them in their new home.

Thank you.

Tabling Returns and Reports

Mr. Ceci: This is a report from the hon. Minister of Seniors. She wants to address the questions that were asked of her in the main estimates for the Ministry of Seniors. She has the appropriate copies here.

The Speaker: Hon. minister, I thought you were going to be wearing another, different colour today. When is that going to happen?

Mr. Ceci: The Stampeders don't seem that important.

Bilous	Hinkley	Payne
Carson	Horne	Phillips
Ceci	Kazim	Piquette
Connolly	Kleinsteuber	Renaud
Coolahan	Littlewood	Rosendahl
Cortes-Vargas	Loyola	Schmidt
Dach	Luff	Shepherd
Dang	Malkinson	Starke
Drever	Mason	Sucha
Eggen	McKitrick	Sweet
Feehan	McLean	Turner
Fitzpatrick	McPherson	Westhead
Ganley	Miranda	Woollard
Goehring		

Totals: For – 19 Against – 43

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

A2. Mr. Smith moved that the 2015-16 main estimates of the Ministry of Education be reduced for the minister's office under reference 1.1 at page 88 by \$141,000 so that the amount to be voted at page 87 for expense is \$4,314,684,000.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A2 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:55 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Hanson	Starke
Anderson, W.	Hunter	Stier
Clark	Loewen	Strankman
Cooper	MacIntyre	Taylor
Cyr	Panda	van Dijken
Fildebrandt	Schneider	Yao
Gotfried	Smith	

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Goehring	Miranda
Bilous	Gray	Nielsen
Carson	Hinkley	Payne
Ceci	Horne	Piquette
Connolly	Kazim	Renaud
Coolahan	Kleinsteuber	Rosendahl
Cortes-Vargas	Littlewood	Schmidt
Dach	Loyola	Shepherd
Dang	Luff	Sucha
Drever	Malkinson	Sweet
Eggen	Mason	Turner
Feehan	McKitrick	Westhead
Fitzpatrick	McLean	Woollard
Ganley	McPherson	

Totals: For – 20 Against – 41

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

A3. Mr. Hunter moved that the 2015-16 main estimates of the Ministry of Infrastructure be reduced for the minister's office under reference 1.1 at page 162 by \$185,000 so that the amount to be voted at page 161 for expense is \$546,446,000.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A3 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Hanson	Smith
Anderson, W.	Hunter	Starke
Clark	Loewen	Stier
Cooper	MacIntyre	Taylor
Cyr	Panda	van Dijken
Fildebrandt	Schneider	Yao
Gotfried		

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Gray	Miranda
Bilous	Hinkley	Nielsen
Carson	Horne	Payne
Ceci	Kazim	Piquette
Connolly	Kleinsteuber	Renaud
Coolahan	Littlewood	Rosendahl
Cortes-Vargas	Loyola	Schmidt
Dach	Luff	Shepherd
Dang	Malkinson	Sucha
Drever	Mason	Sweet
Feehan	McKitrick	Turner
Fitzpatrick	McLean	Westhead
Ganley	McPherson	Woollard
Goehring		

Totals: For – 19 Against – 40

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

A4. Mr. W. Anderson moved that the 2015-2016 main estimates of the Ministry of Service Alberta be reduced for the minister's office under reference 1.1 at page 218 by \$164,000 so that the amount to be voted at page 217 for expense is \$315,582,000.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A4 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:05 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Gotfried	Smith
Anderson, W.	Hanson	Starke
Clark	Hunter	Stier
Cooper	Loewen	Taylor
Cyr	MacIntyre	van Dijken
Fildebrandt	Panda	Yao
Fraser	Schneider	

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Gray	Miranda
Bilous	Hinkley	Nielsen
Carson	Horne	Payne
Ceci	Kazim	Piquette
Connolly	Kleinsteuber	Renaud
Coolahan	Littlewood	Rosendahl
Cortes-Vargas	Loyola	Schmidt
Dach	Luff	Shepherd

Dang	Malkinson	Sucha
Drever	Mason	Sweet
Feehan	McKitrick	Turner
Fitzpatrick	McLean	Westhead
Ganley	McPherson	Woollard
Goehring		
Totals:	For – 20	Against – 40

[Motion on amendment A4 lost]

4:10

A5. Mrs. Aheer moved that the 2015-16 main estimates of the Ministry of Transportation be reduced for the minister's office under reference 1.1 at page 234 by \$72,000 so that the amount to be voted at page 233 for expense is \$850,463,000.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A5 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:11 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Hanson	Smith
Anderson, W.	Hunter	Starke
Clark	Loewen	Stier
Cooper	MacIntyre	Swann
Cyr	McIver	Taylor
Fildebrandt	Panda	van Dijken
Fraser	Schneider	Yao
Gotfried		

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Gray	Miranda
Bilous	Hinkley	Nielsen
Carson	Horne	Payne
Ceci	Kazim	Piquette
Connolly	Kleinsteuber	Renaud
Coolahan	Littlewood	Rosendahl
Cortes-Vargas	Loyola	Schmidt
Dach	Luff	Shepherd
Dang	Malkinson	Sucha
Drever	Mason	Sweet
Feehan	McKitrick	Turner
Fitzpatrick	McLean	Westhead
Goehring	McPherson	Woollard

Totals: For – 22 Against – 39

[Motion on amendment A5 lost]

A6. Mr. Stier moved that the 2015-16 main estimates of the Ministry of Treasury Board and Finance be reduced for the minister's office under reference 1.1 at page 248 by \$386,000 so that the amount to be voted at page 247 for expense is \$150,430,000.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A6 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:17 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Hanson	Smith
Anderson, W.	Hunter	Starke
Clark	Loewen	Stier
Cooper	MacIntyre	Swann
Cyr	McIver	Taylor
Fildebrandt	Panda	van Dijken
Fraser	Schneider	Yao
Gotfried		

4:20

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Gray	Miranda
Bilous	Hinkley	Nielsen
Carson	Horne	Payne
Ceci	Kazim	Piquette
Connolly	Kleinsteuber	Renaud
Coolahan	Littlewood	Rosendahl
Cortes-Vargas	Loyola	Schmidt
Dach	Luff	Shepherd
Dang	Malkinson	Sucha
Drever	Mason	Sweet
Feehan	McKitrick	Turner
Fitzpatrick	McLean	Westhead
Goehring	McPherson	Woollard

Totals: For – 22 Against – 39

[Motion on amendment A6 lost]

The Chair: We shall now proceed to the vote on the estimates of the Legislative Assembly as approved by the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services. Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 59.03(5), which requires that the estimates of the offices of the Legislative Assembly be decided without debate or amendment prior to the vote on the main estimates, I must now put the following question on all matters relating to the 2015-16 offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2016.

Agreed to:

Offices of the Legislative Assembly \$152,407,000

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

We shall now proceed to the final vote on the main estimates. On all matters relating to the 2015-16 government estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2016, those members in favour please say aye.

[The voice vote did not indicate agreement]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:23 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For:

Anderson, S.	Gray	Miranda
Bilous	Hinkley	Nielsen
Carson	Horne	Payne
Ceci	Kazim	Piquette
Connolly	Kleinsteuber	Renaud

Coolahan	Littlewood	Rosendahl
Cortes-Vargas	Loyola	Schmidt
Dach	Luff	Shepherd
Dang	Malkinson	Sucha
Drever	Mason	Sweet
Feehan	McKitrick	Turner
Fitzpatrick	McLean	Westhead
Goehring	McPherson	Woollard

Against:

Aheer	Hunter	Smith
Anderson, W.	Loewen	Starke
Cooper	MacIntyre	Stier
Cyr	McIver	Swann
Fildebrandt	Panda	Taylor
Fraser	Rodney	van Dijken
Gotfried	Schneider	Yao
Hanson		

Totals: For – 39 Against – 22

[The estimates of the general revenue fund and lottery fund were carried]

The Chair: Shall the vote be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That motion is carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I will now move that the committee rise and report.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Currie.

4:30

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of Supply has had under consideration certain resolutions relating to the 2015-16 offices of the Legislative Assembly estimates and the 2015-16 government estimates for the general revenue fund and lottery fund, reports as follows, and requests leave to sit again.

The following resolutions for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2016, have been approved.

Offices of the Legislative Assembly.

Support to the Legislative Assembly, \$68,199,000; office of the Auditor General, \$26,754,000; office of the Ombudsman, \$3,282,000; office of the Chief Electoral Officer, \$31,685,000; office of the Ethics Commissioner, \$1,153,000; office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner, \$6,843,000; office of the Child and Youth Advocate, \$13,242,000; office of the Public Interest Commissioner, \$1,249,000.

Government main estimates.

Aboriginal Relations: expense, \$204,588,000; capital investment, \$117,000; financial transactions, \$77,071,000.

Advanced Education: expense, \$2,567,294,000; capital investment, \$217,340,000; financial transactions, \$579,000,000.

Agriculture and Forestry: expense, \$1,128,189,000; capital investment, \$21,666,000; financial transactions, \$1,860,000.

Culture and Tourism: expense, \$301,645,000; capital investment, \$2,342,000; financial transactions, \$1,618,000.

Economic Development and Trade: expense, \$278,767,000; capital investment, \$25,000.

Education: expense, \$4,314,825,000; capital investment, \$1,240,116,000; financial transactions, \$12,987,000.

Energy: expense, \$371,399,000; capital investment, \$5,999,000; financial transactions, \$86,156,000.

Environment and Parks: expense, \$510,277,000; capital investment, \$117,394,000; financial transactions, \$100,000.

Executive Council: expense, \$25,013,000.

Health: expense, \$18,602,000,000; capital investment, \$64,587,000; financial transactions, \$64,400,000.

Human Services: expense, \$4,297,145,000; capital investment, \$6,801,000; financial transactions, \$680,000.

Infrastructure: expense, \$546,631,000; capital investment, \$1,023,730,000; financial transactions, \$49,162,000.

Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour: expense, \$206,666,000; capital investment, \$1,200,000.

Justice and Solicitor General: expense, \$1,282,888,000; capital investment, \$70,109,000.

Municipal Affairs: expense, \$1,398,365,000; capital investment, \$4,630,000; financial transactions, \$452,026,000.

Seniors: expense, \$575,271,000; financial transactions, \$9,500,000.

Service Alberta: expense, \$315,746,000; capital investment, \$45,921,000; financial transactions, \$15,000,000.

Status of Women: expense, \$1,447,000

Transportation: expense, \$850,535,000; capital investment, \$1,616,411,000; financial transactions, \$78,124,000.

Treasury Board and Finance: expense, \$150,816,000; capital investment, \$2,725,000; financial transactions, \$10,702,000; lottery fund transfer, \$1,547,716,000.

Madam Speaker, that concludes my report. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Does the Assembly concur with the report?

Hon. Members: Concur.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Introduction of Bills

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

Bill 9

Appropriation Act, 2015

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being the Appropriation Act, 2015. This being a money bill, Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor, having been informed of the contents of this bill, recommends the same to the Assembly.

[Motion carried; Bill 9 read a first time]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I will seek unanimous consent of the House that notwithstanding standing orders 64(2) and 77(1) the House should proceed immediately to second reading of Bill 9.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 9 Appropriation Act, 2015

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

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to move second reading of Bill 9, the Appropriation Act, 2015.

This act will provide funding authority to the offices of the Legislative Assembly and the government for the 2015-16 fiscal year. The schedule to the act provides amounts that were presented in greater detail by the 2015-16 government and Legislative Assembly estimates tabled on October 27, 2015. These estimates were subsequently debated in Committee of Supply and standing committees.

Madam Speaker, as we're all aware, Albertans are facing tough economic times. Budget 2015 serves as a temporary shock absorber to shield Albertans from the worst effects of the oil price crash. The measures we introduced are based on three priorities: stabilizing front-line public services, setting out a plan to return to balanced budgets, and stimulating economic development and diversification.

4:40

As noted, stability is at the top of that list because I think we can all agree that what Albertans need most during this economic downturn is stability. Now is not the time to bring chaos to hospitals, classrooms, or cut front-line staff. Alberta's population is still growing. This budget ensures that we'll have the doctors, nurses, teachers we need to provide the public services Albertans rely on.

Madam Speaker, as I mentioned, returning to balanced budgets is another priority we'll move forward on. This will be achieved by limiting spending growth, finding savings, and investing in infrastructure now, when costs are lower. Between cost-saving measures, a gradual rise in oil prices, and a new tax structure, revenue will grow by about 6 per cent a year over the next four years while spending will be held to 2 per cent. Our plan will put Alberta back into the black by 2019-2020 or sooner if the economy recovers stronger than anticipated.

We're also shifting the province away from a failed experiment with regressive flat taxes. We're moving towards progressive taxes, like every other province and the federal government have. We have instituted a modest rise in the corporate taxes, from 10 per cent to 12 per cent, which puts Alberta in the middle of the pack among provinces in this country. Our government believes that creating the conditions for success is not about a race to the bottom on taxes. It's a matter of investing in the infrastructure, programs, and services that allow businesses to thrive and stay competitive and Albertans themselves to enjoy a high quality of life. Everyone who benefits from those advantages should pay a fair share, just as they do everywhere else in Canada, because being able to make these investments is crucial, especially during a downturn. Investments in infrastructure will help maintain jobs in the short term while building a more efficient and competitive economy in the longer term.

But, Madam Speaker, our government realizes that growth alone isn't the solution. Where that growth comes from also matters if Alberta is to be insulated from future oil price shocks, and that's why the third priority in our budget is economic development and diversification. We're responding to the fiscal challenges of today

by developing a plan for economic growth and diversification that supports job creators, entrepreneurs, and workers. As part of that plan we created a new Ministry of Economic Development and Trade to lead efforts to steer Alberta's economy in a different direction so that it becomes less prone to commodity-fuelled boom-and-bust cycles. Because we know that it's businesses and investors that create jobs, not government, we'll be a good partner to industry, providing support through a number of initiatives, including a new job-creation incentive grant, which will provide up to \$89 million per year for the next two calendar years to Alberta employers who create jobs.

We're providing an accelerated capital plan which increases infrastructure investment by 15 per cent over three years, and it'll create 8,000 to 10,000 new jobs. We're also enhancing access to capital for entrepreneurs to help them take their bright ideas from conception to design to the market.

Madam Speaker, we're also putting money in the hands of smart lenders and investors who know what to do with that money. ATB Financial will see a \$1.5 billion increase in the amount it can borrow in the capital markets, allowing it to make more loans to small and medium-sized enterprises in Alberta. The Alberta Enterprise Corporation will receive an additional \$50 million to invest in venture capital funds, helping innovative businesses with a strong presence in Alberta to access new capital that will help them achieve commercial success. Our investment arm, the Alberta Investment Management Corporation, or AIMCo, is being encouraged to invest up to 3 per cent of the heritage fund in growth-oriented companies in this province. Altogether we are mobilizing over \$2 billion to support economic growth and diversification to make Alberta the best place in Canada to launch and grow a business.

Madam Speaker, to recap, Budget 2015 achieves three important things. First, it stabilizes public services by providing long-term sustainable and predictable funding, which is what Albertans asked of us and what we are going to deliver to them. Second, it puts us on a path towards balanced budgets in a reasonable time frame without radical cuts or front-line service layoffs. Third, it ensures our government is a good partner to our province's entrepreneurs and job creators, the keys to diversifying our economy.

Madam Speaker, Budget 2015 is a responsible plan that addresses our short-term economic challenges and stabilizes the programs that Albertans depend on while growing the economy over the long term. I would ask all members of this Assembly to support this bill.

Thank you.

Mr. Cooper: Madam Speaker, I'm hoping that if you seek it, you will find it, unanimous consent for the remainder of the evening for the House to go to one-minute bells.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. When I wrote this speech, I was in a slightly more aggressive mood than I am today, but I'll do my best to address the budget in the light in which I had originally written my remarks.

Today I rise to speak to Bill 9, which allows me yet another enjoyable chance to speak against the budget. Everything I have to say about this budget has pretty much already been said in this Chamber before. Most of the points I'm about to make have been made by myself, by my colleagues, and by Albertans in every possible forum. I've received phone calls, e-mails, and snail mail telling me that this budget will destroy the Alberta advantage. I've

had town hall meetings in Brooks, in Bassano, and in Strathmore where constituents have told me that this will hurt their businesses and their livelihoods. At these town halls my constituents have told me to fight this budget at every turn.

This government has gone out of its way to make people forget about what we used to call the Alberta advantage. We have discussed at length how this government has a chronic spending problem, a problem that existed long before they were elected, but while previous governments had a spending problem, this government has elevated it to a spending crisis, a crisis of such magnitude that spending and debt levels in this budget are not even legal under the current budgetary framework.

That is why the government is also proposing Bill 4, allowing not just consolidated deficits to be financed with debt but now even structural/operational deficits to be financed with debt. It attacks the last line of defence that Alberta has had against spendthrift politicians. That line of defence was established long ago to protect Albertans from politicians that lack restraint. Over the last decade successive governments have watered down and weakened those walls of fiscal defence every time they have run into them. It took the NDP just five months to propose tearing down yet another wall. Bill 4 will allow this government to pass this budget, allowing them to take on more than \$50 billion of debt.

I'll give this much to the NDP: at least they are not trying to hide their intentions. They didn't wait until year 3 or 4 to raise the debt ceiling after three or four years of pretending that they would even balance the budget. No. They are proposing to break the bank in their very first year. This budget expects to run at least four consecutive cumulative deficits. That is under the best-case scenario, with predictions for years 4 and 5 that we will see an incredible 16 per cent growth in revenues those years. As we wander out of the 12 years in the deficit desert, the Minister of Finance believes that he can part the sea and lead us to the promised land of oil and honey.

4:50

If I was doing the books for a business in Brooks, would they renew my contract if I told them that they would see a 16 per cent growth in revenues years 4 and 5 out with zero data to back it up? During the estimates process I asked the Minister of Finance to give us his numbers for years 4 and 5 of the budget. I asked him repeatedly, and he provided us with nothing more than the ministry's talking points. When pressed into a corner, the minister flat out refused to provide the data. I asked for these numbers in this House repeatedly. I asked that the numbers be tabled in this House. I asked that the numbers be given to us in estimates. Nothing.

They say that this is a three-year budget. Fine. We can deal with that. But if this is a three-year budget, then they should take years 4 and 5 out. Remove the two outlying years, that project a balanced budget without a shred of data whatsoever detailing how they actually intend to get there. Otherwise, this is not a three-year budget; it is a five-year budget that doesn't do its homework. Either the crystal-ball predictions for the next four and five years need to be removed from the budget, or the revenue and spending breakdowns must be provided. You can't have your cake and eat it, too, Madam Speaker. The government can't give these highly unlikely but very good for publicity numbers and not tell us how they plan to actually achieve them. This budget does not deserve to be passed without full details.

But since I've asked the minister dozens of times and not gotten any answers, I'll have to take my best guess about where the money is going to come from. On Sunday morning, while most Albertans were at church or watching football or taking the kids to brunch, the Premier announced her new ND PST, a massive, new, \$3 billion

carbon tax that will hammer every single small business and family in Alberta. During the election the Premier promised Albertans that she would never implement a PST, but this carbon tax is the equivalent of a 3 per cent PST. In June the NDP brought down the biggest single tax increase in the history of Alberta. Just a few months later they beat that record again. The ND PST is how the government plans to part the red ink sea: more taxes on Albertans, who are already struggling.

During estimates I asked the Minister of Finance if he had any further plans to raise taxes. He said: no, not unless the economy took a further severe downturn. Yet here they are, raising taxes just a few weeks later. I'd be fascinated to see a single piece of economic literature that says that during times of economic downturn governments should increase taxes as a way to fix the economy. I must admit that I have a hard time finding any economic theory to back that up. The only example I can find is what the NDP are doing to Alberta right now.

While the big five oil companies might be happy to pay a carbon tax, it will be devastating to the hundreds of medium- and small-sized oil producers and drillers like those in my constituency. It will hammer Alberta taxpayers and Alberta families and Alberta small businesses when they can least afford it. It's kicking people when they're down, Madam Speaker. The Premier promised during the election till she was blue in the face that she would never impose a PST, and she never once spoke during the campaign saying that she would implement a carbon tax, but that is exactly what they are doing right now. This government has no mandate for an ND PST carbon tax.

A \$3 billion, backdoor PST would be bad enough on its own, but it's not. This budget taxes and taxes some more, in fact raises over 60 new or higher taxes, not including the tax on everything, that we've just learned about. This budget is reckless not just for its wanton tax hikes, but it is reckless also because the numbers don't even add up. A few weeks ago the Parliamentary Budget Officer released a report detailing their predictions for WTI oil prices over the next five years. As far as reputable, reliable, and respected sources go, the PBO is all of the above. Their numbers were a little different than the government of Alberta's. By a little, I mean a hell of a lot. In fact, the numbers were so different that it opens up an \$8 billion hole in the revenues of this province for the next three years alone.

I want to know how the government managed to book a difference per year of \$11.60 per barrel compared to the PBO's projections. The NDP cannot have a multibillion-dollar rounding error every six months. Every \$3 change in the price of oil is a half-billion-dollar change in revenues for the government. This is not a small rounding error. A \$2 billion hole per calendar year is not acceptable. Before the budget is passed, it must be amended with realistic oil projections. In 2018 the PBO projects oil to be \$53.80 per barrel. This government projects \$72; it doesn't even come close. It is nearly 50 per cent higher than the PBO's projections. It's not even in the same ballpark, Madam Speaker.

Additionally, we don't even have oil projections for years 4 and 5 in this budget whatsoever. The PBO projects oil to be at \$59 in 2020, which, by the way, is the price that the NDP projects it will be next year. The PBO projects \$59 in 2020, but the NDP don't even show their numbers for that year. All the minister could tell me in estimates was that it would be in the, quote, mid-70s range, yet the NDP project their revenues to increase by 16 per cent in those two years.

The Premier's claim that the ND PST will be revenue neutral should be judged with some obvious suspicion by the Albertans who will pay for it. Oil predictions are through the roof. Taxes are

through the roof. The breakdown for revenue numbers in years 4 and 5 simply doesn't exist.

Just the other week I made a friendly bet with the Member for Calgary-Currie that without tax hikes, unbudgeted in the NDP's platform, this budget would not meet its revenue projections of a balanced budget by the next election. Well, I thank the Premier and the Finance minister for making me the easiest \$100 I've ever made in my life.

When we are standing in this place in a few months for the next budget, I'm sure that the Minister of Finance will have all sorts of excuses for why his optimistic numbers never came to fruition. But we don't have to wait a few months to fix the mistakes we're making right now. We don't have to wait four months for the minister to say: oops, I didn't see it coming. It's as clear as day, and every member on this side of the House sees it coming. Let's do the responsible thing with this budget for Albertans and send it back, to the shredder.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member wish to speak? The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to my colleagues. I think I'm going to ask for a certain degree of forbearance as we try to sort of get back into the swing of things. If my comments seem a little bit scattered, you'll have to excuse me. All of us are operating on fairly limited sleep this week, but we'll get back at it, and we'll be banging on all cylinders soon, all eight cylinders, as it turns out.

Madam Speaker, I do want to address some of the issues that we've talked about over these past couple of weeks with regard to the budget. It certainly is a far-reaching document, and there can be no question whatsoever that this budget is very different and represents a significant departure from past practices. There is no question that this government is a clear departure from past practices and past courses of action, so that should not come as any surprise to Albertans. Some are heralding that, some are hailing that as being a brave, new frontier, but I will tell you that others are concerned and are not nearly as joyful about this.

Now, I do want to state here and now that there are some things in this budget that we find entirely laudable, and we want to make sure that the government knows this. To the Minister of Finance: it's a short list, so he may want to stay around so he can hear it. I should be done by 5.

First of all, we are glad to see the reinstatement of the STEP program. The STEP program is a useful program, and it was a program that, certainly, we cut from the budget with a significant amount of trepidation because we know it was important to nonprofit organizations, to cultural organizations, to communities, who would often hire STEP students to do programs in the summertime that would assist with recreation and culture and tourism events.

So we're glad that STEP is back. I'm a little bit puzzled by the continuous reference to STEP being now available to small businesses. STEP, to my knowledge, was always available to small businesses. Well, I had a small business, and I hired STEP students, and I don't think I was breaking the law. If I was, I think I'm past the statute of limitations. We had a small business. We hired STEP students for many years. I'm a little bit puzzled by that, but perhaps you could offer some clarification.

5:00

The second area that I'm actually very glad to see – it wasn't directly in the budget; it was a previous announcement that was made – is the increased funding to women's shelters. We believe

that this is an important step. It's a step, certainly, that our colleague the hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway would have supported, and I'm also especially encouraged to see the expanded funding for second-stage shelters. These are critical in terms of the transition of women who are fleeing family violence situations back into the community and doing it in a way that becomes successful. I'm pleased to see it. I know that in Lloydminster, for example, we have a very active women's shelter. I know the director of that shelter very well, and she has come and met with me about second-stage funding, so I know she was glad to see this.

The third area. You know, for me personally, I'm glad to see the expanded funding for midwifery. I mentioned it earlier, during question period. As most of you know, during the course of the rural health review one of the areas that came up again and again was that people in rural Alberta want to be able to be born in their community, they want to be able to live in their community, and they want to be able to die in their community. In order to do that, there has to be the kinds of supports for the various services in the communities that they need: health supports, social service supports, educational supports.

Above all, they have to have rural communities that are economically viable and, in fact, economically thriving. I will argue with this government that nearly every step that they take is working towards the destruction of rural Alberta. They may refuse to see it, or they may not wish to see it, but I know from what I'm hearing from my constituents and the personal – and it is anecdotal information, granted. I know. I think I was one of the people that coined this term: the plural of anecdote is not data. But anecdotal information is still important because it is important to each and every one of those people's lives, and you cannot ignore anecdotes when people tell you how things like a carbon tax will affect them.

There is no public transit in rural Alberta. I know that the Minister of Transportation wants to expand rural bus services, but I will tell you right now that the option of getting on the LRT in Streamstown, Alberta, is not there today, it won't be there tomorrow, and it won't likely ever be there in my lifetime, nor should it because it would never be economically viable. By necessity rural Albertans travel longer distances to get to work, to get to recreational activities. They burn more fuel because they have to, in order that they can feed Albertans and, indeed, feed the planet, and when you put a carbon tax on things, it makes that more difficult.

Madam Speaker, those sorts of things are being told to me on a regular basis. Ultimately, that accumulation of individual situations and anecdotes is what we need to keep track of as members. It's what our colleague did such a great job of, why he has been so loved over his time in this Chamber. That is why we are paying very close attention to it as we all should in all situations.

Now, Madam Speaker, I want to turn to four specific areas of the budget that are of concern to me, and I want to talk about each one of them separately and the associated budgeting process overall, that we just reviewed in estimates.

The first is a refusal by this government to seriously address government expenditures in the name of stability. We heard that word uttered by the Minister of Finance several times. Well, really, it's a matter of definition. It's a matter of definition as to what you view stability as being. A former leader of our party and a former Premier, Premier Hancock, used to like to say that the NDP approach to everything is: just add money and stir. I will invoke those words as well because certainly that is the approach that this Finance minister has taken with his budget: just add money and stir.

The idea that stability is simply spending more and changing nothing is, to me, akin to having a plane in a nosedive and simply keeping the throttle open full and doing nothing to pull back on the

stick. That's a stable situation because nothing is changing, but the outcome won't be very good. The refusal of this government to recognize that we are indeed in a nosedive and their refusal to recognize that we need to pull back on both the throttle and the stick indicate to me that there is a problem with their basic financial and economic, fiscal literacy.

I have a significant concern, for example, when the Health minister, in the name of stability, does not want to at least look at how AHS is operated, the single most expensive line item in our budget. I know that AHS, for example, has a new board of directors, and these are all excellent individuals, but a good board of directors and good individual directors does not guarantee good governance, and it certainly does not guarantee good outcomes for Albertans. It is well documented that although Albertans spend more than any other jurisdiction in Canada on health care, our outcomes are not what they should be. When Minister Horne was the Health minister, he freely stated that if adding more money was the solution, we'd have solved the problems by now, so I cannot see simply adding additional funds as being the solution to this. I do not see a sufficient commitment to restraint in this budget whatsoever. All I see is additional spending.

That then leads me to my second area of concern, and that is the depletion of the contingency account. Now, the contingency account is one of those things that doesn't get a lot of chat. A lot of people won't talk about the contingency account, but it is, in fact, a vitally important way to manage the ups and downs that we know occur within a resource economy. Now, our contingency account has gone up, and it has gone down, but as of March 31, 2015, before this government came into power, the contingency account balance was some \$6.5 billion. By the time the fourth-quarter financial results were completed and the surplus from the last fiscal year was added into the contingency account, the contingency account balance at the end of June this year was approximately \$8.3 billion, or, put another way, roughly \$2,000 for every man, woman, and child in Alberta.

Well, less than a year and a half from now that calculation is going to be much, much easier to perform because, thanks to this government, that \$8.3 billion number will be reduced to zero; \$8.3 billion will be spent by this government in less than a year and a half in the name, I assume, of stability, and there is no plan whatsoever over the course of this budget to replenish the contingency fund. Now, in terms of household finance we all know that most financial planners recommend that you keep one to two months' worth of your salary on hand as an emergency fund in case of something happening, in case of damage to your car, a very expensive veterinary bill, those sorts of things. Now, we also unfortunately know that Albertans don't always necessarily have that on hand, but zero contingency account: Madam Speaker, we have no savings. We have no emergency fund.

That then will get us into the area that I think is very concerning to us, and that is the abandonment of the principle that you pay for operations and that you pay and keep a balanced budget on operations. When we're borrowing to pay day-to-day operations, we step onto an extremely slippery slope, that we haven't been on for over 20 years in this province. I think that that is something we have to avoid.

5:10

The third area of concern. This came up in estimates, and this is a big area of concern for me. Now, it maybe doesn't deal directly with numbers, but I think it deals with how, then, those numbers are spent, and that is what in committee after committee, in department after department we went through in estimates, the total abandonment of long-term strategic planning documents that were

prepared, we'll say, by the previous government, but in truth they were prepared by Albertans. These strategic documents were put together usually after broad-based, province-wide consultation and were largely written by panels that were led by experts in the field, that had involvement from elected officials but were not run by elected officials.

I know because I was involved in at least two of those processes. One was a rural health review that we completed in March; the other was the recreation plan that guided fitness in amateur sport. We consulted broadly across the province with stakeholders. We got their input, and – trust me – their input was not always complimentary of government. We recognized it, we wrote it down, and we said: we will take action on these things. I can tell you that if you read the health review, it will show you clearly that people had a number of things and were very concerned about how rural health care was being delivered in Alberta.

For example, the tourism framework, the tourism framework act of Alberta, the Alberta cultural plan, the rural economic development action plan, the rural health review are all not even showing up in the business plans for the various departments of this government. If you don't have a plan, how can you expect to go forward and spend wisely and judiciously? I think it's fair to say that there is no plan, and what plans that were there have been abandoned.

I would like to make one specific exception to that that I'm aware of, and that is the Minister of Environment and Parks. The plan for parks, a 10-year plan that started in 2009, is being continued. It was referenced in the business plan for that department, and a number of very important initiatives, including an inclusion plan, which we announced last summer, to increase attendance at Alberta's provincial parks by those groups that are underrepresented in terms of park attendance, were maintained. I am pleased to see that.

There's one other area, and maybe this is just a personal concern that I have. But it is an area that I am very familiar with, and that is with regard to the use of the tourism levy. Now, back in 2005 Alberta passed the Tourism Levy Act. What it did . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, 29(2)(a) is available. The hon. leader.

Mr. McIver: I was actually on pins and needles wanting to know about how this act affected the tourism act, particularly because the hon. member speaking is a former tourism minister, and I can think of no one more qualified in the House to elucidate on that than the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster. I was hoping that he could expand upon that thought.

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

Dr. Starke: Madam Speaker, thank you very much, and I appreciate the opportunity to do so. The tourism levy that was established, called by some the pillow tax, is the 4 per cent levy that is added onto your hotel bill or any fixed-roof accommodation anywhere in the province. It has been by far, across Canada, the most successful form of stable funding for tourism promotion and development in any province in this country. It is the envy of all other provinces. Other provinces have developed tourism levies to emulate ours, but I can tell you that in every case they go and they say: you know, this is great.

What is one of the things we hear about so often in terms of government funding? Stable, predictable funding. Well, the tourism levy provided that. I say "provided" in the past tense because it used to provide that. The tourism department as well as Travel Alberta would know what kinds of allocations they were getting because

they knew how much was collected by the tourism levy in the previous fiscal year, and they knew that that was being allocated to both the department and to Travel Alberta. But no: this year, in this budget some \$9 billion of the tourism levy is being sucked out of the tourism business, is being drawn away, siphoned away and put into general revenue by this Minister of Finance and this government.

It is perhaps the greatest betrayal of our tourism industry in more than a decade, and when the Minister of Economic Development and Trade and others say how important tourism is to this province, it is a hollow gesture. It is a hollow gesture that they do not back up with their actions because they have siphoned off some \$9 billion of the tourism levy, money that's supposed to go into tourism promotion, money that's supposed to go into the building of tourism in this province, and put it into general revenue. Madam Speaker, I find that to be particularly disturbing.

You know, we're hearing it get trumpeted that they created a new Ministry of Economic Development and Trade. They didn't create it; they just brought back a ministry that wasn't used for a number of years, partly because the economy was banging along on so many cylinders that it was hardly necessary. Now the 13th Minister of Economic Development and Trade stands up regularly in the House and trumpets how important his ministry is. Well, it is an important ministry, but it is not new, and he's the new minister, but he's hardly the first minister.

Madam Speaker, in concluding my comments, I'd like to thank the hon. members for their attention. We cannot support this budget because of a number of reasons. I mean, I'm sure that all the members of my caucus and other members within the House could find a number of shortcomings and insufficiencies in this budget, and they are many. But this budget is not one that we can support, certainly not one that I can support, and I believe that it creates a number of very dangerous precedents, that I will not celebrate, nor will the constituents of Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. Still under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Cooper: Yes. Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm just curious to know if the member would provide some context. You know, you mentioned about the leadership of the organization being very important. This evening the government even voted down only amendments that would reduce spending, albeit not very significantly in total number values, on the minister's office itself, a total of less than a million dollars in the whole budget, but I think that could have been a real signal on the direction and the leadership that ministers were taking. I wondered if you might add some comments to the lack of desire to save.

Dr. Starke: Well, Madam Speaker, it's entirely indicative of the entire budgetary process, the fact that ministers need to show by example and lead by example and demonstrate that they are prepared to take some cuts themselves, just as we MLAs will probably take a freeze once the Members' Services Committee makes the decision. Back in February we took a 5 per cent rollback in the wages of MLAs. It was because leaders need to show leadership.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member wish to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Okay. Madam Speaker, I appreciate this opportunity. My colleague the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster was quite eloquent in his remarks, and I'm just going to add one thing.

I've been thinking about this thing, and one of the things that disturbs me the most about the budget, one of the things that makes it hardest for me to support it, is the amount of debt that we will be in and the almost nonexistent capacity that we'll have to pay it back at the end of four years, five years.

I got to thinking about it, and I got to thinking about it in terms of my own minuscule family budget, a budget, I'm sure, in the order of magnitude of probably a lot of Alberta families. Most Alberta families do not have at their disposal \$47.4 billion, which will be the debt the government will be in, by their own numbers here, in five years. But they do understand that lots of times the family will borrow money – it might be for a car; it might be for a home – and they also understand that there has to be a plan to pay it back.

5:20

In terms of what I think is a fairly reasonable comparison to a family budget, let's just say that the budget was \$47,000 a year, \$47,400, because the \$47.4 billion, Madam Speaker, is not that far from the government's annual provincial budget. We're talking about a one-year budget. That's the comparison I'm trying to draw here. The government is going to put themselves in debt by about one year's full expenditures on a budget. That's not unusual for a family to do because sometimes a family that makes \$100,000 a year will have a \$200,000 or \$300,000 mortgage.

But I'll tell you what they don't do. They don't make those payments for the whole year based on one week's pay. According to the government's budget, four or five years from now, when they say that they're going to start paying it back, they're going to pay it back in the first year that they have a surplus, and that surplus will be \$1 billion. So if the annual budget is, you know, \$47 billion – it's about 52 weeks, about a billion a week – they'll have just a little more than a week's pay to pay back the whole mortgage for the whole year. I'm trying to draw this comparison, but in numbers, in terms of how Albertans relate to it, if you were going to pay back your mortgage on one week's pay, your \$1,000 on your \$47,000 loan or mortgage, well, that's monthly payments of – what? – 80 bucks. I mean, I'm not sure what size of home you could get to do that.

I know members might say that, well, a family would never do that because they would normally budget sometimes up to 20 or 30 per cent of the annual take-home pay to pay the mortgage except that this government in four or five years will not have the capacity to do that because they've made it quite clear that they're not going to cut any government jobs, any wages, any salaries, any front-line expenditures, hold the line on anything. They've been quite clear about that.

I'm doing my best not to put words in their mouth, Madam Speaker, but the fact is that I think the average Alberta family will see it doesn't add up. You can't pay a mortgage the size of your annual revenue on one week's pay without supplementing with 10 or 20 or 30 per cent of the rest of your income. It's just not there. The government is not doing it. When you think about that – and I hope members opposite will think about that – I think that financially it's kind of a crash-and-burn plan. I'm not sure how it could be paid back except by taking on more and more and more borrowing – and those banks and those people that lend money will at some point say: enough is enough – or by having to take at some point in the future draconian measures to cut back on expenditures.

I think what we're suggesting is that the government now take reasonable measures to control expenditures, reasonable measures to control growth, reasonable measures to make sure that you can afford to provide. The government is right about one thing, a few things, but I'm going to give them credit right now for one thing. Albertans depend upon their services, and they want them. One of

the important things about that is that if they're that important today, they're still going to be that important in five years, and it's important that we're going to be able to afford them in five years.

If I haven't explained it well enough for everybody, I apologize. I'll call that a weakness in my ability to express it, but to me it's pretty clear that they're headed for a brick wall, where it's going to have to be either draconian cuts or massive debt, something that eventually, finally, you'll say no to. And what's at risk? Those very services that the government says – and I agree with them – are so very near and dear to the hearts of Albertans. As long as that's true, I couldn't possibly support a budget that puts Alberta on an absolute collision course with those services that Albertans depend upon. All Albertans, but particularly those that are educating their kids, will need those teachers five years from now. Those that have family members that get sick will need those services five years from now. Those who are weakest and poorest amongst us will need social services and social supports five years from now. This budget puts all of that at risk, all of it.

It's going to be fine probably for five years, but my goodness, Madam Speaker, I believe it's our duty to look beyond five years. I think it's our duty to look to the long-term welfare of our children and our grandchildren. While there are a lot of other things for me to complain about with this budget, this one issue is so overwhelmingly disastrous, in my opinion, that I'm going to take all my time to talk about that because I think that it really accentuates how this budget is putting Alberta on a disastrous course, a course that I implore the government to turn away from.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, any other hon. member wish to speak to the bill?

If not, then the hon. minister to close debate.

Mr. Ceci: Closed.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:26 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, S.	Hinkley	Nielsen
Bilous	Horne	Payne
Carson	Kazim	Piquette
Ceci	Kleinstauber	Renaud
Connolly	Littlewood	Rosendahl
Coolahan	Loyola	Schmidt
Dach	Luff	Shepherd
Dang	Malkinson	Sigurdson
Drever	Mason	Sucha
Feehan	McKittrick	Sweet
Fitzpatrick	McLean	Turner
Ganley	McPherson	Westhead
Goehring	Miranda	Woollard
Gray		

5:30

Against the motion:

Anderson, W.	Hunter	Smith
Cooper	Jansen	Starke
Cyr	Loewen	Stier

Drysdale	MacIntyre	Swann
Fildebrandt	McIver	Taylor
Gotfried	Panda	van Dijken
Hanson	Schneider	Yao
Totals:	For – 40	Against – 21

[Motion carried; Bill 9 read a second time]

Bill 7

Alberta Human Rights Amendment Act, 2015

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my honour to rise today to move Bill 7, Alberta Human Rights Amendment Act, 2015.

Bill 7 amends the Alberta Human Rights Act by adding gender identity and gender expression to the list of prohibited grounds of discrimination. For clarity, gender identity refers to a person's internal, individual experience of gender. Gender expression refers to the varied way in which a person expresses their gender through a combination of dress, demeanour, social behaviour, and other factors. Protection from discrimination on the basis of both grounds is relevant to transgender and gender-variant people. Their gender identity and expression may differ from the sex they were assigned at birth.

Currently Alberta human rights law includes gender in the list of prohibited grounds of discrimination, which is interpreted as covering gender identity and expression. Nevertheless, trans and gender-variant people continue to be a highly marginalized and discriminated group within our society. In my consultation with members of the transgender and gender-variant community I heard numerous stories of discrimination. I heard of people who had lost their jobs and people who could not keep a job once they came out. Others told me about their safety concerns while staying in shelters. More told me about how hard it was to find a doctor who would treat them, even for conditions unrelated to their gender identity. Even something many Albertans take for granted, using a washroom on a road trip, can be an issue that creates anxiety and safety fears.

I also heard how much work lies ahead of our government. We need to reflect on whether gender needs to be provided on administrative forms. We need to think about wayfinding within the health care system for trans and gender-variant individuals who are looking for a doctor, and we need to find ways to respect the names that people choose to give themselves.

Madam Speaker, more than anything, we need to continue to listen. We need to continue to listen because all Albertans should be able to have the same opportunities to be treated with equal dignity and respect. This proposed amendment will ensure existing rights are clearly reflected in the legislation. It will empower the trans and gender-variant community as they confront stereotypes and discrimination. We know there are still people we haven't heard from, and we're committed to reaching out to hear those voices. The Alberta Human Rights Commission is supportive of the amendment.

Madam Speaker, this is a critical issue. Trans and gender-variant people are still subject to discrimination. Many still struggle with suicidal ideation, and many are still subjected to violence. This government is committed to upholding the rights of all Albertans. We want trans and gender-variant people to feel welcome not only in Alberta but in this Legislature. It's my pleasure to welcome feedback from the Trans Equality Society of Alberta, the Pride Centre of Edmonton, Outreach Southern Alberta, the Institute for

Sexual Minority Studies and Services, and the Centre to End All Sexual Exploitation.

Thank you to the MLAs for Strathcona-Sherwood Park, Calgary-Hawkwood, and Calgary-Cross for their work, passion, and dedication to this issue. Most of all, I would like to thank the individual members of the trans and gender-variant community who shared their stories with us. It's your stories and strength that have brought this legislation forward. Madam Speaker, we have heard their concerns, and Bill 7 is one way we are acting to help address them now.

I would now move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Bill 5

Public Sector Compensation Transparency Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd like to move second reading of Bill 5, the Public Sector Compensation Transparency Act.

This bill follows through on a promise to increase transparency in our public sector, Madam Speaker. If passed, the bill will significantly expand disclosure of public-sector compensation. Disclosure will include employees of public-sector bodies governed by the Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act, including AHS. Disclosure will also apply to employees of Covenant Health, and the legislation can be expanded by regulation to include other entities that receive significant public funds. These bodies will have to disclose the names and compensation of all employees who earn more than \$125,000 in total compensation, including overtime, severance, and bonuses. By including bonuses and other forms of remuneration, we will ensure that compensation cannot be withheld from disclosure.

In addition, these bodies will be required to disclose all remuneration for all members of their boards and other governing bodies. These positions have sometimes been criticized as patronage appointments, so this government, in addition to reviewing ABCs and appointments, will ensure that compensation for these positions is publicly available.

Disclosure for government of Alberta employees will stay the same, but the bill will move the rules from the existing Treasury Board directive into an act. The threshold for these employees will remain at the current level of \$104,754, excluding overtime.

Madam Speaker, the act will also enable regulations to require disclosure of physician compensation. Because physicians and other medical professionals are compensated through a variety of funding mechanisms, unique rules need to be applied. Details will be developed after consultation with physicians and laid out in regulations.

For municipalities and school boards we are providing some flexibility. These two groups are accountable to their electorate and will be able to decide for themselves what best fits the public interest in their community. This act enables but does not require disclosure of names and compensation paid to employees, including teachers. To be clear, this act does not mandate the disclosure of a single teacher's salary.

The threshold for public-sector bodies and other entities is set at \$125,000. Madam Speaker, the number was chosen in order to capture high-income earners. This will also reduce the administrative burden on various groups in that they will not need to extract

the overtime hours from the threshold calculation. All thresholds for compensation disclosure will be adjusted annually for inflation.

If passed, this act would come into force on royal assent, and the first disclosure under the act would be on June 30, 2016.

Overall, this bill will help Albertans understand how public funds are used by agencies, boards, commissions, and other bodies. The government has committed to ensuring that Albertans know how public money is spent, and this is another step on this path.

Madam Speaker, I'd now like to move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

5:40

Bill 6

Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Advanced Education and of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am honoured to rise and speak to Bill 6, the Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act. Farmers and ranchers have long been the heart and soul of our province. Long before our cities were cities, these people were the pioneers who sowed the seeds of what we have become today, a province that embraces the same values that have always been held dear: integrity, ingenuity, and a love of the land. There's no question. Those who work in agriculture have always recognized opportunity and work hard to make the most of it.

On a farm or ranch the hours are long, the chores can be exhausting, and the outcomes are often unpredictable. In those ways it might be similar to working in many other types of jobs or industries, Madam Speaker, but there aren't many jobs where rain followed by a hard frost can make the difference between profit and loss. Despite this ever-present uncertainty farmers and ranchers keep doing the job because they love the land, the lifestyle, and the feeling of pride in producing products that help feed the world.

Madam Speaker, I think that we can all agree. These folks face enough uncertainty without having to worry about what would happen to their families if they were injured or, worse, killed on the job. When most Albertans go to bed at night, they don't need to worry about that, and that's because most of us are covered by laws that protect our health and safety on the job. Most Albertans are covered by workers' compensation to support them and their families if they are hurt while working. But not every Albertan has this support. Unlike the same basic protections workers in other industries have had for decades, Alberta's farms and ranches are not covered by any workplace legislation. To be clear, Albertan workers have been covered by occupational health and safety legislation since 1976, nearly four decades ago, yet farms and ranches remain exempt.

What does that mean? That means workers cannot refuse to perform unsafe work or do work they're not trained for without guaranteed protection against being fired. It means if a farm worker is seriously injured or dies on the job, an occupational health and safety officer cannot investigate the incident to see what went wrong or work with the employer to prevent future incidents. In 2014 17 people died in farming-related accidents. Madam Speaker, those are 17 devastated families who may not have the answers as to why or how their loved one died. Those are 17 missed opportunities to have an OHS officer work with the employers to learn from the incident and to provide support to help prevent future incidents. Those are 17 heartfelt reasons why I support Bill 6, the Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act.

Bill 6 proposes changes to several pieces of Alberta's current labour legislation that cover occupational health and safety,

workers' compensation, employment standards, and labour relations. If passed, this bill will remove the exemption of farms and ranches from labour legislation, and workers in this sector will be able to access protections all other Alberta workers are already entitled to. As it currently stands, Alberta's workers' compensation is optional for farm and ranch workers. We have only minimal employment standards for those employees, and they have no right to unionize or bargain collectively. Madam Speaker, it's time for this to change.

Farming and ranching is one of Canada's oldest industries. Certainly, it dates back to a day and age where most Canadian jurisdictions didn't include the agricultural industry under their respective labour legislation. Back then things were different. Over time farming operations have grown bigger and paid farm workers have become more common. There is also a growing public awareness and willingness to ensure that workers, regardless of the industry, enjoy basic workplace rights. Alberta farms and ranches remain one of the last sectors that don't have access to any form of labour relations coverage for farm and ranch employees, something other Albertans have been able to access since 1938, before the Second World War.

Employment standards are more complex. Employment standards legislation relates to such issues as hours of work, overtime and overtime pay, holidays and general holiday pay, vacations and vacation pay, restrictions on employment of children, and minimum wage. We should support this bill because every worker is entitled to basic rights and protections. Every worker should have a safe, fair, and healthy workplace. Every worker should be able to return home safely after work and should be able to sleep at night knowing their families are protected if something were to happen on the work site.

Madam Speaker, what this bill asks for is that Alberta's farm and ranch workers have the same protections and rights that most of Alberta's other workers – you and I and the vast majority of workers – take for granted. This bill asks for fairness across industries and protections for both workers and employers, no matter the profession.

What this bill does not ask for is one-size-fits-all legislation that would force farms and ranches to follow rules meant for a vastly

different industry. That's why consultation is a key component of how changes will happen if the bill passes. Our government understands that farming and ranching is not the same as oil and gas or construction. Our government is seeking the input of those who will be affected by the bill so that any changes will make sense for the industry and will be practical and enforceable.

We all want workers to have rights and protections. We all want job sites to be fair, safe, and healthy workplaces. Bill 6, if passed, will ensure this is the case for the farmers, ranchers, and their workers. It's basic common sense, Madam Speaker. It's the right thing to do.

With that, Madam Speaker, I move that debate be adjourned.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

The Deputy Speaker: Just before I recognize the hon. Government House Leader, I just wanted to once again acknowledge the wonderful spirit of co-operation and support that we saw today from both sides of the House as we paid tribute to our colleague from Calgary-Greenway. We heard very eloquently about his strength of spirit, his huge heart, his caring, and his larger-than-life personality. He'll be greatly missed in the days ahead, but for today, this afternoon, he was very much with us here in the House.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you for those comments, Madam Speaker. It's been a very hard day, I think, but a very good day in many ways. I would also like to add my thanks to all members of the House for the compassion and care that they have shown, regardless of stripe. I think it is much appreciated, and it is itself a tribute to the hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway.

I think we have made good progress. I want to thank all members of the House for their co-operation and their contribution, and I will move, Madam Speaker, that we call it 6 o'clock and that we adjourn until tomorrow morning at 9 o'clock.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:49 p.m. to Thursday at 9 a.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday morning, November 26, 2015

Day 24

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

First Session

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Feehan, Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (ND), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Kleinstuber, Jamie, Calgary-Northern Hills (ND)	Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND)
Larivee, Hon. Danielle, Lesser Slave Lake (ND)	Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Littlewood, Jessica, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (ND)	Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)
Loewen, Todd, Grande Prairie-Smoky (W)	
Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (ND)	
Luff, Robyn, Calgary-East (ND)	
MacIntyre, Donald, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (W)	

Party standings:

New Democrat: 53 Wildrose: 22 Progressive Conservative: 9 Alberta Liberal: 1 Alberta Party: 1 Independent: 1

Officers and Officials of the Legislative Assembly

W.J. David McNeil, Clerk	Stephanie LeBlanc, Parliamentary Counsel and Legal Research Officer	Brian G. Hodgson, Sergeant-at-Arms
Robert H. Reynolds, QC, Law Clerk/ Director of Interparliamentary Relations	Philip Massolin, Manager of Research Services	Chris Caughell, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms
Shannon Dean, Senior Parliamentary Counsel/Director of House Services	Nancy Robert, Research Officer	Gordon H. Munk, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms
		Janet Schwegel, Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>

Executive Council

Rachel Notley	Premier, President of Executive Council
Deron Bilous	Minister of Economic Development and Trade
Oneil Carlier	Minister of Agriculture and Forestry
Joe Ceci	President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance
David Eggen	Minister of Education, Minister of Culture and Tourism
Kathleen T. Ganley	Minister of Justice and Solicitor General, Minister of Aboriginal Relations
Sarah Hoffman	Minister of Health, Minister of Seniors
Danielle Larivee	Minister of Municipal Affairs, Minister of Service Alberta
Brian Mason	Minister of Transportation, Minister of Infrastructure
Margaret McCuaig-Boyd	Minister of Energy
Shannon Phillips	Minister of Environment and Parks, Minister Responsible for the Status of Women
Irfan Sabir	Minister of Human Services
Lori Sigurdson	Minister of Advanced Education, Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Ms Miller
Deputy Chair: Mr. Nielsen

Cyr	Sucha
Ellis	Taylor
McKitrick	Turner
Renaud	

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Miranda
Deputy Chair: Mr. Schneider

Anderson, S.	Hanson
Carson	Hunter
Connolly	Jansen
Coolahan	Piquette
Dach	Schreiner
Fitzpatrick	Taylor
Gotfried	

Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee

Chair: Ms Gray
Deputy Chair: Ms Payne

Anderson, W.	Miranda
Clark	Nielsen
Cortes-Vargas	Nixon
Cyr	Renaud
Jansen	Starke
Loyola	Swann
McLean	van Dijken
Miller	

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Sweet
Deputy Chair: Mr. Smith

Hinkley	Pitt
Jansen	Rodney
Littlewood	Shepherd
Luff	Swann
McPherson	Westhead
Orr	Yao
Payne	

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Cortes-Vargas
Deputy Chair: Ms Sweet

Bhullar	Nixon
Connolly	Shepherd
Cooper	van Dijken
Horne	Woollard
Kleinsteuber	

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Wanner
Deputy Chair: Mr. Schmidt

Cooper	Nielsen
Fildebrandt	Nixon
Luff	Piquette
McIver	Schreiner
McLean	

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Ms McPherson
Deputy Chair: Mr. Connolly

Anderson, S.	Kleinsteuber
Anderson, W.	Littlewood
Babcock	McKitrick
Drever	Rosendahl
Drysdale	Stier
Fraser	Strankman
Hinkley	

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Mrs. Littlewood
Deputy Chair: Ms Fitzpatrick

Carson	McPherson
Coolahan	Nielsen
Cooper	Schneider
Ellis	Starke
Hanson	van Dijken
Kazim	Woollard
Loyola	

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. Fildebrandt
Deputy Chair: Ms Gray

Barnes	Malkinson
Bhullar	Miller
Cyr	Payne
Dach	Renaud
Gotfried	Turner
Hunter	Westhead
Loyola	

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Ms Goehring
Deputy Chair: Mr. Loewen

Aheer	Kleinsteuber
Babcock	MacIntyre
Clark	Rosendahl
Dang	Stier
Drysdale	Sucha
Horne	Woollard
Kazim	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

9 a.m. Thursday, November 26, 2015

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Deputy Speaker: Let us reflect. As we bring a very difficult week to a close, let us reflect upon the things that really matter. We serve the people of Alberta, but we also owe a debt of responsibility to the people we love – our families, our friends, our colleagues – and, most importantly, to ourselves. We must remain strong and healthy in order to continue in our role as public servants, and this means taking time to rest, time to heal, and time to treasure each precious moment of life.

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 9 Appropriation Act, 2015

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill?

Mr. Cooper: Well, Madam Chair, it's an absolute pleasure to rise this morning. I look forward to many productive mornings together as we talk about the issues of the day that are extremely important to Albertans. While they're busy doing important things, we can be here this morning sharing some conversation around the future of our province. Really, in many respects that's what Bill 9 does. It lays out a new path for the future of Alberta.

I can tell you, Madam Chair, that in the constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, that I represent, I've been hearing from lots of folks about their thoughts on this budget. Again, it's my pleasure to rise to represent those people, not just those people but the many people across Alberta who have been reaching out to the Official Opposition and saying: "Please do what you can to slow down this government. Do what you can to impress upon this government the need for pause when it comes to driving the province over a fiscal cliff." That is exactly what we have before us, a fiscal cliff that ends in upwards of \$50 billion of debt.

We have before us a plan that's been set out by this new government that moves the province in a direction that we have not seen in decades, a direction where the government is changing laws so that they can be borrowing for operational spending. Madam Chair, it's like taking out a loan to buy your groceries, to pay for your electrical bill, to pay for your child care, to pay for your personal day-to-day expenses, and I just don't believe that that reflects the values of hard-working Albertans, Albertans who believe that you should live within your means and that when your fiscal picture changes, you should take a moment and reflect to see the areas where you can find some fiscal restraint.

A perfect example of that, Madam Chair, was that yesterday in this very House the opposition proposed some very reasonable amendments, not amendments that would fire teachers, not amendments that would stop road or bridge construction but that

would give some indication to Albertans that this government is actually serious about looking for efficiencies. Yesterday they proved that they're not, because in many respects they were a fraction of the overall minister's budget, not the budget that they spend delivering services to people but the inner workings of the office. We're talking about paper and whiteout and office furniture and hosting, the hosting costs of a minister's budget, having their friends and important stakeholders to their office for special events.

In many respects many of the amendments were as small as \$50,000, but this government doesn't believe in saving one cent. What they believe in is big spending, raising debt, and not living within their means, and they proved it to all of Alberta yesterday by voting down every single amendment that the opposition proposed. So it is a big concern to the opposition that the government doesn't have a desire to live within its means, that there's no sense to reduce costs, and that the government has made a conscientious choice to drive us towards \$50 billion of debt.

The costs, Madam Chair, to service those debts are astronomical. By 2018, I believe it is, or 2019 the costs just to service the debt will be upwards of \$1.9 billion. It always amazes me to stop and think: how many teachers would that employ, how many roads would that \$1.9 billion build, and how many hospitals would that fix, repair, or build? But when the government has made this conscientious decision to put off the problems of tomorrow, to spend today, it does not put Alberta on the path for success. It puts Alberta on the path for danger.

9:10

As I think about the future, I'm reminded of my three children and family and the challenges that my children will face as a result of the decisions of this government today, the weight of the government of tomorrow on the children of today. It's concerning because of the path forward. At that time, in maybe it's 10, maybe it's 15, maybe it's 20 years, the real, full weight and burden of the debt that this government is driving us to at breakneck speed will be felt. But at that time the only choice that they will have is to raise taxes even higher than this government would like to raise them . . .

An Hon. Member: There'll be no one left to tax.

Mr. Cooper: Or there will be no people left in the province to tax. . . . or absolutely draconian cuts, that this government likes to accuse the opposition of, that we would not do.

In fact, this opposition party has talked at great length about the resources that we would spend, the resources and the ways that we would fund front-line workers, the way that we would put a freeze on the cutting of front-line workers. In fact, just last week in this House we heard about areas of front-line workers that this government is going to be responsible for cutting. We heard my good friend from Cypress-Medicine Hat raise concerns around nurse practitioners in the constituency of Highwood doing wonderful work but who are going to be out of a job in January, not because of the Official Opposition but because of this NDP government, and to that I say: shame.

This opposition, Madam Chair, has continually come to this House, been in the media talking about ideas that we believe can set the province on the right foot, and if the government is looking, they can find many, many proposals on the opposition website. You can find a number of recommendations to move this province forward.

An Hon. Member: Where can we find your shadow budget?

Mr. Cooper: I do love to hear the government talk about a shadow budget, because if you go back in history, Madam Chair, if you look

for NDP opposition shadow budgets, they do not exist, so it makes me smile when I hear them talk about this.

What the opposition has done is provided a number of ideas, and what this government does time and time again is vote against them even when it's in the province's best interest. I think you might remember, Madam Chair, a 7.25 per cent pay raise that this government, in the face of job losses all across this province, voted in favour of, and it was only because of this opposition party bringing ideas forward that they saw the error of their ways and turned around, and for that I say thank you.

I encourage the government to listen when the opposition brings ideas forward, just like we did yesterday afternoon, to show a small amount of fiscal restraint, but that's, unfortunately, not what we saw. It seems that what we're beginning to learn about this government is that this government believes that they know better than all of Alberta, that they know better than all of the opposition, that they know better than every farmer in the province, that they don't need to consult or listen to anyone because they're from the government, they're here to help, and they're going to solve all of our problems. But I can tell you, Madam Chair, that what Bill 9 does is that it proves that nothing could be further from the truth, because it takes Alberta down a path that we have not been on for many decades.

Recently, Madam Chair, Alberta has enjoyed a government, and the government wasn't perfect, and the opposition is likely in its place today because the previous government made a bunch of grave mistakes. One thing that they did do is that they put into place – and more recently they started to change the rules and got away from those key principles that are so important to this party. But one thing that they did do is that they put into place a bunch of rules and regulations that will require the government to stop and think before moving forward and require them to make changes to legislation, and we've seen that happen. These laws initially were put in place so that the government wouldn't drive us down a path of \$50 billion of debt, that it would drive the government in the direction of finding ways to be more efficient in their expenditures.

A perfect example of that, Madam Chair, is as a result of the good work that the opposition has done in the past. I read a newspaper article last week about AHS saving \$5 million on cellphone bills alone. There is a tireless researcher that does wonderful work for the Official Opposition, and I firmly believe that as a result of his good work – his good work – the opposition was responsible for shedding light on an issue, that now the government is going to save \$5 million worth of Alberta's hard-earned taxpayer dollars because of the work of this opposition. This is the exact type of thing that we need, we must see from this government, but it is absolutely not what we see in Bill 9. We see the exact opposite of that. I had hoped when there was a change in government that there would be a new, fresh set of eyes, but that is clearly not what we have. We have a government that is fully intending and 100 per cent bent on spending every single dollar plus the ones that they don't have, not looking for ways to save 5 million bucks, not even looking for ways to save \$50,000, a literal drop in the bucket when it comes to the overall budget, a government that is ideologically opposed to saving taxpayer dollars.

If it wasn't for the good work of the opposition and the dedication of some of our staff, this 5 million bucks would have been spent again next year. I think that he and I think that the opposition deserve some thanks from this government because time and time again we propose ideas, we propose amendments, and the government chooses to go in the opposite direction. It is concerning. I think that what we've seen, as we move forward to this record amount of debt, is that this commitment to overspending is the exact opposite direction that the vast majority of Albertans

were hoping for when this government took office. On top of all of that already troubling framework that this budget has created in the last couple of days, we've seen new taxes being introduced on every single Albertan in the form of a carbon tax. Madam Chair, what we need is not to go down the road of taxing Albertans on every single thing that they purchase, on all of their activities, but we need to provide a framework that respects both our environment and industry.

9:20

We're getting down this path of creating a new tax that will solve some of their spending problems and be a significant burden on the Alberta taxpayer. We have a government that's fully committed to only spending, no reductions. We have a government that's fully committed to \$50 billion of debt. We have a government that hasn't laid out a plan in Bill 9 or any bills that they've proposed as to how they would repay that. On top of that we have a government that's essentially going to introduce a \$3 billion carbon tax. Certainly, many believe that there's a significant risk that this carbon tax is going to wind up being a path forward for them to balance their budget on. What the government has made claims about is that this particular plan is revenue neutral. That was the claim on day 1, and now we've seen a number of people discussing just exactly what revenue neutral means and presenting all sorts of risks and challenges around this revenue neutral. The Premier herself has said that in the future it may be the opportunity for the government to utilize those funds on government-related expenditures.

The Chair: Any other hon. member wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: I would like to take the opportunity to at least cede some of my time to the hon. member over here.

The Chair: Hon. member, we're in committee. You can speak multiple times.

Mr. Smith: Okay. Thank you, Madam Chair. When you consider a budget, there are some realities that I think all of us face. Whether it's a family budget, whether it's a school budget, whether it's a government budget, there are some realities that all of us will face. When I come into this House and when I consider the things that my constituents are thinking about, these are some of the things that I hear from my constituents, and these are some of the things that I reflect on when I look at budgets.

One, budgets should balance. We understand that there are times when maybe they can't, but in general budgets should balance; expenses should equal your revenues. That's a pretty key reality when you start talking about budgets. You should be careful before you spend more than the revenue that you generate. In my family, in your family, in all of our families, and in the family that we call Alberta you'd better be very, very careful before you start racking up debt. You should be careful about spending more than what you generate. When you spend more than what you generate – in my income, in my family, and in the Alberta family that we represent in this House, we understand that eventually that money has to be paid back and usually with interest.

So when I look at a budget, these are three of the realities that I consider. They're really important because – and this is where I think, in many cases, probably the members sitting across the House and I probably will agree – budgets at their very heart are really about social policy. I know that the claim over on the other side is that many of the things that you do, you do because you believe you want to help people and you are concerned about social policy. Well, so am I, and so are the people on this side of the

House. What I really get concerned about is that when we don't recognize some of the economic realities that are present in budgets, when we get them wrong, when we ignore them, the impacts are very real, and they're felt socially within our society.

I believe that this NDP budget doesn't set Alberta up for a positive social reality but in the long run is going to have a very negative impact. As governments we provide services that address social needs: schools, hospitals, roads, bridges, human services. There's no one in this House, none of the 87 people in here, that doesn't understand and that doesn't agree that governments need to provide these social services. Budgets will impact the social realities of the people that we govern, and it's very important that we get them right.

There are some, like Paul Martin, that would argue and who have stated that good social policy is good economic policy. I think he gets it wrong. Good social policy is built upon good fiscal policy. I believe that our present Prime Minister got it wrong when he said that budgets balance themselves. No, they don't. It takes hard work, as you are finding out. You have to make hard choices. You have to decide whether you're going to increase taxes or whether you're going to cut spending. You have to make decisions about where that spending is going to go. Budgets don't balance themselves, and I'm sure that the hon. Minister Ceci understands that better than probably any of us. [interjection] I'm sorry. Thank you very much. I apologize.

I believe that this government is getting it wrong. I believe that this government, with a series of deficits, is getting it wrong. I believe that a \$50-billion debt by 2020 is getting it wrong. I believe that an illusory promise to balance the budget is getting it wrong. I believe that by jacking up taxes during a recession, you're getting it wrong. When you jack up those taxes and you destroy the economic realities that we sometimes call the Alberta advantage, you lose that advantage, and you create an economic climate that is crushing business and pushing those that could invest out of Alberta. You're getting it wrong. I believe you're getting it wrong when you believe that environmental image will create jobs, and therefore this government, when it's willing to sacrifice good jobs for the promise of international goodwill on climate change, gets it wrong. When you put Albertans out of work, you're getting it wrong.

Focusing on spending and creating massive debt: the people of Alberta are very worried about this. I believe – at least in my constituency they're telling me that you're getting it wrong. Responsible governments that truly care about their people ensure that budgets are balanced. They ensure that they keep the economic incentives that keep the economy working. They keep their taxes low while providing the best level of services that they can within the fiscal realities that they face. That, I believe, at the end of the day, when they do that, allows for good social policy.

9:30

Only when budgets are balanced and there is a positive balance in the provincial bank account, will any government be able to responsibly provide for the services that their people need and demand. I do not see that in this budget. It's a serious flaw, and it should be addressed. The economic and social consequences that come when governments do not consider these realities and when they willingly go down deficits and debt – the social consequences of that are very real, and when continually ignored, Madam Chair, the policies can be immensely painful.

Anybody that is any kind of a student of history understands that poor financial and fiscal responsibility and budgeting can bring down governments. If you studied your French revolutionary history, you know that at the heart of it was a government that did

not take care of its financial and fiscal responsibilities. If you take a look at the Weimar government, you'll see that the rise of fascism was directly related to a government that did not and could not contain its fiscal responsibilities. When you take a look at Argentina in the '80s and the '70s, when you take a look at the United States today, when you take a look at Greece today, the social consequences in all of those countries are the result of a government that did not take care of its fiscal responsibilities, and they should be ashamed.

You need to look at your history. [interjections] Nations that do not live by responsible fiscal policy not only are incapable of compassionate social policy, but, worse, these governments can threaten the very stability of the society. It is a historical reality that revolution and wars are the result of economic instability. [interjections] And while I am not even suggesting that we are that far down that path . . .

The Chair: Hon. members, the hon. member has the floor.

Mr. Smith: . . . I'm suggesting that you need to be aware that there are very solid reasons for making sure that you balance budgets and that you take care of your people.

Far more likely, in Alberta there will be economic pressures because of this budget that will create too few jobs. Too little wealth will be circulating in the economy. Too few government programs will be available to cushion the economic realities that Albertans are going to face. And one of the things that worries me – we've created one of the best societies in the world. We have a multicultural society that we should be incredibly proud of.

My brother-in-law was not born in this country. He comes from a country that came out of civil war and civil conflict. My brother-in-law knows what it's like to have lived in a situation where bombs are being lobbed over his high school, where he volunteered to go pick up body parts in the streets.

When you get into a situation where your fiscal responsibilities are so dire and when you've ignored the realities of the economics, when the government can no longer find the money to take care of its people and to take care of its responsibilities, the result will be a multicultural society that will begin to break down. It will begin to tribalize by race, by ethnicity, by income. When you do not take care of your fiscal responsibilities, there can be dire consequences.

I am not saying to my NDP colleagues that we are there or anywhere close to being there yet. What I am saying is that the philosophy and the ability to completely ignore economic reality sets us down a path that we do not as Albertans want to go down. This budget places us on a path that we do not want to go down.

As the representative for Drayton Valley-Devon I have canvassed my constituents, and I would like to read some of the responses that I have received from my constituents about the state of the economy, their fears, and their concerns.

From one of my constituents:

I do not think either the provincial or federal governments understand the depth of the ramifications of the low oil price and resulting slow down in the industry to those living in western Canada outside of the larger urban centres. I do not believe the government understands how dependent the rural communities are on the oil and gas service industry.

I'll skip down a little bit.

Bankruptcies and takeover of smaller companies that based their business plans on much higher oil prices are already occurring. A number of oil and gas service sector businesses are now learning that some of the junior oil companies have gone into bankruptcy and uncollectible receivables are yet another financial blow.

Workers are unemployed or underemployed ... Homeowners have provided their homes for security to mortgages and to personal lines of credit. Should unemployment rates increase beyond 10% many will be unable to meet their financial commitments. A recessionary economy reduces real estate values. Workers will no longer have sufficient equity in their homes; foreclosures and bankruptcy will result bringing further devastation to our economy.

These are the words of one of my constituents, and I know that I have talked to people in my constituency who are handing over the keys to their houses because of this economy and because of some of the decisions that are being made.

We are in a period of economic uncertainty and oil companies like any business owner need certainty to make investments. Oil industry projects require a great deal of time to acquire approvals, permits etc. The industry needs to have a clear understanding [of the] government's position on royalties.

A little further on:

I do not feel the Provincial Government has a clear understanding of the devastation to the oil and gas service sector and the extent of the adverse effects to small business and its workforce. The current provincial government seems to lack both an understanding of the role of small business in the economy and the political experience to deal with a recession of this magnitude. Time is of the essence.

Let me flip to another one of my constituents.

My companies are all service related oil and gas based companies. Since winning the election there has been a gloom and doom atmosphere within the oil patch that has caused companies to revisit their spending budgets until they see something positive come from the new government. Small business is being hit with higher taxes, both corporate and personal and looming carbon tax (which will affect every family in the province by driving up the costs of consumables such as fuel, food, clothing etc)

We are told by Premier Notley there is "nothing to worry about" but her words and actions suggest otherwise.

The Chair: Hon. member, another reminder, please, that we don't use names.

Mr. Smith: I'm reading straight from the letter.

The Chair: It doesn't matter, even if you're quoting.

9:40

Mr. Smith: That doesn't matter? Okay. I'm sorry.

We are told by [the Premier] there is "nothing to worry about" but her words and actions suggest otherwise. Higher corporate taxes and higher personal taxes, along with a hike in minimum wage will spell disaster for Alberta small business owners and drive away investors. We are already seeing projects being shut down, energy stocks in a tail spin and a growing unemployment rate with no end in sight ... and all that topped off with them trying to put through a 7.25% pay hike to themselves! I thought we were supposed to see the end of lining their own pockets ...

To date [my company] has had to lay off 2 employees and ask employees to take a wage reduction to get us by these troubled times. Less customers through the door has meant tough decisions and ultimately it is going to be the corporate Alberta that is going to take the hit for the lack lustre performance of the government to recognize what this province was built on and what has kept the rest of the country strong.

Our government needs to drop the plans for tax increases to corporate Alberta now! It needs to get the confidence back into the major players of this province by not increasing royalties! Forget the carbon tax as their way of funding all their election

promises! Reduce government red tape and lose those high paying jobs that eat up infrastructure money!

I'm done now.

Here's another constituent.

I work as a salesman ... My job is to find work for oilfield trucks (hot oilers and tank trucks). We have had to reduce our prices to a break-even point or in some cases at a loss just to keep trucks working minimally. With extra taxes on corporations and low oil prices they are leaving wells that would normally be hot oiled or worked over with a service rig shut in ... I have taken a 15% reduction in my salary to keep my job. That is 15% less that I am paying in taxes, 15% less that I am spending in the community, and I have 15% less interest getting up for work in the morning. It is my personal opinion that the NDP Government has an agenda to eliminate any job in Alberta that does not have union affiliations. Oil companies are being forced to ask service providers to work their employees and equipment at a loss, by increasing corporate tax, and talk of carbon tax, and increasing royalties for the oil companies. The increased taxes on corporations are also being passed on to consumers as an increase in price at the till. There is such a high rate of unemployment in Alberta now.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Chair. Under 29(2)(a) I'm wondering if the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon would like to share more of the views of his constituents.

Mr. Smith: I'd love to. Thank you.

The Chair: Hon. members, we're in committee. Standing Order 29(2)(a) doesn't apply here, but you can speak numerous times.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Okay. Madam Chair, I thought the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon had some very pertinent points from the members of his constituency. I've had constituents e-mailing me about the inability and the unwillingness of this government to listen. In 36 hours I had over 50 e-mails about Bill 6 alone, that this government is unwilling to hold proper consultations, not a single consultation in my constituency. That's why I've had to hold our own town hall meeting in Bassano for farmers to come out.

This bill has an even greater significance to every single Albertan in this province, and we've not seen a proper budget consultation process, just the same old gimmicky polls on a website. I think it's important that we hear from constituents directly in this Chamber, which is why I think it's valuable for us to hear him reading some of the correspondence that he has received from his constituents.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to continue with this. Remembering that these are the words of my constituents, I think that it's important that this Assembly know what the constituents of Alberta are saying. We should be listening, we should be considering, and maybe we should be changing direction.

To continue:

There is such a high rate of unemployment in Alberta now that revenue from working Albertans will not be able to sustain it (more people unemployed more people to pay out of the revenue). Then when EI runs out it is welfare for those people. With the NDP Government borrowing money for make work projects to keep unionized workers employed (construction, steel workers etc.) with no incentives for oil, gas, or pipeline work or workers.

I think the NDP Government will tax Alberta into poverty by the end of their term.

There is another one here that I'll read, from another company in Drayton Valley.

My business is being affected negatively due to the uncertainty in Alberta. Alberta has weathered many ups and downs in the price of oil before; however, Alberta has never before experienced a government that is working against the very industry that fuels the economy. Jobs are being lost, investors are fleeing and those who are fortunate enough to still be in business or garner a paycheque are being extremely frugal in this situation. To top it off, businesses are struggling and yet are paying higher taxes. A recession is not the time to be punitive to businesses.

I would like to see government reverse their position on higher taxes, the royalty review and the overall "anti oil and gas" message they are moving forward with. They claim they are supportive, but it certainly isn't clear as their actions show otherwise. A healthy, robust economy benefits both the government and the people which seems like a win-win.

Another business owner:

I am [an] owner/operator . . . and self-employed since 1974 and have been supplying welding and supplies to drilling companies within Alberta. I built up my company from one truck to 3 welding trucks. I have employed over the years 2-3 subcontractors. Just barely made it through the recession of 1981 and in 2010 we remortgaged our home to continue to keep our business operational. When my son took up the trade I sponsored him to attend school and get his journeyman welding ticket. He has been employed since receiving his ticket. After the recession of 2010 we were able to employ 1 part-time bookkeeper and 2 casual yard people. In the fall of 2014 there was a down turn of work in our industry and I have laid off all of them. We remortgaged our home once again and took out another personal loan to pay down our debt which we are still owing our creditors. I get daily calls from our debtors and I have to keep telling them that we do intend to pay them only I have not worked enough hours to pay anything. I am nearing retirement age but because of the loans and mortgage renewal I have to try and find another job. Because I am 66 yrs old I was hoping to retire and have my son take over the business only he will have no work to support his growing family. My wife has a job and her pay will not cover the loan and mortgage payments, utilities, and upkeep of our home. Let alone buy groceries for us to eat. We will have to close our company and hopefully someone will hire me so I can help to pay for our immediate needs and slowly pay off companies we owe money to. We need a bail out or help of some sort. There has to be a way of helping small businesses stay in business.

9:50

These are just some of the ones that I have received, and it speaks to my point. When governments don't recognize the fiscal realities of budgeting, these kinds of problems creep up. If you really care – if you really care – about the people of this province, you will care about the fiscal realities that go into budgeting.

We must be responsible in this House. We must listen to the people of Alberta. They do not support accumulating massive debt. They do not support spending beyond our means. They want fiscal responsibility, and for these reasons I will be voting against this budget.

The Chair: Any other hon. member wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like to start off just by saying that no government has ever taxed its way to prosperity. No government has ever taxed its way to a surplus budget. Hasn't happened. Won't happen. We keep spending like this, we're going to be in trouble. You know, if we look across the pond to Greece, you can see what happened there. You can see the fiscal problem

that they're in. Greece has got its own set of problems. You've got the U.S. The U.S. keeps moving their debt level up, and the U.S. keeps getting deeper and deeper and deeper into debt. We have so many different comparisons that we can look at, and we can go through country after country. Time and time, history tells us that you cannot borrow your way out of debt into a surplus.

Alberta runs the most expensive government in all of Canada. Raising taxes, asking people to hand over their hard-earned money via the taxes, well, that money does not make the Alberta government more efficient. In fact, I believe it's the opposite. We become less efficient when we tax. Albertans expect that their government will be good stewards of their money. You know, this is something I've been told time and time again.

When is the government going to look at how much money they're spending?

An Hon. Member: We just did.

Mr. Taylor: You did, too, and we're looking at \$47 billion; \$50 billion wouldn't surprise me.

How much money does it take to service that debt? How many positions are going to be lost? How many schools won't be built? How many roads, bridges won't be built as a result of having to service the debt on this? We need to make sure our fiscal house is in order.

You know, this budget is so important to my constituents. They expect any bill, any law that impacts them into the future – well, they expect consultation and consideration for these ones, and that means a timely amount of consideration and consultation. Our debt financing has increased to \$15 billion. Like I say, it's going to affect Albertans right across the board. You're raising taxes. You're raising the debt ceiling like the U.S. The U.S. kept raising the debt ceiling, and they'll just continue to raise the debt ceiling time and again.

You're raising taxes, sin taxes and taxes on everything. The carbon tax is going to be a tax across the board. It's going to hurt all Albertans. The fuel for railways, all of a sudden now it went from 1.5 cents a litre to 5.5 cents a litre. That's a huge increase when you look at it as a percentage. That's not reasonable. That's not asking to give a little bit more; that's a lot more.

Towns that are around my area where I live – Hardisty, Provost, Wainwright, Lloydminster – they're all feeling the pinch of what's happening here with this royalty review that you've put on there, pending, and the carbon taxes. They're all feeling how much it's hurting them with their jobs. People are worried about what's happening with their jobs.

Fifteen per cent is what you have right now for the debt ceiling, and that's roughly \$50 billion, and the servicing of that we'll have to pay back. I don't know how we're going to get around this very quickly. We spend \$2,000 more per capita than B.C. on operations. On capital B.C. is spending about \$10.7 billion. Alberta will be spending \$24.6 billion over the next three years. I should have said that that's for B.C. as well. B.C. is growing faster than we are, yet we're spending way more money.

We need to focus our taxpayer dollars more efficiently before we start hiking the taxes. If we look at ways to make sure that we're getting efficiencies, that's more important than just saying: tax this; tax that; just go and spend. We need to look at what we're spending on, how much we're spending, ways to maximize it. Ways that we can maximize it is through consultation. Bill 6 is a great example of not enough consultation. We need to go out, and we need to be asking the farmers about Bill 6, same as we should be doing when we're going to make huge increases in taxes. We should be asking Albertans what's more important.

An Hon. Member: We just had an election.

Mr. Taylor: Albertans aren't getting the value for their money, and we can see that. Like you said, let's talk about the election. I think in three and a half years we'll see a new election, we'll see a new government.

An Hon. Member: You can think all you want.

Mr. Taylor: I'm quite sure. Instead of thinking, let's go to some certainty of what I believe here.

Anyway, thank you.

The Chair: Any other hon. member wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud. [some applause]

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Madam Chair. Actually, I appreciate the cheers from the opposition. I am actually looking forward to discussing this in a rational way. I hadn't heard a lot of rationality, actually, from the other side this morning, so I'm happy to participate and bring some actual, real information to this Assembly.

I think what we're hearing this morning in this Chamber is a very interesting ideological discussion. On that side the ideology is that debt is the Satan. Debt is a four-letter word, but it has been proven throughout history, at least throughout economic history, that debt can be used as a very powerful means to improve the overall economy.

The name that's associated with that is Keynes. It's spelled K-e-y-n-e-s. Some people pronounce it incorrectly. Keynesian economics suggests that investing in our economy in a countercyclical way is the best way to deal with periods that we call depressions. In fact, the Great Depression was conquered by the application of Keynesian economics. The Nobel prize committee in economics has recognized this on at least five different occasions over the years up until the one given about three years ago. Countercyclical investment by taking on debt when the overall economy is in a depression is a proven way to deal with our problems, and that's what our government is doing.

Our government is investing in Albertans. Our government is making sure that we have schools today or tomorrow that our students need. If you listen to the members across the way, they would wait to build these schools until we were in surplus. That might not be for four years if the Minister of Finance is correct. We need those schools today.

10:00

I want to go back to some of the comments that were made by the previous speaker about – and I just couldn't believe these comments coming out that every jurisdiction that went into debt ended up in some sort of fascistic environment. I really think that was one of the most ridiculous comments that's ever been made in this Legislature. The previous Premier of this province, the leader of the third party in the early 1990s, basically decimated the province of Alberta. I lost a third of my colleagues in medicine to the depredations of that leader. My colleagues had to move to other provinces. The nurses that worked in the hospitals at that time that were shut down and who got laid off had to move to other provinces or to the United States, and they've never come back. It devastated this province, this mindless application of the cutbacks, and that's what the party across the way is suggesting. That's exactly what the party across the way is . . .

Dr. Starke: Madam Chair, a point of order.

The Chair: Hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, you have a point of order?

Point of Order Insulting Language

Dr. Starke: Madam Chair, we have a long-standing tradition in this House that we do not impugn the character of those that are not present. In addition, we have a long-standing tradition that we do not impugn the character of past leaders and past Premiers. We show them respect and honour. To use the term "mindless" to represent our past Premier, regardless of whether you agree or disagree with the past Premier, is the worst sense of disrespect. You can disagree, sir, but you cannot use terminology like this in this Chamber if you expect to have respect shown to you.

Mr. Mason: Madam Chair, if I can just respond to that, I want to correct one thing. It is not the leader of the third party but it is, in fact, former Premier Ralph Klein that is being referred to. That is not a rule. You may not refer to members by their name if they are a sitting member of the Assembly; otherwise, you can. There is not a rule that you cannot make comments on previous governments. If "mindless" gives offence, then I will on behalf of the member rephrase that to "incorrect policies" if that helps assuage the sense of the hon. member.

Dr. Starke: A point of clarification. I did not state the applicable standing order when I rose, and that was an error. It is 23(j), which is: "uses abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder." This was insulting, sir, to refer to a past Premier as "mindless." That is the worst form of insult.

Mr. Mason: I'm sorry, Madam Chair. I feel that I've dealt with that issue. If the hon. member wishes to continue, he can make those comments in his speech. But normally someone makes the point of order, somebody responds, and the chair deals with it. You don't get extra kicks at the can.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. Government House Leader.

I would just caution all hon. members that in speaking, we make an attempt to refer to policies rather than referring to individuals themselves. Just be a little more cautious as to your language.

We can proceed.

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Madam Chair. I certainly intended to refer . . . [interjections]

The Chair: The Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has the floor.

Mr. Mason: I would advise the Opposition House Leader to get a grip on his members.

Mr. Cooper: Madam Chair, rising on the point of order – I'm not entirely sure what point of order it was – while I can appreciate that this side of the House is slightly concerned this morning, mildly heightened, what we didn't see was a point of order addressed. What I think was asked for was a withdrawing or an apology about the comments. The hon. member on the other side had that opportunity, and he chose not to. I think that would do well to lower the temperament in the House.

Mr. Mason: Madam Chair, I don't want to continue this. I had intended to indicate to the House that the comments on behalf of the member were withdrawn. Obviously, an error on my part not to include an apology for that as well. I hope that that will settle the matter and that we can get on with business.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. Government House Leader.
Please continue, hon. member.

Debate Continued

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Madam Chair. I want to continue these remarks. I was referring to the time in the mid-1990s as an example of what can happen when a government doesn't plan well when they introduce massive cuts. This affected me personally, it affected my friends, it affected the people that I had worked with, and I certainly have strong feelings. It is my strongly held opinion that the policies of the government of the day were misinformed.

I do want to get on to other examples, though, from my own experience of where government debt has been a very good thing. My father served for several years in the Royal Canadian Air Force overseas. He missed the death of his father, came back to a Canada that was recovering from the devastations of the Depression and the contributions to the war effort. My father was able to acquire a half section of land only because the VLA, the Veterans' Land Act, basically subsidized his taking on of debt to do that. I know that there would be many other members in this Assembly that have similar family associations, where starting a business or starting a farm or buying a new home requires taking on debt.

This is good debt. This is debt that we're all committed to repaying at some point and that is going to add to the economy. I think this is a very good example of how you can use debt, or at least the funds acquired from debt, to invest in our future. There were allusions to governments that got into debt that seemed to get into real trouble. What about the United States of America? They have a debt, as was noted, which needs the limit raised regularly, of several tens or hundreds of trillions of dollars. They are the most successful economy in the world bar none. Bar none. The most successful economy in the world functions on government debt to a large extent.

I want to turn now to climate change. I hear a lot of nonsense from the other side that this is going to be a tax on all Albertans and that we should put aside trying to deal with climate change. All Albertans are telling us that we need to deal with climate change. My constituents, up until this morning, are e-mailing me with congratulations on the Premier's action on this. This involves a carbon tax. This is a good tax. The carbon tax is going to be reinvested in our climate change strategy so that alternate energy can be supported and we can support individuals, communities, institutions in dealing with the predations of climate change. I would urge the members opposite to consider those sorts of things when they're decrying the use of tax policy to get the economy going.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

10:10

The Chair: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you to the member across for his mindful comments. Actually, I do enjoy our exchanges. We both sit on the Public Accounts Committee together, and I'm going to give him a hard time right now. He does certainly contribute a lot in the Public Accounts Committee, but that's not going to spare him from right now.

Where to begin? Well, let's just start with Keynes because that was out there. The member has, I suppose, announced himself as an avowed disciple of Keynes. Well, better Keynes than Marx. If we're going to have economists as our role models, I suppose Keynes wouldn't be the worst one in the Chamber that we might aspire to follow, but if we do want to follow Keynes, let's look at what he

would actually say. The member talked about countercyclical deficit spending. It's the theory that when the economy is down and government revenues are down, governments should be borrowing to, quote, prime the pump of economic spending, get the wheels turning. So Keynes said that in bad times you borrow money to fund the government in countercyclical spending, but in good times you pay down debt, and you cut back spending.

Well, Madam Chair, I'm not sure how that fits in the Alberta model. Alberta was borrowing money at \$100 a barrel. Alberta was borrowing money during the biggest boom in the history of this province. We haven't balanced the budget in nearly a decade. At what time are we supposed to actually balance the budget? Are we supposed to balance the budget at \$100 a barrel or at \$40 a barrel? Are we supposed to balance the budget in recessions or in booms? In Alberta it's all deficits all the time. This is not countercyclical spending. This is borrowing for good times and borrowing in bad. In fact, we drew down our sustainability fund, now renamed the contingency account, from \$7 billion to what is going to be virtually zero by the end of the fiscal year we're coming into now.

We have gone from zero dollars in debt to a debt that stands at about \$15 billion today and that will hit \$47 billion before the next election under the very best economic forecasts available. Now, the member is saying that we should be borrowing money in bad times. But what about the good times projected in their budget? Well, in years 4 and 5 of their budget they are predicting a 16 per cent increase in revenues. They're counting on some kind of economic superboom to get us out of this mess. They're projecting very good times coming up in years 4 and 5, but they still plan to borrow in those years. Every single year of this fiscal plan the government intends to borrow, including during the good times. Importantly, they have no plan to pay back a single dollar of that debt. They don't have a plan to pay back a single dollar. Their plan is to wait for us to come to government and pay it back for them.

As much fun as that might be, I believe it would take a Wildrose government a very long time to pay off the debt that this government is racking up in one short term. This is part of the problem we have with political economics, that you can have a fiscally irresponsible government for one term, and it can take decades to fix the mess. One term of the NDP in Ontario drove that province into the ground, and it took the Conservatives to pull it out of the ditch. It took two terms of Conservatives in that province to fix what the NDP did in one term.

We are still trying to pay off the debt from Pierre Trudeau. We're still trying to pay off the debt from Brian Mulroney. We ran a decade of surpluses, giving due credit to where it's deserved: the federal Liberal government of the day and later on the Conservatives for some time. In 10 years we paid off \$150 billion of debt. But how much did we take on in the years before? This is the problem. NDP governments and leftist governments of other stripes take five steps back, and it takes Conservatives a long time just to go one step forward to fix their mess.

If the member was honestly talking about Keynes and countercyclical spending, well, at least he would be on some firm ground in terms of having some economic theory to back that up. But this is not countercyclical spending. This is just more spending all the time, with no plan to ever pay it back.

You know, now that we're talking about former Premiers – and I'm going to be careful with my comments. I will be careful with my comments. But now that we're talking about former Premiers, the hopeful tone about debt did bring back a few memories. A former Premier, who will not be named, talked about debt as hope, that the more debt we had, the more hope we had, that debt was a good thing, and that the more debt you have, the more prosperous you will be. Well, there might be a time and place for debt: national

emergencies, wartime, major disasters, unforeseen economic downturns, when you balance your books in good times. Unfortunately, we've spent our rainy-day fund in good times. We haven't balanced the budget in a decade.

Now, we've been through much worse before, but the member is saying that we should be spending right now. A former Premier said that the more debt we had, the more hope we had, that debt drives the economy somehow. Well, let's look at other jurisdictions that have done this. Alberta since 2004 has been the engine of the Canadian economy. We have year after year had twice as much private-sector investment in our economy as Ontario and Quebec combined. That is an economic miracle. That wasn't debt driving investment into Alberta. It was the Alberta advantage. It was a business-friendly environment. It was low taxes. It was governments of a different stripe than us but conservative for at least a period that believed that you attract businesses not by taxing them and regulating them to death but by lowering their taxes and treating them all equally.

The member has said that the more debt we have, the better off we'll be. But let's look at what the other provinces have done. Ontario right now is about to go bust. Ontario has gone from the engine of the Canadian economy to a have-not basket case in the span of one decade.

Mr. Westhead: That's because of Harper.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Wow. The Member for Banff-Cochrane seems to think Ontario's debt is the fault of former Prime Minister Harper, speaking of former leaders. I'm surprised to learn that the current Member of Parliament for Calgary Heritage is responsible for the government of Ontario's finances.

This government is following the example of the government of Ontario. They're going to replace reliable forms of energy with windmills and sunflower seeds. The government is proposing to finance its very basic operations with debt. They are raising taxes at every corner. They are now imposing a backdoor provincial sales tax, an ND PST, which is a tax on everything. It's going to hammer every single Albertan in this province, every single small business. It's going to hammer the small drilling and service companies in my constituency.

10:20

They're following the examples of governments around this country that have choked themselves off through overspending and debt financing, believing that the answer to increased deficits is to continually increase taxes. But if you increase taxes and continue to increase spending, you're not going to fix your budget hole. You're just going to choke off the economy and keep the deficit in place. We are now, this year, facing the largest deficit in our history by far, a \$9.7 billion deficit as defined by net change in financial assets. It is twice as large as the next-largest deficit run in 1992 by the government of that day. We can't continue to do this year in and year out.

Again I'll thank the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud for his comments. I promise to be a little more friendly when we're back in the Public Accounts Committee. But I wanted to remind him that as much of a fan of Keynes as he might be, I do not believe that Keynes would approve of the policies of this government and this budget.

The Chair: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'm pleased to join in the festivities here with respect to this bill. Now, we've heard a lot today about history, both local history in the province of

Alberta and history going back to the French Revolution. I think the best thing you could say about some of the things that we've heard is that it's revisionist history. I won't deal with the history lesson that we received from the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon other than to say that to encapsulate the French Revolution without talking about the failure to tax the aristocracy or the Weimar Republic without talking about an international, global depression or the role of inflation or to ignore all of those complex factors that made each situation unique is simply not a very credible argument to be made with respect to this budget.

Now, I want to say that it is worth looking, though, at some of the more recent history in the province of Alberta. I'm going to deal with the tenure of Mr. Klein as the Premier. I served with Mr. Klein. I knew him. I liked him. But at the same time I believe the policies of the government at that time were extremely damaging to the province in the long run and something we're still continuing to deal with. So I'd like to talk about that. I'll talk about it in terms of infrastructure because one of the things that happened during that period, quite apart from thousands and thousands of people losing their jobs in the health care sector, in education, and so on, and the impact that that had on the economy, was the failure to invest in infrastructure.

Now, to their credit, subsequent governments have realized the need to increase the investment in infrastructure to try and recover some of the infrastructure debt that was created. We did engage David Dodge, of course, with respect to this, to determine what exactly was the sustainable capacity that we had for spending on infrastructure. He made the case – and this is something I think is being completely ignored on the other side – that all governments and the private sector use debt all the time. It is a part of the machinery of any organization, that allows it to expand, to grow, and to make investments that will result in further growth. I think that this oversimplification of how governments budget is wrong.

Most families, for example, have significant debt, primarily through their mortgages. That's the normal way of financing a home. And, of course, we all accept that the debts incurred have to be repaid. That's not the question.

Let's take a look at the time when Ralph Klein was the mayor of Calgary. I served at that time on Edmonton city council, and we had two very different policies with respect to borrowing. In the Edmonton council we had inherited the policy that had been established by Mayor Laurence Decore, who went on to be the leader of the Liberal party in this place, and it was pay as you go for capital. In other words, you wouldn't borrow for capital. If you needed to build an overpass or pave a road, you had to save up the money first, and then, you know, you could build it. The result was that very little investment took place in Edmonton. At the same time Mr. Klein, who was the mayor of Calgary, was busy borrowing money for capital and making investments. What happened coming out of that? The economy of Calgary moved ahead. The investments were made that allowed the economy to grow whereas Edmonton constrained itself and fell behind.

That is, I think, an important question that people need to consider. How does investing and borrowing in infrastructure relate to future economic growth? This is something that Mr. Dodge talked about, and I think it's something that we need to bear in mind, that when you make strategic investments – and we're very much focused, by the way, in the capital plan on investments in infrastructure that have an economic return to the province or even to the government. So that is something we need to take into account.

You know what happened in Calgary? It had quite a significant debt, especially compared to Edmonton, but the economic growth that occurred there made the debt manageable because there was

more activity taking place. This is something that I think bears some thought as we consider this budget.

I want to leave with another point. I feel that I am compelled to make this point to some members opposite because I have had meetings with a number of MLAs on both sides of the House, including the Official Opposition, and it's pretty clear that there are significant infrastructure needs that have been unmet so far in people's constituencies, including on the other side. I've had any number of opposition MLAs ask me to support capital spending in their constituencies – and good for them because that's their job – but the point I always leave them with is that, you know, you need to consider that when the budget comes up, if your constituency and your municipalities are going to have their needs met, we need to have the means to do that. You can't have it both ways, Madam Chair. You can't say, "Don't borrow any money," and say: "You know what? I need my highway. I need this. I need that." That is exactly what's happening over there. They all want spending in their constituency, but they don't want to borrow for it.

The question is, then: how are you going to build the infrastructure that's necessary? Well, you can adopt the method that we tried in the city of Edmonton, but as a matter of fact, I think hon. members need to recognize and they need to see that they are saying, "Do this," on one hand and, "Do that," on the other hand. There's a contradiction there. It's very convenient for the opposition to have that sort of: cut millions of dollars, cut billions of dollars, but don't lay off front-line staff; don't borrow any money, but, you know, build me my overpass. Madam Chair, that's a little bit hard to stomach. I regret having to point that out, but I think that it was an important point to make.

Madam Chair, just to conclude, this budget will stimulate the province's economy. This will prepare us for a return to prosperity. This will get us back to balance. This will protect the public services that all Albertans want, and I believe all members of this Assembly should support this budget.

10:30

The Chair: I'll recognize the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Madam Chair. The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud was talking about the need for some rationality, and I would like to, if I may, take a moment and correct the hon. member in his understanding of economic theory. Countercyclical borrowing is incumbent on some things, and one of those things, if you studied economics, would be that countercyclical borrowing is incumbent on the organization's ability to service and repay the debt. Point two is that the very economic theory quoted by the hon. member specifically states that countercyclical borrowing is for infrastructure, not for operational needs.

Furthermore, the hon. Government House Leader attempted to correct us over here because, as he points out correctly, we have infrastructure deficits within all of our ridings and we are asking for those infrastructure deficits to be handled. But then what he's asking us to do is to vote in favour of an overall budget that covers, yes, the infrastructure deficits that we all have in our ridings but also to borrow money for operational needs, also to bloat the size of an already bloated government, and we simply cannot do that. There are elements within the budget that are needed, desperately needed, by every community within this province, but you're asking for carte blanche, and quite frankly you're not going to get it. You're not going to get carte blanche from this side of the House.

A little more education, I believe, might be needed for the other side. We've heard the term "revenue neutrality." Well, as a student

yet and a teacher – and as anyone who is a teacher in this room knows, you'll be a lifelong student if you're going to be a teacher – there is in the field of economics and business administration the term "revenue neutrality," and I would like to read to the House the definition of revenue neutrality. I'm very thankful that the hon. Minister of Finance is here since perhaps he could use this definition. I'm sure it would be useful.

To quote: taxing procedures that allow the government to still receive the same amount of money despite changing its tax laws; the government may lower taxes for one particular sector of its economy and raise taxes from another, but this allows the ultimate revenue that they receive to remain unchanged. That is the definition of revenue neutrality, and that is not what we have just seen. We have seen a government that is digging into the pockets of Albertans for \$3 billion to continue to bloat the size of government and to continue to waste money and to continue to justify the borrowing for operational expenses because this government doesn't know how to save money.

There is one more definition that I would like to cover, and that is the definition of arrogance: it is an insulting way of thinking or behaving that comes from believing you're better or smarter or more important than other people. I would ask you to consider: are you smarter than the authors of the texts and the teachers of economics? Are you smarter and better than the authors of the texts and the teachers and MBAs or even your own grandparents and your parents?

I challenge every member in this House to seek the wisdom of our elders that have gone before us and those that are far wiser than any one of us in this room. You will learn from your grandparents this old adage: you have to live within your means. We've all heard that from our moms, our dads, our grandparents, our forefathers. You live within your means, and when household revenue is down, spend less. It's just that simple. When dad loses his job or mom loses her job, you do not go the bank and borrow more money. You tighten your belt. You slow down. You get rid of that extra car.

There are any number of people in this room who are old enough now and have gone through the economic ups and downs that we all experience throughout this world in just plain living. I don't know anybody who went through the '80s and didn't learn that when you lose your job, you spend less. When your income is down, you tighten your belt and spend less. You find ways to spend less. You don't go out for dinner. You start eating beans and rice. You tighten your belt. This government doesn't understand the basic economics that every mom and dad down through time knows: when revenues are down, spend less.

Countercyclical borrowing is incumbent on the organization's ability to service and repay the debt. All we've seen in this budget is to spend more, tax more, spend more, tax more, spend more, tax more, waiting for – what? – some mystical day when the King of Saudi Arabia is going to drop off a cheque to you? It isn't going to happen. The price of oil is going down, so revenues are down. Spend less. Look for ways to save. Instead, you're bloating government on the backs of Albertans, and your days are going to be numbered because Albertans are not going to put up with it. You're going to be a one-term government that's going to sink our province so deep in debt that you will be remembered for a very, very long time.

Thank you.

The Chair: Hon. leader of the third party, did you wish to speak to the bill?

Mr. McIver: Yes, please. Thank you, Madam Chair. I won't be too long, you'll be happy to know, because I've been on my feet a

couple of times, but there are a few things that have to be said. This budget is, unfortunately, full of things that are not good for Alberta, and therein lies the problem. I talked at some length last night about the debt and that there's no reasonable plan to pay it off. You can't pay off a year's income debt with one week's pay. We talked about that, and I think most Albertans understand that implicitly and don't need me to go on at length about that again.

Among the other things that are of concern is the lack of cost control. What the government is right about, Madam Chair, is that Albertans love their services. What the government is wrong about is that they're going to put themselves in a position where they won't be able to provide those services because there won't be any money left. If you want to keep providing those services you're so fond of, you need to make sure there's some money left five years from now to pay for them. Some of us and some of you have kids and grandkids who are going to need those services later. Some of us have parents that are going to need those services either now or later, and some of us need those services now. These are things that this budget does not weigh or consider, unfortunately.

I've got to actually correct some of the revisionist history attempted to be created by the Transportation minister although I'm sure his intentions were nothing less than honourable, ever. But, you know, he spent some time on Edmonton city council, and I spent some time along with the Finance minister on Calgary city council. The Finance minister is a fine man, but we disagreed quite a bit then. He's a good human being. We just don't always see the world the same way. But he might even agree, because we were there for nine of the same years.

Unlike what the Transportation minister said, that the debt was quite manageable and that there weren't any issues after Mayor Klein was there, the debt was actually fairly big in the city of Calgary. The Olympics were coming. The city spent pretty heavily to build an LRT system, which still serves the city very well to this day. I'm not saying that it was a bad expenditure. Rather, we're talking about the level of debt. The level of debt was such that the city built very little infrastructure for the next decade after that. The next mayor after Mayor Klein, Mayor Al Duerr, was, in my view, unfairly criticized in many circles for not building enough infrastructure, because what a lot of people didn't really realize was that he was burdened with paying back a very heavy debt load, that had to be done. In my view, that mayor was unfairly put upon because he had to do what had to be done.

10:40

We're trying to avoid a future Premier and a future government having to stop building the things that Albertans need because we don't want the debt load to become so burdensome and so heavy that you have to stop providing the things that Albertans need just to pay for the poor planning that's gone on in the past. I hope I have, without taking too long, corrected some of the incorrect revision of history that went on here this morning. I also heard the minister say that you can't have it both ways, and I agree with that. If you borrow the money, you've got to pay it back. You've got to have a plan.

And you have to keep building infrastructure. Now, where I might disagree somewhat with the Official Opposition: I think borrowing is okay if you're spending the money on the right thing capitalwise and you have a plan to pay it back in a reasonable amount of time. I've heard it said: save the money. But the fact is that you can't teach the kids under a tree, and you can't do surgery in the local park.

An Hon. Member: Well, you can.

Mr. McIver: Or it's not recommended. I suppose you can do both of those things, but it's not a good idea in February. It's not a good idea in February.

The fact is that you have to keep building and you have to keep providing those services. Sometimes you have to borrow, and that's okay if you have a reasonable plan to pay it back. Telling people that you're going to save the money: nobody wants their six-year-old to wait to start grade 1 till they're 16 because we wanted to pay cash for the school. You can't do that. But you need to have a plan to pay it back.

The other thing that I'll take issue with is a return to prosperity. You know what? For decades before May 5 we mostly had prosperity, and we want prosperity to continue for this province. The hon. minister made it sound like Alberta hasn't had prosperity. Alberta has had the best economy in Canada and probably in North America for decades. Again, in fairness to my colleagues, what we're not blaming you for is the low oil price – I hope we never have, and I hope we never do – but you're doing just about everything you can to not help with the low oil price, and that's the concern.

I will try to start closing with the one advice – with further advice, not the one advice; I've already given some advice. The further advice I will give to the government is to listen to Albertans. Folks, it's not easy. We were in government, and we had to remind ourselves now and again how to listen to Albertans. Here's the tough thing about it when you're in government. Albertans will talk to you, and what's really easy is to listen to those that agree with you. What's a little more difficult and, I think, even more important is to actually listen to and hear those that don't agree with you. That's where you can actually learn something. With all due respect, Madam Chair, that's a lesson that I don't think the government has learned yet. You've been here more than six months now; it's kind of time.

Again, there'll be lots of people talking to you and agreeing with you, and it's all nice to hear the attaboys and attagirls, but you also have to hear the kicks in the pants: "Why did you do that? You're doing this wrong. Why are you not protecting my job? Why are you borrowing so much money? We won't be able to have schools 10 years from now. Why are you spending so much that we won't be able to pay the taxes? Why are you putting a carbon tax in place that'll make everything else less affordable? Why are you raising the minimum wage and taking away the very job that I have rather than helping the job? Actually, that job will disappear." These are the things that people will say to you that you don't want to hear, but it's so very important that you listen to them.

Because I don't believe . . . [interjections]. Madam Chair, I can tell from the cheap seats that that lesson – the hon. member just made my point. He just made my point. I've always found that even when people disagree with me tremendously, that's when I learn the most. I would respectfully submit to you and to the government that that's a lesson they have yet to learn, and at some point Albertans will punish them for that if they don't learn it.

Madam Chair, that's why I won't be supporting this budget. It's not good for Alberta. It will not bring us a return to prosperity. It will not create jobs; it'll actually kill jobs. It will not make it more affordable, and there's a big risk that unless the government changes course, five years from now Alberta will be in such a big hole that even – and I can't imagine it – if this group is still in government, they will have to do draconian spending cuts because the banks at some point will say no. That will indeed be a sad day. There's still time for the government to correct its course, and our advice is that the government does just that.

Thank you.

The Chair: Are there any other hon. members wishing to speak?
The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms Drever: Thank you. We as a province are dealing with a low barrel price, which has had an effect on many Albertans across many sectors. Massive cuts are not the solution. You don't lay off more workers in hopes of creating more jobs. I can say with confidence based on the conversations I've had with my constituents from Bowness, Cougar Ridge, West Springs, Valley Ridge, Patterson Heights, Greenwood Village that they understand that we have a debt in this province already and . . . [interjection] I'm not only talking about financial but in terms of infrastructure, social programming, schools. Cuts to these sectors will only hit Albertans harder during these tough economic times. Our constituents, like mine in Valley Ridge, need schools, or constituents like mine in Bowness who need access to DRP. We need transportation investments like investments in the Calgary ring road. This is not the time for massive cuts.

We can't state that we aren't listening to Albertans when our business leaders and job creators are praising this carbon tax. We are being praised in this province as leaders when it comes to our climate policy, which was clearly achieved by a collaborative effort between government, business, and Albertans.

This bill makes an investment in Albertans, and that's why I am standing here and supporting it. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other hon. members wishing to speak?

If not, then we will call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the clauses of Bill 9 were agreed to]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:48 a.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For:

Carson	Horne	Payne
Connolly	Kazim	Phillips
Coolahan	Kleinstauber	Renaud
Cortes-Vargas	Littlewood	Rosendahl
Dach	Loyola	Sabir
Dang	Luff	Schmidt
Drever	Malkinson	Schreiner
Eggen	Mason	Shepherd
Feehan	McLean	Sucha
Fitzpatrick	Miller	Sweet
Ganley	Miranda	Turner
Goehring	Nielsen	Westhead
Gray	Notley	Woollard
Hinkley		

Against:

Aheer	Hunter	Rodney
Anderson, W.	Jansen	Schneider
Clark	Jean	Smith
Cooper	Loewen	Starke
Cyr	MacIntyre	Stier
Drysdale	McIver	Strankman
Ellis	Nixon	Swann
Fildebrandt	Orr	Taylor
Gotfried	Pitt	Yao
Hanson		

Totals: For – 40 Against – 28

[The clauses of Bill 9 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That is carried.

Mr. Mason: Madam Chair, I would move that the committee rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mr. Connolly: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill: Bill 9.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. That does explain some historical views.

I would request unanimous consent of the Assembly that notwithstanding Standing Order 64(2) the House should proceed immediately into third reading of Bill 9.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Mr. Mason: I have a further request, Madam Speaker, that any further divisions on Bill 9 should have the bells shortened to one minute.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading Bill 9 Appropriation Act, 2015

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Madam Speaker, I want to indicate to the House on behalf of the provincial Finance minister and President of Treasury Board that the Appropriation Act, 2015, lays out our fiscal priorities and our plan to stabilize core services, show a path to a balanced budget, and create jobs to grow and diversify the economy. I want to say that it deals with the priorities that Albertans told us, that it supports families at a time when they need that the most, it sets out a plan that we need now to ensure our province gets back to the path of prosperity for the future. I would ask all members of the House to support this bill.

Thank you.

11:10

The Deputy Speaker: Any hon. members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to speak on Bill 9, the Appropriation Act, 2015, or, for Albertans watching, the Alberta budget. It certainly took a long time to get here, and frankly we're very disappointed. Before Christmas,

especially, we thought we would see something exciting, but it's not. I will say to the hon. Minister of Finance – hopefully, he's watching – that this is an issue of timing and good management, and it's not just an issue of borrowing, borrowing, borrowing and spending, spending, spending.

The problem the Official Opposition have is that there's no plan in place that's realistic. The numbers are outrageously highly forecasted for revenues. In fact, what we've seen is that even the revenue projections over the last seven months are so far out of whack that there's no possible way, in reality, that this government is going to reach any of those revenue figures and that, certainly, the spending will far exceed any ability to pay it back in the near future. The difficulty with that is that when you're going in the wrong direction, you take a lot longer to get back to where you need to be.

Right now the challenging thing for Albertans is jobs. We're losing more than 1,500 jobs a week for Albertans, who are looking and wondering what's going on because their government is not responding to them. This is a situation that we haven't seen in decades, frankly. I remember being in Fort McMurray during the '80s, being in Alberta during the '80s, and I can assure you that it was not a pleasant time. It was a very bad time, and people were lined up, just like they are now, for the food banks. Food bank demand has gone up over 26 per cent just in the last short period of time, and we believe it's directly as a response to what's happening in the economy. The government is not actually taking any steps to improve the economy or to protect jobs.

Now, they talk about what they're doing to possibly stimulate the economy with a \$5,000 hiring tax credit. But let's be clear. That tax credit is not going to be seen by businesses for at least 16 months. You know, it's not going to stop anybody from being laid off. In fact, it's not going to create any new jobs for at least 16 months. Frankly, as an owner of more than 15 businesses, successful businesses, I might add, it would not encourage me to hire any employees at all. I can't imagine that anybody would be encouraged to hire any employees at all for a \$5,000 temporary situation, especially when you consider that \$5,000, Madam Speaker, as you know, when you're talking about an average income in Alberta is one month's salary. So what do they do? Hire them for a month and then lay them off? I'm certainly hoping that there are more details on the plan by the government that would ensure that they'll be good-paying jobs that people will be interested in hiring for under this program. I just don't see it. It's not worked in other jurisdictions, it hasn't worked for the federal government in the past, and I don't see it working, at least at this particular time.

We know as well that there are at least 100,000 Albertans out of work. That's a lot of people. That's a lot of people from the background of the highest per capita income in the country. That's a lot of jobs. Also, those highest income per capita jobs paid more tax than anybody else in the country per capita as well. It was a system that worked very well. Those jobs, that have just been lost in the last few months – 65,000 since, in essence, this government came into power – are a lot of jobs, and the government has done absolutely zero to stop the flow of jobs. Absolutely zero. I don't hear anything from the other side on how they propose to do anything different.

Now, the thing to recognize, too, is that 40,000 of those jobs are directly tied to the energy sector. Again, \$40 a barrel: everybody keeps talking about how we have to blame the \$40 a barrel. Well, I remember when it was \$8 a barrel. I remember when it was \$12. I remember when it was \$15, when Syncrude Canada, one of the top employers in Canada, said: if it reaches \$15 a barrel, we are going to be so happy. Well, it's at \$40 a barrel. Then during the '90s, for a 10-year period, guess what the average price of a barrel of oil was

in Alberta? Forty dollars a barrel. That's right, \$40 a barrel. Very similar to today. The economics have not changed very much in relation to that. In fact, we see some of the indicators, the core indicators and key indicators, that are very, very similar to that.

We did have somebody talk about mindless things earlier, and I don't want to doctor anything up about the particular thing that that gentleman brought forward, but I would like to turn ourselves back to it and talk about exactly what happened during the '90s with Ralph Klein. I think he was one of the best Premiers we've ever seen in this province, and I agree with my friend the leader of the PC Party in relation to that because, you know, he was able to make serious decisions. One of the serious decisions he made was to cut. Now, we've all heard on this side that we would like to find efficiencies of about 2 per cent. Two per cent. Ralph Klein in the '90s cut 20 per cent, 10 times what we proposed in the election. Twenty per cent.

What did that do? Let's talk about what that did to the economy in Alberta. Well, the first thing it did is that it brought a lot of private capital into Alberta. Even though private capital seems to be two dirty words to this government, it's not. They brought \$80 billion in private capital into Alberta during that period of time, a 10-year period under Ralph Klein. Eighty billion dollars in private capital. Do you know how much went into Ontario and Quebec? I know that you, Madam Speaker, know that. It was about \$72 billion.

More money came into Alberta during that time period because of the efficiencies that Ralph Klein brought forward and the good tax legislation he brought forward, lowering corporate taxes, lowering personal taxes, having a tax structure that worked well for people and that paid more and collected more income tax than any other province in Canada per capita as individuals. We saw more private capital come into Alberta during that period of time than went into our two largest economies, Ontario and Quebec. That speaks volumes about a person and a Premier that did a great job, a tough job for the province when it was necessary. Certainly, he became one of the most popular leaders of all time, not just in Alberta but in Canada.

Now, instead of talking about the best ways to defend and promote our energy sector, what I've seen clearly is that this government, the NDP has been a tireless crusader against our oil and gas producers, not just in the last, short period of time but overall, generally. I know that I was in Ottawa at the time when the NDP, the national party, which is the same party as this, though, a different division but certainly the same party, went to Washington, DC, not to encourage a pipeline, not to encourage oil, not to encourage Alberta jobs. They picketed. They went outside Washington and said: stop oil sands. They called it tar sands, but I have news for you. They don't produce tar; they produce oil from that product, so it's oil sands. The NDP went over there. In fact, I've seen, you know, some pictures of the Premier with "stop oil sands" signs. Now, that's not what you do to protect an industry. That's not what you do to protect jobs.

You know, you may be smirking over on the other side; some of you are. You have guaranteed jobs for four years, but Albertans don't have that luxury. They don't have a bureaucracy behind them that will provide them with all this information and a steady paycheck that goes into their bank account every month. They're even wondering if they're going to have a job tomorrow. A hundred thousand Albertans are out of work. Do you care? You're not doing anything for them. You're not doing anything for those Albertans that have lost their jobs, and you're not doing anything for the 1,500 Albertans that are losing their jobs every single week.

Now, you say, "Oh, we're doing so much; we're doing so much," but the truth is that you're doing nothing positive. In fact, the instability you're bringing into the economy – I wish there was one

businessperson on the other side that knew what stability means to businesses. Stability means jobs. It means investment. It means confidence in the future. You're not adding that by taxing, taxing, and more taxing.

You talk about promises that you made. Well, I never heard any promise about a carbon tax. It's in essence a PST because it's not revenue neutral. In fact, even your plan suggests that nothing more than 10 per cent will go back to low- or middle-income Albertans. Ten per cent. That's not revenue neutral, and it's not honest. If you were honest, you would've gone to Albertans and said: "Listen. We're bringing in a \$3 billion carbon tax. You need to know that before you vote for us because that carbon tax is on top of the \$1.5 billion in additional taxes that we're going to bring in against you if you do elect us."

Now, that's \$4.5 billion in new taxes that this government has brought in in a very short period of time. Who's going to pay that? Corporations? That's laughable. Corporations don't pay taxes. Corporations increase their prices to consumers and pay their employees less money because they can't afford it. You laugh again, but that's how it works, folks. They pay taxes that flow on to consumers, that flow on to their employees because it's not about . . . [interjections] It's not about that. Investment is down. Companies are fleeing Alberta.

11:20

And there's more laughter on the other side. I really wish that Albertans would come to this place and have an opportunity to explain how they feel. Farmers, businesspeople, they want to tell you. You can look at Facebook posts that have over half a million hits. Why don't you come to my Facebook and take a look? You can share my Facebook posts to your friends and see how it is.

Albertans are waking up. They are waking up and realizing what's going on, and that's why they're sharing what they are. That's why they're saying the things that they are, about how they don't like what you have done. They don't like that you lied and then brought forward a tax, that you deceived them on the basis of your vote. That's not what Albertans want. They expect their government to come in, tell them what they're going to do, and do that. Now, you've done that, but you've done a lot more than that, and what you're doing is damaging the economy. When people have to look at their cheque and what's coming in, they recognize that when it doesn't come in anymore, they have to adjust things, and they are seriously worried about paying their bills. Those 100,000 Albertans are very worried.

Truthfully – truthfully – there are 100,000 beds in the surrounding area of Fort McMurray. Those beds are camp beds. The oil sands plants in this province pay about \$185 a day, per person, to stay in those camps – that's right – \$185 a day to stay in those camps. Well, the camps are empty, and those camps did not hold Albertans. Some of them did, but very few. Most of them held other Canadians, and those Canadians were making between \$150,000 and \$250,000 a year. They're gone. They're gone. So those 65,000 jobs that have just been lost since the NDP came into power are a small, small portion of the real jobs that are lost in Alberta.

Those 100,000 jobs, the Albertans that are no longer here in Alberta: they say that those are just people collecting unemployment insurance. How about those people that have severance payments? How about those people that haven't started collecting unemployment insurance or have decided to leave the province? The number is much, much higher, and as I say, the government is doing nothing. It seems they don't want to do anything.

The *Calgary Herald* this week told the story of Catherine Appler, a Calgarian. She has worked in the oil and gas sector for some time.

She's aware of how it works, and she had a one-year contract. Well, she received the call from human resources: you're let go. Now, she accepted her two-week notice, understanding that this is what happens in the oil and gas industry, but now she's been out of work for nine months. I will tell you that things do not look any better.

I have a good friend by the name of Bob. He worked up in the oil sands, flew in and out from Calgary. He's been unemployed for six months now. He's been trying to sell his house in Calgary. Housing prices went down 20 per cent just in the last six months. He can't sell it anymore, but he can't afford to keep it.

Now, I remember being a lawyer in Fort McMurray doing foreclosure work for banks right after the '80s. Yeah. Nasty guy. Well, I'll tell you this: I have never felt worse in my life than watching what happens when people lose their homes. It was disgusting, it was depressing, and it was real, and it is real today. I talked to a good friend of mine in Fort McMurray that's been selling real estate up there for 30 years. That friend of mine told me that he's seen more keys given back in the last six months than he's seen in the previous 30 years. More in the last six months than in the previous 30 years: is that a laughing matter? I'm not laughing.

I remember seeing these people's houses taken and their lives destroyed. Everything that they've worked for for 20 years was gone through bad government policy. That was the national energy program, and I promise you that every business in Fort McMurray – every single one – went bankrupt except a couple because of bad government policy. Nobody cared. I'm hoping the government will care. This government should care because these are people that are actually counting on this government to make a positive difference, and we don't see that positive difference happening.

There are thousands upon thousands of stories just like this, just like Bob's, just like Catherine's, thousands upon thousands. Until you individualize them, you don't realize how many people are destitute, but they are.

What are you doing about it? "Let's bring in a \$3 billion carbon tax." Who do you think pays that carbon tax? I do. You do. But all the people that can't afford it do, too, because you're increasing the price of gasoline. You're increasing everything that goes into a petroleum product. You're increasing all the costs of the products people buy. You don't think so, but this is a PST. It's a provincial sales tax. You can call it whatever you want, but it's a provincial sales tax. It's a nonneutral carbon tax. The people that pay it – of course, the oil sands companies are happy. They thought they were going to be shut down or at least devastated.

Let's face it. Your own Premier – your own Premier – stood up with a picket sign saying: stop the oil sands. Do you think I'm going to believe now that she's had a call to the altar and she's going to turn around? This is just the way to do it. I've got pictures. I can show you. I've got one for you, too. This is a Premier that went against our oil companies, and now the oil companies were very nervous. I know that because I know all of those people, very, very many of them. I've lived in Fort McMurray my entire life, and I've dealt with the oil companies for a long time, but I don't work for oil companies. I work for Albertans.

If I was in big oil, I'd be pretty happy right now, too. You know why? Because the NDP government passed on all of the cost to consumers, to Albertans, every single cost to Albertans.

Some Hon. Members: Shame.

Mr. Jean: They should be ashamed of themselves, not only for coming out with one story during the election and doing something else. What's happening in three weeks from now or three months from now? What's the NDP government going to bring in next?

What new taxes are you going to bring in next to destroy the economy and the quality of life of Albertans?

An Hon. Member: Untrustworthy.

Mr. Jean: Totally untrustworthy. It doesn't matter because we are, unfortunately, stuck with these people for a while.

I think the Albertans that voted for you are feeling a lot of remorse. They are, and you hear it, too, because even though you may not believe that we can hear it, we see it. We see it on everybody behind the front row, everyone. You're worried, especially in rural Alberta right now. You should be worried. People are very upset. In my 11 years in politics I've never seen people this upset. I've never had a Facebook post that's gone to 500,000. Never. I am thinking that there are going to be some very angry people. I'm hoping that everything stays calm and we have the ability to have discourse. That's what I've encouraged all people to do because this is about talking. This is about persuading the government that they're headed in the wrong direction.

I only say that because, you know, when you start on a path, Madam Speaker, as you know, when you start on a road trip and you look at a map and you go down that road, if you're going in the wrong direction, it's going to take a lot longer to get back to go to the right place. It's going to take a lot longer to get back to where we need to go, which is, frankly, to give Albertans a good return on investment for their tax dollars. They work hard.

I'll tell you that in my riding they work very hard. I invite you all to come up there and see how people work in Fort McMurray, how they're away from their families for 14 hours a day – 14 hours a day – how they go back and forth on a road and then work very hard and come home and don't even see their kids before they go to bed because they're trying to create a better life. Well, those people are losing their jobs. It's not just about month-to-month anymore. Now it's about digging into savings, about losing the house, about losing the car, about having no RSPs for retirement, about having to extend your work life. It's not 55 or 60 or 65.

People have to work longer now because of your actions, because of your actions to create new taxes and to penalize Albertans when they're already down. When there are thousands of jobs that have been shed, what do you do? You penalize them. You kick them when they're down with another \$3 billion in additional taxes. Shocking. It doesn't matter. You don't seem to care, but I'll tell you that there are accountants in Alberta that have been laid off. There are a lot of engineers that have been laid off. There are truck drivers. I know that. Two of my sons have class 1 drivers' licences. Neither one right now drives. They have to do what they can to get jobs. Neither one is doing what they want to do because they're taking whatever jobs they can.

It's very common. My nephews own companies up in the Fort McMurray area. They're aboriginals. They have very successful companies. They're still doing fairly well, but most companies in that area are not. In fact, a lot of companies – look at Calfrac. I was driving down highway 2 a few days ago, and I saw the Calfrac yard. It's so full of sump trucks that they have no more room for sump trucks in their yard.

An Hon. Member: We need a sump truck for this speech.

11:30

Mr. Jean: You know, it's a laughing matter to some people. I hear the member on the other side. He should be ashamed of himself. While we're talking about people losing their jobs, he's talking about a sump truck needed here because of my speech. [interjections] Well, I can assure you that I listened to that, and I think that Albertans are listening to the trivial way that you deal

with this speech and how important it is that they've lost their jobs – 100,000 people. You've got your job permanently. [interjections] Yeah, for four years you do. I promise you that we will do everything we can and I promise Albertans that we will do everything we can to make sure this NDP government has one time.

It's for Albertans that I stand up today. It's for Albertans that Wildrose stands up every single day in this place and fights for their jobs, fights for their quality of life, fights for a different idea than this government has brought in. This government is already taking the most inefficient government in Canada and making it bigger. They're bringing in a carbon tax that, frankly, does nothing for carbon. It doesn't lower GHGs one iota. In fact, it's going to be about 30 megatonnes more than it currently is under their own plan. I've got it. I think it's on page 9 of your report. It shows that the megatonnes are not going down; they're going up.

So what are you doing with this money? Well, it's a slush fund, right? It's a slush fund to do all your pet projects, to try to get re-elected, to do all those things that you talk about doing in the best interests of Albertans. Well, who's going to pay it? Albertans pay it, and they pay it on the backs of jobs because there won't be jobs here. The jobs will be gone.

Albertans have never looked, I don't believe, to Alberta, the government, for handouts. I don't think that that's what they want. What they do want from their government is for their government to have their backs and not work against them, to not penalize them when they're down, to not kick them when they're in the penalty box. That's what this carbon tax is doing. That's what this budget is doing. It's kicking them while they're down.

They're looking for a government whose everyday focus is on their jobs, on their quality of life, and on our economy. Instead what we have seen from this budget is a dangerous and ideological agenda. It matches the rest of the agenda the NDP have brought in here and right across the country in previous governments, an agenda that seeks to interfere tremendously with the free market that we do have. It's not in the best interests of Albertans. This government is instinctively suspicious about businesses and believes, I would suggest, that businesses are not good things. Well, we believe differently here on the Wildrose side. We believe that jobs are created by businesses, not government.

Now, this government believes that there is no shortage of regulations or laws or new red tape that can't fix a problem. We disagree. Sometimes simpler is better. Sometimes smaller government is better. Sometimes bureaucracy and managing managers that manage other managers that manage managers to manage are not really a good thing. Smaller governments can be effective. We know that because every government in Canada is smaller and, in fact, has better results.

If you look at any organization that does matrixes and does tests on these types of results, you'll find that Alberta is in the middle or at the bottom of the pack on just about every single matrix, yet we're the most expensive, \$2,000 more expensive than British Columbia, without infrastructure. Let's take infrastructure out of it. Without infrastructure, before this budget and before the carbon tax we cost \$2,000 more for every man, woman, and child in Alberta than British Columbia, which has a very similar population; \$2,000 more for the same services, the same constitutional obligations.

Why? I'll tell you why: because the government is inefficient with what it does, and the government is too big. That's why we stand up for the people of Alberta. That's why we do it, because we believe, based upon objective evidence right across the country, that you, the NDP, could do a better job governing this province and governing the bureaucracy. You could do so through attrition. You could do so by freezing wages. You're not even prepared to do that. In fact, you gave civil servants a 7 or 8 per cent raise this summer.

When people are being laid off, you give civil servants a raise. The people that are paying their bills are the taxpayers of the province, and they're losing jobs, yet you give a raise.

Have you even thought about freezing wages? Have you even thought about pulling back some of those bonuses and those special privileges and perks for these bureaucrats that work for the people of Alberta that are losing their jobs? Have you even thought about that? Has anybody come forward with any proposals to be more efficient in your government, in your departments? Not one. Not one single minister has said that. Are you telling me that it's already running as effectively as it possibly can? More importantly, are you telling Albertans that? Because that's what you're saying: "Albertans, even though you're losing jobs, we want to give bureaucrats a raise. We want to give them more perks, and in fact we're going to hire 1,600 new middle managers." That's what you did just in the last few months.

Did you announce that in your budget? No, you did not. Did you announce it in your campaign? No, you did not. All of these little sneaky things you're bringing out now when you have a majority are things that you never said you would do. There is no authority to do so, but certainly it appears that you're going to push it through as quickly as possible, and that is not in the best interest of Albertans.

Now, I could speak a long time on this because I feel very passionate about it, and I know that the Government House Leader on the other side wants me to. I know he's very excited about my speech, but I'll try to wrap it up as quickly as I possibly can. Maybe we can have an opportunity to speak outside afterwards, and I can persuade you of some of my great policy ideas.

We do believe that every Albertan must be treated fairly. Everyone must play by the same rules. That means stop giving corporate grants and handouts. Stop being friends to the corporations here. We don't want to see more corporate handouts. If they can't operate without government handouts, they shouldn't be in business. We believe that stability in our two most important job sectors, energy and agriculture, are very important because they employ the most Albertans. In the 110-year history of Alberta it is these principles that have made Alberta great. It's these principles and the people that have made Alberta the best place to live and work and raise a family, but ever since the NDP took office, they have gone against every one of the key principles that Albertans stand for.

They have brought in policies that have had a direct negative impact on our economy, especially our energy sector, and now they are attacking farms. Do you know that we have more small farms here than anywhere else in the country? I think 47,000 small farms. And you're attacking those farms, which is a way of life.

There's absolutely nothing positive in this budget for Alberta businesses, which, we believe on this side, create jobs. The NDP remains stubbornly committed to a dramatic 50 per cent increase in the minimum wage. We believe that this will reduce the number of jobs and that it will reduce the number of hours. I've owned a Quiznos franchise. I can tell you that it will reduce the number of people because they can't afford it. Those businesses operate on very tight margins, and when you increase business taxes, increase minimum wages, all of these things at once – I'm not saying necessarily that these things can't be done appropriately over time, but you just keep kicking. They're down on the ground, and you just keep kicking. They think that you're going to walk away, and you turn around and slap them and kick them with a carbon tax. This is not what to do to the people who are our bosses. These people pay us to give them the best government possible, and you're not doing that.

There will be higher costs for everyone. There will be lower rates of employment and fewer hours for employees. Many small businesses are worried that they will have to close shop, but the NDP remains stubbornly committed to it. This goes right in the face of every empirical study and any economist. All of them say the same thing: don't do them together because it is a stability issue. It is about piling on and piling on and piling on at a time and place when they can't afford it.

11:40

If you do anything, I would ask the NDP government to slow down. Take some time. Maybe, just maybe, what you might want to do is consult with farmers before you put the bill in place. You know: we're going to have consultations. Well, you've already introduced the bill. How are you going to consult on a bill that you've already put forward? A postconsultation? Seriously, folks. What are farmers telling us? They're telling us that they're travelling six to eight hours to get to some of these meetings, consultations, postconsultations, but they're all fully booked except for, I think, a couple that just came online, and even those, my understanding is, are fully booked. Doesn't that send a message to you that maybe, just maybe, you should slow down and listen to the people that pay your salaries?

You know, I heard a great question from the PCs earlier this month, and it was in relation to the minimum wage. Now, with tax consequences we have the second-highest minimum wage in Canada because we treat people that are more vulnerable better than any other province in Canada. We had the second-highest minimum wage already. Now, you know, you have to wonder, when you do that, what the implications are going to be to these people, and I'm very concerned about them because these are the most vulnerable in our society.

One of the things that sort of shocked me about this was when the NDP came forward and promised that business taxes would fix things. You know, of course, I think some Albertans were hoping it would fix things and give them some more revenues. They promised, in fact, that it would bring in about \$805 million this year and \$2.6 billion over the next three years. Well, instead it was only \$250 million a year. All your calculations are off. That's what brings us the largest fear factor in this. When you bring forward these numbers on expenses, well, those are real. But your revenue projections are so far-fetched that they're in fantasyland. Even this particular one, you know, \$2.6 billion: it's only going to be \$750 million. We see it clearly now, and you do, too.

You need to readjust your figures. What we'd ask you to do is to readjust how many cheques you send out the door to bureaucrats, how many slush funds you create for your own desires and your own political ambitions. Stop. Think about what you're doing. Think about all the Albertans that are unemployed and create a program that actually keeps Albertans employed, not something that's going to happen 18 months or 16 months from today. Employers aren't going to rehire people for a \$5,000 tax credit. Be serious, folks.

There is a \$1.5 billion hole in revenue that the NDP promised just from these tax increases. It's just a testament to the fact that you cannot tax your way into prosperity. You cannot tax away incentive and expect your economy to grow. You've all heard it. I'm sure you have because I hear it. The Wildrose hears it. That is: businesses are leaving Alberta. They are going to Saskatchewan, they are going to British Columbia, they're going to Texas, they're going to Louisiana, they're going to South Africa, to Brazil. They are because of your tax rates, because of the instability you're bringing into the economy, because of the lack of clarity in your bills or any backup to your numbers.

By the way, the projected 27,000 jobs that the NDP say their policy is supposed to create is less than a quarter, 25 per cent, of the people who have already lost their jobs over the last year, and it's not even going to come into effect for another 16 months, 25 per cent of the people that have lost their jobs just since you've been in power. What are you going to do about those people? Nothing, because we've seen nothing. Your legislation is fixated on an ideological bent instead of worrying about the people that are losing their jobs, about making sure corporations can hire new people or at least sustain the people they have.

What are you doing? You're increasing the cost of government. You're increasing the cost to people that pay for that government, because they do pay for the government. They pay for your wage, they pay for mine, they are my boss, and we have an obligation to do what's in their best interest.

I am very worried about the energy sector only because of how many jobs it creates, because our obligation is to create jobs and to keep Albertans employed so they can have this great quality of life, so they can take those trips and have those music lessons and dance lessons and send their kids to the best schools and do whatever they would like to do with their family, to have choice. That is something we have here in Alberta that other places don't have: choice. Choice to do what we want with our money. Choice to go where we want to go, to educate our children, to farm how we want to within certain limits. We have choice, and the NDP are taking away that choice. Why? Because when people go into their pockets, they come up with nothing because the NDP government is not allowing them to keep money to spend how they want.

EnCana said as much earlier this year. In fact, this month they announced that they were moving money and jobs away from Alberta. Guess where they're going? Texas. They're going to Texas. For those whose livelihoods depend on the viability of the energy sector, hoping for a fair hearing, they're out of luck. The Finance minister, the Premier, all of the NDP caucus have made it clear. The only way that royalties are going is up. They say that they support pipelines, yet they don't support pipelines. They say that they support the oil industry, yet there are clear signals that they don't. They are simply spending too much money, and we'll have to pay it back. We will have to pay it back.

We've asked for a spending freeze. We've asked for a freeze on wages. We're asking just to calm down on your ideological agenda just to make sure we can keep as many Albertans employed as possible without borrowing too much money. I don't think that's too much to ask, just to step back, take a breath of fresh air, think about what you're doing, and watch the statistics, watch what's taking place. The idea that Albertans should have to pay more taxes and pay more for their power bills, pay more for their oil and gas, pay more for all the products they use, whether it be a phone or BlackBerry or whatever – they will be paying more. You have control of your policies. Please take a breath. Please step back. Please keep Albertans employed.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak on Bill 9. I'll be as brief as I can with the time being as it is. Three goals, it seems to me, are forefront in this bill, the appropriations bill: number one, make sure that we're spending our money wisely where it is; number two, stimulate the economy while protecting jobs; and three, shift from a heavy overdependence on oil and gas revenue to an alternate economy.

With respect to ensuring that we review existing expenditures, I think there's no question, having worked in the health system for as many years as I have, that there are significant inefficiencies, and I was disappointed to see that there wasn't any evidence after six months that we were looking at some significant changes in efficiencies in the health system. We are indeed racking up a significant amount of debt, some of which is essential to deal with the current reality of low oil prices, but we cannot push this substantial debt onto the next generation. We have to start paying our way as we go.

With respect to stimulating the economy and protecting jobs, we've recommended that the small-business tax needs to be reduced. That would be a sustainable way to stimulate an alternate economy and protect jobs, not giving \$5,000 per job hire as a short-term subsidy to business.

We need to look at the linear tax issue in rural Alberta and make sure that it's more fairly distributed. There are billions of dollars available through linear taxation that are going to just a few opportunely placed municipalities. That needs to be assessed as an opportunity to stabilize some of our infrastructure spending without borrowing so significantly.

We need to see a much more clear commitment to a repayment plan for the debt that we're incurring, and that hasn't been forthcoming.

Certainly, we support the new clean technology incentives that we're seeing the government come forward with.

11:50

With respect to shifting from oil and gas, what we've seen over the last 25 years is a drop in royalty return to Albertans, from 27 per cent of oil and gas revenues in the early '70s, when Mr. Lougheed came in, to about 4 per cent of oil and gas revenues at this time, a shocking loss of revenue for the public purse. So we fully supported a need to review the royalty regime in Alberta.

We clearly need action on climate change and carbon, and I have to applaud the government for its bold, courageous steps on a carbon levy. It is, in fact, a provincial sales tax; don't get me wrong. The past government was not willing to bring in a carbon levy or incentives for improving our carbon emissions in good times or in bad. Clearly, there is no perfect time to bring in a carbon levy, but we are way, way late in getting moving on alternate clean technologies.

In order to give others a chance to speak, I will take my seat, Madam Speaker, and recognize that while there are some very good initiatives in this budget, we will not be supporting third reading.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I believe we only have one more speaker to complete this item, and then we expect a division after that, so I would ask unanimous consent of the House to continue until we complete this item.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the Government House Leader and indeed to all members of the House for unanimous consent to continue this debate in a timely manner. Also, a special mention and thank you to the Member for Calgary-Mountain View for being so brief in your comments. I will also attempt to be brief.

What I think is important to recognize in this budget is that there are some positive aspects to this budget, which I can support. I believe that infrastructure spending is badly needed in this province, and I believe it is okay to borrow some money to build infrastructure to catch up, to create jobs. Those are laudable objectives and, I think, totally and entirely appropriate at this time. My question, though, is the scale of that infrastructure spending and the total lack of any sort of plan to pay back the debt that we're taking on. I'm curious about whether or not we'll be able to actually deploy this capital effectively and whether or not, in fact, we will find in very targeted areas that we have shortages of trades, which drives up costs and, in fact, doesn't achieve the objectives.

I'm supportive of the access to capital for entrepreneurs in this province. That is something that drives our economy in our province. It's a great source of pride for me personally as an entrepreneur, and anything we can do to support entrepreneurs and venture capitalists as they take risks, grow the economy, and create jobs is to be lauded.

Stability in education is also important, an aspect of this job. Stability in our public education, public health care systems is to be applauded as well.

But my problem with the budget overall is that the numbers simply don't add up, not only in this year – we know there's a \$6.1 billion deficit – but in years going forward. What I don't see in this budget is any sort of attempt to constrain spending or do more with less. Albertans all around this province – in their households, in their businesses, even in municipal governments – are doing more with less. This government has not chosen that path. They've chosen a path to feel like money is infinite, that it just comes from somewhere, that we just simply ask Albertans for more taxes, from individuals and from businesses, and that all we need to do is worry about the spending side. That's simply not true. This government ought to be doing more with less just like Albertans are.

Now, there's been a lot of talk in this House about our alternative budget, and I'm going to talk more about our alternative budget because I believe as an opposition member and as an opposition leader that it is my job not simply to reflexively oppose what the government does; it is my job to propose alternatives and to present Albertans with our vision and answer the question: all right; how would you do it?

Well, here's how we would do it. This budget increases program spending this year 2.54 per cent. We would also increase program spending, at about 1 per cent less. From 2014 to 2018 this government will increase spending 10.54 per cent. We would also increase spending but only at 5 per cent.

It's important that we constrain the growth of operational spending in particular. There is no thought given in this budget to operational efficiencies. There is no mechanism in place to enable the public sector – and there are tremendous people in Alberta's public service – to do their jobs more efficiently, to create a free market for ideas, to allow the front lines to suggest ways of operating more efficiently and more effectively. The culture needs to change.

There's \$4.4 billion – \$4.4 billion – allocated over five years to new projects and programs. That is a slush fund which we don't know where it's going to go. It makes it impossible to support this budget.

Personal income tax. While I am supportive of a progressive income tax, five brackets are too many brackets. A 15 per cent top marginal tax rate is too high. It disincentivizes individual initiative, and that is what this province was built on.

The corporate income tax increase, up to 12 per cent, is estimated to increase revenue by only \$250 million or \$450 million by 2017, but in fact the revenue decreases a billion dollars for each of the

next two years. Now, I know some of that can be attributed to challenges in the economy, but I have to think a significant portion of that is a result of tax leakage, of corporations deciding Alberta is no longer the lowest tax jurisdiction in the country. They'll find somewhere else to file their taxes. There are a lot of very bright accountants in this province who have found ways of doing that absolutely legally, and that is to the detriment of Alberta. If we lower taxes on corporations in this province by 1 per cent, we return Alberta to the low tax advantage that we've enjoyed for so many years, but we still generate enough revenue to fund those badly needed programs. This government's budget is out of balance.

There's a 4 cent per litre increase to locomotive fuel tax, which is a 267 per cent increase, which increases the cost to transport our goods, in particular our bitumen, by rail. In the absence of pipelines, that will become an increasing challenge. Now, I will say, speaking of pipelines, that I do broadly support the climate plan because I do believe it will result in and create the scenario where Alberta can finally see pipelines built and can finally get market access built.

I want to speak briefly about the job creation grant, which we've heard a lot about in this House. The very best-case scenario for any company is to create jobs in calendar 2016 and then claim this credit by the end of 2016. We don't know exactly how that's going to work. But if it works that the net number of jobs that you've created by the end of 2016 is greater than the jobs that you had at the beginning of 2016, what is to stop a company from creating a bunch of jobs on December 15, 2016, firing those people on January 1, 2017, yet claiming \$5,000 per job? Or let's take a best-case scenario. Let's say that Alberta's economy picks up in the fourth quarter of 2016. It would be wonderful. But those jobs would have been created anyway. Companies are claiming the tax credit for jobs they would have created anyway.

Instead, we need an investor tax credit to allow businesses to decide how best to deploy their capital to stimulate further investment in those businesses. It's not up to government to tell a business how to best operate their business; it's up to business to decide.

I'll talk briefly about energy price projections. In 2017 this budget presumes oil prices will be at \$68 a barrel. Today's forward curve – I just checked a few minutes ago. The average forward curve for 2017 is \$52.11. That's a \$15 difference. If we do the math on that, that is a \$2.7 billion hole in this government's fiscal plan. That's an enormous risk to this province, and I have grave concerns that this government doesn't fully understand that risk.

They're borrowing for operations. They're borrowing \$700 million for operations in 2016 and \$3.1 billion for operations in 2017, or over \$5 billion if their forecasts are wrong.

12:00

They have not done a sensitivity analysis on the credit rating downgrade; we did. My single budget analyst did a quick credit rating downgrade scenario. A 1 per cent increase in Alberta's borrowing rate because our credit rating is downgraded will cost us an extra \$700 million a year in debt-service costs alone, starting in 2017. That is a risk that this province cannot bear. How big a risk is it that we lose our credit rating? There are five scenarios that the Dominion Bond Rating Service uses. Three of those five are already offside for Alberta. Only one of them is debt to GDP.

With that, Madam Speaker, I want to say that I cannot support the budget. Thank you again to the House for the opportunity to speak.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other speakers to the bill?

If not, the hon. Minister of Finance to close debate.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I will just say that, you know, for the last three days I have been meeting with economists both in Toronto and here, talking about Budget 2016 and Budget 2015. On the whole they believe in the direction this government has presented before them. The debt-to-GDP ratio that we have put forward is supported by these same economists and by investment bankers and by others who would look at investing in Alberta.

Previously, a friend across the floor talked about the Calgary days, former Mayor Klein, and his significant investment all across that city. Yes, Mayor Duerr was hamstrung with the amount of debt, but I think that if we look at it, it was very different in terms of the proposal that this government is putting forward on debt to GDP. I don't know what the figure was that Klein had raised debt to in Calgary, but it was not the same as today. We are starting from a better fundamental place, with no net debt in this province. We have a plan before this province that will support programs, services, capital investments and bring us back to balance in 2019-2020, which is what we will do.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance has moved third reading of Bill 9, Appropriation Act, 2015.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 12:03 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Carson	Hinkley	Payne
Ceci	Horne	Phillips
Connolly	Kazim	Renaud
Coolahan	Kleinstauber	Rosendahl
Cortes-Vargas	Littlewood	Sabir
Dach	Loyola	Schmidt
Dang	Luff	Schreiner
Drever	Malkinson	Shepherd
Eggen	Mason	Sucha
Feehan	McLean	Sweet
Fitzpatrick	Miller	Turner
Ganley	Miranda	Westhead
Goehring	Nielsen	Woollard
Gray	Notley	

Against the motion:

Aheer	Hanson	Pitt
Anderson, W.	Hunter	Rodney
Clark	Jansen	Schneider
Cooper	Jean	Smith
Cyr	Loewen	Starke
Drysdale	MacIntyre	Strankman
Ellis	McIver	Swann
Fildebrandt	Nixon	Taylor
Gotfried	Orr	van Dijken

Totals: For – 41 Against – 27

[Motion carried; Bill 9 read a third time]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, the House now stands adjourned.

[The Assembly adjourned at 12:08 p.m. to 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday afternoon, November 26, 2015

Day 24

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

First Session

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Feehan, Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (ND), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (PC)
Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., Calgary-Buffalo (ND)
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Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
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Party standings:

New Democrat: 53 Wildrose: 22 Progressive Conservative: 9 Alberta Liberal: 1 Alberta Party: 1 Independent: 1

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Chair: Ms Miller
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Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

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Connolly	Jansen
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Coolahan	Nielsen
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Babcock	MacIntyre
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Drysdale	Sucha
Horne	Woollard
Kazim	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, November 26, 2015

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there any school groups for introduction today?

Hearing none, the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'm pleased to rise on your behalf and introduce Mr. Jim Black. Mr. Black is a constituent of Medicine Hat, a strong community advocate, and a personal friend to you. I would ask that Mr. Black, who is seated in your gallery, please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the introduction didn't indicate it, but he was sorry that Mr. Clark couldn't be here today. He actually ran against me as an Alberta Party member, and we're still friends.

The Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly some visitors from the Department of Environment and Parks. I'd ask them to rise as I call their names: Ms Melissa Killick, Mr. Duke Hunter, Ms Wendy Proudfoot, Mrs. Angela Turlione, Miss Leah Arnason, Kristine Cariaga, Amanda Buer, and Graham Brittain. I wish to thank them for all of their service to our province and ask the House to extend the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The Minister of Health and Seniors.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two introductions. First, it's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two visitors from Friends of Medicare. For 36 years Friends of Medicare has been leading the fight to preserve a public, comprehensive health care system that's accessible to all Albertans. Sandra Azocar has been the executive director of Friends of Medicare since 2012. She is joined by communications and administrative staff member Trevor Zimmerman. I commend their efforts in support of protecting, promoting, and restoring the physical and mental well-being of all residents of Alberta. I now ask that Sandra and Trevor please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

I do have a second one, Mr. Speaker. My apologies. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Paul Haskins. Paul is a physician assistant at the Alberta Health Services Sturgeon community hospital. Prior to his current role, he served as a physician assistant and med tech in the Canadian armed forces for more than 25 years. We are grateful. Tomorrow, November 27, is National Physician Assistant Day in Canada, which is an opportunity to acknowledge the positive impact that PAs across Canada, including Alberta, are making on Canadian health care: improving access to medical care and helping to reduce wait times. I'd ask that our honoured guest receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased today to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly Daniel and Delores Warawa. Daniel has 10 years as town councillor for the county of Lamont and also serves as deputy reeve. He is joined by his wife, Delores, who, along with their son Ryan operate a farm outside of Mundare, where I had the pleasure of joining him on his combine to take in the harvest of flax. I thank them for their warmth and generosity. They have truly shown me what it means to experience good, Ukrainian hospitality in Mundare. Please join me in extending the warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm excited to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the group from Schonsee park and playground. They're a group of very dedicated volunteers that are working towards developing a park and playground at 76th Street and Schonsee Drive. They were absolutely thrilled with the outcome of the western final as not only are the Edmonton Eskimos headed to the Grey Cup, but the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort has donated the hundred dollars to Schonsee park. Here today from Schonsee park and playground are Nicole, Mackenzie, Madison, and Chloe Nicholson; Alice, Mason, and Ty Funk; Deborah and Eric Clark. I ask that they please rise to receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I hope you advised them that the hon. Minister of Finance has some new income, so he's good for more than a hundred dollars.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Peace River Constituency

Ms Jabbour: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In our national anthem we sing of the true north strong and free. I'd like to tell you a bit about my true north, my constituency of Peace River, using three words: diversity, resilience, and diligence.

Diversity. La Crête is home to a large Mennonite population, primarily of German and Dutch descent but also from Mexico and Brazil. We have three distinct First Nations: the Dene Thá in Meander, Bushe, and Chateh; the Little Red River Cree in Fox Lake, John D'Or, and Garden River; and Beaver First Nation in Boyer and Child Lake. We have a large Métis community in Paddle Prairie and across region 6 and francophones in Marie-Reine and St. Isidore. Fort Vermilion, Alberta's oldest community, represents a unique cultural diversity of language, religion, and ethnic background. Fort Vermilion also holds the record for the coldest temperature ever recorded in Alberta, a frosty minus 60.

That brings me to resilience. Peace River responded to the devastating floods in the '90s by creating PeaceFest, a celebration of art and music. The First Nations in the north are incredibly resilient, overcoming the residential school legacy to build strength and industry. Traditional language and way of life remain alive in these communities, and they create fabulous aboriginal art. Oil patch towns Zama City and Rainbow Lake adapt to industry cycles and population fluctuations that put pressure on the local economy, and the citizens band together to reduce isolation by creating community activities.

That brings me to diligence. In Peace River we have people who help others and enrich the community through projects like the Curtis Marshall memorial skate park or by sponsoring Syrian refugee families. We have long-established family farms in North Star, Dixonville, and Nampa and family businesses that are models of energy efficiency such as Manning Diversified and The Carbon Farmer. And in High Level we are working diligently to develop and diversify our economy through ventures such as our upcoming winter ice Frostival on December 5.

An ancient Beaver Indian legend says: drink the water of the Peace River, and you will return. I invite you to discover the truth of that. Come and visit Alberta's true north.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member, and please express my regrets to your community that I cannot be there. I would have liked that very much.

1:40

Government Policies

Mr. Barnes: I'd like to go beyond the front-page news and share the incredible impact of NDP policies on Alberta families. So far this year there have been 65,000 jobs lost in our province and counting. That's the same as the entire city of Medicine Hat receiving a pink slip. Behind each one of the 65,000 jobs lost is an individual, a neighbour, a family. If you want to see the human impact of the things we discuss here, come and see the people in my home riding.

Mr. Speaker, as you and I well know, the families and communities of southeastern Alberta are still recovering from the previous government's natural gas royalty review. Now it seems that the people of Cypress-Medicine Hat cannot go a single week without hearing of some new government policy that will only further compound their difficulties and reduce their opportunities.

In spring Cypress-Medicine Hatters were hit with a tax increase on their livelihoods and productivity, in the summer they faced ideological meddling in the labour market with the announcement of drastic minimum wage increases, and now they get saddled with a PST in disguise, massive increases to utility costs, and farming regulations rammed through with no consultation and no certainty of where it will leave them. All along the way the job losses mount, sometimes by the hundreds, as we saw recently with the closure of the Finning heavy equipment dealer in Medicine Hat, but far more often it's by the dozens. Sure, there are newspaper headlines, but you're not hearing about those trying to make their mortgage payments, being unable to enrol their son or daughter in spring sports, or missing out on a Christmas donation to the Salvation Army. It's the small businesses paying the price. It's the entrepreneur who has invested in any one of these many spinoffs from the oil and gas industry. It's the family farm getting buried by a host of costly new taxes and regulations.

My constituents and all Albertans need, more than ever, a government that allows them to be productive and to have opportunity.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Northern Hills.

Calgary to Cochrane Trail

Mr. Kleinstaub: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. From my early days as a political candidate in municipal politics I've always been a strong supporter of bike paths and trail systems. That is why I'm pleased to rise today to congratulate the Glenbow Ranch Park Foundation and Alberta Parks on their initiatives to link the park's internal trail network to the city of Calgary and the town of Cochrane. This initiative is known as the Calgary to Cochrane, or C to C, trail. The C to C trail will provide access to some of the

most spectacular parkland and vistas the Bow River Valley has to offer through a system of walking, hiking, and biking trails.

In early spring 2015 the Glenbow Ranch Park Foundation began the C to C trail fundraising campaign, with a target of \$100,000 to complete phase 1 of the Bears paw Trail. This 2.2 kilometre trail stretches from Glenbow Ranch provincial park to Calgary's north-west corner, Haskayne park. By mid-July I attended the Parks Day celebration in Glenbow Ranch provincial park. There was a big announcement that day, and the Glenbow Ranch Park Foundation announced that around 740 individual donations exceeded the \$100,000 target set earlier that spring and had raised more than \$194,000 for the first phase of this project, proving its wild popularity.

As a donor I was pleased to receive an e-mail at the end of October confirming that the first phase of the trail is now complete. The Bears paw section of the trail now winds through the beautiful native grasslands on the north bank of the Bow River, connecting commuters, hikers, runners, and cyclists to the existing trail system. Someday soon the plentiful trail networks of Calgary-Northern Hills will have a seamless trail connection for residents all the way to the western corner of Glenbow park.

The foundation continues to lead fundraising efforts for the next two phases of the project, and when completed, the trail will be part of the Trans Canada Trail network.

I'd like to end by congratulating the Glenbow Ranch Park Foundation on a fundraising job well done.

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

Charitable Tax Credit

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you are aware, Albertans are known for their incredible compassion and generosity. Whether it's contributions of time, talent, or finances, the generosity of Albertans is unsurpassed in Canada, and it is at times when the need is greatest that the spirit of this province shines brightest. It is through these contributions that charitable organizations are able to offer the vital programs and services that assist youth, families, seniors, and the most vulnerable both at home and around the world. As a social worker and having spent many years working with child and family services and in developing education programs, I've seen the impact first-hand. Indeed, without charitable contributions, many of these programs and services simply could not be possible.

For many the ability to provide that financial contribution has been impacted by the same economic conditions that make their donations and the programs those donations support that much more important. Alberta's charitable tax credit has been maintained in Budget 2015 and is intended to encourage those who are able to continue to support the charitable causes that matter to them. Albertans making a contribution to a CRA-registered charity are eligible to receive a 50 per cent tax credit for every dollar donated above the \$200 threshold.

The charitable tax credit is one of the most generous in Canada, and it helps to stretch that donation dollar a little bit further. The Minister of Culture and Tourism has encouraged all MLAs to assist the efforts of charitable organizations in their communities by helping to spread the word of the charitable tax credit. Mr. Speaker, full details of Alberta's charitable tax credit are available online at the Alberta Culture and Tourism website, culture.alberta.ca.

To all of those who give so generously in support of their fellow Albertans, thank you. To the charitable organizations and the incredible volunteers who are making a difference in their communities and in the lives of those in need, thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Friends of Medicare

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For over 36 years the Alberta Society of the Friends of Medicare has been championing our treasured public health care system and pushing governments to ensure that strong public medicare continues to be a defining part of life in our province. Many surveys have shown that public health care is something that Canadians identify with so deeply that it is now a key part of our national identity. Access to quality medical care when we need it most, regardless of personal financial situation, is one way we as Albertans demonstrate our concern for one another.

The Friends of Medicare has been a steady voice, holding government to account whenever health policy falls out of sync with the Albertan values of compassion and care. Friends of Medicare is not just the story of a group of volunteers who happened to believe in the merits of public health care; it is the story of citizen action and resistance to those corporate interests that would put profits ahead of people. Friends of Medicare has helped to educate Albertans about the benefits of our medicare system and to outline why certain policy directions endanger that system.

Public health care is sustainable, more equitable, and more efficient than private, for-profit medicine. Countries around the world look enviously at what Canada has achieved.

During these tough times Albertans need dependable health care services, now more than ever. As the baby boomer generation heads into retirement and old age, they need to know that the medical system they've spent their working lives to support is now ready to support them. Likewise, many new parents are in the process of raising Alberta's next generation, and these young families also need a public health care system that they can depend on.

I take comfort in knowing that no matter what may come, the Friends of Medicare will still be here, fighting for the quality health care that all Albertans deserve.

Thank you.

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

Simon House Recovery Centre

Ms Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize the tireless work and dedication of an organization within my constituency. Simon House Recovery Centre is a recovery centre for men who have accepted that they have a problem with either drugs or alcohol and want to remedy it by changing their attitudes and behaviour.

Simon House operates through four phases. Phase 1 begins with a full-time classroom portion and lasts for 12 weeks, during which the 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous are completed. There they receive incentives, specific counselling, and learn life and relationship skills. They also learn to manage anger, anxiety, and depression. Through Simon House's partnership with Alberta employment, immigration, and industry they are taught cover letter and resumé writing and job search skills. Phases 2 and 3 begin semi-independent living and independent living, with added responsibilities and privileges. The final phase of the program is phase 4, the goal of all their clients, which is sober living while living independently in the community and being reunited with family and friends.

Mr. Speaker, I must share that Simon House is one of North America's leading recovery centres, where 50 per cent of their

clients achieve the benchmark of one year's sobriety. This far exceeds the industry average of 15 to 20 per cent.

On the last Wednesday of every month Simon House celebrates its graduation ceremony at our Bowness Seniors' Centre, where the graduates of the 12-week, phase 1 program are honoured as well as those celebrating their birthday month, the month they chose sobriety over addiction. Here friends and family honour milestones, and current and former graduates share their stories of recovery. Since July either myself or a member of my staff has attended these graduations, and I can personally attest to the sense of community and collective perseverance shared not only just from the graduates but from family and friends and members of our community.

I thank them for all the hard work that they do for Alberta. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, allow me, if you will, to echo the remarks of the Deputy Speaker yesterday. This has been a very difficult week and next several days for this House. I know I speak for all of the Assembly to the leader of the third party and our fellow members who are here: please express to the family again our sincerest support. It has been a difficult yet a learning experience for all of us about the importance of each other.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Carbon Tax

Mr. Jean: We know that at least 2,200 Albertans have lost their jobs this month. That's on top of the 65,000 Albertans who are already out of work. Those who still have jobs are seeing their wages plummet. In fact, a new report says that the average weekly earnings for Albertans are falling fast. What's the NDP's solution? To hit everyone and everything with a massive new carbon tax, that will make everyone poorer and damage our economy. Why is the Premier making Albertans, who are already hurting so, so badly, suffer even more?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the member opposite knows, one of the critical pieces that we need to do to encourage our economy to recover and to ensure that we can get the best return on the resources that we own is to ensure that we can find markets for our product and, with any luck, get a pipeline to tidewater. One of the key parts of that is to show leadership on climate change, and that is what our plan does.

Mr. Jean: I would like to congratulate the Premier for bringing in the largest tax grab in Alberta history. It will make everything more expensive: driving, heating your home, turning the lights on. The final bill: almost a thousand dollars a year per household. For every Albertan seeing their wages go down – they have to heat their homes in the winter or drive to work – the Premier has one message: tough luck, too bad, so sad. One economist is calling this the equivalent of a 3 per cent sales tax. The Premier never campaigned on this carbon tax. How can the voters ever trust the Premier again?

The Speaker: Madam Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, the member opposite seems to have some difficulty in terms of interpreting and reading the information that we've put out with respect to our climate change plan. We've been very clear that the

carbon price will be completely and fully recycled into the economy, including being dedicated to families and households and small businesses to make sure that they can make ends meet. This whole process is going to actually trigger economic diversification and a renewable economy and renewable jobs. Our experts say that it . . .

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Jean: The only recycling this does, frankly, is to recycle more funds into the government to slush wherever they want.

Municipalities are warning that this carbon tax will make life more difficult for everyone. For the city of Red Deer it will cost an extra \$4.2 million per year. We know what that means: higher property taxes, higher fees, higher prices for everything for everyone right across the province. For most middle-class Albertans any offset they would get would be a tiny fraction of what they pay directly and through increased prices. Premier, this is much worse than health care premiums. It's as bad as a sales tax. Why can't you just admit it to Albertans?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, what I can admit to Albertans, which I think the member opposite would have some difficulty with, is that climate change is real and it is time for us to do something about it. We have had municipal leaders, business leaders, civil society leaders all tell us that this is a good plan. Just yesterday we had the federal Minister of Natural Resources say that this plan is going to help us get our resources to tidewater while we're doing the right thing on climate change, which these guys aren't even sure exists.

The Speaker: Second set of questions.

Mr. Jean: The Premier's claim that this massive carbon tax is revenue neutral is simply dishonest, and it's breaking the trust of Albertans. Everyone knows that this is a tax grab. A revenue-neutral tax would have the government not taking in any more money. A revenue-neutral tax would not raise the overall tax burden on Albertans. If the Premier lowered income taxes by \$3 billion, the carbon tax would be revenue neutral, as she's claimed. Will she do that?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, what we are going to do is that we are going to put every single bit of that carbon price which is collected back into the economy to promote renewable energy growth so that we can get rid of coal by 2030, something which everybody knows is long overdue, so that we can promote energy efficiency, something that we haven't had ever in this province, unlike every other province in the country, so that we can make sure that families can make ends meet. All that money is going back in there, and what it's going to do is build the economy, not bring it down the way the guys opposite would like us to do.

The Speaker: Are we at your first supplemental?

Mr. Jean: Yes, sir.

The Speaker: Please proceed.

Mr. Jean: The economist Trevor Tombe: "The Alberta carbon tax plan is not revenue neutral . . . the government shouldn't try to mislead people." The economist Jack Mintz: "The new consumption levy is . . . directed at spending, not tax relief." The Calgary Chamber: "None of the . . . \$3 billion raised for these measures is directed toward reductions in personal or . . . income tax." Premier, are they wrong, or will you admit that this is just the largest tax grab in Alberta history, that's going to be on the backs of Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, in fact, I believe the Calgary Chamber of commerce endorsed our plan. Dr. Roger Gibbins, a senior fellow and former president of the Canada West Foundation, not actually known as a left-leaning think tank, said: the first word that comes to mind is balance; also, funds generated by the carbon tax will remain in Alberta, and given that Alberta had to act, the Premier has delivered a package that should sit well with Albertans.

Mr. Jean: Well, it doesn't.

Of course, the NDP won't cut taxes; they only raise taxes. They want to take more money out of the pockets of families and into their government coffers so they have slush funds. Wildrose thinks this is wrong. Alberta families do not deserve economic experiments. They don't deserve to be made to pay almost a thousand dollars more every year with no benefits. Premier, I'll ask again: why are you raising the price of everything for everyone without cutting any taxes?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, first of all, I do need to clarify. The numbers that the member opposite is using are completely wrong. That's the first point. The second point is that what we have talked about is recycling, and we may see some tax relief in some areas. So he doesn't actually know what he's talking about.

What I will say is that I'm going to offer up a different quote because I think this gets to the heart of it. Dr. Joe Vipond said that closing these plants will do more to save lives than he could ever hope to achieve as a physician working in an emergency room. That, Mr. Speaker, is why we are taking action.

The Speaker: Third set of questions.

Mr. Jean: Closing down 30 communities.

Farm and Ranch Worker Legislation Consultation

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, last week I asked the Premier about her plan to saddle Alberta farms and ranches with poorly conceived regulations. The video clip of that exchange has become a bit of a viral sensation in rural Alberta. It has been downloaded actually hundreds of thousands of times and seen by half a million Albertans. What does the Premier have to say to the 45,000 Alberta family farms, that are deeply worried that this government, which has no farmers or ranchers in its caucus, is about to badly hurt their way of life?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, what I would begin by saying is that Alberta is a province which is part of the country of Canada, which recognizes fundamental human rights. Some of those human rights are the right to refuse unsafe work and the right to be covered by basic employment standards legislation. Now, we have indicated all along that we understand that when it comes to family farms, ensuring that members of families who are working on the family farm are exempted or not covered by this is something that we need to consult with farmers about. That's what's going on right now across the province, and that's what will happen, but we will not back down on ensuring that . . .

2:00

Mr. Jean: They just don't get it, Mr. Speaker. This government consults on complicated matters, apparently. Democratic reform

changes are getting a committee and hearings. The Municipal Government Act: that bill will be tabled and then lots of hearings. But changes to hundreds of years of a way of life for 45,000 Alberta families who depend on farming and ranching: they get no hearings, no committee meetings, and no study by this government. This bill will be rammed through this place and enforced by January 1. Why is the Premier treating our ranchers and farmers like second-class citizens?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you. Well, first of all, Mr. Speaker, it has been the position of our caucus and now this government and certainly our party going forward through the provincial election that this is exactly what we would do. Moreover, when I got elected in 2008, the former government started reviewing it, and then they reviewed it again, and then they had a study, and then they had another review, and then they had more consultations. So the fact of the matter is that it's been reviewed extensively. The reason it keeps getting reviewed is because it is absolutely untenable that in this day and age in the province of Alberta we would deny basic, fundamental human rights to certain groups of workers in this province.

Mr. Jean: Well, if she won't consult farmers, she can consult the people behind her that are going to be very upset after this weekend, when they talk to farmers. This government claims that it is consulting and refers to some town hall meetings across the province, but some of those town halls are scheduled to happen after everything has passed in this Assembly. Also, those town halls are limited-seating meetings, and almost all of them are full, standing room only. Now we are hearing that these won't actually be consultation meetings as much as come-and-be-told meetings. Does the Premier think that this is how Alberta farmers and ranchers deserve to be treated?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, in fact, I was advised yesterday that in Grande Prairie, where there was a great deal of interest in attending the consultation, a second meeting has just been scheduled. So a full second meeting has been scheduled because it was fully subscribed in the course of organizing it.

But let me be clear, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps the members opposite are not quite aware. We passed this legislation, but the regulations are still being consulted on because the regulations can address a number of the concerns that have been raised around the family farm. [interjections] That is an appropriate way to go forward. It's standard governance procedure. I'm not quite sure what these guys have a problem with.

The Speaker: How quickly we forget.

The hon. leader of the third party.

Victorian Order of Nurses

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Victorian Order of Nurses, VON, just announced that they had closed their Alberta operations. Ten full-time and 95 part-time workers will lose their jobs. In addition, much needed programs such as elder-abuse intervention, adult day programs, and home support by the VON will cease to exist. They will close their programs in Alberta and five other provinces after 115 years. Rather than let this not-for-profit provider of much-needed services leave Alberta, will you commit to working with the VON and perhaps supporting them

with some percentage of their operations or some other help to keep them providing their services?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the member opposite has indicated, the nonprofit Victorian Order of Nurses is shutting down operations in six provinces, including Alberta, and will operate only in Ontario and Nova Scotia. We know that this will affect a number of staff. We also know that it will affect roughly 191 people. AHS is working diligently with those people and with the VON in order to ensure that those services are transitioned in a safe and effective way. We are certainly happy to keep members of this Legislature apprised of what those arrangements are looking like.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. McIver: Thank you. I'm glad to hear the Premier say that they're working with those people because the home-care services are deeply personal, and changes in caregiving personnel can be quite upsetting for those that need the services. Given that it's been long noted that home health care services actually save health care costs and that this is exactly the kind of services the VON has provided decades ahead of the curve, because it's considered very important right now, will you work with those people and keep them, the same people, the same caregivers, whether it's as part of the VON or some other part, with the same care receivers. It's very gut wrenching.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the sentiment communicated by the leader of the third party. You're quite right, particularly when it comes to home care, that continuity of treatment and continuity of caregivers are fundamentally important. Certainly, we want to begin by saying that we are very grateful to the VON for the work that they have done. I believe that AHS will be doing everything that they can to ensure that that continuity and that transition are as smooth as possible. There are part-time employees who are impacted by the VON's closing. There may be opportunities to keep those people in the system. I will ask my minister to work with AHS to ensure that continuity and stability.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Second supplemental.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you. I appreciate the answer from the Premier, and I'm going to extend my question just a little bit further. Will you work with the other provinces to see if there's some joint solution? It may turn out that if we do that, it's more cost-effective for Alberta or will provide more choices on how to deliver the services needed in a more cost-effective way or just maybe a better way. Will you team up, communicate with the other provinces and see what can be gained?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and to the member for the question. The Victorian Order of Nurses is committed to ensuring that there are stable services offered by them until December 2, so given the urgency – and that's around the home-care piece – I'm really focused on making sure that we have alignments in place so that by December 3 there is a smooth transition to protect those patients. Right now that's my number one focus.

In terms of working collaboratively with other provinces, that's certainly something that I will have my department follow up on,

and in terms of day supports the Victorian order will provide those until December 9. We're really working on making sure that we have a smooth transition for every single one of those patients.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Opioid Use

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Fentanyl and other opiates of abuse continue to spread in our communities, and the consequences are deadly. Experts are indicating that we may be facing an unprecedented one death per day in Alberta by year's end. These deaths are preventable. It requires brave leadership from this government. Bluntly put, we need action, and we need it now. To the minister: what instructions has the ministry provided Alberta Health Services with regard to increasing access to naloxone and medication-assisted treatment for opioid-use disorder?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to the member for his question as well as for his service on the mental health review. Of course, mental health and addictions go hand in hand, so this is an area that we have been working collaboratively on. There's a fourfold strategy. Increasing access to naloxone is a must. We know that it is one of those last-minute life-saving strategies, and we've been continuing to add more kits and making sure that it's available in communities throughout Alberta. That is certainly one of the pieces as well as the other prongs, that include addressing recovery and addiction beds, making sure that we're cutting off supply, and also education on the front lines because, of course, we want to cut off . . .

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As we enter the unique stresses of the Christmas season and considering the one death per day, will the minister consider declaring a public health emergency to free up resources and allow her to free up access to naloxone for EMS workers, who still can't provide it, nurses, and even responsible family members to provide this life-saving drug?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We know that there is a community response needed on this. In terms of first responders paramedics are currently able to administer and prescribe the antidote, so that is certainly good news. We are working to change regulations for EMTs so that they can administer naloxone as well. That is very important. All paramedics and pharmacists can administer naloxone in an emergency.

In terms of the question around a provincial state of emergency I've been looking into this, and it's my understanding that that wouldn't actually change any of the federal requirements which are governing this area. I'd be happy to discuss that in more detail afterwards.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, that raises the question for the minister: how hard is she working on the federal government to change Bill C-2, which restricts access to harm-reduction services in this province? How hard are you working on the federal government to change that bill?

Ms Hoffman: I think I hear an offer from a member of the party that is now in federal government to support me in my lobbying efforts at the national level.

Certainly, harm reduction is seen nation-wide as being one of the best strategies to extend lives, and evidence is driving our government's decisions on how we address issues such as the one we're currently facing. I hope it will be the focus of the new federal government moving forward. Certainly, harm reduction and access to naloxone are fundamental in addressing the fentanyl crisis.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

2:10 Farm and Ranch Worker Legislation

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I represent a constituency with a strong community of hard-working farmers and ranchers. Many of these people agree that we need to protect the safety of these farm and ranch workers. However, they are deeply concerned that changes could hurt their family farm and affect their way of life. I would like to ask the hon. Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour about the way she is making sure that this government strikes an appropriate balance between farm safety and preserving the family farm.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. I know that he is a strong advocate for farmers and ranchers both inside and outside of his constituency. We know that these changes are long overdue, but we also want to get it right. We are aware of the concerns that family farms have raised about the need to protect their way of life, and we take those concerns very seriously. We will be looking to other jurisdictions on how they struck an appropriate balance between farm safety and preserving the family farm. We also want to hear the views of farmers and ranchers, which is why we're holding town halls, the first of which is being held tonight in Grande Prairie.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Speaker, given that I have heard that this government is moving forward too quickly and given that there is a lot of misinformation that is fuelling this opinion, can the minister tell the House about a timeline on how these rules will be rolled out?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The regulations, that are the true nuts and bolts of these proposals, will be rolled out in a sure-footed manner. Occupational Health and Safety Act exemptions will be lifted January 1, 2016. Occupational health and safety code technical requirements will be effective in 2017. Workers' compensation is effective January 1, 2016. Labour relations and the employment standards will be effective in the spring of 2016. The regulations of the safety codes will be developed while working with farmers. Consultation is so important to us in going forward.

An Hon. Member: Then do it.

Ms Sigurdson: We're doing it.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this issue is so important and given that town halls are filling up incredibly

quickly, how can farmers ensure that their views are being heard to help inform . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: I'm sorry, hon. member. I didn't get the last part of your question.

Mr. S. Anderson: I think you just like to hear my voice, sir, or the opposition does, too.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I'm still having difficulty hearing you.

Mr. S. Anderson: The last part of the question was: how can farmers ensure that their views are being heard and helping to inform these historic decisions?

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have added additional town halls to ensure that the views of farmers and ranchers are heard and that they receive appropriate information from our officials. There are also many other ways they can be involved. We do have an online survey so that they can have their views sent to us, and we encourage people to e-mail us or phone us if they have further concerns. And we're happy to add additional ones if that's needed. People have responded very positively to that. It's so important for us to hear from farmers and ranchers in the industry, to know how we can support them to create the right balance.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Tobacco Recovery Lawsuit

Mr. Nixon: The government's tobacco litigation project is in the news and not in a good way. The awarding of a contract to litigate health cost recoveries is under huge suspicion. It appears that this Assembly has been deceived and that past Ethics Commissioners have been deceived. Well-connected insiders were improperly awarded a contract that could be worth hundreds of millions of dollars while senior civil servants who should have blown the whistle looked the other way. Can the Premier inform the Assembly about what is being done about this matter?

The Speaker: The hon. Justice minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to the member for the question. Well, of course, these very serious allegations have been raised, and we are taking them seriously. We have asked for more information and will be completing a review on this matter. Obviously, it raises complicated and conflicting legal issues, and we're committed to ensuring that we move forward in a way that ensures transparency and accountability on the part of government.

Thank you.

Mr. Nixon: This issue matters because two of the senior civil servants of this contract are still in this government. One is now the Deputy Minister of Energy. Given that this senior civil servant looked the other way when a former minister fixed a contract and given that the Deputy Minister of Energy will be responsible for billions in contracts under the new carbon tax and that we know that this deputy minister does not stand up to politicians, what is the Premier going to do about it?

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to the member for the question. Well, of course, as I've mentioned, these allegations are deep and concerning to this government, and this caucus did raise similar concerns when they were in opposition. Certainly, we are reviewing it to make sure that we proceed in a transparent and open manner and that we have all the information we need to resolve

these competing and conflicting legal issues and that moving forward we're able to operate in a way that gives the public faith in our transparency. Certainly, my deputy minister, who has been assisting me in this, is new to government and has come in since our government has been in.

Mr. Nixon: Given that this is a serious issue that deals with the trustworthiness of this government and given that the government isn't dealing with this issue in an appropriate fashion, will the chair of the Public Accounts Committee tell us if this matter should be put on the schedule of that committee to be investigated and can he also tell us what steps that committee might undertake?

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very honoured to actually answer a question in question period, and I will actually give an answer.

The Public Accounts Committee, due to the unique circumstances in which we find ourselves, will be meeting briefly on Tuesday to discuss a series of meetings that we'll probably be having later in the winter. I will be asking members of the Public Accounts Committee to put on the agenda that we call the office of the Solicitor General and Department of Justice to get to the bottom of this. We're not interested in playing the blame game, but it is important that Albertans get answers so that we can find out what systems broke.

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

Legal Aid

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last year the former government provided the required one-year notice to review legal aid. Yesterday the Minister of Justice announced that the review would occur. Legal aid is an important service, but in the past year the former government provided it with an increase of \$5.5 million, and over the next three years the government is looking at increasing it by a further \$9 million. To the Justice minister: when this review is finished, will you release the cost of hiring lawyers versus contracting them, which is what is currently happening now, and share those details with Albertans?

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to the member for the question. Of course, legal aid is an issue that is critical to all Albertans since it protects the most vulnerable in society. We are looking into this review going forward. Certainly, we will be making the outcome of this review public as we work with Legal Aid Alberta to ensure that we can move forward in the best method possible and to ensure that we have the best structure and delivery of legal aid. So we will be looking into those issues.

Thank you.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Minister, and thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, to the same minister: given that yesterday the Minister of Justice also announced that she was increasing Legal Aid lawyers' fees from \$84 per hour to \$92 per hour this year alone and given that this government is running a \$6 billion deficit, give or take, will the minister disclose to taxpayers where this additional money for lawyers' fees is coming from?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

2:20

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to the member for the question. Well, of course, the interim measures that have been brought forward to our government were brought forward by Legal Aid. They had expressed a concern that they were having difficulty retaining counsel to protect vulnerable Albertans and to act in these matters, particularly in the cases of family law. As a result, we have addressed a series of interim measures to make sure that Albertans have access to those services in the interim. In terms of the actual cost, that's within the purview of Legal Aid, so I would suggest that the member direct his question to them.

Thank you.

Mr. Ellis: More money to victims. That's what I say.

To the same minister: given that some members of this House have been suggesting that the victims of crime fund surplus should be used to fund lawyers in Legal Aid and given that this fund was set aside specifically for victims of crime, will the minister commit today to ensuring that the money in the victims of crime fund is directed solely to victims of crime, as it was originally purposed?

Thank you.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to the member for the question. Yes, I will commit that the funds in the victims of crime fund will not be used to fund legal aid and that they will be directed to victims of crime.

Thank you.

Wainwright Health Care Facilities

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Wainwright hospital sewage system backed up, filling the basement with feces. It was reported that the whole hospital reeked of body excrement. In 2010 Alberta Health Services warned the government of this facility's sewage issues and the risk of being shut down. Minister, I sent a letter about this on August 28, to which you replied that while you appreciate the invite to meet, your schedule does not permit you to do so at this time. Are you going to just let this hospital close?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you for the question, Mr. Speaker. I was talking about a specific site visit to the facility. I'm certainly open to having opportunities. It's just that right now I'm really focused on making sure that we're in session, that we're connecting with stakeholders. I certainly feel for the situation that has been brought to light in this House and will be happy to follow up directly with the hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Given that the Minister of Health has made a promise to meet with me during a previous question in the House and given that I have contacted her office to set up the appointment and given that your office would not provide me with an appointment date, I would like to ask: when will the minister meet with the mayor and myself to discuss where the patients of the Wainwright hospital are going to go to meet their health care needs?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to the member for the question. Right now I am booked from at least 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. every day. I'm not booked on Sundays, though, so I'd be happy to take time to do a phone call on Sunday, a three-way call on Sunday with yourself and with the mayor.

Mr. Taylor: Well, thank you, Minister.

Now, given that this is a very serious health care issue for the people of Wainwright and given that the minister's own government has flagged this facility for upgrades, will the Minister of Infrastructure consult quickly with the Minister of Health and commit to a new facility for the town of Wainwright, which obviously desperately needs one?

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, we have many competing priorities, as the member knows, but obviously the health of patients throughout the province is a top priority, and we will act accordingly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Ministers' Office Budgets

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday in Committee of Supply members of the Wildrose caucus introduced a proposal to make minor cuts to ministerial budgets in the wake of the province's slowing and struggling economy. Unfortunately, the NDP government unilaterally opposed this proposal. They opposed a \$50,000 decrease in the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry's budget, for example, a budget of \$1.3 billion. To the minister of agriculture: why won't this government put itself in the shoes of the people it serves and take a cut in the lavish perks that ministers currently receive?

Mr. Mason: Point of order.

The Speaker: I'll note that there was a point of order. I'll make note of that.

The question?

Mr. Ceci: I'm happy to answer the question. We have put forward a budget that is built on three priorities. Those priorities will be addressed through the course of this budget. The proposals put forward in Committee of Supply and in several estimates committees were not reasonable in our view, so we refused them.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that Alberta's economy is struggling, it would appear to me that now is not the time to be spending lavish amounts of money on government officials. But while a record number of Albertans are losing work, it is clear that life in the bureaucracy has never been so good. Again to the Minister of Agriculture: why are this government and senior officials so opposed to cutting their budget, like a measly \$50,000 out of a \$1.3 billion budget, in order to better serve Albertans and to better allocate their hard-earned tax dollars?

Mr. Ceci: Mr. Speaker, there's been a hiring restraint kept on by this government. It was instituted by the previous government, and we have kept that on. We believe that's in the best interest of Albertans and government. When you look at the proportion per capita number of workers here in government compared to many years ago, we haven't grown substantially. So we'll keep this going the way we believe it needs to go.

Mr. Hanson: Well, given that I can't get an answer to my question, I'll try to be more direct.

Albertans are hurting, and many are losing their jobs, and the lucky few that are still employed are facing pay cuts and buckling their belts to face the brunt of this economic storm plaguing Alberta. But for this NDP government, however, times are a-boomin': six-

figure salaries, unreserved power to tax and spend, and lucrative, luxurious perks for the privileged few. Minister, why are you standing here today defending these perks and cashing in on the backs of hurting Albertans?

Mr. Ceci: You know, there was a former Finance critic of the Official Opposition who said: we will not balance the budget on the backs of front-line public service workers and services; we will not unilaterally terminate the legal rights of any Albertan. That is not the way to do business. That former official sat on that side before. I think we're doing what we need to do. We're keeping public-sector workers doing their jobs because throwing them out would put them on the unemployment lines. Obviously, that would help the situation, right?

Climate Change Strategy

Mr. Fraser: As a lifelong Albertan, son, husband, and father the environment has always been important to me and more so since I became a father. So I do want to applaud the government for executing the decision on your climate change strategy. I also appreciate that it generally follows the Progressive Conservative plan, outside the carbon tax on all individuals. To the Minister of Transportation. The broad-based personal carbon tax will apply to every Albertan. In order to help reduce individual carbon footprints, will you commit the revenue from that tax to build and support better public transportation like the southeast legs of the LRT for Calgary and Edmonton?

The Speaker: The Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We're going to be looking as a government at a broad range of applications for revenue, all of which are focused on improving the situation relative to climate change. I would think that transit might fall into that category, but no decisions have been made, so I'm unable to supply an answer to the member at this time.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Environment: Minister, given the fact that you've announced a goal of 30 per cent renewable green electricity generation by 2020 and given the fact that renewable energy investors will only invest in Alberta if there is a power purchase agreement in place with the government and given the fact that you've already shown the government's hand in terms of your broader goals, how can you ensure that Albertans will now get a fair power purchase agreement with these companies?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. It was our intention, as reported in the climate change panel recommendations that we accepted, to phase out coal emissions by 2030 and replace that electricity generation with renewable power and natural gas. Our plan will create a diversified renewable electricity sector. It will do so using market mechanisms. The Alberta Electric System Operator and AUC will play key roles in maintaining stability.

Mr. Fraser: To the same minister: given the fact that I've said that our environment is one of the most important legacies that we will leave our future generations and given the fact that what you say and do as a government has a definite impact on every Albertan, can you exactly articulate what you will be saying to the world at

the climate change summit about Alberta, our industry leaders, and our already world-leading track record on environmental regulations?

2:30

The Speaker: The hon. minister of environment.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the opportunity to practise my talking points before I get to the UN summit. We are going to be talking about how Albertans are not followers; it is time for Alberta to lead on climate change and energy development. We will do so by introducing a large number of renewables into our electricity system. We will do so by pricing carbon appropriately. We will do so by diversifying the economy and building on the back of our energy sector so that this province may have a conversation with our trading partners about energy infrastructure on its own merits.

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

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This past weekend our government announced a climate change strategy that has received support from both industry and environmental groups. My constituents know that in these tough economic times we need to stimulate economic growth and diversification to support job creation. They hope our climate strategy will build support for new markets for Alberta's oil. To the minister of environment: how will our new climate strategy support jobs and diversification?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For starters, of course, our climate change plan has a very strong focus on jobs, which is why we heard from so many industry leaders on the weekend about exactly that matter. For example: Alberta wins in today's announcement. Murray Edwards from CNRL said that it "is a significant step forward for Alberta [and for the industry] . . . In this way, we will do our part to address climate change while protecting jobs and industry competitiveness in Alberta."

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that constituencies like mine already have experience and capacity in the energy industry, to the same minister: how will the transition to a greener economy create stable jobs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, Sunday was about articulating our larger vision for leadership on climate. Now a number of things will follow such as our ambitious renewables phase-in. Our methane policy has sort of been a quieter little sister to the other pieces, but our methane goal of a 45 per cent reduction by 2025 will lead to increased energy jobs as companies are investing in leak detection and pneumatic devices in addition to the energy efficiency investments that we will making and the policy frameworks around small-scale renewables, efficiency retrofits, geothermal, you name it.

The Speaker: I'm pleased that the first supplemental allowed you to speak about your little sister.

Second supplemental.

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that revenue from the proposed price on carbon will stay in Alberta, again to the same

minister: can you provide details on how this revenue will support families and communities in my constituency?

Ms Phillips: Thank you to the hon. member for the question. Of course, the carbon price will be directed to two places, Mr. Speaker, investment in the economy and adjustment. The adjustment will help families make ends meet. It will support small businesses, First Nations, and people working in the coal industry through the transition. All revenue collected will be put to work right here in Alberta, building our economy, creating jobs, reducing pollution, and promoting greater energy efficiency.

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

Farm and Ranch Worker Legislation Consultation (continued)

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 6 is threatening family farms across the province, and it's being imposed with little to no consultation with the people it will hit the hardest. Now, to be sure, the minister would never negotiate union contracts without proper input from union members. Farmers should be treated with the same respect. This legislation should not be rammed through this House without proper consultation. My office is being flooded with calls from people who feel ignored. To the minister: will you give farmers the dignity they deserve by providing proper consultation on this bill before it is passed?

The Speaker: The Minister of Advanced Education and of labour.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Family farms are essential to the culture of Alberta, and it's very important to us as a government to make sure that we hear from farms and ranches and industry leaders to make sure that we get it right. That's why we're having extensive consultations. We've added additional ones because they were so well subscribed to. We're very pleased people are stepping up, and we absolutely want to hear what they have to say. We'll work with them to make sure that we understand the specific nuances of the industry.

Thank you.

Mr. Hunter: Given that the first offence for breaking an OH and S rule can be a \$500,000 fine and six months in jail, farmers are rightfully afraid that this legislation could ruin their farms and their lives. That's why in every consultation in the past – every one, Mr. Speaker – they have asked for education, not legislation. Can the minister guarantee that farmers will not face hefty fines or jail time just for doing what they've done proudly and safely for generations?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This bill is about safety. What we're doing as of January 1 is that WCB is mandatory as well as the exemption from the Occupational Health and Safety Act is lifted. That just gives us access to the farm and ranch sector so that if there is a fatality, we can go on and help prevent it. We absolutely know that education is essential to make sure that we can prevent these kinds of serious injuries and fatalities in the future, so we'll be working in an educational way.

Thank you.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, I was asked the following question by a farmer, so I will ask the minister. Given that the NDP's big argument is that Albertans have been waiting 98 years for this

legislation, why is Bill 6 not applying to the rest of the four and a half pages of industries that are exempt from WCB? Four and a half pages of exemptions. If Albertans are in such need, then why so many exemptions still?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's really important for us to strike a balance between the safety of workers on farms and also protecting farmers. We know that there have been previous fatalities where the worker's family has no recourse but to sue that farmer, and then that farmer often will lose their farm. WCB will provide safety for both the farm owner and the workers. We know that this is a really important way to go forward, and it helps both parties.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Climate Change Strategy (continued)

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Some – and I emphasize some – elements of the new climate change action plan adopted by this government should be largely applauded. Indeed, the government has acted upon a number of initiatives that our caucus believes are very important such as continuing with the important work to reduce methane gases from venting and flaring and fugitive emissions. However, there are serious concerns with the overall plan which need to be addressed. To the minister of environment: what will be the costs to taxpayers of transitioning from the previous climate change compliance framework, the specified gas emitters regulation, to the tax on carbon?

The Speaker: The minister of environment.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. Of course, we have quite a lead time for this because when we updated SGER, the specified gas emitters regulation, we did so for 2017, so there will be a phase-in of the performance standards model in oil sands and other energy-intensive, trade-exposed industries beginning in 2018. We have a bit of a long runway here so that we can ensure that we get those performance standards right, that we've had those appropriate conversations with all of the sectors that are energy intensive and trade exposed.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you to the minister. We still didn't get the costs on that.

The government first said they wanted to stop funding carbon capture and storage and then discovered it wasn't such a bad idea after all, and we now find that CCS is absent from this plan. The government committed to continuing our CCS project, which has worked successfully in Germany, Australia, and Saskatchewan. Why is there a gap here? Why did this government continue with CCS if it was not to be part of this climate change plan?

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you to the hon. member for the question. You know, Alberta has made its fair share of investments in CCS, some would say more than our fair share. We were committed to working with existing projects that had signed contracts with the government, to see them through. Going forward, we intend to evaluate all of our options. There will be investments that we make in technology and innovation, Mr. Speaker. What this Alberta government is committed to is science. So if there are science-based reasons for those investments, if they reveal themselves over time,

then we will consider those at that time, but we will not be following any more bright, shiny objects and looking for silver bullets.

2:40

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think there's a song about that as well: *Blinded by Science*.

Again to the same minister: given that we are seeing very different approaches to reducing carbon emissions from coal versus carbon emissions from other sources, why is this government letting the market dictate and drive improved efficiency with other carbon emission sources, including noncoal energy generation – personal vehicles, for example – while not affording the coal industry the same chance to innovate?

The Speaker: The minister of environment.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, if the panel report was read closely, it is a phase-out of coal-fired emissions by 2030. The fact of the matter is that the panel recommended to us a number of ways that we could find to reduce the easiest emissions. That's why we took the position that we did on methane, that's why we are looking at energy efficiency, that's why we are engaging a coal-fired phase-out, and that's why we have implemented performance standards in energy-intensive, trade-exposed industries, to drive our emissions down. That's exactly what we will do. We will bend that curve and lead the country.

The Speaker: Hon. members, we are fifteen seconds away from time, so I'd suggest that we move on.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: The Minister of Transportation and Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Mason: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am standing to provide notice of written questions and motions for returns to be dealt with on Monday. They are written questions 1 to 6 and motions for returns 1 and 2.

Introduction of Bills

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Minister of Culture and Tourism.

Bill 8

Public Education Collective Bargaining Act

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I request leave to introduce a bill being Bill 8, the Public Education Collective Bargaining Act.

I've been here since 2004, and this is the first bill I've introduced.

[Motion carried; Bill 8 read a first time]

Bill 206

Recall Act

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today and request leave of the House to introduce Bill 206, the Recall Act.

[Motion carried; Bill 206 read a first time]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The Minister of Advanced Education and Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to present to the House the Budget 2015 Advanced Education questions and answers that weren't provided in estimates, so I offer them to the House now.

Mr. Mason: I'm probably not on your list, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: At least not on this list.

Mr. Mason: I'm just throwing you a curve here.

On behalf of the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry I would like to table the requisite number of copies of the written responses to questions the minister received on estimates at the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future.

Mr. Smith: I'm not on your list, either, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Actually, you are.

Mr. Smith: I would like to table the requisite number of copies of the correspondence that I referred to this morning.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. One is on naloxone availability and the take-home kits, reported in a recent newspaper article.

The second is a memorial tribute to the late Weslyn Mather, printed by a local media outlet.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Minister of Education and Minister of Culture and Tourism.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table the requisite number of copies of my written responses in regard to the November 3 review of Alberta Culture and Tourism.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the previous questions that have been raised in this House regarding the Wainwright hospital and also the facility infrastructure capital submission from Alberta Health Services in 2011. I do have the five required copies here.

The Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to Section 46(1) of the Conflicts of Interest Act I would like to table with the Assembly the requisite number of copies of the annual report of the Ethics Commissioner of Alberta for the period April 1, 2014, to March 31, 2015.

Hon. Member for Airdrie, do you have a tabling?

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you. Another tabling, yes. I'd like to table the requisite number of copies of the Calgary YWCA's media release announcing the Great Gulf group of companies' no-fee lease extension of two years. I congratulate the leadership in both organizations for ensuring the YWCA continues to offer services for women fleeing violence and seeking social services.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following document was deposited with the office of the Clerk: on behalf of the hon. Ms Phillips, Minister of Environment and Parks and Minister Responsible for the Status of Women, pursuant to the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act the Environmental Protection and Security Fund Annual report, April 1, 2014, to March 31, 2015.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I would make an observation for the information of the House. There was a practice that I was not familiar with. There is a lot that I have not been familiar with. There was no point of order raised, but there was a question to the chair of a committee. I intend to re-examine that process and make myself better informed of it.

We also have the Government House Leader, who has raised a point of order, I believe. The Government House Leader.

Point of Order

Items Previously Decided

Mr. Mason: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. My apologies for not noting which member of the Official Opposition – thank you very much, hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills – was asking a question which reflected upon a decision of the House that had been previously made. The rule is that “a question, once put and carried in the affirmative or negative, cannot be questioned again.” This is from O’Brien and Bosc, *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*. “Such reflections are not in order because the Member is bound by a vote agreed to by a majority.”

So then this exception is a notice that the motion would be rescinded. I just wanted to make that point of order, that questions should not be about previous decisions of the House, and this question was.

2:50

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. Government House Leader. I have to dispute the point of order. I will take it under advisement for the future and have a better look at things.

My question wasn’t actually to have the government rescind a decision that had already been made. I was just pointing out to the House and to Albertans that we missed a great opportunity yesterday to pull back a little bit and just show a little bit of leadership from the House. That was my only point. I wasn’t asking anyone to rescind a decision that’s already been made in the House.

You know, further, I feel that I will stand up in the House and defend the interests of Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills and all Albertans at every opportunity when it comes to lavish spending by ministries.

The Speaker: Hon. member, you stand by the point you made. Is that correct? Are you standing by the point?

Mr. Hanson: Mr. Speaker, I will stand by the fact that I didn’t ask anyone to rescind a decision made by the House.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I just received some background and notes on this matter. I recognize that the House would prefer that I make a ruling immediately. I intend to just study the matter. I will address it, if the House is agreeable, next week.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 5

Public Sector Compensation Transparency Act

[Adjourned debate November 25: Ms Ganley]

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

Mr. Loyola: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me great pleasure to stand in the House today and speak to Bill 5, Public Sector Compensation Transparency Act. Under Bill 5 the Alberta government is significantly expanding public-sector compensation disclosure with the proposed public-sector compensation disclosure act.

Albertans deserve to know where their money is being spent. I think we can all agree on this. I’ll remind members present that this government is keeping its promise to increase transparency in the public sector and expand the sunshine list of publicly disclosed salaries. The bill would require disclosure from agencies, boards, commissions, postsecondary institutions, offices of the Legislature, physicians and other medical practitioners as well as health services entities, and other public-sector bodies. The bill would result in a salary disclosure primarily for those earning more than \$125,000 per year, putting the focus on higher income earners and managers.

The disclosure will include employees of public-sector bodies governed by the Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act. There are currently 157 of these entities, including public postsecondary institutions and Alberta Health Services. The legislation also extends salary disclosure to the offices of the Legislature. Finally, disclosure will also apply to employees of Covenant Health, and the legislation can be expanded by regulation to include other entities that receive significant public funds. The bodies will have to disclose the names and compensation of all employees who earn more than \$125,000 in total compensation, including overtime, severances, and bonuses.

When it comes to board members, the vast majority of them do not receive a salary, as we well know. Instead, they often receive a per diem and rates for meetings. These positions have often been criticized as patronage appointments, so this government, in addition to reviewing the agencies, boards, commissions, and appointments, will ensure that the compensation for these positions is publicly available.

Now, specifically when it comes to physicians and other health service providers, Mr. Speaker, the act will also enable regulations to require the disclosure of fee-for-service payments as well as other payments made with public funds to physicians and other health services providers. Because physicians and other medical professionals are compensated through a variety of funding mechanisms, unique rules will need to be applied, and the details will be developed after consultation with physicians and will be laid out in the regulations.

Delivering honesty and ethics in government was a key priority in the Alberta NDP election campaign platform. Mr. Speaker, commitment 2.5 of the election platform states, “We will extend the sunshine list to include our province’s agencies, boards and commissions.” I’m proud to speak to the fact that we’re following through with our platform promises.

I’d also like to speak to the fact that the Justice minister has been very open on this. On November 6 in the *Edmonton Journal* the Justice minister stated, “The bill follows through on our promise to improve transparency in our public sectors.” This government is

serious about increasing transparency, and this bill will show Albertans how their tax dollars are being spent.

It is with great honour that I speak to this bill, and I encourage all of the members of the House to support it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I've been advised that the Government House Leader may have a request of the House with respect to a procedural matter that was overlooked.

The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I would request that we revert to Notices of Motions.

The Speaker: And you're asking for unanimous consent to do so. Is that correct?

Mr. Mason: Yes.

Mr. Fildebrandt: We don't know why.

Mr. Mason: Well, I did it wrong. Okay?

Mr. Speaker, I did not state the complete motion. It has to do with the written questions and motions for returns that the government has accepted.

The Speaker: As I understand his motion – I think this is the very first mistake that the member has made in the House – it was just simply a correlation between his words and what was on the record.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Notices of Motions

(reversion)

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(3) I am rising to advise the House that on Monday, November 30, written questions 1 and 6 will be accepted and written questions 2, 3, 4, and 5 will be dealt with.

Also on Monday, November 30, Motion for a Return 2 will be accepted and Motion for a Return 1 will be dealt with.

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 5

Public Sector Compensation Transparency Act

(continued)

The Speaker: We're back to the bill. The Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie has finished.

The next speaker is Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This bill has a special place in my heart. I'd like to say that I grew this bill from my heart outwards. There might be a copyright on that. In all seriousness, I am very pleased to see this bill come forward, and I thank the last member for his constructive comments. I am pleased to see that the sunshine list, that, I might say, I think I had some hand in getting started several years ago, is now going further.

When I served with the Canadian Taxpayers Federation, there was little to no public information available on the salaries or severances or contracts of government employers and contractors.

3:00

The fight for a sunshine list in the province got started with a fight over the disclosure of information for government staff. I

wanted to know how much the chief of staff for the Premier of the day in 2012 was making. Normally the government allows anyone and everyone to access that kind of information using the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, or FOIP. I filed a FOIP for the Premier's chief of staff at that time to find their contract in order to find out what severance that member of her staff was making. It seemed like the kind of fact that I believed taxpayers had a right to know. If a large severance package was being paid out to top government officials with taxpayers' money, then the taxpayers paying for that bill had a right to know how much was being spent, which, I might add, was just the transparent thing to do.

Telling taxpayers how their money is being spent is an integral part of transparent and open government. When I FOIPed the Premier's chief of staff for the severance and contract, I was, surprisingly, denied. They gave me the runaround and kept making excuses as to why they could not or would not give me the information. That's when I knew that the information would probably be really interesting. This kind of information used to be public. In fact, previous chiefs of staff to the Premier had had their contracts and severance FOIPed, and it had been released, but for reasons that I still do not understand, I was denied the information.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

We took this fight public and told Albertans that they were being denied information about how their money was being spent, that they had a right to know. To say the least, many Albertans were upset, so we launched a campaign to go further than this, not just to give us this one-off contract and make us fight for every single government employee's contract but, instead, for a full sunshine list to disclose the salaries, severances, and pension entitlements of senior government employees making \$100,000 or more.

Instead of just releasing this one piece of information, the government did the right thing and created its first sunshine list. The government created a sunshine list to detail the salaries and severances of its senior employees. The sunshine list of that day was the seed for the bill that we are expanding upon today. That sunshine list was brought into place through regulation and orders in council. This will entrench it in law and expand upon it. Alberta was one of the few provinces without any sunshine list for its government employees. We have a relatively small sunshine list at the moment, but this bill is a good and strong step forward to a more fulsome sunshine list.

Alberta spends a lot on government employees, their salaries and benefits. In fact, half of Alberta's budget is spent on salaries and benefits. I'd like to say that 50 per cent of every tax dollar is being spent on salaries, but in fact it has grown to become quite more than that. The government is spending more than it is bringing in, and we are now on track to see the portion of our government spending focused on government salaries increase beyond 50 per cent. I'd like to say that it's beyond the point, but that is the point. The point is that if we are spending too much on salaries, Albertans have a right to know about it whenever government is spending their money.

This bill is a major step forward. We would like to see this bill include all 147 of the ABCs under the Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act and all 52 agencies reporting directly to the government of Alberta. I would read every single one into the record, but one of my colleagues, I believe, will be doing that soon. I'm kidding. Not funny to the Government House Leader, I know. I'm not kidding also that this bill should include, though, every aspect of the government, all of the ABCs. Why would Albertans want to know only part of the government's large salaries?

Albertans want a full and comprehensive sunshine list. Albertans deserve to see a sunshine list that is comprehensive and includes the entire government.

Don't get me wrong. This bill is a major step forward and has the full support of the Wildrose Official Opposition, but we can make it better. This builds on what we have, and it accomplishes a lot of what we have been asking for. Our amendments will be constructive and helpful. Quite possibly, I think that the government may be welcoming some of the amendments that come, amendments that would expand the scope of the sunshine list but also ensure that certain areas that the sunshine list has been expanded to or has been proposed to be expanded to are done reasonably and not release the salaries of employees whom no one is asking to see the salaries of. The Member for Drayton Valley-Devon will be speaking on that in a bit. Either way, this is an improvement on a good piece of legislation, that needs to be implemented in this House fully and completely.

I don't mean to dwell on the past, but the past is a large part of the reason why we have a sunshine list in this province. Previous governments, not just in this province but across the country, have been accused of using patronage appointments to fill high-paying jobs with their friends. I'm sure that this government and any future government would not want to be accused of doing that, and I know that no government would want to be found guilty of giving patronage appointments. Jobs should go to those who are skilled and most qualified for the job, not because they are friends of the government or ran in an election for them at some point. Could you imagine a government that was voted out of office because they were constantly accused of doing this kind of thing, only to find out that the new government does it? That would be horrible, and I'm sure that citizens of that jurisdiction would not be happy about it.

An expanded sunshine list would ensure that governments cannot give patronage appointments without those who pay for their government salaries knowing about the appointment. Just as the ability to file a freedom of information request is a tool for the people to keep governments accountable, so too is an expanded sunshine list. Albertans should not have to file a freedom of information request for every single contract, for every single person in the government to discover who was being paid or overpaid for their position. When sunshine lists were created in other provinces, we discovered parking attendants being paid more than \$100,000.

Mr. Mason: Where?

Mr. Fildebrandt: The Government House Leader has asked: where? The Toronto Transit Commission had toll booth attendants, I believe, who had salaries exceeding \$100,000. As much as we value the work, it might be a bit overpriced. Without a sunshine list the odds of someone deciding to file a freedom of information request for that person's contract would be slim to none, but the public needs to know if there are positions that are not being reasonably paid.

The sunshine list helps to keep governments in check. It reminds us that if we are going to give friends in high places high-paying jobs, the public will know, and they'll have a right to respond however they so choose. There will be no way to hide this kind of government entitlement. Without every aspect of the government being covered by a sunshine list, there is always that one hidden place where this kind of entitlement could be hidden. That is why we need a full and comprehensive sunshine list. We need to ensure that no government is ever tempted to give their friends jobs that they're not qualified for.

I am in full support of this bill. My colleagues will be offering constructive and helpful amendments. Before we come to those amendments, I encourage all members of this House to vote for this bill in second reading.

The Deputy Speaker: Do we have anybody who wants to make a comment or a question under 29(2)(a)?

If not, then we will go on to the next speaker, the hon. Member for St. Albert.

3:10

Ms Renaud: Thank you. Well, I suppose the real skill of a politician is reworking things, so you not only plant the seed, but you also have amendments to something that isn't really your idea. I'm always stunned at how the members across the way take credit for everything. [interjections] That's okay. It's all right. You're just here to help, and I appreciate that.

This bill is one of the commitments our government made. Many of the constituents I've met with and chatted with have also expressed to me their satisfaction at the fact that we are taking this seriously and we're moving forward right away. They've expressed that Albertans should know where their tax dollars are being used for public services. Transparency is essential to being accountable to Albertans. Public-sector entities are financed through tax dollars. We all know that transparency is essential.

Municipalities and school boards are governed by elected officials within that entity. They will be given the choice to publicly disclose their compensation. These two groups are accountable to their electorates and will be able to decide for themselves what best fits the public interest of those communities. The act enables but does not require disclosure of the names of and compensation paid to employees. They will be able to create their own rules around threshold amounts and other details around disclosure.

It should be noted, Madam Speaker, that school boards are already required by the School Act to disclose the compensation paid to board members, superintendents, and secretary treasurers. Municipalities are also already required to disclose the salaries of councillors, the chief administrative officer, and the designated officer of the municipality through the Municipal Government Act. In addition, these bodies will be required to disclose all remuneration for all members of their boards or other governing bodies.

Government of Alberta employees: this bill moves compensation disclosure for government of Alberta employees, currently a Treasury Board directive, into legislation. For government of Alberta employees the threshold remains the same, \$104,754, excluding overtime. Including bonuses and other forms of remuneration will ensure that compensation cannot be withheld from disclosure. They will be able to create their own rules around threshold amounts and other details around disclosure.

If passed, the act would come into force upon royal assent, and the first disclosure under the act would be on June 30, 2016. Ministries will be consulting with entities on how best to implement some aspects of the act through regulations.

That is about it. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Does anyone have a question for the hon. Member for St. Albert or a comment under 29(2)(a)?

If not, then go ahead, hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. W. Anderson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour to rise on a bill that aims to bring greater transparency to our government. I know the previous government attempted this, and it never came to fruition. I only hope that this current government

doesn't show the same bad habits like potentially giving patronage appointments to failed candidates. But that being said, this bill is a step in the right direction. Publishing public-sector compensation lists, a.k.a. sunshine lists, is a simple and important tool in the maintenance of accountability and transparency in democracy. That's why the Wildrose has always supported this.

There are over 52 agencies reporting directly to the government on top of 142 agencies, boards, and commissions. However, the \$17 billion that funds Alberta Health Services has been shrouded in secrecy. I think I speak for all Albertans in expressing my interest in what's going on behind the curtain.

This is not an attack on the public sector or any of their agencies, boards, or commissions. In fact, it's quite the opposite. We appreciate the tremendous work they perform, and we understand that they are instrumental in the delivery of many vital services. But like many companies around this province right now, it's important, now more than ever, that we analyze how the organization is functioning. Sunshine lists will also be important moving forward. They will serve as a benchmark for government spending and make sure that we can understand how much the bureaucracy is bloating.

There are a lot of layoffs happening across the province right now. On this side of the aisle we hear about it from our constituents daily. Thousands of Albertans are struggling to make ends meet right now, and these people have a right to know exactly what their hard-earned tax dollars are going towards. Those same Albertans are the ones that are facing tax hikes on almost everything they buy, thanks to the carbon tax grab. They are the same Albertans that are facing a decrease in hours at work because the increase in minimum wage is making it harder for them and their employers to run their businesses.

So while the government is lining their coffers with new taxes on essentially everyone and everything, it is at least nice to know that they'll be showing who is making \$104,000 and up for government employees and \$125,000 per year for public-sector bodies. Truth be told, Madam Speaker, any number selected as a threshold limit is a fairly arbitrary number, but I can understand that bringing Albertans closer in line with other provinces in Confederation is a logical starting place. Now, if only the NDP would apply some of the same logic to the farm safety bill, there might be some real progress.

I've heard some speculation that introducing a sunshine list will cause a wage increase among employees near the threshold, that government employees will be trying to negotiate higher wages once they find out what their counterparts are making. That is a possibility. But what I believe to be just as likely is a compression of wages near the upper end of the pay scale. There are several examples of these.

Now, I'm sure everyone in the House well knows there is no pressure like public pressure. Sunshine lists themselves are a check and balance from runaway government salaries. However, if there are any agency departments that experience a peak in pay, I believe that public sentiment would push those wages downward, and I would hope that rather than the government raising other service providers up a level, they would correct the inflation. Madam Speaker, I cannot speak too confidently on that matter, though. After all, we do have a government that is starting to build a \$3 billion slush fund.

I'm wondering why certain agencies, like the Environmental Monitoring Management Board and the Environmental Monitoring Working Group, seem to be exempt from this legislation. Is there a particular reason why these agencies should be held to a different standard than other groups receiving government funding? Again, not to detract from the work that these groups are performing, it only seems logical that other ABCs receiving government funding

will be subject to the same set of standards. This will not only build trust from the public but will prevent the sentiment of favouritism.

Overall, I am pleased to see a step in the direction of transparency and accountability, a step that's been long overdue in this province. Madam Speaker, I'd like to express my support for this bill and the much-awaited sunshine list for the government and agencies, boards, and commissions and employees. Just as a friendly reminder to the Minister of Infrastructure: we're still waiting for your sunshine list.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under 29(2)(a)? Seeing none, I'll recognize Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would like to thank the government for bringing forward this piece of legislation. It is a good piece of legislation, and with some amendments I think that it could be a great piece of legislation. Every province in Canada excluding Quebec has a sunshine list of some form or another. We were one of the last, if not the last province, to enact a sunshine list.

During Redford's reign the government of Alberta sunshine list was created, which listed those making over \$104,000. This allowed taxpayers to know who was being appointed to high-paying positions directly within the government's main decision-making centre. But this sunshine list was only for government of Alberta workers and excluded employees of the public-sector bodies. It excluded agencies, boards, and commissions governed by the Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act. This bill extends the sunshine list to include those boards, agencies, and commissions. It's a great step forward towards comprehensive transparency.

3:20

The Wildrose has long championed and campaigned on extending the sunshine list to include the 142 agencies, boards, and commissions, or the ABCs. What I am confused about is why this government would choose to include most boards but exclude others. When the Redford government created this legislation, it was because Albertans were accusing them of giving patronage appointments and high severances. The sunshine list was created so that the government would be transparent with how much they are paying people in all high positions in the government.

Now, this bill sets to ensure that all high-paying positions that use taxpayers' money will be fully disclosed. At least, that is what I had hoped. But the speed of this session has not left us with much time to spend on these bills. It doesn't appear that all of the province's agencies, boards, and commissions are covered by this new sunshine list. I'm wondering why some things are excluded, and it's tough to come up with an answer. If the members opposite have more information about this, I would really, truly like to hear more details.

I have had the great pleasure of raising five children with my beautiful wife; several of them are grown up and have moved on in life. But before they grew up, they were just kids, and kids sometimes try and get away with things. They tell you a story about what really happened and how Jimmy down the street was the real culprit and how they were innocent little angels. Sometimes kids use tactics to try to get away with some things, and one of the tactics they try and use is to tell you 90 per cent of the story with hopes that you don't see the other 10 per cent.

Now, what I learned is that that 10 per cent is the key, that 10 per cent has the rest of the story in it, and how illuminating that 10 per cent truly turns out to be. The other 90 per cent sounds really good, and my kids really were little angels most of the time, but at this point you have to look for what they are not telling you, not what they are telling you but what they are not telling you. They give you

so much information, hoping that you overlook that little bit of information left out. That's what I call the 10 per cent rule, which is: always look into the 10 per cent. True transparency and accountability demand more than 90 per cent; they require the last 10 per cent as well.

Transparency and accountability are extremely important, especially when it comes to spending other people's money. Since 50 per cent of taxpayers' money goes towards paying for salaries, accountability and transparency for salaries needs to be beyond reproach. I hope to hear more about who is included and not included and some of the reasons for that.

The last government was accused over and over again of not being accountable and transparent. They lost an election for it. I don't think that this government would like to be similarly labelled. We all want government to be accountable to Albertans. I congratulate this government on bringing in this bill and for taking this major step to make sure that the highest taxpayer-funded salaries are out in the open. I look forward to hearing more debate and to going through Committee of the Whole and hearing what my colleagues have to say.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any questions or comments under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you. I was just wondering if you could expand on some of things with regard to Bill 5 that could be expanded on. You had alluded to some of the things that you thought could be changed or expanded on. Would you mind expanding on those things?

Thank you.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you to the member. I guess the question is: do we have an extensive list of the ABCs that are being added to this sunshine list? From some of the research that I've done, it shows that we do not have an extensive list. So the question remains: if there are some ABCs that are not added to this list, is there a way for the government to appoint patronage positions to these agencies, boards, or commissions? That's my concern. We want to make sure that this bill is right and that Albertans are right with how this bill goes forward.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other comments under 29(2)(a)?

If not, then I will recognize the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker. You know, it's regrettable that we even have to have a conversation about having a sunshine list in order to keep governments honest and responsible when compensating employees or people that have been appointed to agencies, boards, and commissions. It's not something that, you know, in the world that we live in . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Excuse me for a moment, hon. member.

Just a reminder to members that we're not in committee anymore, and you cannot walk around, visit with people from desk to desk. Please use the pages if you need to talk, or pass a note. Thank you. Go ahead.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

You know, I guess that when you come into the world of politics and you've lived most of your life outside of it, it's just something that you wonder. How does this happen, and what's the need for a sunshine list?

You know, it's regrettable that we all can probably point to past examples of governments from around the world and across Canada and perhaps even in Alberta that have lived up to the maxim or the idea that it's okay for governments to use political patronage and to belly up to the public trough in order to reward your political friends. I'm sure that for those of us that went to university and studied any kind of political science, we've all read stories of this kind of unacceptable practice.

So I am very happy that we have the opportunity today to speak to the Public Sector Compensation Transparency Act, that we will have the opportunity as a provincial government to make our government better and to make the spending of our hard-earned tax dollars from our citizens more efficient and have more merit in the spending of that money. It's sad to realize that sometimes governments care more about rewarding political allies than ensuring that the hard-earned tax dollars of our citizens are being spent wisely and prudently. As I've said, it may be regrettable and it may be sad that this occurs, and it appears that a sunshine list is necessary, so I'm glad that we're looking at that today.

Bill 5, as I understand it, extends the public-sector salary disclosure to include employees of public-sector bodies, including agencies, boards, and commissions. This bill will require the disclosure of a salary over \$104,000 for government of Alberta employees and taking it from regulations and into formal law. Board members of agencies will have to disclose all compensation that they receive. It adds physicians, independent offices of the Legislature, public postsecondary institutions, Alberta Health Services, teachers, and other organizations to this sunshine list.

We've heard other members say it from this side of the House. The Wildrose Party has long supported the addition to the sunshine list of agencies and boards and commissions. We campaigned on expanding the sunshine list to include the 142 agencies, boards, and commissions under APAGA and the 52 agencies reporting directly to the government of Alberta.

I guess this is one of those times when we can have common cause with our compatriots across the aisle. Indeed, I would note that the NDP also campaigned in the recent election, stating that they would extend the sunshine list to include our province's agencies, boards, and commissions. So when we may have had to disagree in some areas in the House today, it's nice to be able to agree today at this point in time.

You know, when you take a look at appointments to the agencies, boards, and commissions that serve this government, I think we would all agree that these appointments should be based on merit, that it should not be on whom you know but on what you can do and what you bring to the table. The compensation of those people from these agencies, boards, and commissions should be reflective of the duties that are entailed. The compensation should reflect the level of the job and the duties, and the things that they are expected to accomplish should be reflected in that compensation. But the compensation, Madam Speaker, should be also reflective of the need for good stewardship of the tax dollars that are collected by the government of Alberta from the taxpaying citizens of Alberta. That compensation should not be excessive. That compensation should be reasonable. The taxpayers have not only a right to know where their tax dollars are being spent but also that they are receiving good value for those tax dollars.

3:30

I believe that this bill will move us forward and take us closer to ensuring that not only do we have good stewardship of our resources but indeed that the people that are performing these services on behalf of Albertans are doing a good job. It's important

for all Albertans to know and to have confidence that the remuneration provided to those who serve on government-funded agencies, boards, and commissions is fair compensation and that we are indeed being fair to the taxpaying citizens of this province.

While a sunshine list, I do believe, is not designed to ferret out the salary or stipend paid by the Alberta government to its public employees, not on every salary that is paid for by the government, it's designed, I believe, to shed light on spending that may be deemed as being excessive. I don't believe it's designed to threaten the privacy of your average, ordinary wage earner who is actively working in the public service. Rather, a sunshine list is designed to protect the taxpaying citizens and to ensure the good stewardship of public finances.

That is why I can support the threshold of disclosure in this bill. It's been set at \$125,000, and that will be adjusted annually for inflation. I believe that it's a reasonable limit, a reasonable threshold. Other provinces have set thresholds. British Columbia, for instance, has set a threshold of around \$100,000; Manitoba is at \$50,000; Saskatchewan, \$50,000; Ontario, around \$100,000; Nova Scotia, \$100,000; Newfoundland and Labrador is at \$100,000 starting in April 2016. I think we can see that there are various thresholds that have been set across this country. While I suppose we could argue about whether the number in this bill is too high or too low, I believe, personally, that it sets a reasonable monetary threshold. This threshold will allow the people of Alberta to review those who receive significant compensation from public coffers while allowing for the privacy of average salaried employees of the government of Alberta and those people who serve on agencies, boards, and commissions overseen by APAGA.

There's a balancing act that we have to find here, one that allows for your average citizen, your average person serving on a board or a commission, to have the privacy that they deserve when it comes to their salary and their remuneration while at the same time ensuring that the financial remuneration is not excessive and that it is for the good of the people of Alberta.

There is at least one group of people that I believe is unfairly targeted in this bill, and that is teachers. Why teachers were singled out I guess only the government and the people that drafted this bill can answer. But this MLA and, I believe, this party that I represent believe that Bill 5 should be amended, that it should be amended to correct what I can only refer to as a puzzling aberration in Bill 5. I think that it is simply a matter of fairness and the reasonable desire for privacy by those people who are not receiving excessive compensation from the government of Alberta.

So while I take a great deal of pride in being able to say that I support Bill 5 and the creation of a sunshine list, I will be tabling an amendment to ensure that teachers are provided with the same threshold limit of \$125,000 as the rest of the public employees in Alberta.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments? No questions or comments for the hon. member?

Any other hon. member who wishes to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak to second reading of Bill 5, the Public Sector Compensation Transparency Act. I'd like to congratulate this government on taking the first big steps to making more transparency from within the Alberta government. Wildrose has long been an advocate for this type of reform in order to help address Albertans' demand for greater transparency and accountability across government.

Currently the sunshine list only exposes six-figure salaries and contract disclosure exposes vendors over \$10,000 but only in government departments, meaning that 142 agencies, boards, and commissions have avoided this level of scrutiny. Most notably, a \$17 billion agency known as Alberta Health Services avoids all this. Every individual in this province has a right to know for what and how their money is being spent. I believe that this measure along with a few amendments will help to provide the taxpayers with this level of oversight. It is incumbent upon us as legislators to set these standards in the spirit of good governance and transparency. These measures should help to ensure that public-sector workers' salaries are based on merit and experience.

Going forward, there are a few obvious gaps that we will have to address in order to ensure that the privacy of our public-sector workers is respected. As my learned colleagues have already noted, while this legislation does empower school boards and municipalities to self-report, it does not set a definitive marker for the minimum thresholds that must be met in order to quantify a need for disclosure. The threshold should be universally applied across all the ABCs, and it should not be allowed to vary among different groups. If \$125,000 is a standard for departmental employees, then there should be no reason not to extend that to all agencies, boards, and commissions.

Madam Speaker, while we support the passage of Bill 5, I believe that we need more time to fully examine the legislation to ensure that it strikes the right balance between transparency and protecting the rights of individuals. We have to remember that this is not a fire hall. We don't have to go very quickly on these things. This is a House of legislation. We need time to evaluate and read these things and to understand it and debate it.

Given the ATA announcement it is clear to us that stakeholders have not been properly consulted. This legislation affects thousands of Alberta public servants, and we should be honouring their hard work by giving this subject the due attention that it deserves. A few hours debating a bill does not allow for a fulsome debate, and it clearly has left some stakeholders out of the conversation, but that seems to be consistent with a lot of the NDP consultations.

Overall, the Wildrose supports Bill 5, and we will make amendments to further strengthen this legislation. Albertans have a right to know where their tax dollars are being spent, and transparency is essential to good governance for only with transparency can citizens fully understand their government's operations. I hope to see more common-sense pieces of legislation in the name of transparency and accountability from this government, and I urge them to listen to my learned caucus colleagues and to their suggestions to help strengthen this bill.

3:40

This government should know that the Wildrose, despite what the Member for St. Albert said, did campaign on several specific issues. We campaigned with an emphasis on health care and education. We campaigned on a fiscally responsible government that was transparent and accountable. That was a key point of our platform. The NDP platform: you got by on the good looks and charm of your leader. [interjections] Madam Speaker, we've got to get these guys to settle down. They've been drinking a lot of the Orange Crush, which is a really pretty drink – it's sparkling, and it's sugary sweet – but ultimately it has no nutritional value. We have to recognize that what they serve in the hospitals is ginger ale.

I'm glad to see this government taking all sorts of good suggestions from us. Certainly, I noticed that the Health minister was bragging during estimates about the \$5 million in savings from cellphone plans. That was a Wildrose platform that the NDP

candidate up in Fort McMurray laughed at, but I'm glad to see that this group, once they were in government, recognized the value of the Wildrose's suggestions. I really want to appreciate that, and I hope you continue to listen to us because we have work experience. Not only are we good looking and charming over here, but we are smart. We have business experience. We have life experience.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments for the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, I'll recognize the hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Bill 5, the Public Sector Compensation Transparency Act, brings forward a level of transparency that we haven't seen in Alberta. People drawing a public salary are given a public trust to perform, and public officials work on behalf of the public, not for themselves. By allowing the salaries of the highest paid people to be made public, the public at large has a means of ensuring that they are held accountable when they are earning a salary that most of us would consider high.

Salary disclosures for agencies, boards, and commissions are the norm in other provinces. In fact, Ontario prints an incredible all-inclusive list annually. I remember when the former government brought out the first salary sunshine list. A few of the political staffers were pretty freaked out because their names were now in print and showing up, but in a government where there were problems with staffers, there was some accountability brought to bear.

Agencies, boards, and commissions are a convenient way to hide public expenditures, and Alberta Health Services, being the largest of these, will be given great exposure. This will be a significant start in the effort to figure out what is happening at AHS. Albertans will have the ability to see where a significant amount of their wealth is being spent and where it's going.

The Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission has an enormous regulatory role, so large, actually, that at one point they were their own department, so there will be some light shone in this agency's dark corners for their salaries earned as well.

When the former government brought out its initial salary disclosure list, some MLAs trumpeted it as being the gold standard, but the Wildrose knew better. There are 142 agencies, boards, and commissions under the Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act and another 52 agencies reporting directly to the government. I welcome the change that Bill 5 represents to allow the sunshine in on the agencies, boards, and commissions.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments for the hon. member under 29(2)(a)?

If not, I'll recognize the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Madam Speaker. We, the Members of this Legislative Assembly, are part of a very long and, I think, a beautiful system of parliamentary procedures. Democracy is defined as being government of the people, by the people, and for the people. As such, every one of us in this room is a servant to those people: the people who pay the taxes, the people who work very hard in this province. A portion of their hard-earned money goes to provide governance, goes to provide public services to them.

I think that throughout the history of democracy in this province we have a wonderful heritage of people being elected to office, not just being elected to office but those who are elected to office and in government as well, then, having taken liberty over the years to appoint people, to create boards and agencies and appoint people,

and also to determine what their salaries are going to be. In that moment of creating an agency and appointing people to run those agencies, all of a sudden the public has now been excluded, and these agencies are operating often at arm's length. Some of these agencies that we have with us today are even quasi-judicial, operating at arm's length, where there is not the degree of public scrutiny that all of us in this House are subject to.

I believe that in order for us to continue to be truly a democracy of the people and by the people and for the people, it only makes sense to me that those people who are living off the taxes collected from our people ought to be all right with letting those very same people know how their money is being spent. While I support this bill and applaud the government for bringing it forward, I as well as other members have voiced a concern over the exclusion of certain ABCs from the sunshine list. Frankly, given the number of ABCs that we have in this province, which is hundreds, with all of the people being paid on these ABCs, sometimes very high salaries, I think it is only fair to our people, the good people of Alberta, that those ABCs also be subject to the same scrutiny that every one of us in this room is subject to.

I've spoken with many MLAs before the election, during the election, after the election. I have yet to meet a member of this House, regardless of party, who has a problem with the good people of Alberta knowing what we make or what we spend in our expenses. I don't think anyone in here has a problem with that. The scrutiny comes with the job. We knew about it before we got here. We expect it. I don't think anyone in here would believe that that is somehow a negative, that the good people of Alberta know what we earn and the expenses that we incur in serving them.

By that same token, then, when it comes to these ABCs that are existing and the wages that are there, I know that in my riding during the election I had people coming up to me voicing great discontent because they had heard that certain senior people within some of the ABCs in our province were making \$400,000, \$500,000. The rumours were crazy. The problem with it is that we don't know for sure. We just don't have that information. It's not readily available. I think that in fairness to our people, the good people of Alberta, that pay their taxes and whose money is used to pay the salaries of people in government and government agencies, it is only fair and right and I'll say even a righteous thing that we expose to the public the reality of what people are being paid with their tax dollars.

So I support this bill. I believe it is an excellent first step, but I do hope that members opposite will see this as just a first step, that they will give serious consideration to amendments that are going to be coming forward regarding this good first step and that you will give serious consideration to whom this bill is serving. It is serving our people, our families, our neighbours, our friends, the people in our communities that are paying the taxes that support this great big machine called the government of Alberta. So I hope that in fairness to those dear people every one of us will consider very seriously any exemptions that this bill may offer and take very seriously the need of our people to know where their money is going, as they should in a free and open democratic process.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

3:50

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under 29(2)(a)?

If not, any other speakers to the bill? Okay. The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. The intent of the sunshine list is to provide information to Albertans about how their tax dollars are being spent. This information is intended to

ensure that government spending is transparent at all levels. Through Bill 5 people who work for the public sector, who are paid by Alberta's tax dollars, and who earn more than \$125,000 will have their names and compensations disclosed publicly. The current disclosure list for Alberta government employees is set at \$104,000. This increase is probably an important one given that the wages in Alberta typically have been quite high. This bill is not about seeing who is making what but is about ensuring that government is using our tax dollars wisely.

Secondly, Bill 5 extends the public-sector salary disclosure sunshine list to include employees of public-sector bodies, including agencies, boards, and commissions governed by the Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act, APAGA. Bill 5 adds physician fee-for-service disclosure, the independent offices of the Legislature, public postsecondary institutions, Alberta Health Services, and other large organizations.

Bill 5 does two things. It increases the number of people who will have their names and incomes reported while increasing the base income level that will be reported on. Wildrose has been in favour of reviewing and expanding the sunshine list to include the ABCs in Alberta for quite some time, and we all campaigned on it. By increasing the scope of the people who will have their income reported, Albertans will get a more complete picture of the use of their tax dollars. Payments to public-sector workers comprise a huge, huge amount of the 47-some billion dollar budget, and I'm thinking that it's somewhere in the area of \$25 billion. I could be wrong there, but that's what I've heard. This level of transparency is a very positive step. Prior to this bill there were large pieces of the public-sector that were exempt from being on the sunshine list. Bill 5 provides a more robust approach, and we commend the members opposite for that.

However, there are some shortcomings to this particular bill. Specifically, not all of the ABCs are included. Now, it's one thing to – we would like to see a more comprehensive list of exactly which ones aren't included, and there may be a very good reason for those to be excluded. What we would like to see is the agency and the reason why it would be excluded. Again, there may be a very good reason for it; we'd just like to know what it is. You know, some of the ones that we see that are excluded are in Environment and Parks: Environmental Monitoring Management Board, Environmental Monitoring Working Group, and the Provincial Environmental Monitoring Panel. It would be really nice to know why those particular ones have been excluded, and there are others. Again, just for clarity and transparency I think that Albertans deserve to know why some of these boards were excluded and some were not.

As well as the admission of these ABCs, there is some confusion about how school boards and, in particular, how teachers will be affected by this legislation. Wildrose is very committed to making sure that the sunshine list is used for the purpose for which it was intended, allowing all Albertans to have a more complete understanding of how their tax dollars are being used to pay public-sector employees. To that end, we will and I will support this bill. We will be tabling an amendment to ensure that teachers are treated the same as any other public-sector employee, and if they earn over the \$125,000 threshold, their names will be published as part of the sunshine list but not below that threshold. I think that they should be treated the same as every other employee in Alberta.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments for the hon. member?

Seeing none, are there any other speakers to the bill? The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 5. This is quite interesting. I remember that this was part of the Wildrose campaign platform, I believe, in 2012, so this is actually really interesting, to see this come to light here in the House and to be a part of this. I mean, for all of us that's really great that we're doing this. You know, taxpayers do have a right to know where their dollars are being spent. Our salaries are public knowledge, which is really great, and this is an excellent extension into the transparency of this government. It helps to create a little bit of trust as well, which is something that I think that we're really, really struggling with. This is a really great step.

I am curious as to why the threshold in this bill is \$125,000. In other jurisdictions it's about \$100,000 or \$50,000. I think that \$50,000 is probably too low. Some justification for this would be great. Perhaps, you know, there's some protection in that area, but that would be good to know.

I think that there's a bit of a loophole, and I'd like for the members opposite to be open to amendments on this bill, just to make sure that the legislation that we pass through this House is actually really solid – right? – something we can all be proud of in the long term and that nobody will be embarrassed by. I'm really hoping that we can work together on that moving forward.

You know, there are a couple of risks with this bill. One of them is that this can lead to higher public-sector wages as individuals know what their counterparts are making, hopefully, of course, only over and above or when you make the sunshine list at \$125,000.

Disclosing fee for service is unlikely to be popular amongst physicians. I know that's been addressed, so I certainly hope there will be more conversations surrounding that particular area.

Municipalities and school boards are exempt. I think school boards – certainly, in my office I've had a number of concerns with the specifics around that particular piece, so that's something that needs to be discussed as well. I think that's one of those loopholes that exist.

The sunshine lists do not highlight value for money or publish reasons behind compensation for the said individuals listed. For example, overtime: our health care system certainly has many workers that are taking advantage of overtime because it's absolutely necessary and that's what we need. But will this discourage said workers from participating in overtime activities, where we need this but they may not be so inclined to take on these extra hours for fear of having their information disclosed publicly? Certainly, that's something that we need to consider in the debate of this bill.

In 2010 the Nova Scotia NDP government introduced public salary disclosure legislation which set the threshold at \$100,000. Again, why is Alberta different? I mean, Alberta is certainly a much different province than Nova Scotia. Our salaries are generally much higher.

I very much look forward to the member across speaking to this bill for Albertans and his constituents because you certainly have some things to say. I am definitely interested in debating this with you, so, please, I encourage you to speak to this as well.

You know, I'd just like to point out that Bill 5 was really, truly a Wildrose idea. I heard earlier that maybe it wasn't. I don't really know if it matters or not.

That is, I think, mostly touching on what I'd like to say. Let's discuss this. I encourage these members opposite to be open to amendments and to really make this a solid piece of legislation that we can be proud of moving forward. I commend you for bringing up this bill in the first place, but let's make it great.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

4:00

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments for the member? If not, then the next speaker to the bill, Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Stier: Well, good afternoon, everyone. A pleasure to get up this afternoon to speak to Bill 5. Recognizing that the time is late and everyone's probably tired, I'm sure the attention will be, as usual at this time of day, probably minimal, but I'll try to get through some of the points that I do have. I've got some stuff here, hon. Minister of Education, that actually you might be interested in this afternoon. [interjection] Well, a pleasure to work with you again today.

Anyway, we've seen a lot of things come through in the past few weeks from the government. But certainly with this one here – I hate to say it – I really do want to say that I can support this one. This one seems to be something that we needed to see for some time. We've seen in recent years that it's one thing to talk the talk on transparency but another thing to walk the walk. One of the best things about Bill 5, in my estimation, is that it does not seek to reinvent the wheel. Too often when it comes to instituting reform to ensure greater transparency and accountability, we seek to implement transformational change in short periods of time. Too often these initiatives are victims of their own ambitions, though, and shelved indefinitely sometimes. Bill 5, on the other hand, takes a system that is working and improves upon it.

The Alberta sunshine list, requiring the disclosure of government employee salaries, has been in place for several years, actually. I understand that in the beginning this reporting made some quite uncomfortable. Since then I think we've seen the benefits of transparency outweigh such concerns. Thanks to the sunshine list, Albertans have been able to have fully informed and, I dare say, frank conversations about the former government's severance packages.

I can tell you as a guy that has been around here for three and a half to four years that it has been a topic that has raised the ire of a lot of people over many, many days. For instance, with the update made public in July of this year, we learned that the severance payments to four senior government managers ranged in size from \$104,000 to \$143,000. This information helps inform the ongoing public debate regarding the expenditure of tax dollars and helps us as MLAs to fulfill our mandate and act as faithful stewards of taxpayer dollars, and that's pretty important.

One of the glaring shortcomings, though, of the sunshine list to date is the fact that it only requires the disclosure of salaries for a single stream of government employees, usually. Expanding the requirement of all agencies, boards, and commissions will vastly improve this system, it sounds like, making it fairer for both the employees and the public at large.

The bottom line for me, though, is that transparency in all forms of business is essential, including government. Only with transparency can a citizen be fully informed about the operations of government. Without transparency there can be no accountability. This is a core Wildrose principle, of course, and expanding the scope of the sunshine list was a policy on which I was proud to campaign earlier this spring. We definitely were going around from house to house and town to town throughout my large riding to talk about this on frequent occasions, and it certainly did get a lot of good response when it was brought up.

Setting a threshold for disclosure of salaries is fair, providing that we ensure that the same threshold applies to all employees. I've received concerns from several constituents recently regarding the specific wording of this legislation, however, which may allow

those employees with compensation far below the \$125,000 threshold to be included on the list. I think this concerns all of us. It's been raised I think here in the House this afternoon from several speakers, and it certainly has a lot to do with the education world and some of these other people, municipalities, et cetera. At the core of the process, though, is a commitment to balance the need for transparency with the privacy rights in a just and fair manner. If we allow thresholds to be applied inequitably, it calls this commitment into question.

At the same time we must recognize that while government transparency is more about knowing how much everyone gets paid, true transparency requires that we conduct the business of the House in such a manner as to ensure that citizens outside this House have the opportunity to better understand the issues with which we grapple. In the case of Bill 5 I know some doctors, as an example, who've raised concerns that the data released by the sunshine list is oversimplified, that citizens reading the list, for example, may not be able to recognize the difference between a medical practitioner's revenue and a physician's personal income.

This is probably a valid concern and points to the fact that transparency requires more than just information. It also requires time to understand this information more thoroughly. This is probably something we can give them. By taking more time to discuss government bills and policies, we can give citizens a better opportunity to get informed and understand the issues.

The key is more time. In 2014 Alberta MLAs sat for only 42 days, the second fewest in Canada. By comparison, the Legislatures in Ontario and British Columbia sat for 77 and 71 days, respectively. Meanwhile Members of Parliament were allotted 127 days in the House of Commons. This isn't improving under this new government, by the way. I think we're currently on pace to sit for 42 days again this year. We can debate how many days are needed, but I can tell you this: true transparency requires more than 42 days.

I will be supporting Bill 5 because I support the initiative to make the government more transparent. It's a step in the right direction, but let's not congratulate ourselves too much. There's a lot more we can do to ensure that Albertans have an opportunity to discuss their government's operations. As faithful stewards of taxpayer dollars it is incumbent on us to continue fighting to make this institution more transparent and more accountable.

Thank you for your time this afternoon. I hope that contribution makes us think a little bit more thoroughly about what we're about to discuss here in the next few days on Bill 5.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. My fellow colleague mentioned transformational change. He delved into it a little bit. I'm hoping he could give some examples of some legislation that was maybe not well thought out, that was put through too quickly, and some of the unintended consequences of that action.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Well, thank you for the question, hon. member. Having not actually delved into this one too deeply, I may not have a lot of answers to your question, but I can say this. Over the past few years we've seen an awful lot of this topic come up, whether it's been in some of the contractual things that the previous government of the day had entered into and some of the other kinds of different professions that came up under scrutiny at some of our Public Accounts meetings and so on and so forth.

This has been something that the public has been extremely well aware of. The press has followed it from day to day, from week to week, from month to month, from year to year. Having this kind of transparency is going to definitely – definitely – improve the situation in that regard. Certainly, there has been a lot of controversy, and some of the professions, including the doctors, some of our educators, municipalities, have always been against this sort of thing, so it will definitely be interesting to see how this unfolds as we process this bill.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other questions or comments under 29(2)(a)?

If not, I'll recognize the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler on the bill.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I, too, rise to echo support for Bill 5. I believe that there is potentiality for some changes and some amendments to come forward. The Public Sector Compensation Transparency Act at long last talks about government agencies, boards, and commissions, some much larger than others, which will have to report salaries over \$125,000, much like what's happened in the government of Alberta employee realm. Madam Speaker, the Wildrose campaigned throughout the election on expanding the sunshine list to include 142 agencies, boards, and commissions under the Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act as well as 52 agencies that report directly to the government of Alberta.

4:10

Now, some out there may say that this legislation replaces the former Member for Fort McMurray-Conklin's gold standard in disclosure, but I would be very careful in calling this a platinum standard in disclosure. There still appears to be some impurities in the molten metal that need to be removed. For instance, there is discussion about the Environmental Monitoring Management Board. I'd like to know: if they are making a six-figure salary, would this be included in that list, Madam Speaker? Then there is the Banff Centre board of governors. The facility for artists in spectacular Banff is an incredible asset to operate. Most people do not realize that this is a public asset, not a private or Parks Canada operation.

With that, Madam Speaker, I'd like to indulge the Government House Leader and the Minister of Advanced Education and also the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster. He and others in the Chamber may remember a day when the Member for Drumheller-Stettler rose in the House and spoke in regard to the public disclosure of a member for Tourism Alberta. There was a discussion in regard to the dispensation of an expense account regarding a tuxedo. There was a considerable amount of discussion about that. It was only discovered through the freedom of information act, but it was a form of transparency of government spending, and it was sorely needed.

When that employee expensed his tuxedo, a lot of people thought that it was simply as a result of a highbrow attitude of elitists. Therefore, we need to know some of what those elitists' salaries are. Bill 5 will provide some change. It's something that's important when you're dealing with taxpayers' dollars. I ran in the election on open accountability of taxpayers' dollars.

Other academically inclined organizations like the public universities will fall under this legislation and also open themselves up to scrutiny. I've been hearing for some time complaints from professors at the university for being nickelled and dimed on approval of the use of their per diems for attending conferences to

present their research while administrators make big salaries. Opening up the salaries to scrutiny will enable these agencies' boards of governors to see the full picture and maybe roll back the compensation and redirect that money elsewhere, maybe to professors' salaries or applied research, maybe even to grants and, ultimately, bursaries to students. I know my colleague for Calgary-Foothills highlighted excess salaries at the Alberta Innovates corporations. Without having to dig through annual reports, those top salaries will be available in one easy-to-find list.

Albertans and, indeed, Albertan taxpayers have a right to know where their tax dollars are being spent. Transparency in government, Madam Speaker, is essential. Only with transparency can citizens fully understand their government's operations. The Member for Strathmore-Brooks talked about his involvement in the Canadian Taxpayers Federation and their believing that we can have open accountability and have legislation, freedom of information for the taxpayers of Alberta.

Madam Speaker, I think Albertans would appreciate the upgrade in transparency and accountability that Bill 5 provides in spite of some of its flaws. There may be some amendments going forward. I'd just like to reiterate again that I present support for Bill 5.

The Deputy Speaker: You have a question under 29(2)(a), hon. member?

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Yes, I do. The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler and I have spent some time here. We've experienced an awful lot of this, as I said earlier, and he alluded to a couple of the items before. I wondered if he might have a moment to help us recall when one of the former ministers – was it the minister of transparency and accountability? – had a certain standard that he always demonstrated in the House? Would he like to, you know, enlighten us on that one?

Mr. Strankman: Well, Madam Speaker, it doesn't come as immediately to mind as the event regarding the minister of tourism at the time. But it was brought forward as a – you know, I remember the recantations of the minister, talking about gold standards. There was a good deal of humour on this side of the Chamber of the understanding of exactly what that was.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other questions or comments?

Seeing none, another speaker to the bill?

Seeing none, we will call the question.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:16 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Hanson	Rosendahl
Anderson, S.	Horne	Sabir
Babcock	Hunter	Schmidt
Carson	Littlewood	Schreiner
Connolly	Loyola	Shepherd
Coolahan	MacIntyre	Sigurdson
Cortes-Vargas	Mason	Smith
Cyr	McKitrick	Stier
Dach	McPherson	Strankman
Dang	Miller	Sucha
Drever	Miranda	Sweet

Eggen	Nielsen	Turner
Feehan	Payne	Westhead
Goehring	Piquette	Woollard
Gotfried	Pitt	Yao
Gray	Renaud	
Totals:	For – 47	Against – 0

[Motion carried unanimously; Bill 5 read a second time]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, the House stands adjourned until 1:30 on Monday.

[The Assembly adjourned at 4:32 p.m. to Monday at 1:30 p.m.]

Bill Status Report for the 29th Legislature - 1st Session (2015)

Activity to November 26, 2015

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 1 to 200 are Government Bills. Bills numbered 201 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills numbered with a "Pr" prefix are Private Bills.

*An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If a Bill comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel, Alberta Justice, for details at (780) 427-2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned chapter numbers until the conclusion of the Fall Sitings.

1* An Act to Renew Democracy in Alberta (Ganley)

First Reading -- 9-10 (Jun. 15, 2015 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 30-38 (Jun. 16, 2015 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 85-94 (Jun. 17, 2015 eve.), 152-157 (Jun. 22, 2015 eve., passed with amendments)

Third Reading -- 157-159 (Jun. 22, 2015 eve., passed on division)

Royal Assent -- (Jun. 29, 2015 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 15, 2015; SA 2015 c15]

2 An Act to Restore Fairness to Public Revenue (Ceci)

First Reading -- 104 (Jun. 18, 2015 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 161-162 (Jun. 22, 2015 eve.), 183-193 (Jun. 23, 2015 aft.), 201-213 (Jun. 23, 2015 eve.), 213-227 (Jun. 23, 2015 eve., passed on division)

Committee of the Whole -- 242-257 (Jun. 24, 2015 aft.), 259 (Jun. 24, 2015 eve., passed)

Third Reading -- 259-271 (Jun. 24, 2015 eve., passed on division)

Royal Assent -- (Jun. 29, 2015 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force January 1, 2015, with exceptions; SA 2015 c16]

3 Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2015 (No. 2) (\$) (Ceci)

First Reading -- 77 (Jun. 17, 2015 eve., passed)

Second Reading -- 107-114 (Jun. 18, 2015 aft., passed on division)

Committee of the Whole -- 145-152 (Jun. 22, 2015 eve.), 159-161 (Jun. 22, 2015 eve., passed on division)

Third Reading -- 182-183 (Jun. 23, 2015 aft.), 213 (Jun. 23, 2015 eve., passed on division)

Royal Assent -- (Jun. 29, 2015 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 29, 2015; SA 2015 c14]

4 An Act to Implement Various Tax Measures and to Enact the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act (\$) (Ceci)

First Reading -- 331-32 (Oct. 27, 2015 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 379-81 (Oct. 29, 2015 aft.), 501-522 (Nov. 17, 2015 aft., passed)

5 Public Sector Compensation Transparency Act (Ganley)

First Reading -- 448 (Nov. 5, 2015 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 619 (Nov. 25, 2015 aft.), 650-60 (Nov. 26, 2015 aft., passed on division)

6 Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act (Sigurdson)

First Reading -- 501 (Nov. 17, 2015 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 619-20 (Nov. 25, 2015 aft., adjourned)

7 Alberta Human Rights Amendment Act, 2015 (Ganley)

First Reading -- 548 (Nov. 19, 2015 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 618-19 (Nov. 25, 2015 aft., adjourned)

8 Public Education Collective Bargaining Act (Eggen)

First Reading -- 649 (Nov. 26, 2015 aft., passed)

- 9 Appropriation Act, 2015 (\$) (Ceci)**
First Reading -- 612 (Nov. 25, 2015 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 613-18 (Nov. 25, 2015 aft., passed on division)
Committee of the Whole -- 621-31 (Nov. 26, 2015 morn., passed)
Third Reading -- 631-38 (Nov. 26, 2015 morn., passed on division)
- 201 Assuring Alberta's Fiscal Future Act (Fraser)**
First Reading -- 104-105 (Jun. 18, 2015 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 128-139 (Jun. 22, 2015 aft.), 302 (Oct. 26, 2015 aft., defeated on division)
- 202* Alberta Local Food Act (Cortes-Vargas)**
First Reading -- 105 (Jun. 18, 2015 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 303-313 (Oct. 26, 2015 aft.), 401-404 (Nov. 2, 2015 aft., passed on division)
Committee of the Whole -- 573-83 (Nov. 23, 2015 aft., passed with amendments)
- 203 Election (Restrictions on Government Advertising) Amendment Act, 2015 (Strankman)**
First Reading -- 349 (Oct. 28, 2015 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 404-10 (Nov. 2, 2015 aft., adjourned), 474-77 (Nov. 16, 2015 aft., passed), 477 (Nov. 16, 2015 aft., referred to Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee)
- 204 Residential Tenancies (Safer Spaces for Victims of Domestic Violence) Amendment Act, 2015 (Drever)**
First Reading -- 448 (Nov. 5, 2015 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 477-84 (Nov. 16, 2015 aft., passed)
- 205 Persons with Developmental Disabilities Services (Public Consultation) Amendment Act, 2015 (Renaud)**
First Reading -- (Nov. 18, 2015 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 583-84 (Nov. 23, 2015 aft., adjourned)
- 206 Recall Act (Aheer)**
First Reading -- 649 (Nov. 26, 2015 aft., passed)
- Pr1 The King's University College Amendment Act, 2015 (Schmidt)**
First Reading -- 377 (Oct. 29, 2015 aft., passed)
- Pr2 Bethesda Bible College Amendment Act, 2015 (Nielsen)**
First Reading -- 377 (Oct. 29, 2015 aft., passed)
- Pr3 Rosary Hall, Edmonton Repeal Act (Shepherd)**
First Reading -- 377 (Oct. 29, 2015 aft., passed)
- Pr4 Canadian University College Amendment Act, 2015 (Orr)**
First Reading -- 377 (Oct. 29, 2015 aft., passed)
- Pr5 Concordia University College of Alberta Amendment Act, 2015 (McLean)**
First Reading -- 377 (Oct. 29, 2015 aft., passed)
- Pr6 Covenant Bible College Amendment Act, 2015 (Fildebrandt)**
First Reading -- 377 (Oct. 29, 2015 aft., passed)
- Pr7 Living Faith Bible College Amendment Act, 2015 (Nixon)**
First Reading -- 377 (Oct. 29, 2015 aft., passed)

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Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, November 30, 2015

Day 25

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

First Session

Wanner, Hon. Robert E., Medicine Hat (ND), Speaker
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Feehan, Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (ND), Deputy Chair of Committees

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Rocky View (W)
Anderson, Shaye, Leduc-Beaumont (ND)
Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (W)
Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (ND)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (W)
Bhullar, Manmeet Singh, Calgary-Greenway (PC)
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Fildebrandt, Derek Gerhard, Strathmore-Brooks (W)
Fitzpatrick, Maria M., Lethbridge-East (ND)
Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (PC)
Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., Calgary-Buffalo (ND)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (ND)
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Gray, Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (ND)
Hanson, David B., Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills (W),
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Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (W)
Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (W)
Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (ND)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (ND)
Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (W)
Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (ND)
van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND)
Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)

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New Democrat: 53 Wildrose: 22 Progressive Conservative: 9 Alberta Liberal: 1 Alberta Party: 1 Independent: 1

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, November 30, 2015

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Let us reflect. Fellow members, this past week we lost a former member from the 26th Legislature and then one of our own, the hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway. Yesterday many of our fellow members attended the memorial and heard his family and friends express heartbreaking words to describe the loss of light in their lives. Although it's hard to make sense of the events of this past week, the tragedy of a great life lost too soon, it is clear that this gentle giant of a man brought light to countless lives here at home, abroad, and indeed to this Assembly. Let us take a moment to remember him and what he would be asking of us as we move forward.

Hon. members, we will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Mr. Robert Clark. I would invite all to participate in the language of their choice.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
Car ton bras sait porter l'épée,
Il sait porter la croix!
Ton histoire est une épopée
Des plus brillants exploits.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Thank you. Please be seated.

Hon. members, I believe that our former member who has left us would have been singing that national anthem with pride.

Sergeant-at-Arms, would you please march off the colours of Alberta.

Please stand.

[The Sergeant-at-Arms removed the Alberta flag that was draped over Mr. Bhullar's desk and marched it out of the Chamber]

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: The Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Mr. Thomas Palaia, consul general of the United States of America. The consul general took office this past summer, and we're delighted to welcome him on his official visit to Edmonton. The bonds between Alberta and the United States run deep. The U.S. has long been our largest trading partner. In 2014 alone Alberta's exports to the U.S. were more than \$109 billion. We have strong linkages in energy, agriculture, and forestry and countless ties in education and culture as well. I had the pleasure of hosting Mr. Palaia at a luncheon earlier today. We discussed areas of mutual interest and the potential to build on our relationship, especially when it comes to leadership on the environment. Mr. Palaia is seated in your gallery. He has risen, and I ask all members of the Assembly to give him the traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: I understand that we have some schools with us today. The Minister of Health and Minister of Seniors.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. On behalf of my colleague the MLA for Edmonton-Riverview and fellow cabinet minister I'm happy to introduce a group of students from Grandview Heights school. There are 35 visitors in the audience. Ms Levesque as well as Mrs. Chan, Ms Stromberg, and Mr. Li, would you and the students please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Legislature a group of grade 5 and 6 students from Aurora elementary school in Drayton Valley. There are too many guests for me to introduce individually. I want to assure this Assembly that Aurora school is an amazing place full of dedicated teachers and students totally engaged in their learning. Over the years I've been welcomed on many occasions to the school as I've run basketball clinics and programs for the elementary students in Drayton Valley out of Aurora school. In the group today are former colleagues, former students, children of students I have taught, and to top it off, there is even one student that goes to the same church as myself. This is my family. May I ask the students and staff of Aurora school to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. Minister of Health and Minister of Seniors, do you have another introduction?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this House a group of medical students who are here today to advocate for changes to the immunization policy in Alberta. These medical students have a rich history of advocacy related to their future patients and to the health of all Albertans. They include Justin Khunhkhun. He is here as the chair of the Political Advocacy Committee at the University of Alberta. We also have John Van Tuyl, senior chair of the Political Advocacy Committee at the University of Calgary. Both are joined by their student colleagues, who share in this Assembly's passion for public health. I ask that they rise in addition to the other members of the delegation and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Edmonton-Centre.

1:40

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly today two people without whose love and support I would not be here today, my parents, Ruthven and Annette Shepherd. My father arrived in Alberta from Trinidad in 1967, my mother from the Netherlands in 1948. They are proud Canadians, who've worked hard to build good lives here and now in retirement freely give of their time, most notably in support of their church community and their 13 grandchildren. While our political views may differ and from time to time we've had the differences that parents and children do, I know that I've always had their love and

their support, as evidenced by their presence here today. With them here today is my niece Brooklynn Shepherd, who I look forward to the opportunity to speak a bit more about when we have an opportunity to speak about Bill 205. While they have risen, I'd like to ask everyone to provide them with the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Dan Jolivet. Dan is one of my constituents, who lives in Belle Rive. He's extremely interested in government and politics and has volunteered on numerous political campaigns, including the most recent, Janis Irwin's federal election campaign, as well as my own in Edmonton-Decore. Of course, I would like to ask Dan to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. W. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed a privilege and an honour to introduce to you and through you some very hard-working folks who live and reside in my constituency. I'd like to introduce you to Mr. Dave Plett, the CEO of Western Feedlots, and Melissa McWilliam, the resources manager of Western Feedlots. Some folks travelled with them today to talk a bit about Bill 6 outside on the Legislature steps, and those would be Darlene McWilliam, James Palin, and Bernie McWilliam. I ask them to rise and this House to give them the warm traditional welcome.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to be able to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Mr. and Mrs. Stephan and Mira Quintin. I've had the pleasure of knowing them for quite some time. Stephan and I have a shared mutual interest in going door to door and making phone calls, which we've done quite a bit of this year. Mira, of course, is a proud employee of the government of Alberta, and I'm glad that she gave up her lunchtime to spend some time with us in the Assembly today. With them is Mira's mother, Stojanka Lakovic – I hope that I've got that reasonably close – who is visiting all the way from Serbia. I ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly the staff of the Rutherford constituency office, Thomas Bonifacio and Vicki Anderson, two very hard-working people who spend their day amending all of my errors. I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the House.

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

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly four fantastic people whom I love and admire. First of all, I would like to introduce to you my two youngest children, Savannah and Justus. I

have five children, but these are the only ones that are still at home. Next, I would like to introduce to you my beautiful wife, Angie. She has been the love of my life for 25 years, and I look forward to the next 50 years with her. Last but not least, I would like to introduce my mom. She is the one who, when I was young, was my greatest champion. She was the loudest cheerleader at the basketball games and the most embarrassing person at sappy movies. These four drove up today in order to show their solidarity with our farm brothers and sisters. My wife is a city girl, just so you know. I say this to show that this movement is supported not just by rural Albertans but by everybody. If you could rise and receive the traditional welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, I have others.

The Speaker: My apologies. Please proceed.

Mr. Hunter: Sorry. We don't want to forget anybody here.

I'd like to introduce to you Brian Hildebrand. He's a third-generation farmer from Skiff, Alberta, who farms with his wife and five children. He is here today because he is concerned about the implications that Bill 6 could have to his family farm. Brian's grandfather immigrated from Ukraine after the Russian Revolution in search of freedom and opportunity and purchased the farm where Brian now lives. Brian is hopeful that his children will follow in the footsteps of his grandparents Gerhard and Maria and his parents, George and Irma, and continue the family passion and business of providing Albertans, Canadians, and the world with food that is produced in a safe and responsible way.

I'd also like to introduce Don Penner from Grassy Lake. He's a third-generation farmer. Don and his wife, Jennifer, raised three children on their irrigated dryland farm. His daughter and son-in-law, Ben and Rebecca Thomas, now farm with him and are here also because of their concerns with Bill 6. Ben and Rebecca have three small children, who are enjoying growing up on the farm.

Tim Willms from Grassy Lake is a third-generation farmer who started farming with his father when he was knee-high to a grasshopper. Tim farms both irrigated and dryland with his wife, Michelle, and three children. Tim and Michelle hope their children will follow in their footsteps on this 90-year-old safe and amazing farm.

Jason Saunders from Taber is a fourth-generation grain farmer. Jason began farming with his father, where he learned safe and best practices from three generations before him. He has two adolescent children, who are enjoying the opportunity that farm life provides them. Jason has served on numerous boards and commissions and is a great advocate for agriculture in Alberta.

I'd like them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

Mr. Cooper: You got Whac-A-Mole.

Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise and introduce a good friend of mine as well as a constituent of the magnificent constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. Devin Hartzler is a farmer in the Carstairs area, where he farms on a multigenerational farm. He has a number of children, all of whom also have a passion for farming. There's no one in this entire room that wants a safe farm more than Devin Hartzler. He's here today to express some of his concerns about the direction that this government is going, and I really appreciate and value his long drive here today. I ask that Devin rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege to rise today and introduce to you and through you three gentlemen from Foremost, also a long drive away, that also run very, very successful family farms. Whether it's the 1,600 e-mails I received since Friday or the 1,500 people on the front steps two hours ago opposed to the implementation of Bill 6 – the value that these gentlemen and these farms have provided to all Albertans. I would like to ask Dan Mehlen, Ross Scratch, and Wade Sturtevant to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A great pleasure for me today to introduce to you and to the House my incredibly hard-working office manager, Shannon McClennan-Taylor. Shannon has worked for me for three years coming up in January. Diligent, compassionate, and very competent, keeping my office and sometimes my life running smoothly, she's joined by her husband, Lonnie Taylor, who is assistant manager at Atmosphere in downtown Calgary. Both are great assets to me and my constituency. I wanted to recognize his five years of service as a member of the Social Media Committee with the Calgary Stampede and the last three years with me in Calgary-Mountain View as well. Please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:50

The Speaker: Welcome.

Are there any other guests for introduction today? The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you for the indulgence, Mr. Speaker. It is my privilege to introduce to you and through you indeed to all members of the Legislature some of Alberta's fine farming families. These are the same farming families that have taken time out of their hectic schedules to exercise their rights to play opposition to actions, potentially, in the Legislature. They deserve to be acknowledged. They are Shandele Battle, who has achieved 21,000 electronic petition signatures, and her husband, Ted; my assistant, Laura McDonald, from Hanna; Faye Hibbs; Laurie Painter; Guy Neitz; Doug Larson; John Gattey; Daryl Bouisson; Danny Hozak; Travis Olsen; James Palin; Justin Griffith and Dawn Griffith along with their children Cordel and Mandy. We also have Neal and Vanessa Roes with their toddlers Brinley, Tenley, Jurta, Riber, and Kywnn. Also, we have Vaughn Roes with that same family. We also have Kevin James and Pat James, Vernon Snethun, Jason Wilson, and Jared Dougan. Would those of you who were able to make it into the Assembly please rise and accept the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: Her Majesty's Leader of the Official Opposition.

Farm and Ranch Worker Legislation Consultation

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, all my questions today are about trust. When a government loses the trust of voters, it becomes much harder to govern. This NDP government is determined to squander whatever trust Albertans were prepared to give them. First, they attacked our economy with tax increases and more regulation. Second, they went after the energy industry with the royalty review. Third, they went after a \$3 billion carbon tax, that no one campaigned on, and now they want our farmers and ranchers to trust

them. What has this government done to keep the trust of Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the opportunity to address the question. Certainly, we are working to make sure that we have opportunity to collaborate with Albertans themselves. I want to thank my colleagues for taking the time to actually attend the rallies that have been spoken of. I think it speaks to our values in wanting to work collaboratively with individuals to make sure that we set the record straight around what specifically this legislation means and making sure that we get it right in regulations moving forward.

Mr. Jean: Sounds like we might actually have consultations coming.

There are over a thousand farmers and ranchers here today because they don't trust this government to protect their way of life. They know that this government has zero hands-on experience in farming or ranching. They also know that this government is too arrogant to actually listen to farmers. They know that the government ministers and MLAs say one thing, but the government's own information sheets and the bureaucrats who are running the come-and-be-told meetings say the exact opposite. Why should Alberta farmers and ranchers trust this government at all?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have been informed that there was some misinformation shared by officials at the meetings. That is being rectified. We will have cabinet ministers in attendance at all of the consultation meetings moving forward, and we are very happy to engage with the individuals.

In terms of assertions that have been made about people not having any hands-on farm experience, that's simply not true, Mr. Speaker. There are lots of different types of farms in Alberta. I myself actually happen to be a shareholder in a farm. We own our family farm, that was homesteaded by my grandparents, and I'm very proud of that and to continue with that legacy.

Mr. Jean: Well, I'm sure that if your grandparents were here, they'd have something to say about this particular lack of consultation.

Mr. Speaker, there are 45,000 family farms. I doubt you could even find a hundred of them who are prepared to give this government a blank cheque on regulating every aspect of farm life. Everyone is telling the government to go back to the drawing board. Even left-wing commentators are saying: tap the brakes; slow down. Farmers don't trust this government because they know that this government doesn't trust farmers. If this government won't listen to farmers, will they at least listen to their friends and apply the brake to their plans to hurt Alberta's farm families?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, we are also upset about some of the ways that this has unfolded, that there has been misinformation shared by some members, even, of this House about what the actual legislation is about. We're working to make sure that what we do is that if some tragic incident does happen, farmers don't have to worry about losing their farm and that the family members of the person who may have been harmed don't have to worry about losing their only source of income. This is legislation that's in place in every other jurisdiction in Canada, and we're

working to make sure that we can bring Alberta in line with what was done 98 years ago.

Mr. Jean: News flash: you're in control of this mess.

The NDP government has a strange definition of consultation when it comes to farmers and ranchers. They have written a law that allows cabinet to do whatever it wants through regulations, and their answer to concerns is: trust us. Well, every farmer who attended their first meeting knows that no consultation is happening. Not only that, but the civil servants at that meeting had no answers for the thoughtful questions put to them by farmers. That is not consultation; that's telling them how it's going to be. Why is this government treating farmers and ranchers like second-class citizens?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. We certainly heard the feedback loud and clear from the members in participation in Grande Prairie. Tomorrow there is a consultation happening in Red Deer. There will be cabinet ministers in attendance as well as a number of other supportive parties. We think that the questions that have been asked have been very valid and deserve to have thoughtful responses, and that's one of the reasons why we've worked to expand the number of consultation meetings and to make sure that members have access directly to the ministers implicated.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Jean: Every single person wants safe farms, but anyone with real-world experience in agriculture knows this is a very complicated issue. Farms and ranches are so much more than workplaces. The rules for a white-collar office or a factory have to be different than those that apply to a 24-hours-a-day, 365-days-a-year farm or ranch. If this government actually did any consultation whatsoever, they would know that, and if ministers and government MLAs attended the come-and-be-told meetings, they would know that. Why isn't this government actually consulting with Alberta's farmers and ranchers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are going to be attending all the meetings. There will be cabinet ministers in attendance tomorrow night. [interjections] I know that the question was asked, and we already gave the answer in an earlier question, but it was asked again, so I'm giving the House the respect that they deserve in knowing what's going to be happening moving forward.

I want to thank people for wanting to build this in partnership. I know that there are many farmers, including farmers in my own family, who want to make sure we get this right and that everyone can rest assured at the end of the day. We are absolutely committed to making sure that we address the various types of farms in consultation with farmers.

Mr. Jean: It's very simple, Mr. Speaker. Stop the bill. Put the brakes on. Listen to farmers and ranchers. Don't pass it next week. Any farmer who attended the first information meetings on farm labour changes quickly figured out that it wasn't a consultation meeting. They also figured out it wasn't a place where they could go for any answers whatsoever. Any detailed questions were met with: oh, I don't know. Any government that introduces a bill that impacts the lives of 45,000 Alberta farm families but can't answer detailed questions has got it wrong. Stop. Will the minister just

admit that she has messed up this issue, and will she slow down this bill and actually go back and consult with farmers and ranchers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We've heard from farmers and ranchers, and I want to thank them for speaking up and making sure that we work together to support their livelihood moving forward. One of the reasons why we've added so many new consultation opportunities is because there has been significant demand as well as making sure that cabinet ministers are there in the future and that there will be opportunities to get answers. There is consultation happening tomorrow, and there will continue to be consultation for many days to come. I think that farmers are showing great leadership in this.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Royalty Review

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A hundred thousand Albertans are unemployed, and the NDP remain stubbornly attached to their risky ideological agenda. Carbon taxes, business taxes, massive job losses: it's all beginning to add up. There is perhaps no better reminder than the NDP's royalty review. Over the weekend a panel member had this message to send about the end product. Quote: I am confident that segments of the industry will remain competitive. Unquote. Translation: companies will be shutting down. How can Albertans possibly trust this Premier after the economic chaos the NDP is bringing to our province?

2:00

Ms Hoffman: Thank you for the question. We are working with industry to ensure that we optimize our royalty system to maintain competitiveness and create long-term sustainability for industry as well as for Albertans. The panel will submit its advice to the government in the near future. We look forward to receiving their feedback and making sure that we are acting as the owners of the resource and that it's certainly supporting all Albertans.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you. Well, here's another quote from the royalty review panel member: whenever you have a change of this magnitude, there are always elements of the industry that cannot be competitive. Unquote. We know the carbon tax will handicap companies. Oil well drillers have already said that without lower royalty rates, companies will be running out of this province, and now panel members are cushioning Albertans for another crippling blow to jobs in the energy sector. It's making Albertans sick. Does the Premier realize the damage her policies are doing to people's lives, or does she just not care?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're absolutely working with the royalty review committee. They will be submitting their report by the end of the year. One thing that I think is really clear to all of us on this side and, hopefully, some members on the other is that a good economy is good for Albertans. The two go hand in hand. We are certainly working with them to make sure that we take the feedback that's being gathered into careful consideration. We want a healthy energy sector for many years to come to benefit all of us.

Mrs. Aheer: We hope this idea of feedback will transfer to some of these other issues we're talking about.

Jon Schroter, the head of Victory Well Servicing, has already had to move out of Alberta because of this toxic investment environment, calling the NDP, quote: one more reason why the western Canadian oilfield is slowly going to die. Unquote. Mission accomplished for the NDP. For other small to mid-sized companies still trying to invest in Alberta, all signals are that this royalty review will either make them shut down or move operations. Premier, that's fewer jobs for Albertans out of work; that's less money here in Alberta. Does anyone in the NDP understand?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're really proud of the fact that we're continuing to work with industry on a variety of initiatives, including the royalty review as well as the climate leadership strategy, and that was endorsed astoundingly by a number of individuals in the sector, including CAPP. They want to make sure that they have a strong product that they can sell internationally. Part of that means a strong reputation internationally, and the only way we're going to have that is if the fearmongering on the other side stops and we start working for what Albertans want, which is good Alberta product and good long-term jobs.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Public Consultation

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. By now we've all learned about this government's farm and ranch consultation process. It consists of a few consult phone calls, some trust-us-we-know-everything meetings, and little sharing of the feedback received. This government only hears what they want to hear and already agree with. To the Premier: for the benefit of rural Albertans who are wondering why they were not consulted before legislation was forced upon them, what can you tell us about what your government's policy for consultation should be?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and to the member for the question. I know that after 44 years sometimes it takes time for change and what the processes are going to be moving forward. We made it really clear after the first meeting that we are going to be having cabinet ministers at the consultation meetings moving forward. We've increased the number of consultations, and we're going to be making sure that we have an opportunity to engage with individuals. Certainly, the member opposite would have every opportunity to bring recommendations forward to government or to the democracy committee moving forward.

Thank you.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let's talk about change. When I was labour minister, our government, including the agriculture minister of the day, met with farm and ranch communities on farm safety, and we were at the point where our discussions were leading to overall acceptance of some new rules. Since then, this government has gone in the opposite direction and washed away all of the trust and goodwill built up. To the labour minister: what have you done to so obviously break trust with farmers and ranchers and undo the good work that was previously done?

The Speaker: The minister of agriculture.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to the member for the question. It will give me the opportunity to clear up some of the misconceptions that are out there. We most certainly have been consulting with farming groups right throughout the summer. Acknowledging perhaps the work that the third party had done and did nothing about, we will, I assure you, take it forward with the consultations that we're going to be taking from now and moving forward to make sure we're doing the right thing.

Thank you.

Mr. McIver: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, farmers and ranchers don't agree with what the minister said.

Mr. Speaker, public relations companies are hired to sell products and push out messages. This government hired such a public relations firm to facilitate what they called a consultation in Grande Prairie. To the labour minister: how much was this PR firm paid, and was the contract sole sourced?

The Speaker: The Minister of Advanced Education.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. It's very important to us as a government to make sure that we're walking with farmers and ranchers to ensure that we hear, and it's so important that we understand the nuances of the industry. That's what we're going to do. We've changed things for the forums coming up, and I'll be attending them along with the agriculture minister.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Now, when this government was elected, there was a lot of hope – a lot of hope – that perhaps things would be different. I said “was” because it seems they're falling into the same trap that so many governments before them have fallen into. I'll take the House back to June 3, 2008, when the Government House Leader said, when dealing with a contentious piece of legislation, “I don't think that we ought to be making significant changes to policy that affects thousands and thousands of people's lives without consulting with them.” [interjections] To the Government House Leader: do you still believe this?

The Speaker: I'm sorry, hon. member. I did not hear your question because of the noise in the House.

Mr. Clark: I will happily repeat the question, Mr. Speaker. On June 3, 2008, the Government House Leader said, “I don't think that we ought to be making significant changes to policy that affects thousands and thousands of people's lives without consulting with them.” My question to the Government House Leader is: do you still believe those words?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and to the member for the question around government policy and consultation. We're certainly taking the feedback that we've been hearing after Grande Prairie's consultation into careful consideration. The meeting tomorrow will be held differently. We will continue to ensure that we have opportunities for farmers to work in partnership with the government of Alberta to support their industry.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now I'd like to share what the hon. Premier said on that same day, June 3, 2008, when she talked about consultation, saying that we need: “to consult with

those who are impacted by it. You know, work that is done behind closed doors does not count . . . as the kind of consultation that's required." To the Premier: do you still stand behind those words?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to the member for the opportunity to say again that we are absolutely taking the feedback that's been given through phoning our offices, sending e-mails, and attending the meetings into consideration. It's absolutely impacted the way that consultation . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Now could I hear your answer, please, Madam Minister.

Ms Hoffman: It's impacted the way that consultation is going to be continuing to unfold moving forward, and I thank Albertans for their feedback on that. Hopefully, everyone will be feeling better about the process tomorrow, after the meeting, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Finally, I'd like to share one last quote from the Premier, this time from May 15, 2008, when she said that the government "should talk to the people who work in the system," and that "a lack of consultation . . . will not achieve [their] goal," that "we need to ensure that we take the time to finally get change for the better." Now, this government wouldn't change legislation affecting unions, teachers, and nurses without consulting them first. To the Premier: are there stakeholders in Alberta that are not worth consulting prior to implementing legislation?

Ms Hoffman: No, Mr. Speaker. We're happy that we've had so much feedback, that there's been so much interest in moving forward. We also are going to be happy, at the end of the day, when people can . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Could you try again, Madam Minister?

Ms Hoffman: We want to work with family farms and with all different types of farms to make sure that there are so many different types, that they have opportunities to have their voices heard. There are a number of individuals that have said that they appreciate some of the assurances that will be brought forward with WCB. Some have already volunteered to be a part of that. We hope that we hear from everybody on all sides of this moving forward because we know that what farmers want is also what we want: safe workplaces and good returns for Albertans, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Spruce Grove-St. Albert.

2:10 Provincial Fiscal Position

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government's financial plan has had positive response from constituents speaking with me. The Finance minister met with economists and credit agencies last week to discuss Alberta's economic outlook. Can the minister update the House on those discussions?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to update the House and the MLA from Spruce Grove-St. Albert. I've heard a lot of things and positive responses about the budget, but I think the most important one is that today DBRS came out with a confirmation of Alberta's triple-A credit rating, and they said that we're stable. They confirmed that our government's strengths include a

strong financial position, the lowest overall tax burden amongst all provinces, and a low debt to GDP.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: in your meeting with the Conference Board of Canada and chief economists what advice did you hear on how to kick-start Alberta's economy?

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you. The meeting took place last week, Mr. Speaker. I heard that Alberta is focused on the right things, I heard that they supported our countercyclical approach to investment in Budget 2015, and I also heard that we're in line with private-sector forecasters around WTI and other things.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Horne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the sharp decline in the global price of oil this year, again to the same minister: what advice did you get from chief economists about the government's forecasting?

Mr. Ceci: The advice they gave me is to look at private-sector advisers and to see what their forecasts are. We've taken a low average of all those forecasts going forward.

They also said to stick with the program. They believe that we have to keep on top of expenditures and bend the curve on operational expenditures. They also believe that we've got a countercyclical approach that'll benefit the economy in this province in the outgoing years.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Farm and Ranch Worker Legislation Consultation (continued)

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans are frustrated with this government's lack of wide consultation. This government claims to be doing things differently, but when groups like the Western Canadian Wheat Growers, the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, and indeed the Hutterian Brethren have cause to complain, this government needs to listen. To the Premier: will this government state today that they will promise actual consultation with Albertans that are directly affected by proposed legislation rather than special-interest groups?

The Speaker: The minister of agriculture.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. I'm going to start with something that we can all agree on, and that is that safety is paramount. I think everybody in this House can agree on that. You know, I had the opportunity to talk to many farmers just out here on the steps this afternoon. I welcomed that opportunity to do so. I welcome the opportunity to consult and talk with as many farmers as I possibly can over these next few days and over the next few months, keeping in mind occupational health and safety regulations. We have 13 months yet to consult and talk with these farmers, and I very much look forward to doing so.

Thank you.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, indeed, Minister, safety is a priority.

I have a lot of friends today in the gallery and indeed outside the door. They want the government to make this Legislature a place where problems can be solved, where a level of co-operation and trust between all parties can be achieved. To the Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour: will you give more than lip service to these Albertans by actually spending time hearing their concerns today?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of agriculture.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member again for the question. I absolutely hear the concerns of these farmers. I take it very seriously. I take it as a personal responsibility, a responsibility of this government. As we've said, as cabinet members have already said today, we're taking all that very seriously, and we're moving forward. We're hearing as many farmers as we possibly can.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. member. Second supplemental.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Given that this government has no issue with creating panels to consult with ivory tower elites on climate change and indeed royalties, can the minister explain why you chose to ignore farmers' direct input? Will the minister commit to attending a public forum in Bassano on December 5 to face these farmers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for his suggestion to attend a forum in a town I hadn't known there was a forum in. I couldn't commit to that. Members might know that I lived for some years in Bassano, so I'd actually welcome that opportunity. I also welcome the opportunity to talk to as many farmers, as many farm families as I possibly can. I've had the opportunity to talk to very many – many, many – over the summer; I welcome that opportunity again. Moving forward, this is going to be the right thing to do.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Family Farms and Bill 6

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As someone who grew up on a farm, I understand that farming and ranching is a lifestyle. It is a labour of love. Small family farms are community driven, and friends and neighbours are a big part of how these farms survive when the workload reaches capacity. Growing up on a farm teaches you a great deal about life and hard work. The majority of Alberta's farms are small family operations. As an MLA in rural Alberta I'm proud to have the support of many constituent farmers, and I work hard to advocate for them and their families. I'd like to ask the minister of labour: do you support family farms?

Ms Sigurdson: Family farms are essential to the culture of Alberta. They're very important to us. I myself grew up in the Peace River country, and my friends went to 4-H. They'll continue to go to 4-H. Friends and neighbours, the culture: they'll still exist. This bill does nothing to take that away. We're very proud to increase safety on farms. That's what this bill is about. It's about safety.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that there's a big difference between a family farm and a large corporate farm or a

large feedlot when it comes to labour, to the minister of labour: how do you differentiate between family farms and corporate farms?

Ms Sigurdson: Well, it's very important for us to work out these nuances together in the consultations to make sure that we're hearing them because there's not one size fits all. It's very important for us to make sure that we listen to farmers and make sure the legislation is reflective of that. We absolutely want to work with the farming and ranching sector to get this right.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the minister for the answer. Given that you support family farms and you differentiate between them and large corporate farms, to the minister of labour: do you think you can group family farms and corporate farms into a one-size-fits-all basket for labour standards?

Ms Sigurdson: We absolutely knew that we can't do one size fits all. That's why it's very important for us to work with the sector, and that's why we're having these consultations. We very much need to work that out. We're very pleased because we know that everyone wants workers, people, to be safe on farms, and that's what this legislation is about.

Farm and Ranch Worker Legislation

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, this weekend I saw something that I have never seen before. I organized a town hall this weekend, and within 24 hours I had 184 farmers come to tell me their concerns. I saw people plead and cry over proposed draconian, government-forced changes to their lifestyle. These farmers love to do what they're doing, and if you mess with that, you're not just messing with their livelihood. You're messing with their lifestyle. How many people will it take telling the government not to do something before the NDP actually listen?

2:20

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to the member for the question. Certainly, we are keen on working in partnership with farmers throughout Alberta. There are over 11,000 farms just in the NDP caucus ridings alone, and we know that there are many on the other side as well. We want to continue to work in partnership with them and make sure that their feedback can be well received, and I thank them for doing so.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, there were 1,500 people out there telling them one message: kill the bill. We know that education versus legislation is the best approach. Given that we have the lowest farm-related fatality rate per capita in Canada – and this because no one cares more about farm safety than the moms and dads who run them – what makes this government think that mandating a government-led initiative will be a silver bullet that makes everything better given that the industry-led initiatives have been working for years and years and years?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There are different types of farms, and of course we want to make sure that no matter where you are working, you can go home at night feeling safe. I thank the many farmers of Alberta for showing their leadership over many

years. It's been 98 years since they were left as the one sector not protected by legislation, and 98 . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Just finish your sentence, Madam Minister.

Ms Hoffman: We want to make sure that workers as well as employers can feel safe at night. Farmers are often employers for their communities and for their neighbours. Certainly, the way of life is something that we want to continue to support moving forward, Mr. Speaker, and we'll do so in partnership.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, we have consulted with farms and ranches. They feel it's safe. Why can't the NDP government get this?

Given that it is already difficult for young farmers to take over the family farm, does this government believe that adding more red tape will incentivize young people to get in the saddle and take the reins of the family farm, or is this just about the government's plan to have big, unionized, corporate farms buy out the family farms?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I know that there have been a lot of misconceptions and misinformation out there. Let me be clear. Kids will still pick rocks in the summer, neighbours will still help each other out in times of strife and when they need help with their work, and . . . [interjections]

Mr. Mason: Come on, you guys.

Mr. Nixon: Well, stop lying. Jeez.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, a point of order.

The Speaker: Point of order noted.

Ms Hoffman: Albertans want to roll up their sleeves and help each other, and that will continue to be the case in Alberta. We're confident of that. What has been said is that too much time has passed where simple protections haven't been offered to workers and assurances to employers that if something tragic happens on the farm, they won't lose the farm because they didn't have supports of WCB or other types of insurance programs. We simply want to make sure that we work in partnership to make sure that everyone can continue to have successful livelihoods.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Family Farms and Bill 6

(continued)

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Over the past weekend I met with farmers and their families with tears in their eyes because they thought about the future of their way of life and our province once the NDP are done wreaking havoc. I can tell you that all that my constituents are asking for is just a chance – just a chance – for their voices to be heard before their livelihoods and their communities are attacked. To the minister of agriculture: will you acknowledge the need to actually listen to farmers and ranchers before this government attempts to ruin their way of life?

The Speaker: The minister of agriculture.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. I can assure the member that I will protect family farms to my last breath. The safety of family farms is paramount and will continue to be so. We heard from the third party earlier about the

decade of work they've done, that they've unfortunately failed to act on. I will assure you that this government will act. We'll do the right thing.

Mr. Nixon: Well, given that our province as it stands today was built around family farms and homesteads and given that any drastic changes made to the rules surrounding the 45,000 family farms in our province will have a serious and direct impact on farmers' livelihoods, their children's, and their children's children, will the agriculture minister wake up and realize that listening, not unilateral implementation of legislation without consultation, is the way to go?

The Speaker: The minister of agriculture.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the member: I can assure him that I am fully awake, and I relish the opportunity to talk and discuss with as many farmers as I possibly can going forward on this. Hearing from them, I hear their concerns. Without a doubt, I'm looking forward to the discussions at the town hall meetings, as many as I can. I can assure you that I do listen to them.

Thank you.

Mr. Nixon: Given that there is the truth about family farming and the way that it will be implemented by this government and then there is what the government is saying and given that over the weekend the jobs minister said, and I quote, that farm kids will continue to make their communities proud in the local 4-H programs, end quote, and neighbours and relatives will continue to help each other out in times of need, when you look at OH and S's own website, it says the exact opposite. To the minister of jobs: why does her ministry's website disagree with her?

The Speaker: The minister of agriculture.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for bringing up 4-H. I'm quite proud of our 4-H program in Alberta. I'm quite proud of the 4-H program right across Canada. This legislation will in no shape or form have any effect on the 4-H program; 4-H is an educational, recreational system. It's not an employer-employee relationship. Anyone who thinks that it is, I'm afraid, is sadly mistaken. As well, the culture of a farmer helping out another farmer: this legislation will in no shape or form change that.

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

Farm Safety

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The most important thing when it comes to farm safety is education. Farms are owned and operated by caring and responsible Albertans, who understand just how dangerous things could be if not treated with the respect that they deserve. The diversity of size, the diversity of product, and the diversity of cultural background of each and every farm in this province have a bearing on what farm safety looks like. Family farms strive for the safest possible working conditions because their farms are not only their workplace; they are their homes. My question to the minister of labour: can you explain what expertise this government has that Alberta farmers do not?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much to the member for the question. I know that many farmers every day are very conscious of safety and doing everything they can to make

things safe. We want to work with them to make sure that that's across the board, that there is no jurisdiction in Alberta where workers aren't safe. We'll make sure that the safety rules go ahead. We're going to do that.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Only an NDP minister of labour could equate legislation with safety as a causal effect.

Given that the Farm Safety Advisory Council has researched and consulted extensively with Alberta's farming industry to create action plans for increasing the culture of health and safety through education, certification, and training resources, to the minister of labour: what recommendations from the Farm Safety Advisory Council's 2012 report have been integrated into the government's future plans for farm safety?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of labour.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the hon. member for the question. I just want everyone to know that we're using all of the information that's already been gathered. Further, through the consultation processes we are listening very specifically to farmers about what we need to know. It's, of course, education and legislation, those two things together. Every other worker in Alberta has that, and we're going to make sure that farm workers are protected, too.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's very interesting that the minister of labour's interpretation of that safety council report is very, very different from what the authors of the report stated. Given that one of the most dangerous aspects of the farm is often machinery or heavy equipment operation and given that Alberta farmers know very well how to get the most out of their equipment for the longest period of time, will this government be implementing regulations that will require farmers to upgrade older equipment to adhere to regulatory standards?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of labour.

2:30

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. We're continuing to listen to the farming and ranching sector to make sure that we're understanding the very specifics of their sector. We want to work with them to make sure that it works for them, and we're very proud to make sure that it'll be safe for everyone. Just like workers in other workplaces, they'll be protected, too.

Thank you.

Health Services for Transgender and Gender-variant Albertans

Mr. Connolly: Mr. Speaker, transgender and gender-variant Albertans face a variety of barriers on a daily basis, not the least of which is adequate, supportive access to health care services. As someone who's very involved in the fight for LGBTQ-plus equality, I hear from people from across Alberta concerned about this issue on a daily basis. To the Minister of Health: what measures does the ministry have in place to assist transgender and gender-variant individuals seeking full access to health care?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and to the member for the question. Our government is very proud of the commitments that we've made to publicly support the trans and gender-variant community in Alberta. Of course, part of that is continuing to have budget allocations for gender reassignment surgery from Alberta Health. That's included in this year's budget. As well, we are proud of the fact that we brought Bill 7 forward as a government caucus, which passed first reading unanimously in this House last week. We're working to enshrine gender identity and gender expression as protected categories in the Alberta bill of human rights.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Connolly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that supportive medical personnel in care can be vital for the well-being of transgender and gender-variant individuals and given that transgender and gender-variant people are at a higher risk of heart disease, anxiety, depression, suicide, substance abuse, eating disorders, interpersonal violence, and certain cancers because physicians and mental health practitioners often turn away transgender and gender-variant people because of prejudice or perceived lack of skills to treat such patients, how can Alberta Health ensure that these individuals will be able to access appropriate resources?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and to the member for the question. Our government, of course, believes in universally accessible health care, meaning that we have that top-quality health care for all Albertans, not just those who can afford to pay for it. We are working to identify good models of practice for standard of care.

In Alberta there is a gender clinic at the Grey Nuns hospital, that has been operational since 1996, something we should all be very proud of. As well, in the Calgary zone there's currently a pilot project at the mediclinic, that's been operating for about a year, at the Alberta Children's hospital, which was formed with the partnership of endocrinology, addiction and mental health, and sexual and reproductive health and has demonstrated positive outcomes and a good set of evidence-based practices for care. The mediclinic pilot . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, Madam Minister.

Mr. Connolly: Mr. Speaker, given that many transgender and gender-variant Albertans are worried about beginning and maintaining hormone regimens, to the same minister: are there any plans to help make hormones more accessible?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Right now physicians in Alberta can prescribe hormone therapy to assist with transition if a doctor and patient together decide that that's the best course of action. At times Albertans are also referred to an endocrinologist to ensure that appropriate hormones are prescribed. I'd encourage all Albertans and their family physicians to contact the College of Physicians & Surgeons to identify the appropriate physician specialist to assist with ongoing care of individuals who receive hormone therapy.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Government Policies

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Words are important as they provide meaning to what we are trying to say. Words have definitions. It seems like this NDP government has trouble with definitions. They seem to have the incorrect definition for terms like “revenue neutral,” “consultation,” and even the simple word “no.” To the government: how can something be revenue neutral when it raises \$3 billion in new money? People across this province and outside these doors are against some of your most recent actions, saying no. Is it NDP government policy to not consult, or is it just the current government practice?

Mr. Mason: Point of order.

The Speaker: Second point of order noted.

Response, minister of environment.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member. If I understand the question, of course, our carbon announcements last Sunday made by the Premier referenced the uses for our carbon price, which is that every dollar that is collected in the new carbon price will stay right here in Alberta to build a new economy. An adjustment fund will help families make ends meet. It will support small businesses, First Nations, and people working in the coal industry. That is what leadership looks like. Throwing up your hands and denying the science of climate change is a thing of the past.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that this government does not have proper definitions or answers, let’s fix the problem by giving them all dictionaries for Christmas. Given that during the last election the NDP promised to review rail costs for Alberta’s agriculture industry in order to make transportation more affordable to them, maybe the next definition they should work on is “promise” because this promise was broken. To the Minister of Transportation: why are rail fuel taxes rising in your budget when this government promised to lower rail costs?

Mr. Mason: Well, Mr. Speaker, it’s pretty clear to me with respect to this matter that our taxes, rail fuel taxes are lower than in other provinces, and in difficult times it is time for all of us to pull our weight.

Mr. Loewen: Given that farming can be a difficult thing to do in that the majority of farming is time sensitive as seasonal changes dramatically affect farming actions and given that this government is interested in forcing legislation onto farmers that is ill conceived – I see that no one on the other side represents farmers, though there seems to be lots of consultation with unions – can this government commit to real consultation before passing any bill that affects our most important agriculture sector?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of agriculture.

Mr. Carlier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Rest assured that we’re going to be talking to those farmers going forward. It’s paramount that we take all into consideration for this legislation.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North West.

Farm and Ranch Worker Legislation Consultation

(continued)

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One thing that I find to be the most valuable tool to a legislator is the ability to consult, to listen, and to learn. There are 1,500 folks here today with family farms. They didn’t get consulted, they weren’t listened to, and certainly no one learned from them. To the Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour: can you tell us specifically who you spoke with who actually has a family farm?

The Speaker: The minister of labour.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. It’s very important for us to be consulting with farmers and ranchers, and we have been and will continue to. It’s ongoing and . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Please continue. I will continue to give you the necessary time until I can hear your answer, and that goes to the entire House. Madam Minister, please proceed.

Ms Sigurdson: It’s very important to us to hear and listen to farmers, and that’s what we’re doing. We’ve had one consultation, and there are eight more scheduled. If we need to schedule more, we’ll do that. Please rest assured that we’re doing that. It’s very important to us.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Consulting after the fact.

Again to the same minister: given that we’ve heard from stakeholders who report that the consultation process can in some cases be a phone call informing them of a decision or a meeting where the details of the decision are provided in lieu of asking for thoughts and opinions, can the minister provide any assurance to Albertans who are concerned that government has confused consultation with declaration?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As the minister I just want to apologize for some of the challenges that have already gone on. We have listened, and we know that we need to do things differently in the forward consultations. So we’re listening, and we’re changing the way we’re doing it. We know that this is about safety, and we all want that. We all want to make sure workers on farms are safe. I know everyone agrees with that.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister: given that a key component of proper consultation is a constant and respectful interaction between government and those affected and given that as elected officials the buck should stop with us, will you commit that the members of your caucus will attend every single consultation going forward? If not, then who is ultimately responsible for answering to this legislation?

2:40

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. The buck stops with me. I know that it’s my responsibility, and I take responsibility. I went out on Friday and listened to farmers talk about their concerns. I went out today. I’m going to be attending the consultation as well as ministers and

caucus people. Rest assured that the buck stops with me, and I'm wanting to go forward to make sure that we listen and make a plan with farmers.

Climate Change Strategy

Ms Fitzpatrick: Mr. Speaker, following the climate rally at Lethbridge city hall yesterday my constituents told me that the new climate change strategy shows that we are showing leadership to protect our health, environment, and economy for future generations. I'm proud to say that around Lethbridge we're home to one of the biggest wind farms in the province, several biogas plants, and that many constituents have solar panels on their homes. To the minister of environment: how will the new climate change strategy support . . .

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. Today the Minister of Energy and I announced our government's plan to have 30 per cent renewable energy by 2030. We were joined by leaders from Alberta Energy and electricity companies as well as companies looking to invest in building Alberta's future electricity system. We know that what we have done here has charted a path forward for a stable investment climate for renewable power and a way to transition us off coal, protecting our families' and our future generations' health.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that places like Lethbridge College currently offer training that supports growth in important renewable energy industry jobs, to the same minister: how will the new climate change strategy help expand new jobs for Albertans?

Ms Phillips: Well, Mr. Speaker, we know that investment will be the driving force behind many of the new jobs that our policies are creating. For example, the vice-president of EDF EN Canada today said, "With this announcement the province is well-positioned to attract billions in direct investment from corporations like EDF EN, growing the green energy economy and creating well-paying jobs for Alberta families." I believe that those job creators speak for themselves.

The Speaker: Second supplemental, please.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that coal-fired power plants will be phased out by 2030, again to the same minister: what are you doing to ensure that Alberta has a strong, stable, diversified renewable energy sector to support our power needs?

The Speaker: The minister of environment.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. We are working with our partners to steer Alberta towards a cleaner electricity future. Through this transition we will work in co-operation with the electricity generators and our power regulators, the Utilities Commission and the Electric System Operator, to implement these goals. The president and CEO of the Alberta Electric System Operator today said, "The AESO is confident that by working closely with government and industry, we can reliably implement the transition away from coal." That's exactly what this province will do.

Members' Statements

NutraPonics Canada Corporation

Cortes-Vargas: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise today and acknowledge an Alberta-based business venture that is five years in the making, in my riding of Strathcona-Sherwood Park. What is clear is that there are a variety of ways that many of my constituents continuously focus on local food sustainability and entrepreneurship. This manifests whether it's in our fields or in our warehouses. In this case it's in our warehouses.

NutraPonics Canada Corporation is dedicated to the development and commercialization of intensive, small footprint, high-density natural food crop production technology. I toured this facility in October, and I learned about how this process works. It contains a single aquaculture tank of fish, which supplies nutrients to 10 plant-growing bays as well as harvesting and processing areas. It covers a 38,000-square-foot warehouse, and this warehouse can provide food to over a thousand people in the constituency, Mr. Speaker.

The technology is perfectly suited for individual businesses. Its scalable, modular facilities fit any production demand. Their modular growing facilities are well suited to urban agriculture, remote communities, industrial camps, commercial developments, and even farms. There is low water utilization because they are using recirculated water. NutraPonics supplies naturally grown vegetables and herbs, functional foods, nutraceuticals, and much more. Finally, NutraPonics gives back by contributing to solutions addressing the United Nations zero hunger challenge.

Mr. Speaker, this is an exciting business and a fine example of innovative, sustainable entrepreneurship happening in Strathcona-Sherwood Park. Moreover, it's how the larger conversation of local food sustainable practices needs to be had throughout our province.

Thank you.

Bill 6 Opposition

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, there's an old saying. Put 50 farmers in a room, and you'll hear 100 opinions. That old saying doesn't ring true today because today hundreds and hundreds of farm families have rallied at this Legislature to send this government one message: stop Bill 6 and provide meaningful consultation prior to passing this bill. They're joined in spirit by thousands and tens of thousands of their friends and neighbours back home who are organizing in opposition to Bill 6. Our rural communities are very, very concerned about how this government is taking this rushed approach to this bill. This approach puts at risk their livelihoods, their homes, their very way of life. Farmers are going to have none of it. By refusing to provide meaningful consultation on regulations prior, this government has angered rural Alberta like never before.

Over the past week my office has received a flood of opposition to this bill, hundreds of calls and e-mails, not to mention the stacks of hastily prepared petitions. Family farms shouldn't have to be here demonstrating and demanding a voice. Grandmas and grandpas shouldn't have to be going seat to seat in local arenas for signatures just to protect their very way of life. But they're doing it, Mr. Speaker. They're doing it because they care about their friends, their families, their neighbours, their communities, and their way of life. They're doing it because they recognize the inherent value in that way of life and this government is choosing to ignore it.

Mr. Speaker, if the government's chief objective with Bill 6 was to organize farmers, congratulations; they've done it. This government promised change, to admit when they were wrong, to apologize for their mistakes, and fix the error of their ways, and that's exactly . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Bill 6 Opposition

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, farming is more than a job; farming is a way of life. Across Alberta thousands of farmers are rising up in anger because they see their way of life threatened by Bill 6. Already facing the usual challenges of markets, weather, and rising input costs, now farmers are facing legislation that threatens the very fabric of rural communities. This government has insisted that Bill 6 does nothing more than give farm workers the same rights afforded workers in other sectors. That sounds great, but it's not nearly that simple.

Bill 6 tries to treat every one of the 45,000 family farms in Alberta like little factories, factories that operate from 9 to 5, shut down on weekends, and stay closed on statutory holidays. It completely ignores the reality of farming. There's not a farmer that gets seeding done by working a 40-hour work week or gets harvest done by shutting down on weekends, Mr. Speaker, and I have yet to meet the cow that can plan her calving around weekends, after hours, and statutory holidays.

Let's be very clear. Opposing Bill 6 does not mean opposing farm safety. But in its present form Bill 6 goes too far too fast and demands Alberta farmers accept rules that haven't been discussed or agreed to, and this, to farmers, is completely unacceptable. It's no way to treat the people that feed us and feed the planet.

2:50

We agree that employed farm workers should have a financial safety net in the eventuality of an injury or death, we agree that farm accidents should be investigated, and we agree with common-sense rules that are supported by facts and best practices. But we disagree with rules that have no clear details and threaten the 90 per cent of Alberta farms that are family operations. We disagree with ramming this legislation through without proper consultation.

Please, delay the passage of Bill 6.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

HIV/AIDS Awareness

Ms Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Tomorrow, December 1, is World AIDS Day. It's a day to help us remember and reflect on all that we've lost. December 1 is also the start of Aboriginal AIDS Awareness Week in Canada.

It pains me to say that in 2014 there were approximately 2 million newly infected people world-wide, bringing the number of people living with HIV/AIDS to 37 million globally. While the face of HIV has changed, in Canada there is still much more work to be done to address the stigma and improve access to testing, treatment, and support.

In 2011 over 71,000 Canadians were living with HIV, and it is estimated that over 3,000 people were newly infected. It is also estimated that at the end of 2011 25 per cent of Canadians who were living with HIV did not know they were infected. If people aren't aware that they have HIV, they may unknowingly infect others.

World AIDS Day is a day to reflect on what we have achieved with regard to the national and global response to HIV and what we must still achieve. World AIDS Day is also a time for remembering those who have passed on and for raising awareness about AIDS and the global spread of the HIV virus. We have what it takes to break the AIDS epidemic. Let's all do our part to break the cycle and the stigma.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Calgary Lions Club Festival of Lights

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, 2015 marks the 29th year that the Lions Club has lit up Calgary's greatest constituency, Calgary-Klein, with its Festival of Lights. The Festival of Lights is a drive-by Christmas lights display located on the corner of 14th Street and 24th Avenue on the Confederation golf course. Of course, people are welcome to walk through the display and use the wicked toboggan hill located on the site. Otto Silzer, Lions chair, says that the display was started by the Lions as a way of giving back to the community for its support of the Lions' traditional sight-related programs such as the Lions Sight Centre and diabetic research.

While the display is always magnificent, Mr. Speaker, this year is particularly special because 2015 marks the year when the Lions Festival of Lights, which stretches over a half kilometre, is an entirely green display. With an investment of \$120,000 and over 3,000 volunteers, they converted 300,000 conventional incandescent light bulbs to LEDs. It is estimated that a string of 25 LED lights uses the same amount of electricity as one incandescent bulb.

This year's feature display is a fanciful Rudolph, which stands more than 11.3 metres high and 10 metres wide. The fanciful Rudolph fits perfectly with this year's 29th anniversary. The lights bring greetings from Santa Claus, toy soldiers, Rudolph, Frosty, misty snowmen, toy trains, and the gingerbread family. Stockings full of toys, 18 dancing Merry Christmases, 50 decorated trees, tolling bells, and trumpeting angels bring joy to the nativity scene.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Lions Club as well as all the volunteers and sponsors for this wonderful and well attended display, and I encourage all to pay a visit.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Bill 6 Opposition

Mr. W. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. All across Alberta farmers and ranchers packed town hall meetings to voice their concerns about Bill 6, and Wildrose MLAs were proud to be part of that process. We understand the critical importance of consultation, and we know that farmers want to be heard on this even after the NDP tried ignoring them. Ramming through this legislation is going to hurt family farms.

Just like in Grande Prairie last week the members opposite were absent for most of these meetings, so farmers and ranchers picked themselves up, got in their trucks, and drove here today to the Legislature. If this government was listening, they would hear them loudly but respectfully telling them to slow down Bill 6 and get it right.

These aren't the only people calling for a slowdown to Bill 6. Today the Western Canadian Wheat Growers Association said the same thing: slow down Bill 6; get it right. Even some of this government's biggest supporters are saying: slow down Bill 6; get it right. But the government doesn't want to listen.

It's no secret that this government is being run by people from virtually everywhere in the country except Alberta. Since there are no farmers in this government, let me enlighten the members opposite about what kind of people farmers are. They are some of the hardest working and most dedicated citizens. They feed us, they steward the land, and they solve some of the most complicated problems. In Alberta we're proud of our farmers, and we look for ways to support them, not attack them.

You can't just ignore farmers or hope they give up. They have the strength and courage of conviction that the members opposite couldn't even begin to understand, and when it comes to Bill 6, they have right on their side. Slow down Bill 6. Get it right. You can hear the calls coming from every corner of this province and from the front steps today. This government needs to listen.

Thank you.

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

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

Ms McPherson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, as chair of the Standing Committee on Private Bills I would like to report that the Standing Committee on Private Bills has had certain bills under consideration and wishes to report that the following private bills proceed: Bill Pr. 2, Bethesda Bible College Act Amendment Act, 2015; Bill Pr. 3, Rosary Hall, Edmonton Repeal Act; Bill Pr. 4, Canadian University College Amendment Act, 2015; Bill Pr. 6, Covenant Bible College Amendment Act, 2015; and Bill Pr. 7, Living Faith Bible College Amendment Act, 2015.

Further, the committee wishes to report that Bill Pr. 1, the King's University College Amendment Act, 2015, and Bill Pr. 5, Concordia University College of Alberta Amendment Act, 2015, proceed with amendments. As part of this report I'm tabling five copies of the recommended amendments to bills Pr. 1 and Pr. 5.

I request the concurrence of the Assembly in these recommendations. Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the member has requested concurrence in the report. Does the Assembly concur in the report? All in favour say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Speaker: Opposed, say no. The motion is carried.
The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to request unanimous consent for two items. Number one, I request, in reference to Standing Order 7(7), that we go past 3 o'clock to finish the Routine for today.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Mr. Bilous: My second request is that we revert briefly to introductions.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: Calgary-Bow, you have a report?

Ms Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table the following six letters of support for Bill 204. They are from the Elizabeth Fry Society of Calgary, CEASE up here in Edmonton, the YWCA of Calgary, Calgary Housing Company, Calgary Counselling Centre, and HIV Community Link Society. I have the necessary five copies of each letter.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today on behalf of my colleague to table a petition detailing hundreds of signatures of people across Alberta who oppose Bill 6.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'm pleased to table five copies of the Child and Youth Advocate annual report 2014-2015 in accordance with section 21(1) of the Child and Youth Advocate Act.

3:00

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Ms Hoffman, Minister of Health and Minister of Seniors, pursuant to the Health Professions Act the Alberta College of Occupational Therapists 2014-2015 annual report, the College and Association of Respiratory Therapists of Alberta annual report 2015, the College of Dietitians of Alberta 2014 annual report, the College of Physical Therapists of Alberta annual report 2014.

The Speaker: My apologies. We need to revert to Introduction of Guests.

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: Please proceed, hon. member for the third party.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three fine young Calgaryans from the riding of Calgary-Fish Creek. I ask that they rise as I introduce them. The first guest is Philip Schuman. Philip is a professional in the risk management industry, working for the third-largest insurance brokerage in the world. He also instructs at the Insurance Institute of Canada and the Insurance Brokers Association of Alberta. Outside of this busy schedule he is an active and dynamic entrepreneur, with many projects and partnerships always on the go. He also runs a weekly poetry club at a seniors' residence and is politically active and engaged, volunteering on several constituency associations, including his current role as the youngest president in the history of the Calgary-Fish Creek PC Association.

Next is Elliott Schuman. Elliott is a visual designer with knowledge and experience in various creative fields and mediums while also being active in the promotional industry. Elliott is also an entrepreneur, having just launched his new business, Alpina Visual, which seeks to provide small business and charities with affordable options in creative and original designs. Elliott is active in PC Youth, sits on the Calgary-Fish Creek PC board, and volunteers his time for several other worthy causes.

Finally, Kinga Nolan. Kinga is a politically active high school student who has been involved with a variety of federal and provincial political campaigns since 2006. Additionally, she has been in the sea cadet program for four years, having been awarded three medals for her citizenship work; namely, the Lord Strathcona medal, the Royal Canadian Legion cadet medal of excellence, and the Navy League medal of excellence. She has volunteered at a local long-term care facility, at the Royal Canadian Legion, and with sustainable resource development to help build trails and identify species at risk. Kinga has suffered from postconcussion syndrome for over 16 months. However, in truly inspirational fashion she has used this negative experience to strive towards bringing awareness to the danger of concussions in youth. She

hopes the province will consider a bill similar to Rowan's law, which is currently under consideration in the Ontario Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, please join me in the traditional warm welcome accorded to all guests.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a very great honour for me to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly five guests, that I was told were going to be here, and I certainly hope they've made it. In the spirit of the season they are five wise people who have come from the east. They're here because they have serious concerns about Bill 6, and I'm very pleased that they were able to make it: Melissa Guenther, Lindsay Westman, Helen and Tyler Nowosad, and their five-year-old son Rowdy Nowosad. They are seated in the members' gallery, and I'd like everyone to join me in giving them the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Are there any other guests? The hon. Member for Calgary-Klein.

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two Lions Club members who made the journey from Calgary today: Otto Silzer, Lions Club chair, and Alastair Smith, Lions Club member. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. members, any other guests? Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: I'd like to introduce to you and through you to members of the House Barry Anuszewski. He's a farmer from the Whitemud area, northwest of Valleyview. He drove a long way to be here. The Premier mentioned that some of the issues with Bill 6 were about giving the farm workers the opportunity to say no. Barry was at the Grande Prairie meeting and, of course, with everybody else there said no. He's here today, too, to say no. I'd like to give him the traditional warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Hon. members, any other guests?

I believe we are at points of order, and I noted that there were three today. The Government House Leader.

Point of Order

Parliamentary Language

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll proceed with my first point of order, and I will withdraw the next two. At 2:22 the hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre said to the Minister of Health something to the effect of: then you need to stop lying. The word that is considered perhaps the most unparliamentary of all is to accuse other members of lying. I want to reference, I mean, obviously, 23(h), (i), and (j), but under *Beauchesne's*, Unparliamentary Language, section 485:

- (1) Unparliamentary words may be brought to the attention of the House either by the Speaker or by any Member. When the question is raised by a Member it must be as a point of order and not as a question of privilege.

Mr. Speaker, section 488 gives a partial list of words that are considered unparliamentary. In this list, on page 146, the word "lie" is referenced 36 times. It is, I think, perhaps the most unacceptable and unparliamentary thing that can be said in the House.

I will indicate also, Mr. Speaker, that I have had numerous complaints from this side of the House of other members on the other side using this term. I have not, unfortunately, heard them and so have not taken this step until today, but I clearly heard the hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre use the word. So I would ask that the member apologize to the House and withdraw his comments.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I rise to address the point of order. From time to time in the House temperatures can rise and certain members can get a little bit excited, and I think that it would be best for all if on behalf of the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre I withdraw and apologize and ensure that he does not make accusations of the other side being liars or lying again.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I personally did not hear the comment myself. Yes, that's one way of describing it, that the temperature rises occasionally. It's usually the noise that's rising occasionally.

I should also mention, for the advice of all of the House, that I received a note of apology from a member last week who used a very similar phrase. I just want to remind all of you: please do not let the temperature rise to the point that those kinds of comments take place in the future.

You had another point of order, Government House Leader, or did you withdraw it?

Mr. Mason: I withdraw those. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Point of Order

Items Previously Decided

The Speaker: Hon. members, I have a report which I considered at the last sitting of the House, last Thursday, and I reserved a ruling on a point of order raised by the Government House Leader. The point of order was raised in connection with a question asked by the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, which can be found on page 646 of *Alberta Hansard* for last Thursday.

I wanted to review *Hansard* before deciding on this point of order as it is in his preamble to the main question that the member referred to an amendment in Committee of Supply that was proposed to the estimates of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and was defeated. In arguing the point, as found on page 650 of last Thursday's *Alberta Hansard*, the Government House Leader cited *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, at page 617, for a principle that a question once decided by the Assembly cannot be questioned again.

3:10

Although not mentioned in the discussion of the point of order, the principle referred to by the Government House Leader is in fact incorporated into Standing Order 23(f), which states as follows:

- 23 A Member will be called to order by the Speaker if, in the Speaker's opinion, that Member . . .
 - (f) debates any previous vote of the Assembly unless it is that Member's intention to move that it be rescinded.

I have reviewed *Hansard*. The member's actual question did not refer to the vote on the estimates, what transpired in Committee of Supply; therefore, I must rule that it was not a point of order.

However, even though questions may not violate the rules, I want to remind the member and all members that preambles should be tailored to comply with the usages and practices of the Assembly and relate to the actual question. Hon. members, there have been instances when I might have risen and have drawn your attention to that. I particularly want to advise Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition that on future comments you be conscious of that.

Go ahead.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for that recognition.

I wish to advise the House that notwithstanding what's on the Order Paper, there will be no evening sitting tonight.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Orders of the Day

Written Questions

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

[The Clerk read the following written questions, which had been accepted]

Alberta Health Services Employee Earnings

- Q1. Mr. Barnes:
As of April 1, 2015, how many Alberta Health Services employees earned more than \$200,000 per year in salary and total benefits?

Student Learning Assessment Spending

- Q6. Mr. Smith:
How much has the government spent on the student learning assessment pilot projects for the fiscal years 2010-11 to 2014-15 and from April 1, 2015, to November 30, 2015, and what are the details of what the money was spent on?

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

Alberta Health Services Surgeries and Procedures

- Q2. Mr. Barnes asked that the following question be accepted.
For the fiscal years 2012-13, 2013-14, and 2014-15 how many surgeries and procedures were postponed in each Alberta Health Services facility?

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I wish to have an answer to this written question for a number of reasons. In the three and a half years that I've been the representative of Cypress-Medicine Hat – and I'm very grateful for the opportunity to serve – other than the furor around Bill 6 and the lack of consultation with that, other than the previous government's attempt to harm our property rights, easily the most consistent and enduring complaint and concern of over 42,000 constituents has been the two to three years of waiting to get an elective or a semi-elective procedure done, often to be cancelled at the last moment, often to be delayed further, months into the future.

There is great compassion that I feel for these people, that other Albertans and taxpayers would feel. Of course, there are all the surgeries and procedures that are not elective. How often do those get postponed? How often does some very needy, worthy Albertan fall through the cracks?

You know, it's compounded when I jump into my car and turn on the radio. For any one of Medicine Hat's five quality radio

stations easily – easily – the number one paid advertiser is a Montana station from Great Falls or Kalispell saying: Albertans, come here; no wait time; we'll do your surgery. Then there are a number of Albertans, a number of Cypress-Medicine Hatters, that come into my office and tell me how they spent \$13,000 to \$17,000 to get a rotator cuff fixed or \$23,000 to \$29,000 to get a knee or a hip fixed rather than wait the three years. Madam Speaker, these are the kinds of things that we have to measure. We can't manage it unless we accurately measure it. These are the kinds of things that Albertans need to have control over and Albertans need to have better results in.

Part of the reason why I also feel that this question is very, very pertinent is the recent New Democrat budget. We've hit \$19.7 billion in annual health care spending, almost \$12 billion of it to Alberta Health Services, escalating at over 6 per cent a year, and we're not getting the measured outcomes. So let's measure the outcomes. Let's make the system more accessible for all Albertans.

I would also add that in the recent budget, Madam Speaker, 700 full-time equivalents were added to Alberta Health Services, without the oversight, without the direction. Again, I think that one of the key areas that our New Democrat cabinet can look at is: let's see how many surgeries and procedures were postponed in each and every Alberta Health Services facility, where these facilities are now receiving, coupled with the Alberta Health Services money, \$19.7 billion of our hard-earned tax money.

Madam Speaker, that's why I seek the answer to that question.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Minister of Seniors.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker, as well as to the member for bringing forward the written question. Certainly, the intent is, I think, worth responding to in a factual way. I want to make sure that we can get the actual information that's being sought, so I have two very small amendments that I would like to move with regard to question 2. The first is by striking out the words "and procedures," and the second is by striking out the word "facility" and, instead, substituting the words "high volume surgery site due to system capacity issues." I'll provide some rationale on the wording of the proposed amended written question.

Would now be an appropriate time, Madam Speaker? Thank you. So the question would read:

For the fiscal years 2012-13, 2013-14, and 2014-15, how many surgeries were postponed in each Alberta Health Services' high volume surgery site due to system capacity issues?

There are a couple of reasons why I think this is pertinent, Madam Speaker. One is, of course, that we don't perform surgeries on people who aren't healthy enough to be able to have them done. So there are some times when test results will come back and will require that a surgery not be provided that day, that it would have to be postponed because of patient need. But I'm proposing, to get back to the original wording, striking the words "and procedures" because it's not actually defined for data collection and monitoring purposes. Surgery certainly is, but procedure is not something that is used to track or that is well defined within our tracking systems.

I am also proposing to amend the question to specifically high-volume surgery sites because those are sites where Alberta Health Services currently maintains information on postponed surgeries. To be more specific, AHS collects information and data on the top 20 sites where surgeries are most likely to be, the top 20 areas of volume. So there are, certainly, areas where we do have that data and would be able to share it. AHS is working towards an integrated operating room reporting system to get better data for operational

purposes and reporting to the public just as has been motivated by the member who asked the written question.

I look forward to providing the member with further details related to this question in our written response, but these are the two amendments that I'm proposing today to make sure we can give you a timely response and an accurate one, Madam Speaker.

3:20

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat on the amendment.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you to the Health minister for your answer. I appreciate it. I can accept that the word "procedures" was maybe not detailed and focused enough and that surgery is, you know, more direct and maybe easier to measure.

Limiting it only to high-volume surgery sites greatly concerns me. We have seen since the creation of Alberta Health Services and the centralization eight or nine years ago the lack of engagement, the lack of autonomy, the lack of authority, and the lack of success. Compassionately, the human resource side is a mess in rural Alberta, where good front-line workers can quite often not get answers to their questions, cannot become involved in making the system better for all Albertans. To me, 20 high-volume surgery sites suggests that once again some rural providers, some rural hospitals may fall through the cracks.

In today's electronic world, where – my goodness – we can track so many things, I can't imagine that a corporation with 110,000 employees and \$12 billion of our money can't make this wherever surgeries are performed, wherever hard-working Albertans are willing to let their tax dollars go to make our system better.

I'm wondering, hon. minister and Madam Speaker, why the minister wants to add the words "due to system capacity issues." You know, in some ways it clouds the answer. I also believe I've seen the hon. minister quoted as saying that many of the problems in our health system now are systemic, so maybe that means they all are going to be caught in this situation.

I appreciate that we all want a system that works compassionately and well for all Albertans – all Albertans – that need our jurisdiction to be the great provider that it can be and should be, and it starts with accurately and comprehensively measuring where our tax dollars are going now. So I would ask members of the Legislature to vote against the amendment and to stick to the original question. Please, let's have as much quantifiable information as we can to ensure we help all Albertans, urban and rural.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to the amendment?

[Motion on amendment carried]

The Deputy Speaker: Any further members wishing to speak to the written question itself as amended?

Seeing none, the hon. Minister of Health to close debate.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to my colleagues for their understanding around the current reporting structures and also to the member, who proposed that we not support the amendment, for his feedback around data tracking moving forward. It's certainly something that I will raise with my officials around the smaller facilities.

In terms of the root of the question I think it's in terms of the system that surgeries are being delayed, not in terms of the health outcomes. I know that to test blood, make sure your white blood cell counts are at appropriate levels so you can recover from a

surgery and that it won't put you at greater risk: I don't think the House is interested in information that's based on medical need. It's based on system need, so that's the rationale for that amendment, which was just supported.

Thank you to my colleagues. I appreciate the feedback.

The Deputy Speaker: My apologies, hon. members. It was the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, the mover of the motion, that was to close debate, so I will call on that hon. member now.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thought that was great, too. That's great, and thanks to the Minister of Health for her commitment to get some measurables so that we can actually make the system better.

Again, my concern is clearly with the rural divide and the needs that so often, the further you are from the centralization, can be overlooked. If the problem is systemic, we don't need that part added to the question. Just bring us the information, and let's measure it in a way that – again, I think of the people that have waited two, two and a half years for a surgery that have it postponed at the last minute, and they hear it's because our system didn't have the capacity to handle other emergencies or handle the overflows that are in the acute beds. You know, when it's about the money that goes in, it appears to be rationing a system and forcing people out of our jurisdiction, who have worked all their lives in Alberta. I think the very least we owe them is a measurable and a commitment to make it better.

Thank you.

[Written Question 2 as amended carried]

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

Alberta Health Services Overtime Payments

Q3. Mr. Barnes asked that the following question be accepted. What was the total cost of overtime payments to all part-time employees of Alberta Health Services for the fiscal years 2012-13, 2013-14, and 2014-15?

Mr. Barnes: Thank you again, Madam Speaker. I just want to talk about two primary reasons that I ask this written question today. First of all, again, in Cypress-Medicine Hat and when I go around the province, dedicated, intelligent, caring front-line workers tell me time and time again that the centralized system has moved them from a situation where they can have authority and autonomy to ensure that needs are met quicker, more cost-effectively, and, obviously, something very important in the medical profession, more effectively. I think the whole premise behind centralization, or one of the major premises, was to save money. From what I hear about overtime costs throughout our system, I think the light that this question could shine on our spending could be enormous. It could be very, very helpful in the measurement we need going forward.

You know, I hear about the story – and I think I've said it in here before – where a front-line worker, a maintenance person, needs a little bit of glue, and four weeks later a whole case comes down from Edmonton. Then I hear front-line workers tell me about the overtime costs and how they see it and how they can't believe the inefficiency. Again, we're here for good, effective programs. We're here to compassionately help all Albertans when they need it, but we owe it to the hard-working taxpayer to get as much value for these programs as we can.

The other part of this question to the Minister of Health, the NDP cabinet, Madam Speaker, is that it's hard to find too many of our

good front-line workers who will say that they are happy in their job. I am concerned. I am very, very concerned about the human resources impact that this centralization is having on our good front-line workers. Using Medicine Hat as an example, I'm told time and time again that 10 years ago, when we were regional and we always came in on budget, if you had a problem, you could go into the minister's office, the administrator of the hospital's office, or to one of the people in charge and have a resolution in 20 minutes and then go about your day. That's why you wanted to be there serving and helping Albertans in need. Here's what I'm told happens now. An answer goes up the chain, usually no answer comes back, and if it does, it's five or six weeks later, and it's usually inconclusive.

3:30

Madam Speaker, we've got this big, big centralized system, which we sought for stability and cost savings. We've seen, with people quitting, with the appointment of yet another board, that the stability is very, very much in question. As I've just detailed, you don't have to walk too far in any Alberta Health Services facility to find human resources teetering on the edge as well. I'll bet you that when we look at the total cost of overtime payments to all part-time employees, we will find considerable waste and a lack of resources in the way that they should be. So that is why I would like to see the answers to this question and an effort to be more compassionate for the needs of Albertans.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Seniors.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It probably wouldn't surprise the House to know that before Alberta Health Services became one health region, there were multiple, different payroll systems that were deployed in the various regions, and for that reason, of course, in terms of data gathering and comparative data it makes it highly labour intensive. I don't think that the intention of this House is to create highly labour-intensive initiatives for public servants who are working in the organization but is, rather, to have information to help guide future decision-making. I want to say that I commend the position from where I think this request is coming.

I do have an amendment. Basically, I want to strike the words "2012-13," but to do that, I have to strike all of the years, 2012-13, '13-14, and '14-15, and substitute "2013-14 and 2014-15." The rationale is that that data simply is not easily accessible for 2012-13 because of the multiple, different payroll systems. So I doubt that it would be the intention to spend considerable HR resources, that could be spent on addressing some of the concerns that the hon. member has just brought forward, to gather information from before there was one consolidated system.

The good news is that by having the move forward to one system, we have much more easily accessible data like the payroll data around overtime payments from one system. AHS has moved from these multiple legacy systems that existed with the former health regions to one, single province-wide system, so it certainly is going to make this request and any subsequent request – I imagine that this might be one that might come up on a regular basis – easy for us to be able to provide the information on in a timely fashion and consistently.

Just to clarify, the amendment is to strike "2012-13, 2013-14, 2014-15" and substitute the words "2013-14 and 2014-15." The amended written question would read as follows:

What was the total cost of overtime payments to all part-time employees of Alberta Health Services for the fiscal years 2013-14 and 2014-15?

That's the rationale for the amendment.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat on the amendment.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you again, Madam Speaker. I'd like to thank the Health minister for that answer. Certainly, transparency costs money and is always worth it, but in the interests of moving forward, in the interests of the commitment to gather the information and go forward, I would ask the House to accept this amendment. Let's go forward, build on that, and use this information.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to the amendment?

If not, the hon. Minister of Health and Minister of Seniors has moved an amendment to Written Question 3.

[Motion on amendment carried]

The Deputy Speaker: Any hon. members wishing to speak to the written question as amended?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat to close debate.

Mr. Barnes: Just again, thanks to the Health minister for the commitment to making, you know, our measurements stronger in there. In the three and a half years that I've been here, it's sort of frustrating and interesting that so many Auditor General reports start with the words: cabinet failed to have enough oversight. I encourage you to put in the measurables to make our very, very important health system as good as possible for those that need it. Obviously, we all will someday, our families and our friends. I appreciate the commitment to that and your commitment to electronic health records as well. It's nice to hear that that's high on our list as well. When I'm out talking to Albertans, it's important that we have this system developed and we have a system that is there for all of us. Again, I ask everyone to support the question now, and I look forward to going forward with this.

[Written Question 3 as amended carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Distracted Driving Violations

Q4. Mr. Cyr asked that the following question be accepted.
How many tickets were issued for distracted driving violations pursuant to sections 115.1 to 115.4 of the Traffic Safety Act, broken down for the period from September 1, 2011, to December 1, 2011, the calendar years 2012, 2013, 2014, and from January 1, 2015, to August 31, 2015?

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The reason we're moving this question forward is that I've talked with several law enforcement agencies across the province, and they're bringing forward concerns that distracted driving convictions are increasing. The only way to find that out is by actually writing a question. That's pretty much exactly why we're moving this forward.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I would like to thank the hon. member for his written question, and I would like to propose an amendment that Written Question 4 be amended by striking out "tickets were" and substituting "convictions resulted from tickets that were." The amended written question would read as follows:

How many convictions resulted from tickets that were issued for distracted driving violations pursuant to sections 115.1 to 115.4 of the Traffic Safety Act, broken down for the period from September 1, 2011, to December 1, 2011, the calendar years 2012, 2013, 2014, and from January 1, 2015, to August 31, 2015?

The reason for the amendment is that Alberta Transportation does not receive data on the number of tickets issued for distracted driving violations but only the resulting convictions. I want to indicate that I think, based on what I heard the hon. member say, that this will be sufficient for his purposes because it's actually what he's after.

I wanted to just conclude, Madam Speaker, by saying that distracted driving is unacceptable, dangerous, and puts everyone on our roads at risk. Between 20 and 30 per cent of all collisions are due to distracted driving, so it's clear that more work needs to be done, and our government is committed to doing that work. We have increased fines under the Traffic Safety Act from \$172 to \$287 for distracted driving. Those charged with careless driving could face fines of up to \$543.

I would like to make this amendment as requested, and I want to also indicate to the member and to the House that we are pursuing distracted driving demerit points through regulation. That is a key disincentive for repeat offenders, some of whom are happy to just pay a monetary fine. Actually, the demerits provide a real disincentive over a longer period of time for distracted driving. We are committed in moving in this direction.

I thank the hon. member for his question with respect to this matter. Thank you.

3:40

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, do you wish to speak to the amendment?

Mr. Cyr: Thank you. Thank you to the hon. minister. I would agree that this clarification of my question does add clarity, and I would thank him for that clarity and would ask all of my colleagues to accept this amendment.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to the amendment?

If not, I have to call the question.

[Motion on amendment carried]

The Deputy Speaker: On Written Question 4, any other hon. members wishing to speak to the question?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake to close debate.

Mr. Cyr: I'd like to close debate.

[Written Question 4 as amended carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Alberta Health Services Employee Earnings

Q5. Mr. Cooper asked that the following question be accepted. For the fiscal years 2009-10 to 2014-15 what was the total amount and the amount at each level paid to employees at the management and executive levels in the Alberta Health Services central zone?

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The reason why I proposed this question is that there are some who believe that the costs of management are increasing greatly. Oftentimes it's difficult

to get answers in the midst of question period debate, so I wanted to provide the opportunity to the Minister of Health to give some indication to all members of the Assembly of just exactly what's happening in the central zone.

I've had a number of folks contact my office that are front-line workers, who share some concern with the perceived growth at the management level and that the front lines of the hospitals in the region aren't seeing the sorts of supports and resources that they believe are critical to ensuring that they can provide a level of service that Albertans expect, that certainly members of this Assembly expect, that we on this side of the House expect, and, I'm certain, that members on that side of the House expect but who at the same time are quite frustrated that they see multiple layers of bureaucracy growing and growing and growing. So I said that I would be happy to ask to see just exactly what that looks like, and then it will provide us an opportunity to continue the debate around levels of management.

I know that, specifically, I've had individuals highlight some concerns about what it takes to get a job posted and, like my hon. colleague from Cypress-Medicine Hat mentioned, what it takes to get some glue or other supplies, some of the inefficiencies that these multiple layers of bureaucracy have created.

It's a small step just to try and get a sense of what's happening at that management level. It's unfortunate that finding the information is so difficult that we need to take it to this step, but I look forward to the minister being forthcoming with all of the information that is available to her.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Some of the information is difficult to access; other information certainly is not. For example, the executive level compensation is posted on the website. Part of this is very easy to access. It's through the audited financial statements. But we'll be happy to gather that information in a way that makes it more easily digestible for all members of this House.

I do have a slight amendment: first, by striking out the words "management and executive levels" and substituting "executive level," and then later, after the word "zone," adding the words and what was the total amount paid to management in the Alberta Health Services Central Zone commencing the fiscal year that Zone reporting and the single, province-wide payroll system (E-People) took effect up to and including the fiscal year 2014-15.

Just for a little bit of rationale, Madam Speaker, I'm proposing the amendments because the information requested is readily available at the executive level in schedule 2 of the AHS audited financial statements but not readily accessible for the management level. For management pay requisite data can be provided for the central zone starting with the first available fiscal year when both zone reporting and the single province-wide payroll system e-People came into effect, so not dissimilar from the amendment we voted on for Written Question 3, which I believe was 2013-14. Certainly, we can gather that information for the executive and management levels and return it to this House in a timely fashion.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills on the amendment.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I might just say that late last week, on Friday I believe, the chief of staff to the Health minister did call and provide a bit of an update that this may be the direction that the minister would like to go, and for that I would just like to say thanks. All too often in this place we have a fairly

adversarial approach, so from time to time when we can work on areas of mutual benefit or concern, it's always enjoyable. I would love to see the government take more direction, if you will, from the opposition. I know that might make them a little nervous, but at least, perhaps, the government might listen just a little bit more, and we could actually have more of these types of exchanges, which I think would be better and not worse.

Having said that, I just wanted to very briefly highlight – and I don't want to pile on – some of my concerns that got us to this point. I must admit I was surprised on Friday to hear the extent of the work that the department would have had to undertake if the amendment hadn't been accepted, just in terms of trying to go through old paper records and finding boxes of files. It's surprising to me that it was only, really, just a few short years ago that this information became so readily available, and I hope that the new government can continue to make a commitment and then follow through on that commitment to a more open and transparent government in terms of information.

I know, certainly, that on this side of the House that has been and that would be our desire. Should Albertans ever trust us to form government, we will be advocating at every turn to try and find ways to make information that should be available to people readily available to people and to be able to access it where appropriate. Obviously, we don't think that, you know, personal details of every employee of the government should be released publicly, but where appropriate we should be taking steps to move in that direction.

I thank the minister for reaching out to us. I express my disappointment that the question can't be answered, because much of the concern of the constituents in Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills certainly began around that time frame that was written into the question. Having said that and knowing that the information is extremely difficult to garner, I will encourage members on this side of the House and all members to accept the amendment as presented by the Minister of Health.

3:50

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to the amendment?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment carried]

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to the question?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills to close debate.

Mr. Cooper: With brevity being close to godliness or something like that . . .

An Hon. Member: That's cleanliness.

Mr. Cooper: Oh, cleanliness. I sometimes get these things wrong. . . . I'll close debate.

[Written Question 5 as amended carried]

Motions for Returns

[The Acting Clerk read the following motion for a return, which had been accepted]

Alberta Health Services Severance Payments

M2. Mr. Barnes:
A return showing a list of all severance payments made to Alberta Health Services employees at the management and

executive levels, broken down by each individual position, for each of the fiscal years 2012-13, 2013-14, and 2014-15.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Construction Projects

M1. Mr. van Dijken moved that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing for the period from April 1, 2007, to March 31, 2015, a list of all the projects identified in each of the published Alberta Transportation three-year tentative major construction projects lists that have not yet been contracted.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm asking Alberta Transportation to provide a list for the last eight years outlining all of the projects that were not contracted yet published in the Alberta Transportation three-year tentative major construction projects lists. This is an exercise in accountability. These lists were not sunshine lists. They provided a snapshot in time of what may have been the transportation projects in a three-year forecast if something more important didn't arise.

By identifying the projects not contracted over this time frame, Albertans will be able to hold Alberta Transportation to account for some of the most important projects not done. Not only this, but Albertans will start to understand the scope and magnitude of the infrastructure deficit at Alberta Transportation by seeing all of the projects that were priorities that suddenly became no longer priorities. Madam Speaker, there may even be an opportunity to identify political projects on these lists. Highway 19 has been promised to be twinned for two or three elections now, and it still has not happened. The latest list has the highway 19 twinning project broken down into smaller sections.

Madam Speaker, this request is very simple. It may take a junior clerk or an intern summer student a week to check against the road optimization and decision-making application database and compile a new list for distribution. I trust that the hon. Minister of Transportation will see the valuable service the compilation of this list will provide to himself and his department as they strive to serve Albertans better each and every day.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation and of Infrastructure.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I, unfortunately, will ask for this motion for a return to be rejected. The Transportation department tenders hundreds of projects through each year. As this is a continuous process, the list of uncontracted or untendered projects is ever-changing and is, therefore, only valid on the day it's produced, particularly for the current construction program. The department does not keep historical records of what projects went untendered on an annual basis.

Although our list of major construction rehabilitation projects over a three-year cycle is updated each year after careful planning and is available to the public on the Alberta Transportation website, how many projects are contracted and completed in a given year or when exactly a project is contracted depends on many factors, including the project priority changes and what new projects come onboard; the length of the construction season, which depends very much on weather, as we all know; environmental issues; market

capacity for material; unexpected land- or utilities-related challenges; industry and sector capacity; and the evaluation of projects for cost-effective delivery.

As a result, some projects may be delayed, some may be combined with other projects for cost-effective delivery, and some may be cancelled. To produce the requested list would require going through Alberta Transportation's contract system to check the status of about 1,500 projects. Additionally, changes were made to the contract system technology in 2010, so the time required to retrieve earlier data would be even greater. This would be very time consuming and, I suggest, not a very effective way to use an already busy staff who are working hard to move these projects forward, and that is our priority. If the member is interested in specific projects, we would be happy to work with him or other members to make that specific information available.

I would urge all hon. members to vote against this motion. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to the motion? The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise to speak in favour of my hon. colleague's motion for a return. While we've had a fair amount of co-operation in the first number of questions – and for that I'm grateful – I think that the other thing we're seeing is that governing can be quite difficult and finding answers can be quite difficult. I wish that I had before me some of the comments that the Minister of Transportation has made in the past when it comes to rejecting motions for returns or written questions because I certainly have been privy to a number of times when members of the NDP, while they were in opposition, stood up in this place and were extremely frustrated and disappointed in the government when they would reject a question out of hand all because it was difficult to answer.

While I appreciate the challenge – I think the number used was 1,500, and that is a big number – some of that information is vitally important to Albertans, and as my hon. colleague mentioned, the truth of the matter is that it could be very valuable to the department to have a sense of contracts that they tender and that they don't and exactly where they're at in the process, particularly on a year-over-year basis, so that it can help them in their planning. So not only is it good information for us to have, it's also good information for the department to have. It allows them to plan on a year-over-year basis. It allows them to decide when they should and shouldn't be sending things for tender and exactly what processes they might need to be refining so that they can move forward in a more effective and efficient manner.

When we reject a question out of hand like this, the challenge is that it gives the illusion or the sense that there's information that the department has that they're trying to hide not only from opposition members but from Albertans and particularly folks like the road builders association and others who are concerned about the status of our roads. I know there are lots of counties that are concerned about the status of bridges and the overall condition of roads and maintenance. This is a really good opportunity for the department to come forward with that information, to provide information to all of those folks that might like to have a better sense of the direction of the department and also provide the opposition with the information that we require in order to do our job.

4:00

We've seen the Minister of Health work as well as possible with members of the opposition to try to come to a mutually agreed upon solution when it comes to the question that's being asked, and I find

it a little bit unfortunate that the Minister of Transportation wasn't able to do the same. While he mentioned in his remarks that some of the even older information is significantly more difficult to track down and to go back and find, I am certain – I wouldn't want to speak for my hon. colleague, but I might just say that it would be my best guess – that if the hon. member had proposed some form of this question so that we could get a sense of the direction of the department, he too, like the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat and myself, would be agreeable to getting any piece of the information we're hoping for.

It is a little unfortunate, and it is for these reasons that I will be supporting the motion as written and not the fact that the government will be rejecting this request for information out of hand.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the motion?

Seeing none, the hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock to close debate.

Mr. van Dijken: Yes. Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's been identified by the minister that this appears to be too onerous a job to actually get completed and that it would be too time consuming, but from my understanding of the road optimization and the decision-making application database, that's already been compiled, I fail to see where it would be too onerous and not offer good information for the department and also, then, for Albertans to know where we are at with these projects. So I would continue to encourage everyone to vote in favour of this.

[Motion for a Return 1 lost]

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 204 Residential Tenancies (Safer Spaces for Victims of Domestic Violence) Amendment Act, 2015

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms Drever: Thank you, Madam Chair. I have an amendment to present, and I have the required copies to distribute.

The Chair: The amendment shall be known as amendment A1.
Go ahead, hon. member.

Ms Drever: Thank you. The amendments proposed were made after discussion I've had since the introduction of my bill in an effort to increase protections for tenants as well as those they care for. The amendments are as follows. Section 2 is amended by adding the following after clause (a):

(a.1) by adding the following after clause (j):

(j.1) "protected adult" means an assisted adult, represented adult or supported adult as [those terms are defined] in the Adult Guardianship and Trusteeship Act.

This amendment will extend the protections of this bill to not just include children under the age of 18 but would also protect those whom the tenant cares for, whether they be a dependent blood relative or someone that the tenant is a caregiver for.

Section 4 is amended in the proposed section 47.2(1) and in section 47.3(1) by striking out “when a person or that person’s dependent child” and “or that of a dependent child of the tenant” respectively and substituting the newly added clause including protected adults.

In the proposed section 47.4 in subsection (2)(b) there is a similar substitution, again to include protected adults. Again, in the proposed section 47.4 the amendment adds the following after subsection (4): (5) the designated authority shall issue a decision with respect to an application for a certificate made pursuant to subsection (1) within seven days of its receipt.

These are high-risk situations, and we need to ensure that applicants for these certificates are not waiting around for weeks to know whether they can flee without the financial repercussions. This addition ensures that they will receive a response no later than seven days after the application.

These amendments offer more protection to the survivors and those they care for. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to the amendment?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Chair: Back to the bill as amended. Are there any comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Acadia.

Ms Payne: Yes, Madam Chair. I rise to introduce an amendment to the bill, and I have the requisite number of copies.

The Chair: This will be amendment A2.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Ms Payne: Thank you. I am pleased to rise to table the following amendment on behalf of the Minister of Service Alberta. The bill will be amended as follows. Section 10 is struck out, and the following is substituted:

10 This Act comes into force on Proclamation.

This government amendment, to delay implementation of Bill 204 until proclamation, will allow for consultation on regulatory development to begin in January 2016. Time for regulatory development and consultation with affected stakeholders will allow government to implement Bill 204 effectively and properly and ensure that all stakeholders understand their roles in protecting tenants who’ve experienced domestic violence. Service Alberta expects consultations and regulatory drafting with key stakeholders, including landlords, certified professionals, and women’s organizations, to take six to eight months.

I implore my colleagues to support this amendment, and I commend the Member for Calgary-Bow for her fine work to support and protect victims of domestic violence across Alberta.

The Chair: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to amendment A2? The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just rise for a very brief – I won’t say that, just in case it’s not. I rise to speak to amendment A2. Part of my concern or frustration is that we’ve seen an amendment proposed before the House, and we are all going to need to make a decision on that in the next few minutes. There’s a pretty high likelihood that at the end of me being on my feet, the government isn’t going to continue debate. I don’t know how many of my hon. colleagues will also be rising, but the challenge is that we received this amendment approximately 35 seconds ago – that’s

untrue – at the beginning of the hon. member’s discussion. It’s my guess that prior to her rising, she had a very good sense that the Minister of Service Alberta would be proposing this amendment. It makes some significant changes to the way that the bill will be rolled out.

4:10

We have seen some co-operation in this House earlier. In fact, the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow had the opportunity and shared some of her amendments or some of her hopes for her bill earlier with the opposition, which allowed the opposition time to review, to think about, to consider some of the ramifications of the amendments that she just proposed. As we saw, the opposition felt that there were a number of good things here, but the benefit is that we had the opportunity, prior to a couple of minutes ago, to review those and then to make the decision that we didn’t have much to add specifically to the amendments. We saw them voted on in this House by members of this side and members of that side, and the bill can move forward. I think that that is a healthy process.

The hon. member talked about consultation from the time that she introduced the bill until today, which has been a number of weeks. We’ve seen some of the positive things that can come from consultation, and we’ve seen the government – perhaps the government could learn a lot from this hon. former colleague and, it’s my guess, someday to be a colleague again on a day very soon. Not that I would speculate, but if I was, that would very likely be the case. So we might just, in fact, see her back on the government benches, and perhaps that’s going to be a win. The hon. member gets the need to reach out to stakeholders and potentially deviate course on a bill and an amendment, and we saw that, but what we haven’t seen on this particular amendment is any reach to the opposition.

We heard the member rise and speak about the need to change the proclamation date so that they could consult on regulations. If, in fact, there is this great need to consult on regulations, we on this side of the House have been very clear over the last number of days that this is exactly the type of thing that needs to be done prior to making law because so many of the details of a bill are often tied up in the regulations. What regulations do is that they give cabinet essentially carte blanche ability to make whatever changes they see fit as long as it fits within the framework.

We’ve seen the government propose an amendment that makes significant change to the rollout of Bill 204. Let me be clear – let me be very clear – that members on this side of the House and, as we’ve seen in the past during debate, members on that side of the House fully support Bill 204. Today, as I stand here, I continue to support Bill 204 and much of the very, very, very important work that Bill 204 intends to deliver upon.

The frustration is around the government’s lack of desire – and I say the government’s lack of desire because it was moved on behalf of the Minister of Service Alberta, who is not a private member in this Assembly – to consult. They certainly didn’t even mention it in passing to the opposition, that this might be something that you want to consider and be prepared for. We’ve seen legislation move through this House quite quickly from time to time, and today very well may be another example. So it is extremely difficult for me under such short timelines to understand the full ramifications of what moving the date of proclamation around does, particularly in terms of consultation on regulations and some of the details and the nuances that will be required because of this bill. It’s because of that that I certainly won’t be able to support this amendment.

I know from consultations with members of the community in Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills that what they had hoped we would do, certainly me and, I would expect, many members of this Assembly, is to be able to provide thoughtful consideration to

legislation that's placed before the Assembly. Submitting amendments mere moments before expecting members to vote on them is not what our constituents expect. What they expect is for us to be able to provide thorough, thoughtful review that at the end of the day will ensure that our province is better tomorrow than it is today.

While Bill 204 does many of those things – and let me be clear. At third reading, barring any massive new surprises in amendments from the government, I will be proud to stand in this Assembly and support Bill 204 and all of the good intentions that it does do. But I will not be supporting an amendment that's placed before the Assembly with no prior consultation, with no discussion with the opposition. We saw this last week as well. It's becoming a trend.

We have also seen the government make some errors when they haven't taken the appropriate time. I don't want to dig up old challenges, but 7.25 per cent comes to mind. Bill 203 comes to mind, when the government went one way and then stopped to go another. Lots of times that happens because they haven't taken the time to listen to the opposition. They haven't taken the time to properly consult, which is exactly what we're seeing in government business on Bill 6, and are creating significant concern.

So I will not be supporting the amendment as presented. I would encourage others, when it comes to considering legislation thoughtfully, that's it's very difficult to do in just a matter of moments.

The Chair: Any other hon. member wishing to speak to the amendment?

The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to speak to this amendment. I guess I, too, have conflicting thoughts here. I'm very much in favour of the spirit of the bill. But, quite frankly, I'm frustrated by the process, as a succinct statement. I am pleased to see that the Member for Calgary-Bow has tried to put forward a piece of legislation with the intent to make a hopeful and a helpful and a meaningful impact for victims of domestic violence. To be clear, violence is evil. I am totally, truly in support of the intent of the bill. Albertans escaping domestic violence already face a lot of substantial barriers to a safe and healthy life. A dangerous living situation can actually be made worse by sort of the systemic issues that this bill desires to change.

4:20

Sometimes people just need to leave the situation that they're in, pick up and go, so to speak. When a situation is unsafe, it's really not fair to expect Albertans to put themselves or their family in harm's way, which is what sometimes going back to a residence means. Often the perpetrators of domestic violence will still be at the victim's home when they come back from a shelter or a hospital, and we just don't think that that would be appropriate, to expect them to have to go to an unsafe place. As legislators it is our responsibility to ensure that Alberta's most vulnerable really do have a means to protect themselves and their families regardless of the economic issues. This is really a core of what it means to believe that violence is not appropriate in our society. Just because a person can't afford to break a lease shouldn't mean that they're bound to stay in an abusive situation.

So while I think that the bill has noble aims – and I will support it, as I said at the very beginning – my point is that I'm very frustrated with the process not just for this bill but the pattern of the process. I do believe that there are opportunities to make this legislation more complete. What I'm frustrated with is to see bills continually presented and then, "Oh, withdrawn; we forgot to put

this in," and before we even get to discussing them, a whole raft of amendments are thrown at us. Surely, these things should have been thought of before the bill was handed out and presented.

The reality is that a really good intent that's done in a wrong way doesn't produce a good result. I think what we're seeing here with bills being presented or motions or whatever being presented and then, "Oh, let's take it back and change something," maybe change a whole bunch of things, as with the bill we saw the other day, 24 different amendments to it, is that there is a lack of consultation. There is a lack of considered thought going into these things. They're being thrown out like I don't know what, and I am frustrated with the process. This is not a professional way for us in the Legislature to be presenting bills that change people's lives. I just wish we could slow things down and think through them well enough so that we don't have to change them before we even start discussing them. That's my biggest frustration.

I would like to suggest, though, that in light of that, there are some areas – and I throw them out for consideration – to be thought about because I do believe there does need to be consultation on this bill, that there are some important discussions that need to be had here rather than just rushing forward with it. There are a number of nonprofits in the service sector that do help victims of violence who have actually written and made suggestions to us. I think they need an opportunity to be heard. I think the bill can be made more complete. I'm glad to hear that at some point there will be some sort of consultation. The reality is that it probably should have happened before we got to this stage.

One of the points that's been made to us by one of the foundations in Calgary is that the bill makes no provision for accountability on the part of the abuser. They go on to say that they would recommend that the bill not be put forward for second reading and, further, that inclusive consultations with service agencies would actually take place. I actually am glad to see that implementation will be delayed somewhat so that some of this could happen. But, again, I think the process here – I mean, it's continually getting the cart ahead of the horse, pushing things forward and then having, "Oops, we need to change that," before we can even deal with it.

A second suggestion again from the same organization. Their concern is that parts of the way this bill is written may in fact in the end reduce the number of available places for rent to victims of violence. Why? Because they may in fact be shunned and passed over in the rental application process when some landlords figure out that they're dealing with those kinds of situations, and then they have this bill. I think there just needs to be more thought put into bills before they're put forward. I think one of the essential principles of law-making is that they should be just, that you should do no harm, and I agree. I understand that's the intent of this bill, no harm for one segment of our society, truly a vulnerable segment. At the same time sometimes in our enthusiasm to protect one group we turn around and we create injustice for another group.

We have those who have said to us that in its current form – actually, the Calgary Homeless Foundation has suggested that in its current form landlords are exposed to a great deal of risk from those who may seek to exploit the program. I think that it's possible to mitigate some of these risks while still maintaining the intended protections for those who are vulnerable and those who are victims of abuse.

May I also suggest in that regard that the reality is that many landlords are amateurs. They're not professionals. They're not slumlords, as sometimes they're caricatured as. In fact, a growing number of landlords in our province at this particular stage in our economic cycle are people who have lost their jobs, some who have gone elsewhere to get work. They've got their house. It's underwater in terms of mortgage. They can't sell it. They want to rent

their house out. The truth is that many of those landlords have no idea how to actually rent a house. To be honest, many of them don't even understand the landlord and tenancy regulations. Furthermore, many of them, quite frankly, are good, gracious, and I'm going to say sometimes timid people who don't want to offend, who don't want to be abusive, who don't want to be hard with tenants.

As a result, all too often – and I'm sure many of you know stories and experiences of the horrors of being a landlord – you can be taken advantage of. You can end up with people that you can't get rid of. You can end up with people who do thousands of dollars of damage and then leave in the night and you have no idea where they went. Amateur landlords, what I think of as homeowner landlords, who don't understand the process, who don't understand the rules, often get taken advantage of, beat up, and abused and spend nights in tears and fear and lose thousands of dollars over it.

There are seniors that I know of who in an attempt to try and fund their income have actually moved into smaller places, tried to rent out their house, but again they're not capable landlords in some cases, and they get taken advantage of. I don't know. Sometimes the landlords are also abused, and I think that there needs to be a justice that goes for all people.

I just suggest that it needs consultation, it needs thinking.

An Hon. Member: Then vote against it.

Mr. Orr: I'm going to vote against the amendment. I will vote for the bill because I think that the spirit of the bill is right. I just wish it was written well in the first place. I wish all the issues were taken into consideration before a bill that's half thought through is thrown out for everybody to approve.

So I will vote against the amendment in principle, but I think that in principle it's the right thing to do. Let's just do it properly. That's all I'm saying. When nonprofit agencies who care for abused people are sending letters saying, "We have concerns with how this bill is going to be implemented," it causes me to sit up and listen. I cannot vote for the amendment, but I will vote for the bill because I think that it is an important bill and I think that we should move forward on it. I just wish we could see a process in which things would be handled a little bit more clearly and professionally.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much. I just want to rise very briefly to address some of the comments that have been raised. I mean, obviously, this amendment is intended to make it the case that, in fact, the bill doesn't come into force until proclamation. It's a fairly short amendment. It's fairly straightforward. The reason that it's not going to come into force until proclamation is because we would like to consult on some of these very issues. This is an amendment that has been moved by the government to a private member's bill.

I just want to say that I actually think that some of the member's comments with respect to the bill from the Member for Calgary-Bow are overstepping a little. I think that she's done a very good job with this bill, and I think to say that she proposed a bill that was slapped together or unprofessional is a little bit unfair to her. I think that she's done a very good job. I think that, you know, people have proposed some amendments to that bill that will make it easier to move forward. We're all co-operating, and I think that we're working very well together.

Those are my comments. Thank you.

4:30

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-North West.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm going to support this amendment because I like the idea of going back and making sure that all the t's are crossed and the i's are dotted. In doing so, I think one of the things we find when we look at putting legislation together – and this has happened in a lot of cases – is that as we come up with the final product, there are oftentimes people who come forward and bring out a thoughtful change. I think intelligent leadership is looking at those changes and saying: okay; that actually makes the bill better. I actually believe that you don't have to necessarily assume that a bill is slapped together when amendments are brought forward. I prefer to think of it as making thoughtful changes in order to make a bill better.

In this case, I was happy to see this bill, and I believe, in speaking with the member who proposed it, that the idea behind bringing in the amendment that the act comes into force on proclamation is just to be able to get some checks and balances in place so that when the bill actually is used, there is an opportunity for people to use it in the right way. That's why I'm going to support this.

I want to actually talk about something, and the member brought it up. I think it was the concept that there could potentially be discrimination against people once there is a bill like this. I'm going to go out on a limb here and assume that you're talking about single moms. I find it a little bit disturbing that there would be a conversation about the potential of keeping single moms out of rental facilities because there is an assumption made that they are in that situation because they're a victim of domestic violence. I would also say – and I say this as a single mom – that if a situation arose where any woman in the province felt she was being kept out of a rental facility because someone made that assumption about her, I would hope that she is able to come forward to the government, report that landlord, and that landlord would face punitive measures for their behaviour.

When we have positive legislation such as this, I think that we have to put aside that need to nitpick, and I think we have to move forward with it and understand that sometimes some checks and balances have to happen afterwards, but in this case, I think – not every piece of legislation is perfect, but having a discussion about it, making some changes as you go through the process, and moving it forward so people in this province, so women in this province can use it and be protected by it I applaud. I applaud the amendment. I applaud the bill. Let's just get on with it.

The Chair: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to amendment A2?

If not, I'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A2 carried]

The Chair: We're back on Bill 204. Are there any further comments, questions, or amendments to be offered with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to speak in favour of the Residential Tenancies (Safer Spaces for Victims of Domestic Violence) Amendment Act, 2015. Domestic violence is an unacceptable societal wrong, which we must all stand up against. Often victims are forced to stay in dangerous living situations because of financial reasons, putting themselves and often their dependants in harm's way. This bill proposes an approach to help mitigate the financial burden of breaking a lease due to domestic violence.

My office has received some concerns about this bill which have led me to make the following minor amendment. This amendment is merely a housekeeping formality, which I've actually spoken about with the member already, to attach a statutory declaration to the attested statement. I believe this will provide concerned landlords the insurance that this process is monitored and is subjected to a strict . . .

The Chair: Excuse me, hon. member. Can you ensure that the amendment is brought to the table here before you continue with it? We need the original copy.

Mrs. Pitt: Okay. Do you want me to wait?

The Chair: Just until we at least have it here.
The amendment will be A3.
You can proceed, hon. member.

Mrs. Pitt: I'm actually just going to read the amendment. I move that Bill 204, Residential Tenancies (Safer Spaces for Victims of Domestic Violence) Amendment Act, 2015, be amended in the proposed section 47.4 by adding the following after subsection (3):

(3.1) A statement made under subsection 2(a)(ii) must be in the form of or accompanied by a statutory declaration attesting to the veracity of the statement.

I urge my colleagues to support this motion with this common-sense amendment, and I thank the Member for Calgary-Bow for putting forward this piece of legislation.

The Chair: Any hon. members wishing to speak to amendment A3? The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Madam Chair. Just a couple of questions for the mover of the amendment that maybe she could respond to. I guess the concern might be that the steps that would be required to obtain a statutory declaration may be difficult to achieve by someone who's under the stress of family violence and trying to move out and protect their kids and so on. Could the hon. member speak to how a statutory declaration might be obtained and how somebody under considerable personal stress might be able to accomplish one in a timely fashion?

Mrs. Pitt: That's a fair question. It was actually one that was discussed when this amendment was first proposed within the caucus. I mean, the intention is to sort of satisfy the stakeholder groups, the landlords in this situation, while still making sure – the intent of the bill is to protect those fleeing domestic violence, that they are having an easier time getting out of those situations. It's actually quite easy to have a commissioned letter free of charge, too, in most places. I'm sure that it won't be that difficult in that situation as well, understanding, too, that a lot of times these situations aren't actually immediately, that night, that this is something that has been in the works possibly for a couple of days, weeks, months, whatever the situation may be. But city halls offer, free of charge, services for this; I believe there's somebody always at a police station as well, so it won't create an extra barrier in this circumstance.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm looking at the amendment, and I have some additional questions. The amendment says, "A statement made under subsection (2)(a)(ii) must be in the form of or accompanied by a statutory declaration attesting to the veracity of the statement." Now, I noticed that in the initial bill as presented, the declarations are provided by members of various

professional organizations. I think the College of Social Workers is one of them. Now, I am a member of a professional organization myself. I'm a member of APEGA, the professional engineers and geoscientists association, and when I make professional statements, my stamp and seal are the standard that I'm held to. I trust that my colleague from Calgary-Foothills can also attest to that because I know that he is also a member of APEGA. It seems to me that just having a written statement from a member of a college or a professional association should be good enough.

4:40

I'm just wondering why the Member for Airdrie is not willing to take professional people practising within their scope of practice at their word and why they're putting this additional hurdle in front of people when professional members of these professional associations are providing their professional opinion, which they have to be held to account for according to the code of ethics that they operate under. It just seems to me that this might be an additional hurdle to the people who are seeking this kind of declaration. As well, it degrades the value of the professional services that the people on the list are providing. So I'm wondering if the Member for Airdrie could provide some more clarification on those points.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: I would be more than happy to. Thank you. I first of all would like to start off by saying that I have great respect for all persons with professional designations. That's not quite the issue here. When a document has had a statutory declaration, the person who is responsible for signing that document can actually go to jail in a case of fraud whereas persons with a professional designation don't have that level of accountability . . . [interjections] – sorry; I've not finished that sentence – as much as somebody who has actually commissioned the document. That's just the way the law is. It in no way is meant to be or add any additional barrier to a person fleeing domestic violence. It's just adding a layer of accountability during this process so that this is, in my opinion, a really good piece of legislation.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Gold Bar, then the hon. Member for Calgary-North West. Or Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Chair. I caught a case of the cold sweats when you suggested that I was from Calgary.

In response, then, I can't speak, of course, to the processes that are in place for the members of the professional associations and colleges that are listed in this particular bill, not having been a member of any of those associations at any time in the past. However, speaking from my own experience as a member of a professional association that does have a code of conduct and ethics, that all members have to abide by, I can say that the range of penalties for making false or misleading statements as a professional member of this professional association includes administrative penalties, letters of warning, and can range all the way up to having my professional designation revoked, which in essence means that I would no longer be able to practise as a professional geologist if I was found to make false or misleading statements in a professional document.

You know, I have no particular desire to go to jail, and I don't think that any members of any professional associations require that kind of penalty hanging over their heads to dissuade them from making false statements. Professionals or professional members are bound by a code of ethics. By and large, most members uphold those at all times that they're doing their work. I fail to understand

how this is going to prevent somebody from making a misleading statement. In fact, I think it's a quite serious allegation against those professional associations to suggest that the codes of ethics and the regulations that those members have to abide by aren't sufficient and that we need to go to the level of requiring statutory declarations so that people can go to jail if they're making false or misleading statements.

I guess I'd like the Member for Airdrie to suggest to me why she thinks that the professional associations that these members in the bill are members of aren't doing their job well enough to encourage compliance with the law and why she feels that additional steps are necessary here.

The Chair: Hon. Member for Airdrie, did you wish to respond?

Mrs. Pitt: I do. I just want to add that this is something that's done in other provinces. It's commonplace; it's best practice. That's it. That's all. It's very simple.

Ms Jansen: I have to say that I've heard in the past from my Wildrose colleagues and from their leader that they didn't want to legislate on social issues. I get it; you don't like it. You're uncomfortable with it. But I find it unbelievable that your critic on women's issues would look at this bill, and the first thing that comes to her mind is: how do we protect the landlords? I think these folks seriously need to look at their list of priorities. When they're thinking about a woman leaving a situation where she is a victim of domestic violence and it's clearly stated in the bill who she has to talk to, they come up with an amendment suggesting that we need to protect the landlords. Unbelievable.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms Drever: Thank you, Madam Chair. I thank the Member for Airdrie for the amendment, but domestic violence is on the rise in this province. This bill addresses one of the barriers that currently stops survivors of violence from breaking the cycle of violence. We ensured that those lists of those able to write the third-party statements included professionals from communities in both rural and urban Alberta.

In rural communities, for example, having to make a declaration or to take an oath, as this amendment suggests, will create another unnecessary barrier to receiving help. In rural Alberta it is already difficult for survivors fleeing domestic violence to be able to get the help they require, which is why additionally seeking a commissioner to validate the statutory declaration on top of finding a professional from section 47.3(3) may have the unintended consequence of deterring a survivor of violence from taking the first step to break the cycle of violence.

The professionals on this list are individuals that deal with survivors of domestic violence on a daily basis, and I have the utmost confidence in their ability to decide on whether to issue their third-party statement. This amendment, although proposed with good intentions, will add additional barriers, especially to rural Albertans, and for that reason I ask that the amendment be defeated.

Mr. Clark: Very briefly, Madam Chair, I don't know what can be said beyond what was said by the hon. Member for Calgary-North West. I'm maybe not quite as charitable as my friend here from Calgary-Bow, but this is a ridiculous amendment and deserves to be defeated.

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

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Madam Chair. I want to share in my appreciation for the previous comments on this. I am, like the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, somewhat concerned at the aspersions that are cast on professional organizations. I am a physician, and I believe I am actually listed in the act as somebody that could sign this. To have an aspersion cast upon whether or not I would be faithful in pursuing my activities is reprehensible. I would feel the same if you'd cast aspersions on my colleagues in social work or psychology or nursing.

4:50

I think what's important is that women in this situation have the ability to remove themselves from the situation, and that's what this bill is about. It's not about people trying to game the system. These are women in crisis. Whatever this Legislature does, it needs to protect the most vulnerable. I would ask the Member for Airdrie or a member of that caucus to justify the comment that a statutory declaration can be acquired for no cost. I don't think that that's true. But if it is true, I would like to have the information so that I can pass it on to some of my constituents that might need that information in the future.

The Chair: Any further speakers to amendment A3? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Fitzpatrick: I wasn't going to say anything. I thank the member across from me and the mover of this bill and the other people who have spoken against this amendment.

My kids are alive, and I'm alive. This amendment would put myself, my children, or any other woman in that position in jeopardy. Please vote against this amendment.

The Chair: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to amendment A3?

The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Cortes-Vargas: The irony of what's happening here, the fact that we weren't consulted about this amendment: that is not common sense. The common sense that happened here was the bill that was introduced, which protects people from domestic violence in a way that is feasible by having social workers, by having the people that are already working get them out of that situation into a better place. That's common sense. What this amendment does is that it creates another barrier, and it shows that you don't understand what the issue is.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Madam Chair. I feel compelled to rise to some of the comments that have been made in the Chamber. When I was first elected to this illustrious Chamber, I sought out to achieve the use of a legacy building that was abandoned in the small town of Youngstown, Alberta, to be used as a women's shelter. To the Member for Calgary-North West: I do know, and I have been involved. Many members in this Assembly will know and can learn that you can sign commissions. That's part of your role as representatives. You can sign commissions as a member of the Legislature. That is some of the role that we can do. So I think that some of the misconceptions and some of the emotions that are being brought forward here are unfair. This caucus is simply trying to improve a piece of legislation.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Madam Chair, thank you. Let me be clear. We support Bill 204. We support women fleeing domestic violence and

all of the horrible things that come with that. To say that we don't is a challenge. I just want to be clear that at no point in time was it the intention of this caucus, at no point in time was it the intention of the Member for Airdrie, at no point in time was it the intention of any member of this House to create barriers to women fleeing domestic abuse. It certainly is and was our intention when the amendment was proposed that it would not create those sorts of challenges and barriers in the future.

The Chair: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but the committee now must rise and report pursuant to standing orders.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 204. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

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

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed, say no. So ordered.

Motions Other than Government Motions

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

Microgenerator Regulations and Policies

506. Mr. Feehan moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to amend the necessary regulations and policies to encourage microgenerators to contribute more renewable electricity to the grid such as locally generated wind and solar.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I rise today to put forward Motion 506. I am very pleased to have an opportunity to speak to this particular motion and idea here in this House as I think it is very consistent with the movement of this government in its climate leadership initiative and continues the work that is being done by the government in a particular area, and that is the area of microgeneration.

Some 10 years or so ago new regulations were brought into this Legislature that allowed individuals, communities, and small farms to begin to provide electricity through various sources such as solar and wind and, most importantly, to be connected to the electrical grid and allow their generation to be contributed to the larger society around. At the time this was a dramatic change, allowing individuals to move on their beliefs and contribute to the larger society in a very particular way, focused on climate change, on responsible electricity generation.

We were very pleased that that legislation was brought in at the time, and now we're asking, as the legislation is coming due for renewal on December 31 of this year, that we revisit these regulations because so much more can be done than was previously done in the regulations introduced earlier. In particular, there are a number of limitations on the amount of generation that is allowed

for individuals, whether they be an individual home or perhaps a farmer wishing to generate his or her own electricity or perhaps in the area of community leagues in the cities or in small towns throughout the province.

5:00

One of the limitations that was introduced at the time was that one could not be compensated for any more electricity than you actually consumed yourself, which meant that, at the very best, houses in the city or on farms throughout the province could simply generate enough electricity to pay off their own electrical bill. Of course, a laudable regulation at the time, but so much more is possible.

Now we have reached a place where wind and solar and many other forms of microgeneration have become viable for the average person. We can now put solar onto our house and be able to actually expect to pay the cost of that solar panel in a reasonable lifetime of our home. It means now as well that we have to consider something new, not simply that people are able to take care of their own contribution to the change in climate and to be responsible electricity users. Now we've reached the point where they can actually be contributors to the whole province and be part of a solution that goes much beyond themselves and their own personal needs in this situation.

We've reached a point where a farmer may be able to put solar out into his field and may be able to put solar onto the roof of his barn and generate enough money to not only pay off the costs of his or her electrical use on the farm but also generate small amounts of income to help sustain the farm over time. Given our deep concern for the family farm in the NDP we would really like to see an opportunity for them to be able to generate that kind of electricity and to be able to contribute not only to the environment, which, of course, they're very dedicated to as farmers, but also to the neighbourhoods in which they live and all of the electrical use in the communities they depend on to go and get their groceries and so on. This is a great opportunity for us.

There are a number of other regulations that I could go through, but each of them essentially is focused on the same point, that it's time. It's time that we not only have people able to take care of their own needs but that we invite every single person in this province to become part of the new economy that we are creating here in this province, the economy that is not dependent solely on the roller coaster of oil revenues but, rather, on a renewable energy production system that would involve not simply a few big companies but every single household.

Imagine, if you will, a community that every household has solar on the roof. Imagine that every farm has wind out by the barn. Imagine that every community in Small Town, Alberta, is able to use a biomass generator to generate their own electricity. What we have, then, is an opportunity for people all over this province to feel like they are contributors, to assist in this move forward from the economy in which we've lived for the last 44 years into a bold new economy, an economy that is already true in many other places in the world. Places like Denmark and Germany are already in a place where their renewables are producing enough electricity to account for full days' worth of electrical use in some of those countries on occasion. We, too, can be part of that.

As part of this, it gives us an opportunity as well to begin to develop the technology, the resources, the production lines, the training necessary to ensure that we become the leaders in international, global renewables and the installation of microgeneration.

Right now we are in a terrible place where we're watching other countries do things that we are moving away from. We are reducing

our coal usage. We'll be completely out of coal usage by 2030, and we're watching at the same time countries like China build more coal plants. We need to set an example for them. They look to us for the type of living that they want to have. They see across the ocean, and they say: that's the middle-class living that we want to have; therefore, we are producing more and more electricity using coal because we want to have that middle-class living. Because we are the models of middle-class living and we do such a good job of it, it's a requisite upon us to make sure that that middle-class living is indeed a sustainable, long-term form of middle-class living. Simply doing what we've been doing for generations over and over again, we have learned, is unsatisfactory. Climate change is real, climate change is man made, and it is time for us to establish a new way of being that the rest of the world can adopt in becoming sustainable members of the whole world community.

This is our chance. I'm asking that we all in this House support the opportunity for people to come forward to develop the new green economy, to develop the opportunity for farmers to make a few dollars, for community leagues in the cities to be able to make a few dollars, and for small towns to be able to make a few dollars, all of which will sustain them financially and also sustain them in terms of providing work in the new green economy locally, in their situation, in their homes. This is a great opportunity for us. I'm thrilled to have an opportunity to do this.

Some 23 years ago, when I built the home that I live in now, we built a home to R-2000 specifications here in the city of Edmonton. As a result, we have felt like we've been contributors to this new, modern world. Unfortunately, at the time that we built the home, the individual who built our home, a well-known net-zero home builder in the city of Edmonton, told us that it just wouldn't work to put solar on the roof, that we'd never be able to reclaim that amount of money. So we didn't choose to do that, and now I find myself here in the House saying: let's change these regulations so I can go back and revisit what I wanted to do some 23 years ago and turn my house into a net-zero house. Everything else about it is ready. It's an R-2000 registered house with the federal government. All I need to do now is generate enough electricity, and I can actually stop polluting.

Thank you. I appreciate it.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to the motion? The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you Madam Speaker. I'll be brief. I'd like to congratulate the member from the government caucus. It's the first green initiative, I think, that they brought forward that doesn't directly cost jobs. So congratulations on that.

You know what? I think the thought behind this is okay, so I'm not going to criticize the member for that. I think that his intentions are good, and I will even admire his grand vision on where this could go. I think the motion on its face is not a bad thing, but I think that when we go forward and green the planet and do all these things, we need to always make sure that we're not doing more harm than good.

What I like about the motion is that for those people that produce, if I understand it – I hope I do – more electricity than they can consume, they can sell it to the grid. Beautiful. If that's what it is, that's beautiful. If it's to have solar panels on every house in the world, maybe. Here's the problem. Again, as I think I understand it – and I'm happy to be corrected by someone with better science than I've read – solar panels are a good idea because the sun provides free energy. On the face of it, it is free. But solar panels have issues, I understand, because it uses up the rare-earth minerals that are available at a higher rate than they probably ought to be for

what they produce. Nonetheless, for those that do experimental things, if they're going to produce the electricity anyways, why not let them put it into the grid? Great. Windmills have issues. When the wind is blowing, the electricity is essentially free, and the motion says that if you're going to produce the wind energy anyways, you should be able to sell it into the grid. Good idea.

All the new technologies start out with problems, but you don't get past them unless you experiment, at least with the new technologies. For those that put solar panels on, great; let them sell it into the grid. Let's study those solar panels so that we get to the point where we know that solar panels are good. For those that produce wind, let's let them put it into the grid while we study the windmills and we look for better ways to have windmills work and every other technology, too. As far as that goes, it's fine.

5:10

I probably wouldn't be quite as giddy as the member making the motion, assuming that the current technologies are that good that it's going to take us into the future. I would say that with every technology for more green energy that comes up that while we're studying it, we might as well let people put the energy into the grid. We should always be trying to do more research so that we can get better, cleaner, purer forms of energy, and for that, I'll say that I just wouldn't want anybody to make the assumption that this is any magical answer.

A lot of these technologies have good intentions. I mean, the first battery-powered cars and maybe the ones now: I think it was proven that the environmental damage might be more than the environmental good because of the problem with recycling the batteries after the life cycle of the car. Nonetheless, the intentions were good, and great for trying that.

I applaud the member for his good intentions. If it is what I think it is, that those who produce electricity be allowed to sell it into the grid, beautiful. I just wouldn't be quite as giddy as the member was that made the motion.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Environment and Parks.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise, of course, in support of this motion. I note that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford went through a list of things that we could imagine: imagine if we had a world where we had more solar rooftops, imagine if we had small family farms producing their own power, imagine if we had community leagues or First Nations producing their own power and taking those input costs out of the functioning of their communities. I would submit to the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford that I disagreed with none of what he said. However, I don't think that we need to imagine anymore. I think that the time has come in Alberta to act. We can act, we can do, we can move beyond imagining, and we can lead.

We heard during the panel process a great deal about micro-generation, a great deal about the possibilities. These were, in fact, some of the conversations with the public that were the most animated, that were the most real for people. Certainly, in the consultation process, in the technical engagement sessions, Madam Speaker, we heard as well from the renewable energy industry on this matter of microgeneration. But more than that, we heard from municipalities on this matter, we heard from First Nations on this matter, and we heard from the agriculture and forestry industries in the technical engagement sessions on this. We also heard in the buildings and houses technical engagement session a great deal of interest in moving our microgeneration policies beyond their

current straitjacket of one megawatt into a more fulsome policy where we might realize some of the gains that other jurisdictions have begun to realize.

This is about more than simply feeling like we are doing the right things for small businesses, for our agricultural producers, for our forestry industry, for our First Nations, and for municipalities. It's about taking input costs out of their budgets. It's about smoothing out many of their electricity costs and other costs of undertaking the business of their organization such that they may focus their efforts on other important works: if they are municipalities, then focusing their efforts on issues related to reducing housing and homelessness, for example; if they are landlords for low-income housing, ensuring that they may keep rents affordable. These are all ways that organizations might benefit from such an undertaking as amending the microgeneration regulations, Madam Speaker.

We also heard in the engagement sessions, both in the public consultations, in which almost a thousand Albertans participated, and in the online written submissions, which numbered close to 500, a great deal about community power, about geothermal, bioenergy, and waste to energy. Again, Madam Speaker, these are community-building initiatives in which there is a great deal of entrepreneurial energy, that previously the government of Alberta had taken a pass on, essentially let it pass them by. We are interested in those job-creation opportunities. We're interested in that entrepreneurial activity. We are interested in the spinoff effects that such trades and other manufacturing jobs could have across the province.

Dr. Leach's panel did recommend an amendment to the microgeneration regulation, and, you know, in principle we liked that idea. The question then becomes, Madam Speaker, how to do it and to ensure that we are making the right policy design changes, that we are doing so carefully and thoughtfully in ways that ensure grid stability, to ensure that we have accommodations for later times once we have future advances in things like energy storage, that we have an appropriate regulatory framework for such undertakings, that we have the appropriate interaction with the transmission system. So that is the kind of work that our government will now undertake within the rubric of the overall implementation of our climate change leadership strategy, a leadership strategy that, I might add, is receiving local, national, and global acclaim for its collaborative nature.

One of the things that we heard loud and clear was that Alberta had previously not had an energy efficiency strategy or much in the way of a renewables overall strategy or framework, Madam Speaker. So those are undertakings that we will now examine through the work of the Ministry of Environment and Parks. Part of that will mean that we will make commitments to Albertans with respect to energy efficiency and what they can do in their own homes, and part of that will be these matters of microgeneration.

We've heard a great deal since launching the climate process in June on the possibilities for individuals, for small businesses, for First Nations, for municipalities, for farms and ranches, for forestry operations, and we believe that those dreams ought not to be dreams anymore. We believe that they should become reality, Madam Speaker. I think we heard a great deal in many ways from Albertans on this because this presents a democratization of power. It puts power in the hands of people.

Given that independence is a distinctly Albertan virtue and a value that all members of this House hold dear, I urge all members to support this motion.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak in favour of this motion. I note that this is something that we put out in the Alberta Party climate change plan, called Alberta's Contribution, last week, so I'm pleased to speak in favour of this. I'll note while I have the floor one more time that we are the only party on this side of the House that has actually put out our own climate change plan in addition to a full shadow budget. So I do look forward to seeing both of those from our friends if not in this go-round, then next.

But that's not what we're here to talk about. What we are here to talk about is microgeneration, of course, which I'm here to speak in favour of. Clearly, the one megawatt limitation was far too low. I concur with my hon. colleague, that this is the future of generation, and it's also part of that transition away from other forms of energy.

Now, I note that my hon. friend from Calgary-Hays noted that there are some challenges with microgeneration of solar and wind, but I can tell you that there are challenges in the generation of any kind of electricity, most notably coal-fired power. The impact of coal-fired power is of significant particulate matter in terms of pollution, a significantly higher portion of carbon emissions, which I give this government credit for taking steps to tackle.

I will cede the rest of my time, but I wanted to be on the record as speaking in favour of this motion. I encourage all members of the House to do the same.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

5:20

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today with enthusiastic support for Motion 506. I'm only sorry that he beat me to the punch. I am a renewables junkie. It's been my vocation for a lot of years. I am just thrilled that we are going to take a good, long look at the microgen act, and I'm hoping that at the end of the day, we just take the cap right off that sucker and throw it out the door.

I'm pleased to see this motion. Wildrose believes in practical, cost-sensible solutions to fight pollution on all fronts, and this is one of those lovely little things that can really do a major job on pollution of all kinds, not just greenhouse gas emissions. I know we focus on GHGs all the time, but frankly there's a lot more to pollution than just GHGs. Let's be honest about that.

I really look forward to having some sort of mechanism in place to reduce electricity demand by developing market-based mechanisms rather than subsidies, that encourage conservation and efficiency to allow our businesses, our co-ops, and individual Albertans to sell locally generated electricity from their cogen – wind, solar, biomass, or any other of the many alternatives that are out there – and move it back into the grid. Granted, that's not without challenges. We're going to need some very major changes in how our grid is currently managed and metered, as the member would know.

Now, this government recently announced the results of a climate change panel, and there didn't seem to me to be a sense of the technological and practical difficulties that make that plan kind of costly and, in my opinion, infeasible in 15 years. But if we were to take the cap off microgen, we just might squeak it in there. We'll see.

I am surprised, also, that this first truly sensible move since our government came into power, regarding the greening of Alberta's power grid, has come to the House through a private member's motion. But I'll take what you give me – right? – and I'm pleased to see a sensible proposal with the potential to really profoundly and positively impact Alberta's power generation.

We have a risky investment climate right now with this government and some of the plans that they've been throwing out here. We've got a call for 5,692 megawatts to be replaced by 2030. That number does not account for the expected growth in our demand for electricity of about 500 megawatts a year. Every time someone brings up numbers and facts, of course, it seems like those aren't really taken seriously, but this amount of power is enormous to just make up in 15 years. Although, in my opinion, this NDP government has been halting a lot of further industrial growth in Alberta – it certainly seems to be their plan – replacing 5,692 megawatts is a pretty daunting task if we're just going to be tackling that at a utility scale, that requires billions and billions of dollars of investment. It's going to be difficult to attract that kind of money here.

There's something else that I wanted to bring to everyone's attention in the House here. You know, I realize that coal has been vilified a whole lot, but I want you to know something about the last couple of coal plants that were built. Maybe this hasn't been brought to the attention of members opposite, but when it comes to particulate emissions, the last coal plant that was built, that came online, I think, in 2011 or 2012, actually has fewer particulate emissions than combined-cycle natural gas. Yet we're going to prematurely retire that thing, and the billions of dollars that the company is going to come after the people of Alberta for in compensation, that are going to come out of our pocket to unnecessarily retire a coal plant like that are to pick up what? In fact, it removes more particulate than combined-cycle natural gas. So why retire that thing so prematurely when there isn't any particulate gain and, efficiencywise, it's almost as efficient? It just seems kind of silly to me to be spending that kind of money.

Energy infrastructure has a cost, and that cost is amortized over three to five decades. The energy infrastructure that we're talking about for gas, for example, is going to cost about \$3.3 billion in infrastructure.

There are a couple of other things here that I wanted to cover just briefly. To give you a little bit of an idea about the scope of replacing the amount of power that we're going to retire out of coal, we're going to need something between seven and nine times more wind than we currently have. That's substantial. Coming at this from the microgen point of view, it seems to me that it puts all Albertans now at work, and everybody and anybody that wants to contribute to the grid can if the changes are made appropriately in microgen. That is going to cause, though, a little bit of a problem, and that is the variable nature of so many renewables coming on and going off and coming on and going off the grid.

I've talked to some of the stakeholders about the current system that we have managing our grid. They're not sure that a high renewables fraction – I'm sure the member understands "renewables fraction" – can be accommodated by the current management system. That's going to be a cost. That is going to be a cost. You've got to admit that, right? You see. He's admitting it. There you go.

There's more than just saying that we're going to take the cap off with the microgen act and let everybody go at it. The grid has to be able to respond. We still have a baseload that needs to be covered off. If we have a lot of renewables coming in, how is that going to affect the bidding process, too? This is another consideration that has to be taken into account. Microgeneration can strengthen the grid by mitigating grid disturbances.

I want to add one more element here, and that is distributed generation with microgeneration. Distributed generation, of course, is always serving a nearby load, which means you are not then having to access massive infrastructure to get the power from here to there because you're just serving a nearby load. One of the mechanisms that we may have to look at, that I bring to the hon.

member's attention, is that if you're not going to require the main infrastructure for transmission of that electricity in serving a nearby load, are you still going to be hit with the transmission costs that are currently out there? This is a big consideration. That is a big number. I would ask the hon. member to take that into consideration here.

I've taught a number of students at NAIT that now work in renewable and alternate industries, and I've met with a number of this industry's stakeholders, and one of the topics that consistently comes up is the manner in which the existing limits on the microgen act have prevented investment and growth in this industry. In talking to them, there were three regulations that most of the time came up in those conversations, that I feel are preventing the act from achieving its desired outcomes. One, the regulations demand that the total nominal capacity of the generating unit does not exceed that required by the customer, so you have to consume the power on your own site. Number two, the regulations require that the unit is located on the customer's site or an adjacent site but no further. Number three, there is a very low cap, one megawatt, in place on the microgenerator's generating capacity under the regulation.

Another issue that was actually brought to my attention by a municipality is the movement of energy across property lines, from one property to another property. Currently, apparently – and correct me if I'm wrong – we don't have an allowance to allow for the movement of energy in this way. One of the benefits of microgen and distributed generation is that there is a component involved beyond just generating electricity, and that is the generation of heat. When you take, we'll say, a natural gas fired cogen unit or a combined heat and power unit, the efficiency of that unit could be in the 34 to 40 per cent range. When you also have the capacity to move and sell the heat from that unit, your overall efficiency now climbs into the high 80s, low 90s. There is no other form of generation that comes even close to it, and I'm sure the hon. member is familiar with CHP.

Again, we come to this problem of moving heat energy across a property line to sell to someone else. This is an issue that is going to have to be addressed if we're going to take the lid off microgen because now we're talking about moving substantial amounts of heat energy and electricity across one, two, three, four property lines. Now we're talking about energy corridors. [Mr. MacIntyre's speaking time expired] And I'm all done.

I'm going to support . . .

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. My knees were getting sore; I was going up and down so much here.

I confess that I do not know as much about . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Just one moment, hon. member. Just a reminder that we are not in committee.

Thank you.

5:30

Mr. S. Anderson: Okay. I do not know as much about this as the hon. member who just spoke at length, which I found interesting because every day I'm trying to learn more about these things, but I was excited when the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford brought this forward. Feeding this electricity back into the grid and people getting credit for it: we know that right now the existing regulations have limits on them to a certain extent, where it wasn't intended, you know, to incent this microgeneration, and I think most of us here are saying that we know this needs to change. You know, as well, I was excited about the climate change panel's

leadership report, that included recommendations to renew and update the microgeneration regulations, which will investigate the feasibility of small-scale community generation.

Madam Speaker, this does fill me with excitement because I've been receiving a number of questions and suggestions about possible positive changes that we can look at in the regulations from hard-working and innovative constituents in Leduc-Beaumont and actually, in general, in Leduc county. You know, the climate change panel also heard some broad interest from these individuals and co-ops and munis, or municipalities – I call them munis all the time – and it kind of brings to light some of the incredible initiatives being undertaken in Leduc county. Some of these projects I can't really talk about right now because they're under way and they're in early stages, but suffice it to say that things are changing in the province for the better. Keep an eye out for the county of Leduc as a leader in many aspects of that change.

I think we have many opportunities here to work hand in hand with these communities and industry and innovators, whether it be with biomass, wind, solar, bioenergy, geothermal, to create jobs and a greener economy, and I think we're all looking forward to that.

Madam Speaker, I think the future looks bright, and I, for one, am looking forward to being actively involved in it, so I encourage every member to support this motion. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: I will first recognize the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's truly an honour to speak about this, and I believe I'll speak in support of this from the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford. I can speak about it without a good deal of notes because I've done a lot and I've worked on this microgen regulation a lot on our farm. I was one of the first farmers in our district to have a solar-powered remote water pump, and I was one of the first operators in our area to spend some money – I actually got a master's student from Minnesota to explore our farm to see about the potentiality of wind generation and the sites that I'd chosen and how that would fit into the regulation existing at the time, once it came forward.

The concern that kept coming back from it was that the actual energy – the actual energy – in the province is cheap. It's not the cost of our bill. We have a bin site location at one of our farm sites where the bill that came just this summer was \$240, but the actual energy charge was \$2.38. The ongoing transmission of some of this stuff is frustrating. When we need energy at that bin site, we need to be able to flip a switch and have that energy at our beck and call and our demand. We can't wait for the wind, and we can't wait for the solar. We have no efficient method of storing it. If we could and if there was some way that we could efficiently store energy and retrieve it in an adequate fashion – that, I believe, is what some of the failure is going on.

I also want to speak to the success of a former private member of the Chamber at the time, an independent member, who at one time was the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, who got a private member's bill passed in this Chamber, the first bill in 90 years, I believe, that was a private member's bill, and it actually talked about the itemization of all energy bills that are brought forward in the province, and that will allow customers, consumers, to understand what their actual energy charges are and what the transmission and distribution charges are, which a lot of Albertans are being held ransom to.

Back to the microgeneration, the construction of or the achievement of. I do have it, and I believe that solar generation is on a new horizon, and that is a more modern way than the potentiality of wind generation. East of the town of Stettler there are some 90 windmills

there in the county of Paintearth that are feeding power into the grid when the wind blows, with the great acceptance of the county of Paintearth, but when I attended the county of Paintearth's 50th anniversary celebrations and I met with the people from Capital Power to learn how they could commercially develop 90 windmills on a site and why I couldn't have one effective business model for my farm, the gentleman from Capital Power said: Mr. Strankman, in three words, the reason for this project is "American carbon credits." There wasn't a business model for what they were doing there. It was based off an assist from a foreign jurisdiction.

Now, I don't know the effect of that, and I never did go beyond that, but I know from the feasibility study that the master's student from Minnesota did for our farm that the potentiality of generating wind-generated electricity would have been something beyond 15 years. The lifespan of many windmills is 25 if properly maintained. So with a \$60,000 investment – we have many machines on our farm that are worth well more than \$60,000 – if there would have been a business model, a business investment for that, we could have gone to the bank or achieved whatever means possible to create a business model to have that, but because our energy costs are so low and the transmission costs are so large, the way this system feeds power in, it's not effective.

To my understanding, in other jurisdictions they have what they call a feed-in tariff. Much of the cost of electricity is somewhere near 15 cents a kilowatt hour whereas in Alberta the wholesale price at some times is well less than 3 cents a kilowatt hour. So there are great variables in this jurisdiction that we call Alberta. Fifteen cents a kilowatt hour would not be beneficial to businesses. It would not be beneficial to any sort of creation of normal businesslike models that need to be brought forward. So we need to be careful in our quest for what is somewhat ideological that there is reality to the business model that we bring forward.

Right now on our farm I'm looking at the extension – those members opposite who were at the AUMA and at the AAMD and C convention saw new innovator awards that went to the county of Starland, which is in the diverse constituency of Drumheller-Stettler, and that county of Starland has solar projects that are creating a lot of I'll say enthusiasm for that model, and there is reason for that to be done. It's a nonmoving thing, and solar panels now are of new technology. They're far more efficient than they have been in the past, and possibly they are created more efficiently. With that, I think there are ways that we can explore this. There are ways that we can look into doing this in efficient fashion.

I also want to close with a comment that a friend of mine that I confer with, counsel with, made mention of the other day. He said that within the last two years one of the most newly energized coal plants in the world was in the jurisdiction of Germany, and because they've learned that to create the flat power line curve that's desired and needed for AC electricity, they need to have a stable source of energy. Atomic energy is still not applicable or suitable to the personalities or the communities of people in Germany, so they went to what's called clean coal. Whether our facilities here in Alberta, with their electrostatic filtration devices like they have in Forestburg and Sheerness, are to that standard I don't really know, but it's something that we need to strive for because if we're going to continue to use alternating current electricity, it is an issue that we maintain a flat input curve to the electricity that comes forward.

With that, Madam Speaker, I'll turn the chair back to you.

5:40

The Deputy Speaker: I'll recognize the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, followed by Chestermere-Rocky View.

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is indeed a pleasure to rise in this House today to speak to what is probably my favourite topic. I really want to congratulate members opposite for their insightful and important contributions. The Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake is obviously an expert on this, and I think we have a lot to learn from him. I would actually encourage him to consider resigning his seat and taking a job with the government and helping us with implementing some of these new regulations.

To the Member for Drumheller-Stettler: as I said in my maiden speech, he and I have a common background in farming. I still operate a reasonably large farm in Manitoba, and I'm continually impressed with the ability of my colleagues that are farmers and involved in agriculture in general to be innovators, and this is what we're talking about. We're talking about looking at innovation and applying it and removing obstacles from the application of that innovation.

I also want to thank the other people that have spoken today on this. I will admit to being somewhat skeptical when everybody is in agreement with us on a bill. Is there a trap waiting for us? I don't know. I'll ask maybe my other colleagues that have more experience to help me out with that. But it is truly appreciated.

I'm sitting here looking at a monitor that tells me that the solar panels on my roof today have produced 118 watt hours. I've had solar panels on my roof here in Edmonton for over two years, and while it's not a money-making proposition at the present time, I have had a significant reduction in my power bills, and I get that warm, fuzzy, sunny feeling of contributing to the control of the emission of greenhouse gases. I would think that the members opposite would also be encouraged to support this motion. This is a no-cost-to-the-people-of-Alberta solution except for the valid concerns that were raised about the transmission system. From the microgeneration point of view, if I were allowed to put 28 panels on my roof instead of the 21 that I was limited to by the current regulations, this is of zero cost to the economy, and I would be producing, I guess, another third more power and reducing the equivalent of greenhouse gas producing coal-powered generation.

Alberta is a leader in this sort of thing. We have more solar-powered homes in Edmonton per capita than any place in Canada, and this is living in a city north of the 53rd parallel. Our citizens here in Edmonton and, I dare say, citizens in Calgary and the rest of the province are really interested in this. We need to respond to that interest and make it easier for them and make it more profitable for microgenerators to proceed.

I would invite all members to consider attending the ecosolar tour, which happens on a yearly basis here in Edmonton. The home builder that the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford referred to is one of the main organizers of this, and there were 16 homes this past year that are net zero homes. One of them had two Tesla Model Ss parked out front, which all us old guys drooled over. One of them didn't belong to the homeowner, but that homeowner did own one of them, and even with the powering of that electric vehicle his home was net zero. Probably this summer there are going to be 25 homes on that tour.

We look outside the province of Alberta to the state of California, the state of Nevada. Germany was mentioned. Throughout the developed world, really, we're seeing the application of solar power to replace generation.

I do want to mention something that would be of interest to those of you that are representing rural ridings. I was at the conference, the bioenergy meeting, just recently. The bioenergy folks, which includes forestry companies as well as municipalities with waste management issues and, of course, farmers, are really interested in expanding this, and they are limited at the present time. As has been mentioned, they are limited at the present time by the cap on

microgeneration. Let's get rid of it. Let's make it easier for Albertans to participate in dealing with this crisis that we have. We want to be leaders in climate change, and this is one way that we can contribute to that.

The solar panels that were put on my roof were actually supplied through Enmax. Both Enmax and EPCOR have programs that are supporting the application of solar panels. They do provide interest-free loans to individuals that are interested in this. To my colleague from Edmonton-Rutherford: he could probably benefit from using the interest-free loans.

But the most important thing is that we need to be facilitating the easy application of this phenomenal technology. It's not just solar. It's not just wind. It's a whole range of others: bioenergy, biomass, methane. The Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat knows about Methanex in Medicine Hat. They have very innovative projects to convert methane to non greenhouse gas causing elements. There's also in his riding a wind power system on the Milk River that we need to be helping to facilitate getting hooked up to the grid.

I think all of these initiatives are really positive, so I'll close with that. I am in full support of this motion, and I would encourage every member of this Legislature to support it.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise also in support of this motion to strengthen Alberta's microgen legislation. I actually operate my home and business with more than 45 solar panels on my own home. I'm not quite at zero net.

An Hon. Member: It's a big house.

Mrs. Aheer: Yeah, and the business is as well.

Again, I feel the same as you. It's a wonderful feeling to be able to know that you're contributing to that part of this process. It's wonderful. It's so wonderful to hear. Thank you so much for bringing this motion forward and for helping us choose a path of accountability when it comes to these things and to become better stewards of the environment. These are all wonderful things, so thank you for that.

This was a long time coming, and I think that one of the things that we need to talk about, though, of course, is customer choice. By allowing Albertans to generate their own electricity through solar panels and wind, microgeneration fuel cells, geothermal, biomass, or small-scale hydro, we permit every single Albertan to be accountable for their own electricity in any way that they wish.

I know from our meetings with the stakeholders that one of the biggest issues faced by the companies is, of course, gaining that grid access. The thing that's so great about microgeneration legislation is that in its current form Albertans interested in generating their own electricity, like my family, are enabled to be part of the grid on their own terms. Small microgenerators under the act are permitted to sell their electricity back to the grid at commercial rates, but the larger generators are selling their excess back at the pool rate. These regulations will allow a consumer to express their individual willingness to pay for green technologies without actually burdening the users on the grid to share in that high cost of renewable generation. So it's obviously the most sensible way to green the grid in a noncoercive way.

5:50

One of the things I'd like to reiterate from my fellow legislator from Innisfail-Sylvan Lake is that he already highlighted the array of choices that would likely need to be taken into consideration. I'd just like to echo that a little bit by focusing on the fact that right

now these units have to be located on the customer's site or be site owned or leased by the customer that's adjacent to the customer's site. So it can be very limiting for some obvious reasons; for example, for Albertans that don't own their own homes, Albertans that are living in high-density housing, Albertans who live in the middle of our cities and who live in condominium communities or other housing communities with standardized rules about how the houses have to look. That's extremely prohibitive, especially if you don't own your land or have room for a wind turbine or have permission to do something like a solar panel.

Raising the cap on microgeneration is a subject that we've brought up with many of our province's renewable energy stakeholders. The Alberta-based solar company noted that increasing limits on microgeneration could allow for things like a wind co-operative. That idea would have to have a bunch of individuals buy into a small wind farm; for example, in the Bragg Creek area, actually. Allowing for off-site microgeneration would be a really important step toward allowing Albertans to make those markets more accessible. In terms of the economics of that, that cap would be more efficient. Again, I do agree with the hon. member and with the other members that that cap needs to be raised or even extinguished.

Just to talk about California, that was mentioned as well. Just as something that I'd like to expand on with that, they've taken a number of steps to green their grid, and they've also made some mistakes that I think we can learn from. One of them was their decision to embrace solar panel generation, which was intended to get around the drawbacks of the burden of the large-scale renewable energy projects, like the capital costs of energy transmission across the large states. For that reason we believe that that initiative is laudable.

What California learned, however, is that the policy to transform the grid with tens of thousands of little decisions through their initiative to have Californians themselves develop a 12-gigawatt renewable energy infrastructure by 2020 has its pitfalls. One of the things that we want to look at is: what is that highest nominal capacity? What will allow that source of renewable power to function at that highest capacity? One of the things that has happened in California is that a large number of residential rooftop solar installations in San Francisco happened, but San Francisco has a humongous amount of cloud cover and fog during the summer, so it would be more optimal to relocate those high numbers of solar

panels to an area like Apple Valley, where there's 22 per cent more solar energy each year.

The Deputy Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, but pursuant to Standing Order 8(3) I will now call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford to close debate.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Noting the time, I won't take very much time to end this debate. I just want to acknowledge and thank members on both sides of the House for your very thoughtful contributions. Many of the issues that you have identified were also identified by our team in terms of looking at the changes in microgeneration over the next little while. I really look forward to having further conversations with all of you and asking for your input, your experiences with the solar panels you have now, and, of course, talking to people all across the province who are interested not only in solar but in wind, in small hydro, in fuel cells, in biomass technologies, and in geothermal technologies.

My conversations so far with members of the rural municipalities and the wind and solar generation societies in Alberta have all led to the point where we can quite happily say that this is no longer a time when we're envisioning some great future. We are indeed at the opportunity where we can live that future today.

As the minister of environment indicated earlier, it is truly the time to act. I encourage all of you to vote in favour of this motion and for the government to take it upon themselves to act, to act now, and to act fully and thoroughly in terms of making the changes necessary so that microgeneration becomes a reality for everyday Albertans as soon as possible.

Thank you very much for your time.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 506 carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. On that happy and harmonious note, I suggest that we conclude the day's business and call it 6 o'clock and adjourn until 10 o'clock tomorrow morning.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:56 p.m. to Tuesday at 10 a.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday morning, December 1, 2015

Day 26

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

First Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

10 a.m.

Tuesday, December 1, 2015

[Mr. Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Hon. members, let us reflect. This past week the Pope, who is the head of the Catholic religion, paid a visit to Africa, and there was a section from that prayer that I thought would be appropriate for us as we contemplate our work today. O God of the poor, help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this earth, so precious in your eyes. Bring healing to our lives that we may protect the world and not prey on it, that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction, touch the hearts of those who look only for gain at the expense of the poor and the earth.

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 7

Alberta Human Rights Amendment Act, 2015

[Adjourned debate November 25: Ms Ganley]

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General and Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

Ms Ganley: I believe that I was probably sufficiently through my speech on this, so we'll just call that the end.

The Speaker: Hon. member, you have 16 minutes left if you wish to speak any longer.

Ms Ganley: Yeah. That's sufficient. Thank you.

The Speaker: Who would wish to speak to second reading of Bill 7, Alberta Human Rights Amendment Act, 2015? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Mr. Connolly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak on Bill 7, the Alberta Human Rights Amendment Act, 2015. This bill, which will add gender expression and gender identity to the Alberta Human Rights Act, is something the transgender and the gender-variant community have asked for for decades. This bill will allow transgender and gender-variant Albertans to confront discrimination that we know still exists in our society.

Some of our members may not be familiar with what being transgender means. As a gay man and ally to the transgender and gender-variant community I make my fair share of mistakes, too, but I do my best to get it right. That means listening to transgender and gender-variant individuals when they tell us about their lived experiences. What does transgender mean? Transgender is an umbrella term for people whose gender identity differs from the sex assigned to them at birth.

The key to understanding what transgender means is understanding the difference between sex and gender. Sex refers to the physical characteristics that are associated with being male or female, including primary sex characteristics such as genitals and secondary sex characteristics such as breasts. Gender refers to the social presentation of masculinity and femininity. Many cultures have strict rules about how to perform masculinity and femininity.

Rigid masculine and feminine gender roles are referred to as the gender binary. However, ideas about gender are not static. They change across time and place, within one society, and between different cultures.

Transgender individuals do not identify with the sex that they were assigned at birth and present their gender in a way that reflects their true selves. Some transgender persons choose to have gender-affirming surgery so that their physical characteristics reflect their gender identity, and some do not. Gender identity does not relate to sexual orientation. Transgender and gender-variant people may identify as straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual, or any other sexual orientation.

You may not know the difference between gender identity and gender expression. Gender identity is one's innermost concept of self – male, female, a blend of both, or neither – how individuals perceive themselves, and what they call themselves. One's gender identity can be the same or different from their sex assigned at birth. Gender expression is the external appearance of one's gender identity, usually expressed through behaviour, clothing, or a haircut, which may or may not conform to socially defined behaviours and characteristics typically associated with being either masculine or feminine.

Trans and gender-variant Albertans face problems none of us could even imagine. When the Minister of Justice and Solicitor General and Minister of Aboriginal Relations, the Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park, and the Member for Calgary-Cross, and I held consultations, we heard of the incredible struggles that these individuals face on a daily basis. Not only is it difficult to find a proper psychologist as a trans individual; it can be near impossible to find the particular psychologist that can offer the services required to start hormones or apply for gender-affirming surgery. There are also only two doctors in Alberta that have the authority and the knowledge necessary to connect these Albertans with the one clinic in Canada that can perform gender-affirming surgery if the individual wishes to have the gender-affirming surgery.

Many transgender individuals chose not to have the gender-affirming surgery and are therefore ineligible to receive various forms of government identification with their correct gender on it. While this legislation will not deal with this specific issue, it is an important first step to show the transgender and gender-variant communities that we are on their side when it comes to these issues.

Trans and gender-variant individuals are less likely to have access to health care in our province and are often turned away by physicians and mental health practitioners because of prejudice or perceived lack of skills to treat transgender and gender-variant Albertans. This happens even if the individual is seeking care for issues not related to their gender, which has led transgender and gender-variant people to have higher risks of heart disease; mental health concerns such as anxiety, depression, and suicide; substance abuse; eating disorders; interpersonal violence; certain cancers; and to be less likely to participate in preventative health.

Follow-up care is also a big issue as few doctors will assist postsurgical patients directly, requiring trips back to the original surgeon for any corrective work. For trans women finding a gynecologist willing to give examinations can be a problem. One trans woman had her gynecologist refuse to refer to her parts as a vagina, instead only calling it her hole. Offensive and hardly the attitude of a caring physician, but this was the only gynecologist who would agree to see her, so she stayed.

Another trans woman in Calgary was given an M wristband despite presenting both her forms of ID with the F marker. When asked to change it, the clerk refused. Alberta Health Services policy already states that a client's preferred gender should be respected on wristbands and in the address regardless of ID presented, so this

action was against policy and significantly added to her stress right before undergoing a fairly major procedure.

The concerns of trans and gender-variant individuals is only increased by the fact that approximately 50 per cent of transgender and gender-variant people have been raped or assaulted by a romantic partner and that transgender and gender-variant people of all ages frequently face rejection by their families. Youth who experience family rejection are more likely to attempt suicide, experience high levels of depression, use illegal drugs, and become homeless. This helps to explain why the LGBTQ community makes up the highest segment of homeless youth, with the majority of that youth being transgender and gender-variant.

People loving and accepting transgender and gender-variant family members are the cornerstone for transgender and gender-variant Albertans to have happy, healthy, and longer lives. Without the support of family it can be hard to build strength and to fight against the inequality and discrimination that transgender and gender-variant people face in their day-to-day lives.

Employment can be an incredibly tenuous situation for many transgender and gender-variant Canadians, particularly once they begin to transition. Once a transgender person loses their job, it can be very difficult to get rehired, especially in our current economic climate. Chronic unemployment is a significant factor in the community and drives the disproportionate level of homelessness, depression and may result in trans individuals taking higher risks to make ends meet.

As an example of how little understanding there is among employers, I was told by one transgender woman that when coming out to her supervisor at work, he expressed concern that she would show up to work looking like a drag queen. So it's clear there's still a long way to go in explaining the difference. While she can't conclusively say that it affected her career arc, the supervisor stopped taking her along for lunch with consultants and bringing her to trade shows. Another woman, just starting her transition at work, was told by her boss: if it affects our customers and they stop coming in or our employees have an issue, then we will have to have a difficult discussion. This was from someone whom she thought would be supportive.

The concept of the toxic work environment figures heavily into what trans people face in the workplace. Rarely is someone told that they are being terminated because they are trans; instead, they are made to use different facilities, asked to work from home, or simply made to feel unwelcome until they leave.

Bill 7 will help to show transgender and gender-variant people that we stand with them in solidarity. We are here to show this community that we cannot and will not sit idly by while our friends, family, and colleagues are struggling to survive and receive the care that they are supposed to be guaranteed by our Constitution. Forty to 50 per cent of transgender and gender-variant individuals have attempted suicide, and 90 per cent have seriously considered it. This is absolutely unacceptable. We are here to show Albertans that we will not stand for discrimination of any kind.

10:10

Albertans are diverse and welcoming and understand that our communities thrive when they are supportive. We must ensure that our legislation holds true to these values. Simply voting for this bill does not mean that we as MLAs have vanquished transphobia. It does not mean that we can no longer be called transphobic ourselves. It only means that at this point in time we were able to do the right thing. Legislation is only ink on paper unless it can somehow be moved from paper into the lives of Albertans; therefore, legislation cannot be the government's only role. Basic human rights for trans and gender-diverse people must be

embedded into the culture of all that comes forward. Each and every member of this Legislature, every staffperson, every department, every communiqué, every policy and future piece of legislation must ultimately change with this bill.

We must remember to think of how everything we do in this Chamber will affect the LGBTQ-plus community, especially the transgender and gender-variant community, so that we can stop the institutionalized discrimination minority groups face across the province. Only when people are provided with knowledge will we see real change in the lived experiences of transgender and gender-diverse people.

Albertans recognize the importance of freedom. With Bill 7 we can provide protection for transgender and gender-variant people to live freely as their authentic selves. That is why I'm supporting this bill, and I hope all my colleagues in this House will as well.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Eggen: On 29(2)(a)?

The Speaker: Minister of Education, I'm sorry. There is no 29(2)(a) on the second speaker, hon. member.

Thus, the Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my great honour and privilege to rise today to speak in favour of Bill 7. I'd also like to recognize that we have a couple of members of Alberta's trans community here with us today. It is such an honour to present today in favour and support of such an important bill. It allows individuals, all Albertans to feel protected, to feel included, and to feel truly part of our community and our society. It give allies the ability to effectively argue in favour of and advocate for their family, their friends, and their neighbours. It provides the clarity that's needed. Irrespective of any argument that transgender expression may already be included, it clarifies and removes any doubt, which is why this is such an important bill.

When we think about what that actually means – and I was listening closely to the Member for Calgary-Hawkwood and reflecting on his words, and I think he brought a lot of clarity and power to this discussion and debate, and I thank him very much for his words, for his advocacy, all members of the government caucus, and indeed others who've done work on behalf of transgender Albertans. It is quite something that we have unanimity, I believe, in this House on this issue. It's, I think, a big change over the course of even just a few short years. I think what it does is that it reflects what Alberta really is today, and I think we should be proud that we're in this place, having these discussions openly and without controversy. I think that's very telling, very encouraging.

Having said that, our work here is not done. We well know that there are challenges in schools in particular. As we look at what's happened specifically at the Edmonton Catholic school board in discussions around access for a transgender student simply to use the washroom of her choice, our work is not done. It is not simply about, as the Member for Calgary-Hawkwood says, putting words on a piece of paper. What we need is advocacy.

I suspect we may not actually get to my Motion 511 here this fall, but that motion, in a nutshell, calls for the Minister of Education to allow school boards time to come up with an appropriate policy but not much time. It calls on the minister to allow them till March 31, 2016, to come up with an appropriate policy to his satisfaction that will in fact protect all students, transgender students included especially, and, should they not come up with an appropriate policy, to impose an appropriate policy upon them. I applaud the minister for his leadership on this issue to date. There is still work to do,

though, and I'm sure you know that we'll be watching closely to ensure that an appropriate policy is in fact put into place.

Words on paper are important, laws are very important, but action is equally important. So I would like very much to see – and again in keeping with the words of the Member for Calgary-Hawkwood, we need to back this legislation with action. It's one thing to say that this will allow landlords to know that they cannot discriminate because it's in the law. I think that, unfortunately, for people who may think about discriminating, the first thing they do is not to go read the legislation.

I think it's important that we, not just here, as leaders in our communities and representatives of those communities show that leadership, but I really urge the government to think about ways of advocating, of communicating, of putting it out there that this is no longer acceptable and to consider some sort of communications strategy so that once Bill 7 – I'm hopeful it will be passed, and I'm hopeful that it will be passed unanimously and enthusiastically by this House but, once that happens, that the government will consider undertaking some form of information campaign to let every Albertan know that it is in no way acceptable in any circumstance, in any context to discriminate against transgendered individuals.

Again, I just want to close by recognizing the work that has been done by members on both sides of the House, going back even to the previous government. I think it's important to recognize the members for Calgary-Hawkwood, Strathcona-Sherwood Park, if I'm not mistaken, if I've got that right, and Calgary-Cross as well as the minister. I know you've all done a lot of work on this. I think you have brought a perspective that this House has been lacking for many years. It really is an important day here in the Legislative Assembly, so I want to thank everyone for the work that you've done to date. This will be an important moment in Alberta history and from here to recognize, however, that our work continues.

With that, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there any questions or comments for the Member for Calgary-Elbow?

Hearing none, the hon. Member for Calgary-Cross.

Miranda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am honoured to rise and speak about Bill 7, the Alberta Human Rights Amendment Act, 2015. As you know, the Alberta Legislature has the unique privilege of hosting an exhibition of the Magna Carta, celebrating the 800th anniversary of the signing of this magnificent document, in 1215. Visitors are asked to come to the Legislature Grounds and experience this iconic document, seen as the embodiment of the underlying principles of parliamentary democracy and the legal system, that has arguably changed the course of law, justice, and human rights in the Commonwealth and perhaps across the world.

I begin there because it is crucial that we understand the importance of our shared history as a people and to highlight that it is not the first time that a single document can change the reality for so many of us. While many know the history of the Magna Carta, not too many know the history of the lesbian, gay, bi, trans, queer, and gender-diverse people who have fought for their rights and their place in history.

10:20

It is a commonly held belief that the LGBTQ liberation movement started on June 28, 1969, in what came to be known as the Stonewall riots. It was a watershed moment in the history of the LGBTQ people. The Stonewall Inn was routinely subjected to police raids, where the procedure was to line up the patrons and check for their identification. Police officers would then arrest trans

women, subjecting them to abuse and humiliation. But on that June night many trans women refused to go with the officers, many others refused to produce their identification, and what resulted was the start of a movement that saw many of the laws change, including my journey here.

Regrettably, it is almost 45 years later, and it's not until today that we're talking about ensuring that the rights of trans and gender-diverse people are explicitly and clearly recognized by making discrimination on the basis of gender identity and gender expression illegal in this province. I would say that it's about time.

I take this opportunity to recognize and highlight for the members of the Legislature the violence and discrimination that are faced by the trans and gender-diverse community on a daily basis. In a recent nation-wide survey 74 per cent of trans and gender-diverse youth reported that they had experienced verbal harassment in school, while 37 per cent reported experiencing physical violence. Many face unemployment that is over three times the national rate, and many more are underemployed.

As a result of discrimination and bullying, the trans and gender-diverse community faces higher rates of mental health issues as well. Rates of depression are as high as two-thirds, and in some jurisdictions as many as 77 per cent of trans and gender-diverse individuals report having considered suicide, while 43 per cent have actually attempted suicide at least once. This is horrifying. Members of this Legislature have the opportunity to address the violence and discrimination faced by trans and gender-diverse individuals by passing, without delay, legislation that will amend the Alberta Human Rights Act to provide trans and gender-diverse individuals with the same legal protections as any other vulnerable group.

On the issue of human rights across Canada, while each province and territory within Canada has a human rights act or a code that enumerates protections for its citizens, as of March 2015 only some provinces and territories explicitly protected either gender identity or both gender identity and gender expression in their human rights legislation. Some provinces and territories are not explicit about these rights, but they do have documents explaining how such protections exist under other grounds. Still, sadly, as of today national human rights legislation in Canada does not explicitly protect gender identity and gender expression. Mr. Speaker, Alberta can and must do better than that because as of today the phrase "rights for all" is not quite accurate.

There are some specific areas that I want to tell you about, Mr. Speaker. The one which I've touched briefly upon is the issue of violence. Trans and gender-diverse people face extraordinary levels of physical and sexual violence, whether on the streets, at school, at work, at home, or, regrettably, sometimes even at the hands of law enforcement, although I'm happy to report that law enforcement agencies have made great strides in changing this in their respective departments. But the fact remains that trans and gender-diverse people often face bias-driven assaults, and the rates are even higher for trans and gender-diverse people of colour.

I applaud the work of antiviolence groups, women's rights groups, racial justice groups, and law enforcement agencies currently combatting violence against trans and gender-diverse people. I would only add that this effort cannot be limited to just a Transgender Day of Remembrance. Public education, as was mentioned earlier, policy changes, community efforts, and, in our case, legislation are indeed useful to address the complex causes of violence against trans and gender-diverse people and ensure that victims can receive support and protection under the law.

Employment is another area that we need to also keep in mind. Many trans and gender-diverse people have lost their jobs due to discrimination, and more than three-fourths have experienced some

form of workplace discrimination. Refusal to hire, privacy violations, harassment, even physical and sometimes sexual violence on the job are common occurrences and are experienced at even higher rates by trans and gender-diverse people of colour. Many of them change jobs to avoid discrimination or the risk of discrimination, and extreme levels of unemployment and poverty lead many to become involved in underground economies such as sex and drug work in order to survive.

Many families, whatever their composition and however you choose to define them, support the well-being of trans and gender-diverse people. However, despite the existence of marriage equality in our country for many years now, trans and gender-diverse people and their families still face many other challenges. Both trans and gender-diverse parents and supportive parents of trans and gender-diverse children can sometimes face unfair and harmful challenges to their parental rights and their decisions. As with LGBTQ families in general, trans and gender-diverse people's families continue to face barriers to foster care and adoption and the recognition of their family relationships in many situations. Trans and gender-diverse people seeking support in the face of family rejection or domestic violence still often face barriers as well.

Health, another subject that we have briefly touched upon, is another area of concern that I would like to speak about. Trans and gender-diverse people need access to quality health care that is responsive to their unique needs. I want to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood for his questions to the Health minister yesterday. It is clear that many continue to encounter barriers, and I am happy to know that our Health minister is committed to breaking those barriers.

Mr. Speaker, suicide is one of the most serious health risks facing trans and gender-diverse people. While the causes of suicide are complex, growing evidence links high rates of suicide amongst trans and gender-diverse youth and adults in part to stigma and discrimination. I hope the mental health review that is taking place will explore ways to address suicide prevention and double the efforts to help trans and gender-diverse people.

I would add also that I hope that anybody who is watching the proceedings here today while they are looking at their lives and they are looking at their existence and perhaps contemplating doing self-harm realizes that there are people out there who are like them, who understand absolutely what it feels like to be rejected and understand absolutely what it feels like to know that there are people out there who would hate you just because of who you are. But I also want them to know that they are people who can actually lead very productive, meaningful lives and can actually contribute to our society, and I would ask them to reach out for the supports that they need and to think about the future and how much they have to contribute to our society because we so desperately need them to be here.

Trans and gender-diverse people often face discrimination when seeking a home, and some have even been evicted from their homes because of their gender identity. This bill will make it clear that discrimination against trans and gender-diverse people or homebuyers based on gender identity or gender expression will constitute discrimination and will be prohibited under the law. Unfortunately, a general lack of awareness has contributed to continued discrimination, eviction, and homelessness of trans and gender-diverse people. It is with that in mind that clear, explicit legal protection from discrimination based on gender identity and gender expression is very much needed.

An alarmingly large and disproportionate number of trans and gender-diverse individuals have experienced homelessness at some point in their lives. Rejection by family and friends in addition to discrimination and violence often contribute to a large number of

trans and gender-diverse as well as LGBTQ youth who identify themselves as homeless. Unfortunately, social services and homeless shelters that work with this population are not always equipped to appropriately serve homeless trans and gender-diverse people, including not being able to provide them shelter based on their gender identity or housing them in a gender space they do not identify with and failing to address co-occurring issues facing transgender homeless youth and adults. This bill will ensure that trans and gender-diverse people accessing housing and homeless services do not face such discrimination.

10:30

Identity documents and privacy is another area of great concern. Trans and gender-diverse people need accurate and consistent IDs to open bank accounts, start new jobs, enrol in school, and travel. However, the name and gender change process can be sometimes complicated and prohibitively expensive for some. As a result, many trans and gender-diverse people who have transitioned have not been able to update all of their IDs and records with their new gender. This is particularly problematic because gender-incongruent identification exposes trans and gender-diverse people to a wide range of negative outcomes, from denial of employment, housing, and public benefits to harassment and physical violence. Any remaining requirements that are intrusive and burdensome for trans and gender-diverse people to update their IDs should be eliminated, and I will encourage our government to do that.

Interactions with law enforcement, jails, and prisons can be traumatizing for most of us. They're often places where dangerous interactions can happen, especially for trans and gender-diverse people and for anyone who is gender nonconforming. Trans and gender-diverse people are more likely to be stopped and questioned by police while they engage in survival crimes such as sex work and when ending up behind bars are more likely to face abuse there. Being trans and gender-diverse in jail or prison can leave them exposed to humiliation, physical and sexual abuse, and fear of reprisals. We need to continue to look at ways to ensure stronger protections and create new tools for advocacy focused on trans and gender-diverse people's interaction with the justice system. Given that this bill is brought forward by the hon. Minister of Justice, I am hopeful that this will change.

Combating racism and poverty and uplifting the voices of marginalized people is paramount, even more so for trans and gender-diverse people of colour, who face greatly elevated negative outcomes in every area of life. Racialized trans and gender-diverse people report some of the worst outcomes regarding discrimination in obtaining a job, violence both in the streets and by law enforcement, accessing health care, and homelessness. People in rural communities also face significant barriers in their quality of life. We need to recognize that an intersectional approach and sensitivity is required when policies and advocacy work that seek to address issues critical to trans and gender-diverse people are implemented.

Trans and gender-diverse youth face many challenges at home, at school, in foster care, and in the juvenile justice system, and it should not come as a surprise that many trans and gender-diverse youth feel unsafe at school. I will say that it is not just hostility from peers that fosters these feelings. As we all know and as was previously mentioned, currently there are debates taking place regarding policies in the school boards. It is important for them to know that these students are looking to them to lead the way and provide the safe environment they need to grow. For now providing this environment is entirely under their control, but I ask them to please not fail these students.

Finally, older trans and gender-diverse adults face profound challenges and experience striking disparities in areas such as quality of health and access to health care services, mental health care, employment, housing, and other areas of livelihood. Research has revealed that many trans and gender-diverse elders routinely encounter both a health care system and an aging network that is often ill-prepared to provide care and services that they need and create residential environments that affirm the gender identities and expressions of trans and gender-diverse older people.

Mr. Speaker, discrimination is almost an everyday experience for many trans and gender-diverse people and can affect nearly every area of their lives. The phobias that drive discrimination we can eliminate, and I ask all of you to vote yes to this bill.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Under 29(2)(a), the hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I must say that after listening to these words, I am so very, very proud to be one of your colleagues. I think that this is a conversation that we have to have, but we have to have all of the conversation. I kind of felt that maybe there was still something left to say, so I was hoping that the member might be able to finish off those thoughts for us.

Miranda: I would only add that another area that I think we need to set our minds to is the issue of voting rights. Voting is a key part of having our voices heard on the issues that affect all of us regardless of who we are. When we're talking about your ability to vote, also the other part that comes into play is identity and pieces of ID. It is important to know that having ID that doesn't match your gender identity or presentation does not affect your right to cast a ballot. In my work with the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee, which has been appointed to review the Election Act, this is something that I will be making sure that we look at and take into account.

I would just end at that. Thank you.

The Speaker: Are there any comments from the hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford?

Mr. Feehan: Thank you. Under 29(2)(a) I'd just like to ask the Member for Calgary-Cross: you called for people affected by this to seek out help when they are in need, and I would just like to know if you are aware of some of the resources that are available in Calgary for people who are in need at this time.

The Speaker: Hon. member, please proceed.

Miranda: Thank you. I do believe that there is one umbrella group that is called Calgary Outlink. They have a Facebook page, and also they are on Twitter. It's the one place that many people can reach out to and actually have access to many, many resources, including a suicide prevention line. They also help with providing the safe spaces that are needed throughout the city, actually, for people to gather in a safe environment to be able to interact with one another and learn from one another. That's just the beginning. But, of course, anybody who asks, wanting to have more information: I hope they can reach out to the MLA offices throughout the province. I know that all of us here are committed to ensuring that we provide those resources for people who need them and that we would be more than happy to help with that. I'm certain of that.

So there you go.

The Speaker: Any other questions for the Member for Calgary-Cross under 29(2)(a)?

Hearing none, I would recognize the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a shadow minister for Justice for the Wildrose I'm pleased to rise in the House today to voice my support for Bill 7, the Alberta Human Rights Amendment Act, 2015. I would first like to thank the government for introducing this legislation, which clarifies what rights are protected under the Alberta Human Rights Act. This is important work as it clarifies into law what is already understood by the courts.

As many members in this House know, something that is set in legal precedent may not be fully understood by the larger community. The impact of a disconnect between the legal judgment and a person impacted by the interpretation of the law can be overwhelming. Just because human rights lawyers know that gender is interpreted to mean gender identity and expression doesn't mean Albertans do.

This is important not only for those who might be discriminated against but for the employers and landlords who might not know that these grounds are prohibited. Let's face it. Most Albertans don't open their days reading case law.

Clarity and certainty are very important for Albertans and our laws. This is a complex, relatively new area, and the real benefit of this bill is that it lets all Albertans be more clear on what is unacceptable in discrimination. In this particular instance, the amending of the Alberta Human Rights Act by adding gender identity and gender expression to the list of prohibited grounds for discrimination is an important landmark for transgender and gender-variant people within our province.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take this opportunity to share some of the stark facts about what transgender people face in their day-to-day lives. Transgender individuals continue to be a highly marginalized and discriminated group within our society. A study released this year by researchers at Western University in London, Ontario, found that 35 per cent of trans people seriously consider suicide over a 12-month period and that 11 per cent try to kill themselves. This is a far higher rate than the general population. One in 167 Canadians try to kill themselves each year, but for transgender people that number goes to 1 in 9. We know legislators and Wildrose MLAs work for all Albertans equally and must work to protect all Albertans.

10:40

Transgender Albertans deserve the same inclusivity and acceptance as all other Albertans. It is my true hope that with this communication and clarity in legislation those alarming suicide-attempt statistics will drop. What do these numbers have to do with this legislation? By clarifying what the rights are, protected under the Alberta Human Rights Act, we ensure that this clarification is circulated to the LGBTQ community. While it may seem like a technicality, it is not. This could be a significant step that would make a significant difference in transgender Albertans' lives. The fact of the matter is that one life lost because a transgender or gender-variant person feels as though their rights aren't protected is not acceptable, and one is too many. I am hopeful that, as was stated to me in the briefing on this legislation, should it receive royal assent, the big thing will be education to the community impacted by the change about their rights.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak about this legislation. I am confident that it will be passed with support from all parties in this Legislature.

The Speaker: Are there any questions under 29(2)(a) for the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you. I'd just like to ask the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake. I know you are the Justice critic for your party. I'm just wondering if you feel that your views, that you've expressed today, represent the whole of your party and if this is the position that all of the Wildrose will be taking.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.
The hon. Member for Calgary-North West.

Mr. Feehan: He's got to answer the question.

The Speaker: Do you choose not to respond to the question, hon. member?

Do you have a question under 29(2)(a) for the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake?

Mr. Connolly: Yes.

The Speaker: Please proceed.

Mr. Connolly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the member for his comments. I was just wondering if one of the other three members of his party who decided to come and debate this bill would like to speak on the bill as well?

Dr. Starke: Point of order.

The Speaker: Point of order noted.

Point of Order

Referring to the Absence of Members

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, once again – and we're getting used to the rules, I understand – you cannot refer to the presence or absence of members either directly or indirectly within the House. It's against House rules and should not be brought up in either an indirect or a direct manner.

The Speaker: That has been my understanding.

I'd also tell the House that it's my understanding that a member can choose not to respond. I hope I've interpreted that correctly.

I'm not sure if you can get two questions under 29(2)(a).

Mr. Connolly: I was just going to respond to the point of order. Was it a point of order that was raised?

The Speaker: Oh, I'm sorry. Responding to the point of order: I'm with you now.

Mr. Connolly: Thank you. I apologize and withdraw the question.

The Speaker: Thank you very much. I appreciate it.

Debate Continued

The Speaker: Any other questions for the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake under 29(2)(a)?

The hon. Member for Calgary-North West.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I feel like I've been standing up lately and offering a lot of support across the aisle.

I have to say a special thank you to our Justice minister and to the Member for Calgary-Cross, whose words were lovely and filled with emotion. I can really understand how you are feeling today.

To the Member for Calgary-Hawkwood and the Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park as well: I thank you for your advocacy on this. I think that lived experience in dealing with these issues is something we never had before in our government benches, and I think that's an important thing.

It was 2013 when I had the first meeting that the Trans Equality Society of Alberta had ever had with a government official. It was an incredibly emotional meeting, and it was the first time, the folks from TESA told me, they'd ever sat down in the Legislature and had a conversation about trans and gender-diverse issues.

You know, I remember thinking at the time that there are always going to be folks who have a level of discomfort talking about these issues. I believe that at the end of the day the more we have the opportunity to discuss them, to use the language, to understand the language, to understand what it means to be gender diverse, to understand what trans means, the difference between sexuality and sexual orientation, what gender expression and gender identity mean and why they are different from each other, when we have those conversations, for the folks that have a hard time wrapping their head around some of these things, that's when we'll move forward.

I have to say that when I was the minister responsible for these issues and we put out the first transphobic bullying fact sheets, we had an opportunity to really start to have that discussion, layering that information and that education with people. It was, to me, a wonderful moment when we were able to begin talking about a wish list with TESA and with folks from the trans community about what they wanted to see going forward.

What you are doing here today was on my wish list. Our government didn't get it done, but you are getting it done, and I could not be more thrilled to support this bill. I speak on behalf of all members of our caucus, who felt it was important to be here today to honour this discussion, to listen, to be educated, and to take part in something that changes the face of this province. I want to thank you for doing this work and to tell you that we are here to take part in the discussion any time it is warranted. We couldn't be more happy about it.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education on 29(2)(a).

Mr. Eggen: Yes. I just would like to thank the hon. member for her kind words. I know that this was a difficult circumstance, part of a larger difficult circumstance that she lived through and worked through, and I'm really proud of how she came around and helped, ultimately, in the pursuit of equality and social justice.

I'd like to ask her as well just how Bill 7 might help us to develop coherent and province-wide policy in regard to GSAs and LGBTQ policy at a school board level.

Ms Jansen: I'm happy to take that question and happy to continue this conversation with our Education minister, whom I had a chance to sit down with and talk about these very things. They are hugely important to me. We know we have seen news stories in the last little while where, clearly, that conversation has not hit home with all the folks that really need to have it. We are struggling with some boards. We have a patchwork of policies across the province right now when it comes to dealing with LGBTQ issues. As I advised our Minister of Education, I think that it is time – and, certainly, I've had this conversation with the Member for Calgary-Elbow as well, who has a motion, I believe, that will not likely hit this session but is a really important piece around talking about what a province-wide LGBTQ policy would look like.

10:50

I believe that at the end of the day when we have that policy – we have some amazing people. I know that you're working with those stakeholders right now. I've worked with those stakeholders in the past. We have a lot of wonderful people in the province who want to help articulate what that policy could look like. It makes it easier for school boards if they don't have to sit down and try to carve through something they may not have a high degree of comfort with. But I think that at the end of the day something like this is an opportunity, that this discussion is an opportunity for people to become more comfortable with the issue, and as they become more comfortable with the issue, it can inform province-wide policy going forward.

This is an important place to be. This is an indication to folks in the province who still haven't wrapped their heads around it that this is where we are in Alberta in 2015. I think that means that going forward, any kind of a province-wide policy that school boards will adopt, hopefully, will flow from that.

So I think this is an excellent place to start. I believe at the end of the day what we will get is a province-wide policy for school boards that really changes the way that we view education in this province.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you. Further to that, Mr. Speaker, I believe that the hon. member had a very insightful comment in the beginning of her speech, which was that as we work through, we become more comfortable with the language and the ideas around LGBTQ issues and GSAs, so it becomes an educative process by which people can use those things. Rather, sometimes, I believe as a teacher, people can work through and own the policies that they develop over time and internalize those policies so that they can in turn become educators in each of their 61 jurisdictions so that we have not just coherent policy but that people have internalized and used that policy to teach the general population right across the province.

I would just ask the hon. member if, you know, the application of her first concept might be a way by which we can do this and, of course, just remind her that, as she knows, I have in fact set a March 31 deadline. It's perhaps some kind of mind meld between the hon. member and myself and Calgary-Elbow that that is indeed happening, and the clock is ticking right now.

Thank you.

Ms Jansen: I want to thank the Minister of Education for that. You know, when we talk about education – and I know that the Minister of Education views his job through the lens of his background as a schoolteacher, and I view my job through the lens of my background as a communicator and a former journalist.

An Hon. Member: And a mom.

Ms Jansen: And a mom. That's true.

The Speaker: Please. Are your comments finished? You can proceed.

Ms Jansen: I would just say that if we have the opportunity – and I've mentioned this to the Education minister – to put this into the curriculum, to have comprehensive sexual health education, to include LGBTQ education in that, that would be wonderful.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. I appreciate the time here to speak in support of Bill 7. Firstly, I would like to recognize that as a cisgendered woman – and for those who are not familiar with that term, it just simply means one's gender corresponds with their biological sex – I have a lot of privilege. I want to recognize that when I speak out about the importance of recognizing gender expression and gender identity as a human right, it is as an ally.

Four words. Four words, Mr. Speaker: "gender identity" and "gender expression." To many that may not seem like a lot, but adding those four words to the Alberta Human Rights Act will change lives for some of our fellow Albertans. I am so proud of this government for this bill, and I would like to congratulate the hon. minister for bringing it forth.

In Alberta many people have shared heartbreaking stories of discrimination and violence because of their self-identity. Loss of work, isolation, homelessness, assault, and, in too many cases, death are all realities for transgendered and transvariant people.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Madam Speaker, 70 per cent of young trans people have reported sexual harassment, 36 per cent have been physically threatened or injured, two-thirds reported self-harm, and more than one-third have attempted suicide in the past year. Because we only recognize binary expression of gender, so often people are forced to prove themselves and their gender in humiliating and degrading ways.

We need to do better to help these Albertans. Again, I'm very proud of this government for flying the transgender flag on the Legislature Grounds for the first time in this province's history for the international Transgender Day of Remembrance.

What this bill shows our transgendered and gender-variant Albertans is that we as a Legislature are your government and that we as a Legislature will stand with you.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: I'll recognize, first, the leader of the third party. Thank you.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: My apologies, hon. member. I neglected to do 29(2)(a). Was that what you were responding to?

Mr. McIver: No. I'll wait.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. Were there any questions for the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow under 29(2)(a)? The hon. health minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm just wondering if the hon. member has had constituents reach out to her office and give feedback or in what way she'll be helping us to gather feedback from her riding to help inform further actions that we can take to support the inclusion of transgendered individuals in government initiatives?

Ms Drever: Yes. Over the summer I have been reaching out to many different stakeholders. I've had constituents come in. I'm just trying to find ways to help and to find these resources within my constituency and within Calgary to point them in the right direction like the suicide helpline for Calgary Outlink, for example. Those are the types of things I've been doing over the summer, and I will continue my work.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other questions or comments under 29(2)(a)?

Then I'll recognize the hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm happy to rise on this today. I'm not as conversant as some members of this House are. The Member for Calgary-Hawkwood – I was listening carefully – is obviously a lot more conversant than I am. But when our caucus discussed this legislation when it came forward, after all of the discussion it came down to some simple principles. Everybody in Alberta is equal. Everybody deserves to be able to live and work and find homes and get medical care without discrimination and without exception. Since we're in a place where transgender people are still experiencing that discrimination, then it just becomes obvious that the answer is to support this legislation.

Other people can use better words than I can and probably a more sophisticated description of the issue, but for us and for me it's a principle-based decision. Albertans are equal. Discrimination should never be tolerated in our province. Our caucus and I will be supporting this legislation.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments under 29(2)(a)? The hon. minister of economic development.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I thank the member for his comments, also the Member for Calgary-North West, and for the fact that the whole PC caucus will be supporting this bill.

There is a part of me, though, that has to get up and ask this question because for years, while I was a member in this House, I spoke in favour of amending our human rights legislation, with our current Premier as well for many years, asking the former government to do such a thing. I'm wondering, after 44 years, why the previous government didn't make amendments. Why suddenly this change of heart?

11:00

Mr. McIver: Well, Madam Speaker, I think it's a good question. I've been here since 2012. You know what? You're government. Someday, when you're not in government anymore – and hopefully that won't be too long. [interjections] But I will answer the question because it's a fair question. You'll find that there's work still undone, and I don't think it's any more complicated than that.

The Deputy Speaker: Any further questions or comments under 29(2)(a)?

Cortes-Vargas: Yes.

The Deputy Speaker: Go ahead.

Cortes-Vargas: It's an interesting comment to me, and I want to refer this to you. When I was watching our Premier stand up and ask in this House for this to be included in the Human Rights Act, the answer by the minister was simply no. It is that arrogance of feeling that it was not supported and not important that created that feeling of marginalization in our community, that was advocating for it so thoroughly. It's not just a recognition that it just wasn't done, but there was a feeling generally from the previous government that only a few people truly supported it, and that is the experience of the transgender community, being marginalized. To say that it was just not done – there was a bigger issue at play, and it's a systemic issue. It is something that our government is quite different on. Not only do we have members in the community that know the community, know the feelings, and know who to reach out to and how to do that, but we're willing to follow through. We're willing to listen.

I would like to know, because the question was asked multiple times. I watched all of those videos. Sometimes it was just simply,

“No, we will not do it; you've asked that question before,” and they sat down. That's hurtful – hurtful – to a community that experiences such high levels of suicide, hurtful to a community that shows so much courage, courage in everyday existence to be themselves. Yet the former government was unable to do that. It has to be more than that it just wasn't done. My question is: why didn't you take action?

Mr. McIver: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the question. You know what? I think there was probably an element of a lack of understanding, a lack of appreciation. You know, in fairness, a lot of us either don't talk to a transgendered person on a regular basis or we're not aware we do, and I'm sure there was an element of a lack of appreciation in the past of the importance. I think your question is fair, but it's before the House now, and we're supporting it. We think it's the right thing to do. In fact, we don't think it's the right thing to do; we know it's the right thing to do. For me, again, I've said that I'm not as conversant in all the finer details of what's going on, but I'm very solid in my belief in the principle that Albertans are all equal, that discrimination should never be tolerated, and I'm pretty comfortable with that.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other questions or comments?

I'll recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, then.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm honoured to speak to Bill 7 today. It's a great day in the Legislature. I'm proud to rise today and join in the unanimity of this House in support of our transgendered and gender-variant community. Legislation has been a long time coming, and it's an important step towards greater equality and human dignity. It's something I believe in very strongly. Absolutely no one in the province should face discrimination because they are different. No one should face the sickening choice between being who they are and being safe. As we've heard, the transgender and gender-diverse community continues to face that choice on a daily basis in Alberta. The transgender community faces higher levels of violence, unemployment, homelessness, harassment, and, indeed, suicide.

This is why it was important for me to raise the issue with the Justice minister in our first meeting and in letters since. At every point I was delighted to find her every bit the passionate ally that I expected, and I thank her for bringing this bill forward.

Madam Speaker, we don't get the opportunity to push forward important human rights legislation often. It's an exciting and important honour to be part of it. Make no mistake: this legislation is historic and a first step in creating a safer and more inclusive society for transgendered and gender-variant Albertans. However, it's just a step. I'll end my comments with a quotation I'm quite fond of by former federal Liberal leader Michael Ignatieff. He's a great writer, a great thinker, and a great Canadian, in my view, and I quote from the book called *The Rights Revolution*.

Rights are something more than dry, legalistic phrases. Because they represent our attempt to give legal meaning to the values we care most about – dignity, equality, and respect – rights have worked their way deep inside our psyches. Rights are not just instruments of the law, they are expressions of our moral identity as a people. When we see justice done . . . we feel a deep emotion rise within us. That emotion is the longing to live in a fair world. Rights may be precise, legalistic, and dry, but they are the chief means by which human beings express this longing.

I would add, Madam Speaker, that this is more than principle. This is about relationship, this is about people, and this is about the care that we share for one another and that we must find the means to express in very tangible ways: in the ways we listen, in the way we ask, in the way we contribute to honest conversations, in the

way we work together to solve relationship issues and conflicts and signs of mental illness and addiction in our community. This is a sign of real, deep respect for the human condition.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments for the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View?

Seeing none, I'll recognize the hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park, followed by Edmonton-Centre.

Cortes-Vargas: As I wrote my notes, Speaker, I started off by asking myself why I need to include in that your gender in order to identify you. I asked myself this question before I even came into this Legislature and was asked to identify my gender so *Hansard* could put that into the transcription. I have always battled with gender identity, gender expression, and I continue to do so. A lot of the time I don't have the answers to who I am, why I act this way, why I dress this way, but I do know this: I do know that I'm a person, that I deserve rights, and that anything less than that is unacceptable.

Gender, Speaker, plays a role in everyone's life, but for the trans community and for the gender-variant community it's magnified to a level that creates high suicide rates, high unemployment rates, high levels of work in the sex trade because people are shunned. People feel like they cannot be themselves without continuously having to explain to people that, hey, maybe I'm a boy and maybe I'm a girl. It shouldn't matter. If the way I look confuses people, I love it. I will always continue to challenge that the way I look needs to define anything about me, because at the end of the day, when I look in the mirror, I say: "For the first time in my life, when I cut my hair, when I chose different wardrobes, when I challenged my cultural identity as a Hispanic woman, hey, maybe I don't need to wear heels, and maybe I don't need to have long hair just because that's what is expected and that's what's considered beautiful. I think I'm a beautiful person."

11:10

Today is a marker of a historic decision, historic but not because it's new. It isn't new, and frankly I've been waiting far too long for this. We do need action, and we do need education, so that's why I was hoping to hear more voices from the other side. To truly make a difference in education, we need to have those voices heard, to make sure that we know that people are looking for something different, that people are hearing from the community that they've never heard from before, that people are reaching out. In order to do that, we need to hear your voices in the Legislature.

I'm humbled by the work that has been done by so many members and by, I always say, the courage, because it is a thing that at home you have to decide whether you're going to be true to yourself or not. To look in the mirror and to see something that doesn't represent you is heartbreaking, and that is a real experience of this community. To know that a society has accepted this as a way of being, as an acceptable law – yes, there were cases that made it so that everyone was welcoming. But to say that a community that has been marginalized to such an extent has to learn how to read law in order to defend their rights is unacceptable.

To the people present in the stands: it is your work, your continuous courage that I stand for here, and it is this government, that creates such a welcoming atmosphere for every single person in Alberta, that I stand with and that I know I am supported by. It is not an individual that is fighting for this, but it is a collective decision. That's what is needed.

My colleague spoke of the definitions, which I think are very important to know what we're talking about. If we're going to

present legislation that affects their everyday lives, people have to learn about it in order to really understand themselves. To know what pronouns are, what they mean, to know what gender identity is: those are important to making sure that legislation is filled with education and to know that it was inspired by the community and driven by the community.

While I have my own personal experience that makes me extremely happy to see this happening, I know that there are many more stories, especially for the transgender community that works in the sex trade. It's heartbreaking to know that they're so ashamed, that they're so discriminated against on a level in the workplace, that in order to make ends meet, that is the option that they have. In order to create a society that is truly welcoming and so that we can see the benefits of a diverse culture, we need to be empowering, and that is what this legislation starts.

I've gone through the speech without crying, so I feel like I've accomplished a very good thing. I know it has taken a lifetime for me to understand where I am, who I am to this day, and I will have many more years to really understand whether gender binaries are what define me or whether I choose to decide that I can define gender binaries in the same way it was created by society. That's what I do every day. I ask myself who I am, why I act, and it will not be defined by words like "masculinity" and "femininity" because I will redefine them every single day, the same way that this community does in everything you do. Your support has been integral to my development into a healthy relationship, into a healthy self-esteem, and I am so grateful for the work that has been done before us. It makes it feel like it's a win not just for the government but for the community in an authentic and hard-fought way.

That's all I have to say. Thank you. [applause]

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments for the hon. member? I will call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Mr. Connolly: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The member touched on pronouns a little bit. I was just wondering if she could explain to the House how integral the use of pronouns is to many members of the trans and gender-nonconforming community and how using the incorrect pronouns can be triggering for many individuals.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you. I think pronouns are a concept that's sometimes hard for people to understand. It's reasonable because we teach this from a very young age. People need them to define how they're going to talk to you, how they're going to see you. Pronouns are a way of showing respect to the decisions that they have made, very personal and internalized decisions that they now want to be represented in their external world. That's what pronouns do, and that's what respecting pronouns does. That's why thinking about and asking people what they prefer is truly important and signifies a culture that is accepting of differences and different ways of living.

I think one of the most tangible experiences, I guess, is going to the washroom. The fact that it says, when you walk in, what gender is supposed to be going in there is an experience for a lot of the community because they have to reflect over and over and over again, because of the way our society is built, on whether they're going to enter a washroom that has a pronoun, that has a gender attached to it. When they decide to be called "she" or "he" or "they," to respect that is how we change society. It's how we show respect. It's how we show that we are willing to educate ourselves and we are willing to accept differences amongst everyone.

So thank you for the question because I think that it is truly important and probably one of the first times the importance of pronouns has ever been talked about in this Legislature. You know, I'm being called Member Cortes-Vargas because I don't think it is relevant to know in the transcripts whether I'm a woman or a man. Studies show that there is a difference in the way you interpret information, whether you're a woman or a man, so why does my transcript need to add that? What if I don't know whether I'm a woman or a man? It doesn't matter. I am a person, and Cortes-Vargas is my name, and that's all you really need to know.

Mr. Westhead: Well, I really want to thank the member for sharing a powerful story. Her story was so powerful that the majority of the members in this House got up on their feet and gave her a round of applause, although there were some notable absences of people standing. [interjection] I didn't name a member.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, I would encourage you to refrain from making those types of comments as it is inappropriate to refer to absences.

Mr. Westhead: Okay. I'll retract my statement, then.

I would like to ask the member this. She mentioned how important it would be to hear some voices from across the way. I wonder if she can elaborate on how important it would be to her to hear those comments, especially from someone like the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Cortes-Vargas: You know, I think a lot of the times these changes have happened with one or two people pushing it and a bunch more people just accepting that it's happening. The difference is that if they are truly committed to making this change be felt authentically and creating a culture that does not discriminate, hearing your voices to make sure that that's what you're doing is extremely important.

11:20

Mr. Jean: I do want to congratulate the member, first of all, for her speech today. It was very moving, and I know many members of this place will congratulate her personally later on. I do think we've made it very clear on this side that we support this.

I spent many years in Alberta arguing the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Constitution. I'm very proud of my work in relation to that. I think everybody has the opportunity to be who they are to the fulfillment of what they want to do, and I clearly believe that all Albertans should be protected no matter what choices they make, and I will continue with that.

I do have a question for her, and I would like to say, first of all, that I do have many family members that are in various communities . . .

The Deputy Speaker: We are out of time on 29(2)(a).
Edmonton-Centre was next on the list.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm not sure I have that much I can add after such a powerful statement from the Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park, but given some of the experiences I've had since being elected, I did want to take a moment to say a few words, you know, acknowledging that as a cisgender heterosexual male I can't say that I understand the experiences of the individuals in the trans community. But I've certainly been very fortunate in having had the opportunity over the last few months to learn from many strong advocates, including these wonderful members here in our own caucus as well as some of the members of my own constituency of Edmonton-Centre.

Earlier this year I had the opportunity to meet with Mr. Mickey Wilson, who joins us here today, executive director of the Pride Centre of Edmonton, and had the opportunity to discuss with him the issues and the challenges that face many LGBTQ individuals. He made specific note of the issues that face many in the trans community here in Edmonton and across Alberta. I'd like to recognize the Pride Centre for their excellent work in being one of the few organizations which is here that provides direct support to people in that community. He made it quite clear in our conversation that trans and gender-variant people in Edmonton and across Alberta face challenges not only in finding acceptance and understanding and support but often just in accessing the most basic human rights, that the rest of us take for granted.

Over the last few months I've also had the opportunity to meet with representatives from the Society for Safe Accommodations for Queer Edmonton Youth, or SAFQEY. SAFQEY's goal is to develop safe housing for LGBTQ youth because, unfortunately, many of these youth find themselves homeless due to discrimination and a lack of support in their home, particularly those individuals who are trans or gender diverse. Once homeless they often face further discrimination, prejudice, and mistreatment, sometimes from staff and sometimes from fellow residents in shelters. In September I had the opportunity to view their documentary *For Want of a Home*, which specifically focuses on the stories of homeless trans individuals here in Edmonton and Calgary. Those were powerful stories, Madam Speaker. They confirmed for me again the deep need for greater awareness and education about the challenges faced by gender-variant and trans individuals here in Alberta.

In the time that I spent when I worked as a writer for Alberta Health, I was also tasked with responding to many inquiries from trans men and women regarding the challenges that they faced in accessing health care in Alberta. As my colleague from Calgary-Hawkwood noted, these men and women often face multiple barriers and prejudices as they seek to access transitional surgeries, hormone treatment, counselling, and even, unfortunately, simple, basic health care with the respect and dignity that we all enjoy and expect.

I also had the honour in early September of accompanying Mickey Wilson and two of my constituents, long-time Edmonton LGBTQ advocates Mr. Murray Billett and Michael Phair, to meet with the hon. Minister of Justice. At that meeting they expressed the clear and present need to amend the Alberta Human Rights Act to include protections for gender identity and gender expression. So, Madam Speaker, I was incredibly pleased to see that the minister did exactly that by bringing forward Bill 7.

Madam Speaker, as I said, I can't speak to the experience of individuals in this community, to the long years of suffering and fighting and advocacy that they've spent to achieve this moment and see this happen here in this House today. I thank our members so much for sharing their stories and giving us the opportunity to hear from them, to learn, and to see the deep passion and, I think, indeed the deep joy that they feel in this moment here today. It's an honour to be a member of this House, to be able to participate in this debate, and to be able to cast a vote in favour of Bill 7.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North West under 29(2)(a).

Ms Jansen: Under 29(2)(a) I would like to ask the member just a quick question triggered by the Leader of the Official Opposition and a comment he made about folks who are trans or gender diverse and the choices they make. I'm wondering if hearing that is a little frustrating when I am given to understand that it's not about making choices; it's about living your authentic life. Can you explain this?

Mr. Shepherd: Well, Madam Speaker, I thank the member for raising that point. I would certainly agree with her. I'm sure that, provided the opportunity, the hon. Leader of the Opposition would wish to clarify that statement. I'm sure he understands as we all do that this is not a matter of choice but that this is a matter of who we are. Certainly, as our member expressed earlier, this is an issue of core identity. This is an issue of who people are in their hearts, in their soul, in their mind and body. I'm certainly sure that this is something that he would agree with as well.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Jean: Thank you. I did notice the time frame, so I didn't get an opportunity to complete my sentences, as you know. I did want to ask a question of the hon. member because I do have family members that I love very much that are in these different communities, and I have had an opportunity to work with them. Many of them have helped me on my campaigns in the past.

The choices we make are to fulfill who we are and who we believe we are, and there are a series of choices that go with that. I myself make choices every day. Those choices are to fulfill who we are and who we believe we are and who we are in our hearts. I think that that's very, very important.

My interest in this particular decision by the government and the reason why I'm supporting it is along the same lines as, I think, all members that are going to support this particular piece of legislation. It's time. It's necessary. It's past time.

My real, sincere compliments to the government would be on the clarity that it brings to the law and the certainty that it brings to people that have the opportunity to read the law. That's what I would compliment the government on in this particular case because too often citizens of Alberta don't know what they are supposed to do and what their obligations are. I think, clearly, this is one of those opportunities.

I would congratulate the member on that speech and let them know that I myself find – and I have for many, many years – very unacceptable the high suicide rates. Some parts of some communities, their lack of acceptance, I find very discouraging. I think that through education and proper bills like this that we can make the changes necessary to be inclusive to all peoples because that's what we have to be. We have to protect in this place all people. We need to stand up for all people of Alberta. That's what our job is. We have to protect each and every one of them the same way: with passion, with vigour, and with common sense. And this is common sense.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any further questions or comments under 29(2)(a)?

If not, the next person to speak to the bill is the hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just have two points to add to what I want to say has been a beautiful debate. First of all, I want to say to the hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park that she is beautiful and that while many of us have to make decisions every day, we don't have to make a decision about denying our true selves by the clothes we wear or the washroom we use. I think the law that we're passing today will take the world much farther ahead in making sure that people can actually be welcome and will actually make the world a better place.

11:30

In 2010, when I was first elected to public office as a school board trustee, that was the summer that the It Gets Better campaign was happening all across North America because so many kids were

taking their lives. It's taken us five years, but we're here today to make it better. We can't just say: it will get better. So I want to thank all hon. members for what I'm sure will be a unanimous vote in actually making Alberta a more welcoming place.

On one other note, an employee from Alberta Health Services contacted me the day the bill was tabled and said: in an unwelcoming world I feel welcome in Alberta.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments for the hon. Minister of Health?

If not, the next speaker to the bill.

Ms Fitzpatrick: I'm going to keep my comments really short. This bill will take care of the legal part of changing the Alberta Human Rights Act. We have to be supportive in our actions to give definition to this bill, so I hope not just that each of the parties supports the legislation with your vote but that you stand and speak in support of this legislation when you return to your communities.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments for the hon. Member for Lethbridge-East?

Seeing none, do we have another speaker on the bill?

Seeing none, then, the hon. Minister of Justice to close debate.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's quite a challenge to speak after so many moving words. I perhaps wish I had spoken up front, but I'll do my best to give credit to this bill.

Over the last few weeks and leading up to the passage of this bill, I think I've had a lot of opportunity to reflect on the purpose of law and what it is and does in our society. I mean, certainly one of the things it does is the obvious thing, and that's to give remedy. In the case of this particular law that remedy was probably already available through case law.

But the reason this is so important, in any event, is because of the educational value that law holds for us in our society. You know, we as lawmakers, we as the people who sit here in this House have a real critical role, to act as the voice of the people and to voice their feelings and their will, if you will. One of the things this bill does is that it sends that signal, that we the people of Alberta stand with the trans and gender-variant community, that we feel that they are entitled to equal rights, that we feel they should not be discriminated against, and that we will stand up for those rights.

I think this signals to the wider population that that is our feeling, that we as lawmakers feel that equal rights are important and that they should be extended to everyone. So I think that that educational value is absolutely instrumental, particularly now, because this bill is, Madam Speaker, in my view, just a first step. This bill signals the government's and the whole House's commitment to move forward on these issues, but more than that it tells the population what it is we're thinking, and it allows us to start taking additional steps and to start having additional conversations.

Oftentimes, people who would speak against a bill of this nature would do so out of fear. It's that fear that ultimately we're here to combat, and the thing that will best combat that fear is education and information. People, unfortunately, often fear change and what they don't know. If I were to speak to those people, what I would say to them is that this small change in society, which they may fear, which may cause anxiety in them, is nothing compared to the changes that members of this community have to experience in their daily lives.

In order to simply be who they are, they have to go through an incredible – incredible – process of recognizing who they are, of being willing to stand up and tell the people around them. You know, I don't think that most of us recognize – and I'm not sure that I understood before we did the consultation with respect to this bill – that simply

standing up each day and having the people around you understand who you are through the expressions that you have of that is a really critical value. To have people misunderstand who you are and to have to stand up to them and to face the fear that they will reject you on that basis, I think, is just an overwhelming demonstration of courage on the part of individuals in the trans and gender-variant community. So I think that when we as a society face a change like this, we need to understand that whatever anxiety people out there may feel, it's nothing compared to what these incredibly brave individuals have gone through just to be accepted as who they are.

One interesting aspect of this bill for me personally is that when I was originally standing for election, one of the very first questions I got asked through my brand new e-mail was about this specific issue, so one of my very first commitments as an individual politician was to this specific issue, to make these amendments. I really think, for me, it's sort of a very moving expression of democracy, to have had a value and to have had the opportunity to now stand in this House and to act on that value and to act to protect Albertans who deserve that protection, who need that protection, who simply want to stand and be who they are. So for me this has been an incredibly moving experience.

I mean, my reasons – and I'm sure everyone in this House has reasons that they stood for election because it's not, as you will be aware, a particularly easy process. My reasons for that were to increase political discourse because I felt that the values that I saw in my fellow Albertans – and I've lived in Alberta my whole life – were not necessarily reflected in the policies of the government of that day. I felt that if Albertans stood together and we discussed our values, we might see that we stood in a different place than where we appeared to the rest of the world to be standing. So it's just a real honour to ultimately be able to stand up and to reflect those values as a government.

You know, one of the things we heard in consultation from people was how welcome they felt here in this Legislature and in this government, and I think that that is absolutely critical. All people should be able to come to this place and feel welcomed. This is the place for the people. To hear that is so incredibly moving, that we would have this opportunity, that I could stand here with my colleagues and have this opportunity to make people feel like they are part of our wider Alberta community and that they are valued within our community. I think that that is just an incredible honour.

I'll move on because apparently I've been speaking for a while. I think one of the critical things to recognize with this and one of the things that I've certainly heard in comments that have been sent to my office or social media is that this is a soft issue, and I just want to make it really clear that this is not a soft issue. I had the opportunity to attend in Calgary the Transgender Day of Remembrance, and I have to tell you, Madam Speaker, that that list of names was long and troubling and disheartening. At the ceremony I attended they read out the ages of the people, and they were as young as 10. These were names of people who had died due to violence because of their gender identity or expression, so I think that this is a really critical issue.

11:40

The other thing that I wanted to make absolutely clear is that for this government this is not an end; it is a beginning. In my ministry one of the things we are working on right now is to adopt a best practices policy from other jurisdictions with respect to correctional institutes. Certainly, for anyone who has come into conflict with the law, going into a correctional institute is an overwhelming and difficult process. To then be housed in an incorrect institution because you are identified by a different gender is really, I think,

very, very challenging. The other issues that we'll be working with going forward have to do with access to medical care.

Ultimately, you know, what we really need to work on is changing the views of those around us so that everyone is equally committed, so that everyone, rather than feeling fear when they encounter a trans or gender-variant person, rather than having that experience, should have an experience of feeling the need to support so that people can access housing, doctors, jobs, that they have sort of a comprehensive policy.

I suppose the last thing I will say is that we will as a government be examining our policies with respect to instances in which we require people to identify their gender, because sometimes it can be difficult to change and sometimes it's unnecessary.

I guess, in closing, what I'd like to say is that I'm incredibly honoured to stand here today with this bill, and I am incredibly honoured to have the support of the entire House moving forward. I'm really glad that we finally get the opportunity to get this done.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. members. I think we've all enjoyed a great deal of education this morning and a wonderful dialogue from both sides of the House. Thank you, everyone.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:43 a.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Ganley	Nielsen
Anderson, W.	Goehring	Nixon
Babcock	Gray	Orr
Bilous	Hanson	Payne
Carson	Hinkley	Phillips
Ceci	Hoffman	Piquette
Clark	Horne	Pitt
Connolly	Jansen	Renaud
Coolahan	Jean	Rodney
Cooper	Kazim	Rosendahl
Cortes-Vargas	Kleinsteuber	Sabir
Cyr	Loewen	Schmidt
Dach	Loyola	Shepherd
Dang	Luff	Smith
Drever	MacIntyre	Starke
Drysdale	Malkinson	Strankman
Eggen	McIver	Sucha
Ellis	McKittrick	Swann
Feehan	McLean	Sweet
Fildebrandt	McPherson	van Dijken
Fitzpatrick	Miller	Westhead
Fraser	Miranda	Yao

12:00

Totals: For – 66 Against – 0

[Motion carried unanimously; Bill 7 read a second time]

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 4(2.1) the Assembly stands adjourned.

[The Assembly adjourned at 12:01 p.m. to 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, December 1, 2015

Day 26

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

First Session

Wanner, Hon. Robert E., Medicine Hat (ND), Speaker
Jabbour, Deborah C., Peace River (ND), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Feehan, Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (ND), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (W)	McKittrick, Annie, Sherwood Park (ND)
Bhullar, Manmeet Singh, Calgary-Greenway (PC)	McLean, Stephanie V., Calgary-Varsity (ND), Deputy Government Whip
Bilous, Hon. Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (ND), Deputy Government House Leader	McPherson, Karen M., Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill (ND)
Carlier, Hon. Oneil, Whitecourt-St. Anne (ND)	Miller, Barb, Red Deer-South (ND)
Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-Meadowlark (ND)	Miranda, Ricardo, Calgary-Cross (ND)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, Calgary-Fort (ND)	Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (ND)
Clark, Greg, Calgary-Elbow (AP)	Nixon, Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (W), Official Opposition Whip
Connolly, Michael R.D., Calgary-Hawkwood (ND)	Notley, Hon. Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (ND), Premier
Coolahan, Craig, Calgary-Klein (ND)	Orr, Ronald, Lacombe-Ponoka (W)
Cooper, Nathan, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (W), Official Opposition House Leader	Panda, Prasad, Calgary-Foothills (W)
Cortes-Vargas, Estefania, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (ND)	Payne, Brandy, Calgary-Acadia (ND)
Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake (W), Official Opposition Deputy Whip	Phillips, Hon. Shannon, Lethbridge-West (ND), Deputy Government House Leader
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (ND)	Piquette, Colin, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater (ND)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South West (ND)	Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie (W)
Drever, Deborah, Calgary-Bow (Ind)	Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (ND)
Drysdale, Wayne, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (PC), Progressive Conservative Opposition Whip	Rodney, Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC)
Eggen, Hon. David, Edmonton-Calder (ND)	Rosendahl, Eric, West Yellowhead (ND)
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Hinkley, Bruce, Wetaskiwin-Camrose (ND)	Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (W)
Hoffman, Hon. Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (ND)	Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (ND)
Horne, Trevor A.R., Spruce Grove-St. Albert (ND)	Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Hunter, Grant R., Cardston-Taber-Warner (W)	Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (ND)
Jansen, Sandra, Calgary-North West (PC)	Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (W)
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Kleinstuber, Jamie, Calgary-Northern Hills (ND)	Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND)
Larivee, Hon. Danielle, Lesser Slave Lake (ND)	Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Littlewood, Jessica, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (ND)	Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)
Loewen, Todd, Grande Prairie-Smoky (W)	
Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (ND)	
Luff, Robyn, Calgary-East (ND)	
MacIntyre, Donald, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (W)	

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Kazim	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, December 1, 2015

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Statement by the Speaker

Magna Carta

The Speaker: Hon. members, before we begin, I want to share a message with you. I've managed to arrange for the Sergeant-at-Arms to be standing while I give this message. Earlier this week Magna Carta: Law, Liberty & Legacy opened in the Borealis Gallery in the federal building. This exhibit is quite a unique experience for Albertans to enjoy free of charge.

In addition to encouraging your constituents to visit the Magna Carta exhibition, you can also bring the Magna Carta story to them. A program has been developed that provides your constituency with its own version of the Magna Carta. A special Magna Carta package will be delivered to your office with instructions, educational information, and a scroll.

Today important documents are shared in an instant; 800 years ago great ideas expressed on parchment had to be mailed. That situation has changed.

I do hope you take advantage of this opportunity and share it with all of the people of Alberta.

Thank you.

Introduction of Guests

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

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two grade 6 classes from the Edmonton Christian northeast school. With them today are two teachers, Mr. Greg Gurnett and Ms Elaine Junk, as well as parent helpers Mr. Chris Maluta, Mrs. Amy Jeffery, Mr. Jason Visser, Ms Ilda Dias. I would ask all of them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Ms Gray: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly the wonderful class from Millwoods Christian school that is enjoying the School at the Leg. program this week. I hope they're enjoying themselves. With them is their teacher, Mr. Nathan Marshall. I'd like to ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Are there any other school groups to be welcomed today?

Hearing none, the hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a guest that is near and dear to my heart. Pat Nixon is seated in your gallery today. Pat is truly one of my great heroes. He came to this province as a homeless teenager and would go on start the Mustard Seed in Calgary in 1984, an organization that would eventually care for 1,100 people who experience poverty and homelessness daily, and

would mobilize more than 11,000 volunteers a year to fight poverty in this province. Pat to this day still works helping those in need, and his newest role is as the executive director of Oxford House.

Pat hates it when we talk about his accomplishments, but I will mention a few. In 2001 he was named Calgary citizen of the year. In 2005 he became a member of the Order of Canada, and in 2007 he was inducted into the Alberta Order of Excellence. In addition to his many accomplishments in his career, he is also an accomplished family man, a fact I know as I am the eldest of his six sons. He, together with my mom, always challenged us to reach for the stars and provided us with an amazing childhood. The accomplishments of all of his boys is a testament to his dedication to his family.

My dad has played many roles in my life along the way, Mr. Speaker, but I will introduce him through you to this Assembly in the role that I value the most, and that is as my friend. I know there are members from all parties in this Assembly and across all aisles that are proud to call Pat their friend and know the value of that friendship. With that said, I would ask Pat Nixon, my dad and my friend, to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly. [Standing ovation]

The Speaker: Welcome.

Hon. member, I do hope that you are the biggest one, that there aren't ones bigger than you.

The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly the grandparents of one of our pages, Andriy Krugliak. Andriy started as a page in August of this year and is a valued member of our team. Before moving to Canada, he lived in Ukraine, where his grandparents still reside. But today Volodymyr Sukhariev and Lidiia Krugliak are here to watch their grandson hard at work in the Legislature. They are seated in your gallery. They've already risen. I'd ask that we all give them the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Minister of Health and Minister of Seniors.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Michelle Merchant and Ellen Molloy. Michelle works part-time at the Edmonton-Glenora constituency office. She brings great experience as a social worker as well as a psychologist, having worked in child and family services and mental health. Ellen is completing her practicum in the constituency office as a first-year social work student. Previously, Ellen had eight years of medical training experience in the military. Through this and her work with the RCMP she has brought a focus on first responder support and advocacy. I'm very proud to have these two skilled women as part of my team in service to the citizens of Edmonton-Glenora. Will Michelle and Ellen please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you three special guests today. Patti and Don Machell are from the small town of Cereal, Alberta. Don spent 32 years and Patti spent 25 years teaching students in the Prairie Rose school division. They worked hard to bring passion to the classrooms and to make an impact on rural students' lives while also running a family farm. The farm has been in the Machell family for more than a century. Don and Patti are the parents of Aileen Machell, who is the press staff for the Human Services ministry.

They are joined by their son-in-law Matt Buchi, who recently moved to Edmonton from Prince George, B.C., where he worked at the University of Northern British Columbia as an AV technician, helping students in the medical program. It's my pleasure to ask my distinguished guests to rise and accept the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

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

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly several guests who are here with us in recognition of World AIDS Day. Shelley Williams is the executive director of HIV Edmonton, and Leslie Hill is the executive director of Calgary's HIV Community Link, both valuable organizations that provide education, prevention, and support across Alberta.

Maggie McGinn is also in the gallery. She's my mother and an HIV-positive person who is a tireless advocate for persons with HIV. Her contributions are numerous but include serving as the executive director of the Edmonton persons living with HIV society for over a decade and serving multiple terms on the boards of CATIE and CTAC.

Also joining them in the gallery today are Ray Chorney and Marlo Cottrell, advocates and persons living with HIV, as well as ACCH co-ordinator Ferdinand Langit. I would ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

1:40

Mr. Clark: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly a close friend of mine, Mr. Jason Kropp; his wife, Patricia Kropp; and their three boys, Mackenzie, Carter, and Caius Kropp. Now, if I were to describe some of the things that Mr. Kropp has gotten up to in his time, I may have to resort to unparliamentary language. The good news is that he would also probably say the same things about me. It's that mutually assured . . .

Mr. Cooper: Safety first.

Mr. Clark: That's right

. . . destruction that keeps, I think, a friendship strong. I would ask the Kropp family to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly my constituency staff. Heather Belanger is a caseworker and constituency assistant for Edmonton-Manning. She has spent many years in the field of human services, assisting the community in northeast Edmonton. Her ability to listen to constituents and assist in times of struggle has proven to be very valuable in our constituency office. She is an excellent advocate for Edmonton-Manning. Her laughter and easygoing disposition make the office a welcoming place for all of my constituents. Michael MacLean is a constituency assistant for Edmonton-Manning. His ongoing work within the constituency has been praised by many of my constituents, and I am extremely thankful not only to have his commitment to his work for all Albertans but also his willingness and patience in dealing with me. I will now ask both Heather and Michael to please stand and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Northern Hills.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is my maiden introduction. [interjections] It's my pleasure today to rise – thank you – and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly four guests joining us today from the Alberta Bottle Depot Association. I'd ask them to rise as I call out their names. Trevor Nickel is the president of the ABDA, representing and advocating for 216 independent small and medium-sized businesses that collectively are the point of return for about 2.1 billion beverage containers annually. He is joined by colleagues Jeff Linton, president of the Beverage Container Management Board, who has more than 30 years of management experience across multiple disciplines; and Guy West, president of the Alberta Beverage Container Recycling Corporation. Guy has been involved in beverage container stewardship since 1989. Guy also serves as director of the Recycling Council of Alberta. Also joining them today is Karim Dossa, owner and operator of the Beddington Heights Bottle Depot, located in my constituency of Calgary-Northern Hills, which has been a growing and successful family business since 1986. I'd ask all members to give our guests the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my absolute joy to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly my excellent constituency staff. Alan Parish is my constituency manager and works around the clock to ensure that our office runs smoothly and that the people of Edmonton-Castle Downs are well taken care of when they contact our office. Heather Belanger is our caseworker and works relentlessly to help solve the many issues that arise on a daily basis that my constituents may need assistance with. Cassidy Green recently joined our office as part of her social work placement, and I'm so pleased to have her on our team. I'd ask them all to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly a wonderful organization in my constituency, the Somali Canadian Women and Children Association. They're a nonprofit organization proudly serving all of Edmonton and the surrounding area that recognizes, responds to, and focuses on the unique concerns and needs of women, children, and holistic families, especially, of Somali Canadian women and their families. Visiting us today are Bob Walker, treasurer; Ahmed Ali, vice-chair; Jaamac Jaamac, board member; Kahye Dubow, youth manager; and Sahra Hashi, executive director. I would ask that they please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House five Calgary-West residents who have travelled to the Legislature today for question period. From the Discovery Ridge Community Association are Jacquie Hansen-Sydenham and Ben Lee; as well, from the Springbank Hill Community Association: Fiona Christiaansen, Marshall Naruzny, and Elio Cozzi. These residents are all tireless activists for our community, and I thank them for being here today. My guests are seated in the public gallery, and I'd ask them to stand and please receive the traditional welcome from this Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to stand today and introduce to you and through you two wonderful women in my life.

An Hon. Member: Wonderful.

Mr. Hanson: Wonderful.

The very first is my wife of 34 years, Donna, my best friend for 36. The second is my daughter Nikita. She is an RN working here in the city of Edmonton and one of the reasons that I stand up proudly and defend front-line health care workers. I would like them both to rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Hon. members, on your collective behalf I would like to welcome all of our guests here today. You've heard today that there are many family members that are with us. I know I speak for all of you that the important stuff that we do in here only happens because of the family support we have at home. You should all be proud of them.

I would also apologize to one of the members. In fact, through my error I did not recognize him yesterday for some guests. If by chance in the future I am not able to see you, don't be afraid to maybe wave a little bigger.

Members' Statements

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

World AIDS Day

Ms McLean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today, December 1, is World AIDS Day. Today is meant to highlight the enormity of the pandemic and each nation's responsibility to ensure universal treatment, care, and support for people living with HIV. The theme of World AIDS Day 2015 is Getting to Zero: zero new HIV infections, zero discrimination and stigmatization, and zero AIDS-related deaths.

This virus does not discriminate. World-wide the fastest growing number of those infected are women. In Alberta 1 in 4 persons living with HIV is a woman. Odds are that you know or have met someone infected or affected.

I was born to an HIV-infected mother, who did not know she was positive, and while I did not contract the virus, my family and I live with the stigma every day. When I was about six years old, we attended a candlelight vigil to remember those lost to the virus. I recall sitting on my mother's lap and asking if she was HIV positive. She didn't lie to me; she told me that she was. I asked if she, too, was going to die. At the time our reality was that I would lose my mother before my 12th birthday. The fear of discrimination due to stigma meant that I kept this to myself.

Today my mother sits in the gallery – well, she stands in the gallery – expecting her first grandchild, whom we never thought she'd live to meet.

While persons living with HIV are living longer than ever before, the stigma remains, and while I am in a position to speak out about my family, not everyone is or feels that they can. Valuable organizations like HIV Edmonton, Calgary's HIV Community Link, and ACCH advocate against the stigma and discrimination, promote prevention, provide community support to those living with HIV, and educate all Albertans.

Today, this World AIDS Day, help us get to zero. Start by getting educated.

Thank you.

[Standing ovation]

The Speaker: Hon. members, I must say that I continue to be amazed when I hear speeches like that. I tie it back to the point I talked about, our family members. We should all be very proud of each other that those kinds of stories can be told here on behalf of all Albertans.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: I feel the need to mention – and I speak now because I won't be heard later on – that the volume in the House tends to creep on certain days, so I want to remind you all to please allow me, the members to hear. Handle your volume and probably your tone more judiciously than you have in the past.

With that message, the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Farm and Ranch Worker Legislation

Mr. Jean: Yesterday 1,500 Alberta farmers rallied at the Legislature in opposition to Bill 6. Their message was simple: they want consultation, not dictation, and until that happens, kill Bill 6. This morning the Premier admitted that she's lost the trust of Albertans over Bill 6, but who's fault was that? Not hers, of course. It's the bureaucrats' fault. A failure to communicate, she says. She should be ashamed of herself. If the Premier wants to restore the trust of Albertans, blaming faceless bureaucrats will not cut it. Why won't she just kill Bill 6 and hold meaningful consultations with Alberta's farmers?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There certainly has been misinformation on this issue, and it has come from official channels. We sincerely apologize for that and are working to rectify it.

I find the irony of the member opposite, who comes into this House and beats up on public services every day, talking about cutting billions of dollars from the budget, astounding. [interjections]

The Speaker: Could the hon. minister please finish her remarks? Were you finished? It was so hard to tell if you were finished or not.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm sure I'll have an opportunity to add more in subsequent questions.

Mr. Jean: It's my job.

It's clear the NDP don't understand farmers. No one in the government actually depends on farming as a livelihood. The new carbon tax will raise the cost of operating the family farm, driving vehicles, turning the lights on, operating farm equipment, and new changes being rammed through by the NDP will dramatically change how the farm operates. But the Premier is pushing harder on the gas pedal. This is wrong, stubborn, and simply out of touch with Albertans. Why does the Premier believe she needs to ram through her attack on family farms all across Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This bill is specifically about ensuring that paid farm and ranch employees have the same rights and protections as employees on every other work site. Every

other province in Canada has implemented these reforms, and they continue to have successful family farms, and we will in Alberta, too. We've certainly heard some feedback from farm communities, and we are acting on that through amendments.

Mr. Jean: Over 45,000 farms are being hit hard by bad NDP policy. Carbon taxes, dramatic changes to farmers' livelihood: it's all creating fear and uncertainty. Farmers want this government to go back to the drawing board. They want the same respect municipalities are getting through the Municipal Government Act review. They're tired of the Premier, ministers, and bureaucrats patronizing them. They're tired of consultation meetings becoming come-and-be-told-how-it's-going-to-be meetings. How can the Premier expect any farmer in Alberta to trust them again after this direct attack on their way of life?

Ms Hoffman: This legislation is geared at ensuring that people who are injured, or, God forbid, killed on the work site have some protections. That's the point of this legislation, Mr. Speaker. I know the member opposite wants us to sit on our hands and wait another six months while people continue to be at risk, but we're not going to do that. We're going to keep working, moving forward together, in partnership, and we are absolutely willing to bring forward amendments. We've said that, but the member opposite just wants us to sit on our hands, and we're not going to do that.

Mr. Jean: If you were so right last week, you wouldn't be pushing amendments today.

Royalty Review

Mr. Jean: We know the NDP are hammering farms across the province, but companies are rapidly losing confidence in Alberta's energy sector. According to a new survey Alberta has plummeted as an attractive place to invest. Top reasons: political turbulence and bad policies, carbon taxes, business taxes. It's all making things much, much worse. Albertans are very worried. The NDP have made it clear that royalties are going up, and companies are shutting down. What does this government have to say for all those Albertans who will now be out of work as a result of your policies?

Ms Hoffman: I know the Leader of the Official Opposition thinks that the way to have a balanced budget is to lay off thousands of front-line workers, Mr. Speaker, and we're not going to do that. We're going to stand up for what Albertans voted for us to do. While the Leader of the Official Opposition might have no intention to actually implement things they campaigned on, this government does.

Mr. Jean: The only one cutting front-line jobs here is you.

A panelist from the NDP's royalty review recently said that there are, quote, elements of the industry that cannot be competitive. End quote. Engineers, geologists, administration staff, rig workers, honest and hard-working men and women will all be hit hard by the NDP's economic experiments. A new royalty review is creating further instability, which results in more money leaving our province very quickly. NDP policies are out of touch, and they're losing the trust of Albertans. Why does the NDP insist on kicking Albertans when they're already down?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We were elected to stand up for families, to stand up for jobs. That's the Alberta way. That's why we brought forward a budget that has balance: balance in maintaining services, balance in making sure that we're investing in job creation, a philosophy that the members

opposite fail to see the merit in but that Albertans do. That's why we're going to create up to 27,000 jobs each year for the next two years. We're working with industry. We've created a ministry that's focused on this. We're actually working to build jobs and build the Alberta economy.

Mr. Jean: One hundred thousand Albertans are now unemployed. Their number one priority is getting back to work, but all the NDP can talk about is jetting around the world, taxing everything, hurting businesses, raising power bills for all Albertans, and attacking family farms. This royalty review has the potential to be the final blow to an economy already on the ropes. Why does the NDP care more about their own risky experiments than doing what's best for Albertans?

Ms Hoffman: I know the Leader of the Official Opposition finds it hard to keep his promises, but we are absolutely committed to doing that. He campaigned on bringing forward legislation to ban floor crossing, but we haven't seen that yet, Mr. Speaker.

We are absolutely committed to fulfilling our promises. We promised to bring forward a review of royalties, and we're committed to doing that. Former governments, that are no longer in power, failed to do that, and Albertans failed to believe their future commitments around royalty reviews. We've promised to do this. We're doing it. We're going to make sure that we get value for Albertans, Mr. Speaker.

Provincial Quarterly Fiscal Update

Mr. Fildebrandt: Mr. Speaker, section 11 of the Fiscal Management Act requires the Minister of Finance to make public "the actual results of the fiscal plan for the first 6 months of the fiscal year, on or before November 30 in that year." That was yesterday. Every Finance minister since Jim Dinning has more or less faithfully provided a quarterly fiscal update, but today we find ourselves with a Finance minister who has for the first time broken the law. Can the minister tell us why he has broken the law and failed to provide Albertans with the fiscal update?

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act, which I tabled before this House, it said that we will not bring that in for November 30 because we are bringing a budget in. We tabled a budget on October 27. There's no need for a November 30 update.

Mr. Fildebrandt: The minister knows perfectly well that he has not passed Bill 4; it has merely been tabled in this House. The minister has not given any justification as to why we shouldn't get a quarterly update. These laws exist for a reason, to prevent politicians from spending beyond their means without any accountability. Perhaps the reason he has neglected to follow our fiscal laws is because the numbers are embarrassing. Can the minister tell us whether the projected deficit and debt for this year are higher or lower in the budget than they are in his phantom fiscal update?

2:00

Mr. Ceci: We have reported, Mr. Speaker. It's called Budget 2015. The deficit in Budget 2015 is \$6.1 billion.

Mr. Fildebrandt: The minister is not answering the question, and he knows it.

This is an unacceptably dangerous precedent that the minister will be setting, breaking the law one day and then passing a law a week later, making it retroactively legal for him to break that law.

DBRS has predicted that they will run right through their debt limit before they stop borrowing. Do you see that this hurts your credibility, when you play fast and loose with our fiscal laws? Will the minister explain to this House why Albertans should trust the government with our finances when they can't follow their own laws?

The Speaker: Hon. member, I am not familiar with the exact details in the amount of time, but I feel uneasy, and I want to caution you with the use of the phrase "breaking the law" in the House.

Mr. Ceci: DBRS yesterday reported triple-A rating stable. The other thing I would say is that our fiscal plan and transparency act set out our financial regulation for this province. We will be following those, and we have reported on our deficit.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Farm and Ranch Worker Legislation Consultation

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On Monday the jobs minister told this House that the buck stops with her on Bill 6. That was a positive statement. Then, to my surprise, Albertans were told on Tuesday that the Premier blames government officials for the miscommunication. Now, that is a far cry from the level of responsibility Albertans should get from their Premier. To the minister of jobs: does the buck still stop with you on Bill 6, or do you agree with the Premier on throwing all the staff under the bus?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We absolutely admire family farms, and we want to work in partnership with them. There were mistakes made through official channels, and we take responsibility for that. Moving forward, we've assured that there will be cabinet ministers on all of the consultations happening throughout Alberta. There is one happening right now in Red Deer, and we've got two cabinet ministers in attendance. I want to say thank you to Albertans for stepping up and working with us to make sure that this provides safety and also honours the role that a variety of farmers play in being experts in their own field.

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, it seems the cat's got the labour minister's tongue.

Given that the Premier has decided to blame the staff, the hard-working members of the public service that operated under her political direction on Bill 6, can the labour minister tell us: does she agree with the Premier? Do you blame your officials, or does the buck still stop with you and the Premier?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much for the question. I think what's really important to know is that we're listening to farmers and that we brought forward an amendment today that we're working on. They asked us to put it in writing explicitly. It was our intent all along to do that in the regulations that would come out in 2017, so we're very proud. This is democracy in action. We're listening to farmers, and we know everyone is working together on that.

Thank you.

Mr. McIver: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's pretty crowded under the bus now with the minister, with the staff, with farmers, with ranchers. There's no room under there.

But minister, again, since the Premier has dismissed your botched consultation that you claimed to do, will you commit today to showing up in person for all future consultations so that there's at least a slight chance you might get it right on Bill 6?

Ms Sigurdson: Well, I think it's pretty obvious that this is democracy in action, that we actually are listening, and that we're putting forward amendments. This is how it works, and I'm very proud to stand here and know that the public servants, our government are really taking this seriously, that this is very much a true consultation process, and that's why we're bringing this forward.

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

Violence against Women and Girls

Ms Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. From November 25, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, to December 10, Human Rights Day, the world has united in 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence. This is a time to take action to end violence against women and girls. Twice an hour, every hour Calgary police respond to a domestic conflict call in which 1 in 5 calls involve actual physical violence. To the Minister of Human Services: what initiatives is this government taking to support social programs already in place to protect the victims of domestic violence?

The Speaker: The Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Ending gender-based violence is important to all Albertans, and it's a priority for our government. I thank the member for her advocacy on this important issue. What we are doing is stabilizing the funding for social services, and we have invested in women's shelters to provide wraparound supports for the women and children fleeing violence. We have restored the cuts proposed by the previous government to family and community supports programs. These initiatives will help . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

First supplemental.

Ms Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that domestic violence is on the rise in Alberta and the strain on these social programs is increasing, again to the minister: how does the 2015 budget address the strain?

The Speaker: The Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member. The member is correct that demand for Alberta social programs has increased, and the 2015 budget for Human Services represents a 4.6 per cent increase over the last year actual. What we have done is restore the cuts proposed by the previous government to the Human Services budget, and we will make sure that we provide all needed supports to Albertans during these tough times.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the minister for Status of Women. Given that one of the largest barriers toward dealing with domestic violence is awareness, what is this government doing to promote these services so that Albertans who desperately need them are aware of these programs and, more importantly, have access to them?

The Speaker: The minister of environment.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. Of course, Albertans need to feel safe in their communities and in their homes. There have been far too many accounts of intimate partner violence and gender-based violence in Alberta in the past few months. Our government works in partnership with many community organizations to raise awareness of services for survivors. A few of the ways we are raising awareness right now include supporting the UN's UNiTE to End Violence against Women Orange the World campaign. This Sunday marks the anniversary of the École Polytechnique massacre, December 6, and many MLAs and department staff will be attending the commemorations. We need to do better, and we will.

International Trade

Mr. Malkinson: Mr. Speaker, with the price of oil falling below \$40 per barrel, my constituents are concerned about the economy. I spent the last four years working in the diesel generator business, and they are feeling this drop in the price of oil. When I talk with them, they tell me that it is time to look for new markets. To the Minister of Economic Development and Trade: what are you doing to promote increased ties for Alberta businesses in Asia?

The Speaker: The minister of economic development.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the hon. member for his very pertinent question. We are very supportive of diversifying Alberta's economy, expanding new and existing markets, which includes a strategic and cost-effective international presence. Now, I'll educate the members of the House in the fact that we have 11 international offices, primarily focused in the Asia Pacific area: Beijing, Hong Kong, Tokyo, Seoul, Shanghai, Singapore, Taiwan, and in addition, Mexico City, New Delhi, London, Washington, DC.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

2:10

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that you just mentioned that there are eight international offices in Asia and two offices in China, can the minister explain the benefit of these offices to Albertans?

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm quite happy to talk about the benefits that these offices provide. As a trade-focused province our ongoing success is tied to how well we can seize opportunities in new markets and leverage opportunities in existing markets. This is why expanding access to markets in key global areas, particularly the growing Asia Pacific region, will remain a vital part of the work that my ministry does. Last year international offices facilitated nearly 200 negotiations, resulting in 33 trade deals or investment projects here in Alberta.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that finding new markets will promote economic diversification in Alberta, again to the same minister: what are you doing to help promote Alberta's business interests to additional markets abroad?

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the member for his question. My ministry is here to promote trade with and attract investment to Alberta. Last year alone Alberta's international offices worked with more than 600 Alberta companies looking to

diversify and expand into new markets. I'll be working with my department to look at our current foreign offices with an eye to efficiency, effectiveness, and productivity. I also want to inform the House that last year alone Alberta exported \$121 billion; \$109 billion of that was to the United States. Therefore, we need to look at expanding into other markets much more robustly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Farm and Ranch Worker Legislation Consultation (continued)

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday over 1,500 farmers and ranchers took time to come to the Legislature and peacefully protest on the steps of this building. The government needs to recognize the anger and frustration that farmers and ranchers are feeling about the lack of consultation. Legislation before consultation or during consultation is ridiculous. Also, the moms and dads of small farms and ranches know more about safety on their land than any government can legislate. To the minister of agriculture: why don't you care about what farmers in this province are trying to tell you?

The Speaker: The minister of labour.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. I was out at the rallies both on Friday and yesterday. Two ministers are there at the consultation today and all throughout the week. The consultation is very important to us, and we're listening, and obviously by saying that we're going to move forward and make explicit the amendment, that shows that we are. This is a good showing of working together.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that two ministers stood up in the House yesterday and provided vague answers, creating more uncertainty about consultation with farmers and ranchers, and noninformation from their government has left farmers and ranchers across this province just plain mad about the way that they're being treated and where safety has always been important on family farms and ranches, will the minister of labour acknowledge, as Rick Bell said, that "those in . . . government in charge of explaining things . . . well . . . they suck at it."

Ms Sigurdson: This bill, Mr. Speaker, has always been about safety on farms, and we want to work with the farming and ranching sector. This is about Kevan Chandler, who was killed in a farm accident, and his family, with three young children. His wife struggled with three jobs, and the farmer lost his land and his way of life because she had no recourse but to sue him. This is a disaster all across the board. We want to make sure that this never happens in Alberta again. Safety on farms and having compensation for people when they're hurt or injured is so important.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that I am a farmer myself that manages 1,800 acres, doing all the work alone, and I understand the frustration that farmers and ranchers are feeling when I hear them say that their government isn't listening to them and that they want this legislation to go back to the drawing board, to the minister of agriculture. Based on your actions so far, this government is out of touch with Albertans. How can farmers and

ranchers of Alberta trust that you will be looking after their best interests when you bring in legislation that affects them without prior consultation?

Ms Sigurdson: I think we're demonstrating very clearly that we are listening. We have put forward an amendment. Sara, whom I spoke with, who was the organizer on Friday, said, "We want it in writing, Minister," so that's what we're doing. We're putting it up front. It was always our idea to do it in the 2017 regs, but we're bringing it up front because they asked us. I think that's listening, that's acting, and that's respecting.

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

Climate Change Strategy and First Nations

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The government has identified First Nations as a group that will feel significant impact from its climate change plan, and we know that First Nations are working hard to become active players in a resource sector that is already well established and difficult to break into. The government has talked about empowering First Nations to become more responsible for their energy efficiency and development and emissions and other resource activities. To the Minister of Aboriginal Relations: what are the specific details regarding the expected impact of climate change initiatives on First Nations communities, and what supports are you offering them?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of the environment.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. We heard loud and clear in our indigenous stakeholder engagement sessions through the climate panel process that, you know, the new economy that we are about to embark upon with respect to green energy development and green jobs ought not look like the old economy of social and economic exclusions for indigenous peoples. That's why the panel made some very robust recommendations with respect to adjustment for First Nations, with respect to investment in First Nations. We are considering how to best move forward on that, and we'll have more to say about it through the Budget '16 process.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you to the environment minister, but we'll try it a different way. To the Minister of Aboriginal Relations: given that on November 4 we discussed estimates for Aboriginal Relations and there was no special budget line allotment relating to climate change for First Nations and given that there was no discussion whatsoever on the shifting ground that the climate change initiative will have for First Nations, where will the funding assistance for First Nations come from in Budget 2015, and how much is allotted to it exactly?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of the environment.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Of course, as the member knows, the changes that we are bringing forward via the climate change leadership plan will have an effect in 2017 as part of the budget 2016-17 deliberations. Therefore, we have been presented with a number of options by the panel, a number of which are very creative ways to ensure that we have indigenous participation in renewable energy and in ensuring adjustment and investment in First Nations communities as we move forward with our green economy initiatives. That's why we will see those items in Budget '16.

Mr. Rodney: The first two questions were directed to the Aboriginal Relations minister, and I'm sure that our First Nations friends would like to hear from her. We'll try for a third time. Obviously, you'll have to consult with First Nations to determine the impact of your climate change plan on their resource operations. Given that your government's record on consulting has received failing grades from many stakeholders – business with regard to the minimum wage increase, farmers with respect to farm worker legislation, and your own Premier just a few hours ago – how can Albertans have any confidence that you will consult with First Nations to ensure that they do receive the assistance they need to adapt to your climate change plan?

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. As I'm sure the member is aware, there has been extensive consultation already going forward with First Nations, not only through my ministry but through every ministry in government. This is because this new government is committed to building a new relationship with First Nations. We have valid, actual consultation, unlike the previous government.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Public School Boards' Association of Alberta

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To quote the Minister of Education from the *Calgary Herald*, "We want to ensure we're spending public dollars . . . in the classroom." While we applaud his comment, many are finding it hard to believe. It is still unclear whether or not the Public School Boards' Association is still intending to collect the special levy from school boards to stop Lakeland Catholic school board from opening a school in Lac La Biche. The last time I brought this up, I did not receive a definitive answer. Does the minister know if the PSBAA is collecting or still intends to collect the special levy?

2:20

The Speaker: The Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you for the question, and thanks, Mr. Speaker, for the reply. Certainly, we've been monitoring the circumstances very closely in the Lac La Biche area. Certainly, this government respects the right to Catholic education right across this province. I've sent a letter to the PSBAA as well as to the affected parties to make sure that they spend money in the classroom and not in litigation kitties.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's reassuring to hear that the minister is determined to ensure that school boards are properly spending his ministry's funds, but how can Albertans trust that he will do this? Given that Albertans want the ministry's money spent on education and not litigation and given that the PSBAA intends to pit school boards against each other in court, Minister, will you direct the PSBAA to either return the funds being collected from the school boards or redirect the spending of these funds so that they will be used to improve classroom experiences for our students?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, and thanks for the question. Certainly, you have to recognize that the PSBAA is an advocacy group that takes

funds from different school boards, so they run their operations independently. But that being said, certainly I have spoken to not just the public school boards in those areas but also to the Catholic ones to have a détente on these litigation procedures and get back to putting the money in the classroom.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the minister said, “These boards are accountable for their decisions, but I would just like them to reconsider this choice they are making,” – in the words of a famous politician, I would like to trust but verify – will the minister commit to tabling documents in this House to show that funds allocated to the PSBAA for this special levy are being clawed back until they decide to stop the pooling of such funds into a litigation fund, a fund that takes money away from the children of this province?

Mr. Eggen: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, once again let me make it clear that the PSBAA is an advocacy group unto itself, that we don’t have control over. However, certainly, I can put lots of messaging and very direct information to each of these boards to ensure that they back off from the litigation and get back to co-operating and building and operating schools in the best interests of our children here in the province.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Government Policies

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government seems very out of touch with farmers. There was no consultation with them on the impact of this carbon tax on their fertilizer costs, on their fuel costs, or on their soon to be skyrocketing electricity costs. The Premier affirmed this morning that this government will ram through Bill 6 this session. So much for consultation. The minister of jobs claims that she has heard from farmers. Has the minister heard the farmers shouting, “Kill Bill 6” at every rally in the province?

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. I just want to say that we have responded to the concerns presented, and we have addressed them through the amendments that we will give more details about very shortly. We’re continuing to consult. We have cabinet ministers at those consultations. It’s very important for us to hear, so we’re already listening.

Thank you.

Mr. MacIntyre: Given that this government has consistently failed to seek proper consultation in advance of drafting legislation and given that this government has consistently failed to assess the economic ripple effects of its policy proposals, did the government bother to assess the cost of implementing Bill 6, the carbon tax, the corporate tax increase, the locomotive tax increase upon Alberta’s farmers, its industries, and its citizens, and can the minister table these calculations?

The Speaker: The minister of the environment.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. Of course, during the climate change panel process we did have technical engagement sessions with those in Agriculture and Forestry, and as a result, when our government released our response to the panel recommendations, one of

the things we did was ensure that purple gas would be exempted from the carbon price. That’s just part of it. Certainly, we know there’s a tremendous amount of potential in our agricultural operations to ensure small-scale renewables, other waste-to-energy programs, which we’re examining to put together a regulatory framework so that we can make life better for farmers.

Mr. MacIntyre: Given that this government is obviously consultation challenged and given that we have yet to see any numbers necessary for a cost-benefit analysis of this coal phase-out, did this government bother consulting with the coal industry in advance of the coal phase-out acceleration regarding the plan’s price tag, and will the environment minister finally disclose to Albertans, who are on the hook for this bill, how many billions your plan is going to cost?

The Speaker: The minister of the environment.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. Of course, we had a number of technical engagement sessions on the subject of the electricity system and the evolution of the system over time. Had the Official Opposition bothered to engage in the climate process at all, given that they were so busy denying the science of climate change . . .

Mr. Cooper: Point of order.

Ms Phillips: . . . they would have read what the coal industry, the electricity industry, and others have said. Had they bothered to engage with this subject meaningfully, they would have seen the reaction to these plans from the electricity industry that we are moving forward.

The Speaker: A point of order is noted.

The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Calgary Southwest Ring Road

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have been working with the constituents of Calgary-West on the portion of the highway 8 corridor that is not on Tsuut’ina land. The residents have superb suggestions that will save the province \$1 billion, but community groups are disappointed that their recommended cost savings have gone unheard since the NDP formed government. To the Transportation minister: given that the former government had been working well with the residents and given that since the NDP took over the project, the residents feel they have gone backwards, what is the current status of this project?

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much for the question. To the hon. member. The current status of the project is that a request for qualifications has been evaluated, consortia have been selected, and we are awaiting the issue of the tender for the work. I will remind the hon. member that according to the agreement that was negotiated by the previous government, there is a seven-year time frame for the completion of that ring road to the specifications set out in the agreement with the Tsuut’ina people. If we fail to complete it in seven years, the land, the highway, and everything else reverts to the nation. We want to make sure that that does not happen.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That’s why I said, “not on Tsuut’ina land.”

Again to the same minister: given that the residents of Discovery Ridge and Springbank Hill offered your government excellent

recommendations that could save taxpayers, again, \$1 billion and given that the city of Calgary has confirmed the savings that would result from these recommendations, why are you insisting on building a future 16-lane highway when we can reduce the bridge deck sizes now and save Albertans \$1 billion?

Mr. Mason: Again, Mr. Speaker, according to the agreement previously negotiated by that member's government and by that member's leader when he was the minister, we have seven years to complete the road according to the criteria and the scope that are set out in the agreement. We are not going to delay that. The risk to the people of Alberta is simply too great, far greater than \$1 billion.

Mr. Ellis: Again, I'm not referring to Tsuut'ina land.

Given that the Transportation minister has been an MLA for 15 years and given that when he was in opposition, he criticized ministers for not consulting, but now that he's in government, he won't meet with the residents in my constituency – the people of Calgary-West are deeply disappointed with the government as a result of that – will the minister commit today to meet with the residents of Calgary-West and review the cost-saving measures for this ring road?

Thank you.

Mr. Mason: Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, as I've indicated to the hon. member, the project is about to be tendered, and there is a clock that is ticking. However, if the hon. member feels so strongly about meeting with his constituents, then I'm happy to do so.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

2:30 Aboriginal Workforce Participation

Ms Woollard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've worked in Alberta for over 40 years both as a teacher and an educational psychologist, and I've spent a significant amount of my life working closely with students from the First Nations, Métis, and other indigenous communities in Alberta. I'd like to see more opportunities for young people from these communities to find and keep employment; hence, I was very pleased to see an increase in the budget for employment and career development. To the hon. Minister of Human Services: how will this budget increase support for our aboriginal working-age population?

The Speaker: The Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. Our government was elected on a campaign promise to work with our indigenous communities as partners. Budget 2015 includes increased funding to support Albertans who need assistance to re-enter and enter the workforce, including our indigenous community members. These programs range from training for work programs like the aboriginal training to employment program and career development services. The outcomes of these programs are greater opportunities, enhanced skills, and sustained employment for all Albertans.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Woollard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Minister. I'd like to ask the hon. minister if he can share with us any statistics of working-age aboriginal people living off-reserve in Alberta. Also, what per cent of the total workforce is comprised of indigenous people?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. The number of indigenous people living off-reserve in September 2015 was 152,000. Of these, 94,700 are employed, which represents 4.1 per cent of Alberta's overall employment. Of those employed, 82,800 were employed full-time and 11,900 were employed part-time.

In 2013 roughly 10,200 were enrolled in postsecondary schools.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Woollard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that 4.1 per cent of Alberta's overall workforce is comprised of aboriginal people, I'd like to ask the same minister: what is this government doing to ensure their long-term employment?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Member, and thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government campaigned and was elected on a promise to renew the partnership, renew our relationship with First Nations, and we intend to keep that promise. That is the reason that we are scanning our programs and services delivered to indigenous communities in consultation with indigenous communities, led by the Minister of Aboriginal Relations, to make sure that those services are delivered in a culturally appropriate manner.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Highwood.

Sheep River Nurse Practitioners Clinic

Mr. W. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On July 29 – mark that date: July 29 – I wrote the Health minister about the lack of a funding model for the Sheep River nurse practitioner clinic in Okotoks. The minister said to me: I don't have time to meet with you; go through your shadow minister. Okay. So on November 19 the shadow minister at my request asked about this, to which the minister said: it's the first time I've heard of it. Minister, this clinic is in the process of shutting down because you've ignored your duties. Are you finally ready to work with these front-line workers to establish a funding model that works? Yes or no?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I've prided myself on reaching out to my colleagues across the floor and to my critics to make sure that we have an opportunity to bring items of mutual concern forward in a comprehensive way to actually work through some of the challenges. It was brought forward in question period. I did not recall the letter until this moment, when I was reminded. It might not surprise you that I do receive a significant amount of correspondence. I'm really happy to work with the member to have a greater understanding of some of the challenges there. Of course, we want to make sure that Albertans get the right care in the right place at the right time by the right health professional.

Mr. W. Anderson: Words are good, but we need some firm timelines, Minister. She's already kicked the can down the road twice, and now this facility is closing, and the 1,800 people it serves are facing the lack of critical health care services. Given that we've repeatedly reached out to the minister and considering time is of the essence, is the minister prepared to do what she hasn't and sit down with the Sheep River nurse practitioners to find a solution today?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. If he passes a phone number to me, I'll be happy to find the time to call them. My schedule is very busy, but I will make sure I don't go to bed until I reach out to them personally if he will be so kind as to send the number.

Mr. W. Anderson: Airdrie, Wainwright, now Okotoks. This minister is cutting front-line health care services across rural Alberta, and she's about to close this facility, as was outlined in a letter to her from the nurse practitioners on October 21. Given that this makes three times now that I've asked the minister to sit down and do her job and considering she's not ready to commit, can the minister explain to the people of Okotoks why she ignored them for six months?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, I've said that I'll make the phone call. I'm committed to making the phone call. We've actually increased funding to health care as opposed to what members opposite are proposing, which is to cut billions of dollars from the overall budget. I find the irony of the fact that people who spend their days telling us how bad we are for spending on essential front-line services like health care and at the same time are criticizing us for doing so astounding. But I personally will reach out to the affected parties should the member follow up with a phone number today.

Climate Change Strategy

Mr. Fraser: Albertans care deeply about the environment, and as Albertans we also understand the importance of our actions and the potential outcomes on all levels. Mr. Speaker, the government needs to be keenly aware that their actions have real impacts, and that's why real consultations are so important, so I urge the government respectfully to stop talking and start listening. To the minister of environment. The coal-fired electricity generation industry has told us that many of their facilities will have to close before the 2030 date, with the onset of the government's carbon tax. This will drive energy costs well above the expected 20 per cent hike. Minister, how will you ensure grid stability when these facilities shut down early?

The Speaker: The minister of environment.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question and for his ongoing, I believe, respectful and genuine engagement on environmental files. I applaud it. On this matter of the transition and evolution of our electricity system we've made it very clear that, of course, under the previous government's timelines and the previous federal government's timelines, for that matter, 12 of the 18 plants that are currently coal-fired emissions plants would be coming offline by 2030 anyway, leaving the six. We have engaged in a process with the operators of the remaining six plants. We will be appointing a negotiator in order to make sure that we are doing this in a way that's fair for workers, companies, and communities.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Fraser: Given that Alberta does have an abundant supply of wind and solar possibilities and given that it's very clear that these sources will play an integral role in ensuring reliability, maximizing efficiency, and accommodating long-term growth and given that new transmission lines will have to be built through southern

Alberta to distribute the power from the source to where it's needed, to the same minister: how many transmission lines will have to be built, and how much land will have to be ceded to the government, and can you tell rural landowners what the consultation process will look like?

The Speaker: The hon. minister of environment.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. member for the question. Of course, we have been in constant contact and consultation with transmission generators and others as we move forward with this plan. Of course, this is a long-term horizon planning item that we have undertaken as part of our government's commitment to climate leadership, and we have heard already from transmission companies and others that have said that this is a golden opportunity for Alberta. We have some of the finest wind and solar and other resources in North America, and we know from the systems operator that this will be done in a careful, cautious, and thoughtful manner.

2:40

Mr. Fraser: To the same minister: given that the climate change framework has a strong emphasis on methane emissions and given that you have previously stated that you will look to work with the agricultural sector to address "certain inputs, certain outputs," what would be the total average burden placed on Alberta farming families when you add together the increase in personal income tax, the fuel tax, the carbon tax, the other effects of the climate change plan, and compliance with the spectrum of proposed changes in the farm workplace regulations?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Phillips: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to the hon. member for the question. Of course, our methane policies have to do with the oil and gas sector. Those were a very robust consultation process between industry, government, and environment groups, and we're very proud of those recommendations that we accepted.

Now, on this matter of agriculture we did undertake a number of technical engagement sessions with the agricultural industries. We will work with them on frameworks in order to ensure that we can give opportunities for small-scale renewables, for geothermal, for other microgeneration possibilities, Mr. Speaker, so that all Albertans can enjoy the benefits of a green economy.

Members' Statements

(continued)

Government Policies

Mr. Stier: Mr. Speaker, Albertans just can't trust this NDP government. See, when the NDP was elected six months ago, they promised to do things differently. They said that they'd be honest with Albertans, but the broken promises continue to pile up. Take, for example, their promise to deliver a balanced budget by 2019. That didn't last long. Then there was their promise to release a full infrastructure sunshine report. Say goodbye to that, too. Then they said that they would consult with Albertans. That might make sense given that their leader spent a lifetime in opposition talking about the importance of consultation, but that quickly went the way of the dodo.

As well, they instead made announcement after announcement without any consultation with their key stakeholders or local officials involved. I would point to their decisions in the Castle area, Springbank, and most recently their decision to impose the most

heavy-handed agricultural legislation in provincial history without having consulted with farmers or ranchers, a decision, by the way, that they never campaigned on.

They promised to operate a government that was respectful of the public purse, but that didn't stop them from almost immediately ramping up spending and plunging Alberta deep into record debt and record deficit. Now they're killing the economy with their royalty review, business taxes, and most recently their backdoor PST, also known as a carbon tax, which, once again, they never campaigned on.

They promised to be open with Albertans, but look who's behind the curtain: radical activists, anti-oil crusaders, political mercenaries. Look at the damage that they've done in just a few months: tax increases, job losses, and ideological experiments that have caused unprecedented levels of unemployment. The NDP ... [interjections]

The Speaker: Was there anything else that you wanted to add, hon. member?

Mr. Stier: There certainly is, Mr. Speaker, if I may continue.

The Speaker: You have 10 seconds left.

Mr. Stier: Ten? I'm sorry, sir. That's not possible.

Family Farms

Mr. Drysdale: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to talk about Alberta family farms. Growing up on a farm, I learned a lot of lessons about life that I carry with me and still use today. When I was a kid, I was involved in 4-H. When I was 12, I chaired my first 4-H meeting. In the cities there are lots of activities for kids to get involved in like hockey, dance, karate, et cetera, but for me and many farm kids like me it was 4-H.

In 4-H you learn about farm safety and how to safely deal with animals. The 4-H motto is Learn to Do by Doing, so you are prepared for the unexpected and you have tools for how to deal with complicated situations with animals. These were things you relied on in all aspects of your life around the farm. If you took a tour of the farm on a quad and you happened by a cow that had gotten herself in trouble, you knew that you could help her because you were taught by your parents and your grandparents or you learned it in 4-H.

Farming, Mr. Speaker, is so much more than a geographic location or means of income for your family. It is a lifestyle, and this lifestyle, a great one, I might add, does not break down into specific compartments. Life on a farm is constantly mingling chores, extracurricular activity, and family life all the time. Whether you're dealing with your 4-H steer in the barn or a farm steer, you handle the animal with the same care and diligence because you were taught that way. There's no separation of states in farm life. You're a farm kid, and I would hate to see that lost.

I am proud to have grown up on a farm, just like so many of my constituents who grew up and continue raising their families on their own. I will continue to work as the MLA for Grande Prairie-Wapiti to advocate for the family farms of Alberta and ensure that this government is taking the right steps to act in their best interests and not against them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Alberta Bottle Depot Association

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Mr. Speaker, on the 24th of October I had the opportunity to visit Banff and deliver a speech at the annual industry

conference hosted by the Alberta Bottle Depot Association. I have always been an active recycler wherever possible, so it was an event that I was happy to attend. Each year depot owners and stakeholders gather together in an effort to collaborate, educate, and recognize excellence within the industry.

The container return and recycle system in Alberta is an environmental, social, and economic success story. I learned that last year alone 216 bottle depots within the province were able to gather close to 2.1 billion beverage containers, achieving an 83.3 per cent return rate. Because Albertans chose to recycle their bottles and cans through the depot system, it meant that more than 129,000 tonnes of waste was diverted from landfills, and this waste was repurposed into other useful products that benefit society. Mr. Speaker, every incremental tonne of beverage containers recovered has a significant environmental impact, reducing GHG emissions by at least 4.1 tonnes of CO₂ equivalent.

In addition, this program allows community groups to raise funds through bottle drives, and it gives the disadvantaged a way to gain some income through recycling. The program also has the effect of benefiting the Alberta cans for kids initiative and the Ronald McDonald House through generous donations from within the industry. Ronald McDonald House received around \$80,000 in donations that evening.

Demonstrating environmental stewardship and protecting our natural resources by reducing the amount of bottles and cans that end up in landfills is important to Albertans, and I am grateful that this system is in place. I would like to thank the minister of environment for the opportunity to attend the event. It was pleasure to meet many of the bottle depot owners and industry partners that make this a world-class system.

Thank you.

Climate Change Strategy

Mr. Hinkley: Mr. Speaker, our government is taking strong leadership on climate change, and I would like to provide for the record quotes from industry representatives. Many representatives from the energy sector have spoken loudly and clearly in favour of Alberta's climate leadership plan, and here are some of the quotes.

First, Steve Williams, CEO of Suncor: when we look back, we will see this day will be a historic day, certainly, for oil sands, I think for all of Alberta and for all of Canada; we think this is the moment for us to get back into the position of being a leader, particularly around environment performance; today is a real demonstration we are willing to take action, move from just conversation.

Also, the president of Shell Canada, Lorraine Mitchelmore, said:

It's rare to see energy companies and environmentalists find cause to agree ... the government of Alberta gave us reason not only to agree, but to stand together and applaud ... I firmly believe that Alberta's climate plan is a win for both the economy and the environment. It will position Alberta, and by extension Canada, to be a global leader in combatting climate change. It will also promote economic prosperity for future generations by focusing on jobs and diversification and by ensuring that the cost burden of the carbon price is eased for the most vulnerable Albertans.

TransAlta president Dawn Farrell called the strategy "a positive, timely and important step forward." TransCanada president Russ Girling said that he also supported this plan.

2:50

The Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers said in a statement that it agreed with Notley and expected changes proposed by the panel "to further enhance the reputation of our sector and

improve our province's environmental credibility as we seek to expand market access nationally and internationally."

These quotes are just some of the many from industry that support Alberta's climate change leadership.

The Speaker: Thank you very much.

The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Family Farms

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am very thankful to call central Alberta home. I draw your attention today to the central Alberta economic region, not just one riding but many. It's a region of 41 municipal governments of the top region by GDP in all of North America. This area has a long history of prosperity and continues to be a driver of our province's economic development. The manufacturing, oil and gas, petrochemicals, logistics, agriculture-agrifood sectors are the big five key industries. Central Alberta is Canada's largest producer of cattle, hogs, poultry, and barley. Our fertile soil and favourable climate make central Alberta a thriving centre for agriculture. This central region has the largest amount of farmland in Alberta, at 3.8 million acres, truly placing it at the core of the province's thriving agri-industry.

The natural assets of this region have made it one of the great places in the world. But our area isn't successful just because of the land. It's successful because of the people who work the land. Through generations of farmers and ranchers they have perfected their craft and passed down their knowledge to their children. The greatest farm product of central Alberta is not wheat or livestock. It's progeny, the children who become the leading young men and women of our future who grow up strong and free, broadly knowledgeable and experienced. There is no better or safer place to grow up than on an Alberta farm. Children who ride seeders with their moms and dads, children who learn to bottle-feed calves with their grandparents, the young man from Innisfail who at 12 just bought six preg-checked heifers this fall: they learn from experience. There is no teacher like it.

It takes a lifetime to learn the skills which are needed to keep our province's agriculture sector the strongest in the world. I urge this government: please keep the family in family farms. They are vital to their education and the future of our province.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Tabling Returns and Reports

Ms Miller: Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Section 15(2) of the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Act I am pleased to table the 2015-2016 second quarter report on the Alberta heritage savings trust fund. The report has been distributed.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North West.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the appropriate number of copies of a petition from Calgarians who want the provincial government to amend the Health Act to include an independent seniors' advocate.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Ms Hoffman, Minister of Health and Minister of Seniors, pursuant to the Health Professions Act the Alberta College of Combined Laboratory and X-Ray Technologists 2014 annual

report, the College of Dental Technologists of Alberta 2014 annual report, the College of Alberta Denturists annual report 2014, the College of Alberta Psychologists annual report 2014-15, the College of Naturopathic Doctors of Alberta annual report 2014, and the College of Registered Psychiatric Nurses of Alberta annual report 2015.

Tabling Returns and Reports

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake. My apologies.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table these letters from my constituents regarding concerns with Bill 6. I have the correct number of copies.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. members, I believe there was a point of order raised by the House leader for the Official Opposition.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to a point of order in question period. I am specifically speaking to Standing Order 23(j): "insulting language... likely to create disorder." During question period the hon. Minister of Status of Women along with some other responsibilities that she has rose and was answering a question that had been posed by the opposition. In her reply she made a number of statements that created disorder in the House.

I know that we have seen a lot of misinformation being spread by the government. In fact, Mr. Speaker, just yesterday in this House there was an apology by an hon. minister for spreading misinformation. So for the minister to make claims that members of this caucus are climate change deniers and don't believe in science, while the government members may like to continue the spread of this misinformation from the backbenches, at no point in time, certainly to the best of my knowledge, did any member of this new caucus make any claims that would allow such a statement, that is not close to the truth, to be made in this Assembly.

If the minister is serious, she can rise and apologize for the misinformation that she's spreading and the type of language that continues to create disorder on this side of the House. I'm certain that disorder would cease if the government would stop spreading misinformation and untruths about this caucus.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, with respect to this point of order I can only suggest that it is simply a disagreement between members as to a set of facts. It is the opinion of many on this side of the House that, in fact, the Official Opposition, the Wildrose Party in particular, has had a long history of denying climate change and, in fact, it was a key factor in determining the outcome of the 2012 election.

We have subsequently seen that the Wildrose has continued to oppose climate change proposals, reasonable ones that are supported by a wide range of Albertans, including oil sands producers, First Nations, and responsible environmental groups. We heard the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod in his member's statement just today attempt to ascribe those kinds of policies to just listening to a certain bunch of radical environmentalists. That was my recollection of what he said. You know, in

fact, even today in question period the Leader of the Official Opposition referenced a Fraser Institute report authored by a known climate change denier, Kenneth Green, who has said in the past, “We can expect the climate crisis industry to grow increasingly shrill, and increasingly hostile toward anyone who questions their authority.”

Mr. Speaker, there’s lots of evidence not to prove or demonstrate conclusively that everyone in the Wildrose Party is a climate change denier but to say that there’s a very strong element within that party that actually is . . .

3:00

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister. I didn’t hear any new information that you were providing to help make the decision.

Mr. Mason: I’m sorry, Mr. Speaker. I’m merely saying that the minister spoke the truth.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, as you’re certainly well aware, this House relies on decisions of past Speakers, and it relies on precedent in order to make decisions that are then consistent and carry us forward.

Now, I consider myself privileged to have been here in the last Legislature when the ruling of Speaker Zwodzesky came down. It was a very interesting day. It’s one that I’ll never forget because it was, in fact, the day that the predecessor to the current Official Opposition House Leader, while he was still a member of that party – sometimes it was hard to keep track of which side of the House he was on – and while he was over on this side, stated unequivocally that the Official Opposition agreed that climate change was real and that it, in fact, had a man-made component to it. He stated that, and he stated that that was the official position of the Official Opposition, which prompted, actually, calls as to how they felt about the whole round/flat Earth thing. Indeed, it did also prompt the Government House Leader at the time, the previous Premier of our province also, to point out that he had just seen the lake of fire freeze over.

Nonetheless, Mr. Speaker, the sum total of the discussion was that the term “climate change denier” was decided by Speaker Zwodzesky to be a term that should be avoided in this House, especially when referring to the Official Opposition. That may be the opinion of some hon. members on the government side, and we recognize that those members were not necessarily here during the last Legislature, but I think it is fair to say that using the term “climate change denier,” because it could also be linked to the denial of another event that happened in the 20th century, is, I would consider, a great insult. Because of that, the ruling of Speaker Zwodzesky at the time was that the term “climate change denier” should preferably be avoided by members of the House.

Accordingly, Mr. Speaker, I would recommend to you that in ruling on this particular point of order, you simply caution members in the future to avoid this particular term because indeed it is a term that, while it is a matter of debate, can incite disorder within the House and therefore would be a violation of Standing Order 23(j).

The Speaker: Are there any other parties or members who would like to speak to the point of order?

Hon. members, when hearing the arguments, I thought this was a fairly reasonably straightforward matter, but on my cautionary approach to this new job I will take the opportunity once again to consider the arguments on both sides and report back. I recognize that I was not, for example, familiar with the previous Speaker’s ruling. Nonetheless, I will report back at a future time.

Orders of the Day

Government Motions

Adjournment of Fall Session

14. Mr. Mason moved:
Be it resolved that pursuant to Standing Order 3(9) the 2015 fall sitting be extended beyond the first Thursday in December until such time as or when the Government House Leader advises the Assembly that the business for the sitting is concluded, and at such time the Assembly stands adjourned.

[Government Motion 14 carried]

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 8

Public Education Collective Bargaining Act

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education and Minister of Culture and Tourism.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I’m very pleased to be here today to introduce the second reading of Bill 8, the Public Education Collective Bargaining Act.

Since its introduction in the House last Thursday we’ve been having ongoing discussions with key partners about this legislation as well as discussions and interaction for many, many months. Our conversations have been very positive and constructive, and I have several more scheduled for the days ahead, in fact, subsequent technical briefings and so forth over the next three or four days.

We’ve been hearing much positive feedback around this and some concerns as well among school boards, so certainly we’ve been working hard to help everyone understand exactly what we’re doing. The role in determining what items might be bargained provincially, of course, is one item that people are concerned about, and we’re working to provide more information about the new teachers’ bargaining association and the fundamental role that school boards will play in this body. Boards will have a further opportunity to provide feedback in the coming days as well, and we’re actively sharing more details with them about this process.

Schools and teachers are a pillar of our community, Mr. Speaker, and they are a priority for this government. This bill will give the government, as education’s funder, a seat at the bargaining table, which is something that all parties involved understand the essential need for. I want to stress that this legislation focuses on how we bargain and not what we’re bargaining on, so this is an important thing to keep in mind as we work through Bill 8 here. Conversations about which items will be negotiated at each table will continue through the coming weeks and months.

During this past fall officials with my department consulted with every one of this province’s 61 school boards about the bargaining processes of the past and how we can move forward in a collaborative manner. The feedback from this consultation was very, very positive, as were my subsequent meetings with each of the 61 school boards in the fall and summer as well. Mr. Speaker, the conversation is just beginning. We know that our teachers and school board representatives alike work tirelessly to support our students and provide them with a world-class education, that they deserve. This bill marks a very positive first step to forging a collaborative relationship between all parties involved.

Mr. Speaker, I support the passing of this bill so that Alberta’s bargaining process can proceed in a fair and effective manner and so that we have the best control over our scarce public resources, to

ensure that we continue on delivering really one of the best education systems across North America and throughout the world. This will allow us to continue focusing on our task, which is to shepherd our students through their K to 12 education, and I certainly encourage all members here today to speak fully on this, have a fulsome debate, and then help us pass this bill.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Are there any hon. members who wish to speak to Bill 8? The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms McKittrick: Merci, M. le Président. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am honoured to rise here today with the Minister of Education and my colleague the Member for Calgary-Shaw to move the second reading of Bill 8, the Public Education Collective Bargaining Act. We all know how critical it is to provide a quality education to our students because, above all, students are the future of our province.

I personally served as a school trustee in British Columbia for nine years, including a term as board chair, so I know that the focus of school trustees is on the students and their needs, and they do so by focusing their resources in the classroom. I also know that teachers, just like school trustees, are focused on creating great classrooms for their students and their students' achievements. I should also include that the support staff in our schools are also focused on ensuring that the students have great achievements.

3:10

School boards also reflect the values of their local community, and it's really important that we respect the roles that school boards have in reflecting the values of their local community. I believe that the establishment of the teachers' employer bargaining association, as mentioned in the bill, will allow all school boards to have a voice at the provincial table. I understand that the exact structure of that organization will be determined in collaboration with our partners. The hon. Minister of Education has been very clear that he respects the roles and responsibilities of elected trustees, and I know that he will take their input on the bargaining process very seriously. I have had the pleasure of meeting many existing school trustees in Alberta, and I know that they are dedicated to ensuring the best for their students in their school district.

We also as government must be in a good position to meet our obligations of balancing the budget and ensuring fiscal stability in the province as best we can. Bill 8 removes questions about the roles and processes for all parties and provides a framework by which all of these parties can participate in the collective bargaining process, including government.

Mr. Speaker, I firmly support this bill, and I do believe that it will be in the best interests of all parties to have it passed. Thank you.

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

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for allowing me to elaborate on the words of my colleagues in support of Bill 8, the Public Education Collective Bargaining Act. As I have said before in this House, I am a father of three young children, who will be attending school in Alberta for the next two decades. As such, quality education is a cause near and dear to my heart. Having had family who have been involved in public education, I have a strong interest in the matter. Since being elected, I have visited schools, met local trustees, and met members of some of the 61 school boards in Alberta. I have learned how some share similar concerns and how some have issues that are completely different from one another. That is why I stand here in full support of Bill 8, because I believe that putting a framework in place that allows multiple boards to find a fair, cost-effective way to negotiate a collective

bargaining agreement is the right choice for our province, our taxpayers, and our children.

This important legislation will implement a two-table system that allows for significant monetary items to be negotiated provincially while allowing boards to retain autonomy and direct input on matters of local concern. These local matters can involve, for example, travel allowances for substitute teachers or stipends for sports team coaches.

For the first round of bargaining, which must begin before the current collective agreement ends in August of the next year, government will sit down with partners, including the province's 61 school boards, to identify and discuss which items will be negotiated at the central table and which ones will belong to the local board.

This process, Mr. Speaker, will allow all boards to have inputs on bargaining matters. Many people believe that this could divert a possible strike, which could be hard on single parents and households that require both parents to work. Major organizations, including the Alberta Teachers' Association and ASBA, have advocated for a two-table approach for many years. Just last year the president of the ATA reiterated his organization's belief that it is important to have the funders at the bargaining table.

I am proud of the work we are doing to establish a fair and effective bargaining process for all parties. For the sake of our children's education I urge all colleagues on both sides of the House to join in support of this bill.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there any questions under 29(2)(a) for the hon. member?

Hearing none, the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, once again we're seeing a bill introduced on a Thursday and attempting to be jammed through this House within just a few days without appropriate consultation. I have heard from school boards in my riding, and they are asking us to do what we can to actually slow this bill down. They're not telling us whether they're for it or against it. The issue that they have is that the only consultation they received was, quote, a three-minute conference call with the minister. That is not consultation.

Mr. Eggen: That's not true.

Mr. MacIntyre: That's what we were told.

Now, if you're going to have consultation, you're going to need to give the school boards an opportunity to gather together to deliberate over this bill and all of the parts within it and to have time to consider this. Frankly, this time of year, being the Christmas season, it's not exactly something that is necessarily easy to do. It would be, in my opinion, significantly better if this government would slow down. Take your time. Give the school boards an opportunity to deliberate appropriately over this thing. There is no rush. You know, why not wait until the spring session to put this thing through the House? Give the school boards the time they need to properly deliberate and time to get back to the minister with what their deliberations come to.

This government is failing to consult appropriately with key stakeholders on legislation after legislation after legislation. It is a consistent pattern that is alarming. We're not seeing bills going to committee for proper consultation with stakeholders. It's just: ram it on through here. They use their majority to simply bulldoze bills through this Legislature without taking the appropriate measures to make use of the parliamentary system that is in place like standing

committees, like proper stakeholder involvement. Instead, it's just pushing stuff through this House.

We're hearing, as I said, from school boards saying: please do what you can to, quote, slow this government down. That ought not be something that school boards have to ask the Official Opposition to do. Come on. This is silliness. I would ask the government to please consider these concerns from school boards, that are legitimate. Slow down. Listen to what they're saying. Give them an opportunity to appropriately look at this bill and the implications of this bill on their individual school boards, get back to the ministry with their input, and then let the ministry develop legislation.

What we're seeing, Mr. Speaker, is that they're legislating first and consulting second. That's not genuine. That is not genuine consultation. That is just being almost dictatorial. It's really shameful. I would ask the government to reconsider their actions, to properly consult with these school boards, and let's come up with a really good bill that is maybe developed by the school boards for the school boards. It kind of sounds like a democratic thing to do.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there any questions or comments for the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Mason: With respect, hon. member, the bill is not by school boards for school boards. The bill sets in place a framework for negotiations between the government and the Alberta Teachers' Association and between school boards and the Alberta Teachers' Association locals. That's what it does. To let the school boards write the legislation would not make any sense.

Mr. MacIntyre: While that may be true, Mr. Speaker, in having the involvement of the school boards, who are the ones given the responsibility for our children's education, who are given the responsibility for schools in this province, they should be having some serious consultation with the minister over the content of this bill, and that is simply not happening. My point is: consult first; legislate second. That's the right way around.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there any other comments for the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake under 29(2)(a)?

Hearing none, I will recognize the Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

3:20

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The minister stated today, and I quote: conversations with each of the 61 school boards have been very constructive and positive. Perhaps he has had conversations like that. I can't help but wonder if there are other conversations than the conversation we're having today, and here's why. I say this with great respect, and I think that you know this, Minister. I have heard the opposite comment from those who represent trustees provincially. They've told me that they have not had a chance to discuss the bill with the minister or Alberta Education. The minister's call to the board chairs, which occurred on Friday, November 27, did not allow for questions to be asked, and the boards had not had an opportunity to review the bill prior to it being introduced.

We could throw in a number of clichés here, but I don't feel the need to do that. I think the minister gets the point. There seems to be a huge gap between the input that the school boards indicated they provided to Alberta Education and the comments the minister is making suggesting that this bill reflects the input and wishes of the school boards, a product of having missed a step in the

minister's consultation process where input could have been validated with school boards and the related decisions explained.

School boards need an opportunity to meet with the minister or Alberta Education staff to understand the proposed legislation and how it advances the interests of school boards and how school boards are going to be engaged in the process moving forward. I would think it's just common sense that school boards need to have the chance to raise any concerns they have now as the matter may be concluded in this Legislature before they've had a chance to speak to the minister or Alberta Education.

I just see such an inconsistency from when they sat over here – and I heard them very loud and clear – talking about the importance of consultation. Many times when we were sitting over there, we were accused of consulting too much. There's got to be a happy medium here, and that is not what we're enjoying at this moment. There is a serious gap. I can't help but wonder what the minister is going to do with yet another significant consultation issue.

It's in your hands, Minister. Please do the right thing.

The Speaker: Are there any questions for the Member for Calgary-Lougheed under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Eggen: Well, certainly, I will frame the question in the broadest possible way. I just wanted to address, actually, the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake as well as yourself. Certainly, from the time that I assumed the role of Minister of Education, this was a very important part of what we wanted to work through with all of the parties that are involved. It's very important, again, to remind oneself that this is about how the framework of negotiation will take place. It's quite straightforward. From the beginning I made sure that not only I myself was touring each of the 61 school boards to have meetings with them in regard to this issue but also my senior staff that was working on the legislation and on the negotiations as well, so two layers of consultation on this issue and others over a period of many months.

Now, when you have the legislation itself, of course, you have some consultation, but is it not also very important to know that you don't hand out the legislation before you do so? It was made pretty much explicit what was in the contents of this before, as we went through the process, and then, of course, last week we had the representation from the Alberta Teachers' Association in one room here and a technical briefing for all of the members here in the opposition and with the School Boards Association as well. Now, the legislation is out, and then we go through a legislative process by which we debate the merits of the bill and also work through with each of the school boards over the next three days or four days how those technical things happen as well.

I mean, this is certainly very reasonable. I would think, to frame this into a question: isn't it about how we use not just the legislative process but, through layers of interaction over quite a long period of time, that we come up with the most reasonable solution? We're not trying to pull the wool over anybody's eyes on this. It's a framework which we can use, that people understand, and that was arrived at over a period of at least six months.

Thank you.

Mr. Rodney: I didn't quite hear a question in that, but that's the point. Our trustees, who are charged with these responsibilities, on Friday were informed of what was to come, to be debated, in the minister's words, in a few days. They weren't allowed to ask questions. I'm sure that over the months – I don't doubt the minister – he had good conversations but not specifically about this. It's one thing to not necessarily take this side of the House at their word, but these are the words of the people who are running our school boards

and who voted to do exactly that. I would hope that the words, that I will not read into *Hansard*, would be heard loud and clear. I've heard so many times from members all over this House: slow down, do it right the first time, consult, and then legislate. It's just a word to the wise. That's all.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, I know the hon. member made a comment that we've been accused of consulting too much. I heard the Government House Leader, though he didn't have the floor, say: and that never happened. I would say to the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed on Bill 6: when our government spent a long time talking to farmers and ranchers, while we didn't think we were quite finished yet, which is why we hadn't brought forward legislation, would you not agree that we had been accused of consulting too much? There's one shining example of that.

Mr. Rodney: There's no question about that, and there are others. I'm not necessarily proud of that other than the fact that we definitely strove to get it right. You look at the social policy framework as just yet another example. I was so proud of the wellness framework, the only one of its kind in North America. It's being copied all over the world right now.

I think that's the point. We're not opposed to a lot of the intent of many of these pieces of legislation, but we're saying that to ram it through before Christmas, in a matter of days and, I might add, nights and mornings, is nonsensical. I just urge caution. I urge us to slow down and get it right.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I just read again the point that was raised, again for your edification as well as my own. Standing Order 29(2)(a) – and I'm abbreviating it – reads:

To allow Members to ask questions and comment briefly on matters relevant to the speech and to allow responses to each Member's questions and comments.

I would remind all of the members, on both sides of the House, to maybe read that again in terms of their comments when time is used under 29(2)(a).

The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today on Bill 8. I, too, will be echoing some of the concerns from folks on this side of the House about the direction that we're going on Bill 8. But before I do that, let me just say thank you to the minister. I know that he had a very busy summer getting around and meeting with lots of school boards and getting feedback on a wide variety of issues, and some of those issues are certainly addressed in this bill.

I don't believe that the comments we're hearing today are specific to the lack of consultation that took place in the summer, that included a wide swath of issues affecting the department, but more so the process and the rollout of the conclusion of those consultations. There are many steps that take place in the process of consultation. One of them is gathering information, providing feedback, thoughtful reflection, and then delivery of that, delivery of the results of that consultation. I think one of the real big frustrations – and I know that I had the opportunity to meet with one of the school boards that is in the area of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. They highlighted a number of frustrations for me and asked if I on their behalf could try and let the minister know some of their concerns and frustrations, and they are that while the consultation process certainly took place this summer, at no point in time did they receive any feedback of what the results of those consultations were.

3:30

Then on Thursday, when the bill was introduced, they were quite surprised by a bunch of the content in that bill, particularly in light of the fact that a lot of the consultations were around “what method of two-table negotiations would you like?” Not “are the two-table negotiations the only and the best way?” but “if you had to choose between these two types of two-table consultations or bargaining, which one of these would you like, and how can we make it work?” To say that there was consultation – certainly, consultation did happen, but it wasn't an opportunity to provide all feedback but more about: “This looks like the path forward. How do you feel about that?”

Then, also, this frustration and disappointment around not receiving any sort of feedback on the consultation so that they would have a sense of the path forward: I know that that certainly was an issue for this particular school division. In fact, what they've done is that they have identified for us a number of potential risks and challenges. I might just say that today I hope that we don't get through second reading because I'm just not a hundred per cent sure where I even fall on the bill. They've highlighted a number of concerns within the bill, and it would be great to have a little bit more time to be able to discuss with them as they continue to analyze and get more feedback from other members and other associations across the province.

They've highlighted just a couple of issues that I think are worth bringing to light today, particularly when it comes to TEBA not having a seat at the initial bargaining table to determine such critical aspects of the path forward, and that's predominantly around this discussion that will take place around what is local and what is provincial. The bill recognizes the importance of TEBA in future negotiations but not this first one. TEBA is the organization that's predominantly or solely the voice of school board trustees at the negotiating table, Mr. Speaker, so it naturally creates a sense of concern that the ministry and the ATA are going to do all of the decision-making when it comes to what TEBA gets to have input on and what they don't have input on, but they don't have a voice about what those things will be. It's a major, major, major concern for them.

The other concern that I know I've heard, not specifically from this school board that met with me this morning but from many others: some concerns around the vagueness in the legislation when it comes to who the minister will be able to appoint onto TEBA and who they might not. It doesn't give any parameters on exactly the groups of folks that he might appoint.

[Mr. Feehan in the chair]

You know, naturally there's some concern or risk that not this minister, sir – not this minister – but a future minister might take this opportunity to utilize this vagueness in the legislation for a political purpose, not one that is solely in the best interest of TEBA itself or in the ATA or perhaps even the department or Albertans but that it might be just a bit of a kickback for a friend or a political opponent or whatever reason that they might.

Let me be clear. I don't believe, not even a little bit, that this minister would ever have that intention, but the problem is that when we pass legislation in this place, it's not only for today, but it's also for tomorrow. We need to have pause and caution when we set out the course of the future, particularly around something so important as collective bargaining. You know, this next bargaining arrangement and agreement is going to be very significant for not only the public purse but also for the health and well-being of our teachers and how they engage in our classrooms. What we're doing is quite important.

So it's very, very concerning that school boards are saying: ah, we appreciate the chat in the summer; we appreciate the three-minute shout-out that this is what's going to happen on Friday – maybe “appreciate” is a bit of stretch there because I've received a little bit more feedback on that, that there was some significant frustration around that being a come-and-be-told conference call event, not a consultation event. But we will set that aside for now. There is this frustration about: now we consulted in the summer, but we are going to move forward at breakneck speed in the passing of this legislation.

I know one school board in Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, the one that I spoke about prior, and I asked them about sharing some of this information. Certainly, they said that that would be fine. They have released a couple of public documents with concerns, and I'll just briefly mention some of those concerns from the document. I'm more than happy to table the document in the House tomorrow. We understand that there is consideration for second reading and third reading to be completed and the passage of this legislation into law before the currently scheduled December 3 end of sitting. Now, we did extend that today, so it's possible that it won't be quite as quick as the 3rd, but it's very reasonable to think that if this government doesn't slow the bill down and if members of the government don't rise to prolong the debate, by the end of the week this could in fact be law. These folks have concerns about that.

They go onto say that we have not seen this legislation prior to November 25, which in accordance to the practices of the House would have been a breach of privilege, and they were unable to see the bill. My guess, Mr. Speaker, is that this government knew probably sometime around the 26th of October, when we all got back to this place, that this bill was coming, so it could have been put on the Order Paper on the 28th of October or the 26th, early in the session, and allowed for this conversation to take place then. But that isn't what happened. They introduced the bill on Thursday. We're already here on Tuesday, debating the nuances of what is a quite technical piece of legislation.

I'll continue to quote:

It contains measures that we did not anticipate from a single consultation on a potential bargaining framework that was facilitated by your staff,

referring to the consultations that took place earlier in the summer.

We believe that as locally elected school boards, democratically chosen to represent our students, their families, and our constituents, we should be given more than a few days to properly review the proposed legislation to provide you with our recommendations on Bill 8 prior to passing it into law.

The letter goes on, but those are the high points, Mr. Speaker.

It's with that in mind that I would like to table an amendment. This amendment, Mr. Speaker, is one that members of the opposition are quite familiar with. If you don't mind, sir, I would like to proceed while the amendment is passed out. This amendment is one that is becoming quite familiar in this place.

An Hon. Member: My guess: is it a hoist?

3:40

Mr. Cooper: It's not a hoist because that would stop a bill, and we don't suggest that this bill needs to be stopped.

Listen, the framework that's going to be created is a very important framework for the bargaining that's going to be taking place in the future. But what the framework needs to ensure is that all of the members, including TEBA, at the first round of negotiations can determine what is a provincial issue and what is a local issue. The only way that we're going to be able to make that happen is if this government sends a bill to committee.

For the record, Mr. Speaker, I move that the motion for second reading of Bill 8, Public Education Collective Bargaining Act, be amended by deleting all the words after “that” and substituting the following:

Bill 8, Public Education Collective Bargaining Act, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

Mr. Speaker, we have seen the government on issues that are not nearly as significant in terms of private members' legislation send a bill to committee. In fact, with every piece of legislation that has come before this Assembly, the opposition has risen – I will withdraw that because there are maybe one or two that we haven't proposed this amendment to. But with the vast majority of legislation that has come before this Assembly, the opposition has risen and said that committees are important, that thoughtful reflection, consultation is important. The only time that we've seen a bill be accepted to committee is when the government rose on an opposition member's piece of legislation and sent that to committee, sir.

So it's my hope that today we can see a change in pace from this government, we can see a change in direction because goodness knows that there are other pieces of legislation that are currently before this House that are presently spiralling out of control because of the lack of consultation, and that could also be all solved by sending a bill to committee so that people, individuals, and in this case stakeholders can have their ability to chat, to talk about it.

What this bill does allow is ATA and the minister full breadth of negotiating power and not the same respect and authority for TEBA and locally elected school board trustees, and for that I think that we should probably pause, make sure that we get this right the first time . . .

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, member.

Under 29(2)(a) would anyone like to speak? I will begin with the hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and the hon. member. There seems to be a bit of a trend here, and we all recognize that many of us are new to this House. Some of us have been around before, some of the members of the front bench. You know, speaking from experience, there are things that I wish we could go back in certain instances and say: let's take a little bit more time; there are some things we need to take a look at here. I think some members from across the way spoke in great earnestness this morning about their lives and how they felt towards the government at the time, that, simply, the government of the day didn't care. They weren't listening. So, I guess the question to you, hon. member, is: it's my understanding that boards only got to see this legislation Friday, so that's only a few days ago. That's what they're saying, minister.

Then, secondly, would it be so bad – and I get it. In government, hon. Minister of Education, it is important that when you do draft a piece of legislation to get on with it, get on with the business and make things productive. To the member: maybe you could elaborate a little bit about what you've been hearing because it just seems to me that it's going too fast. The general consensus from school boards, from trustees is to slow down. I would support this amendment to slow it down, but I understand it's got to go quickly. Perhaps we can put a timeline to it, get the school boards together, get them to get their input, and move forward.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, hon. member. I think that you're bang on. There certainly seems to be a trend with the new government of rushing through pieces of legislation. I know that I've heard from a number of school divisions within the constituency of Olds-

Didsbury-Three Hills that also share that same concern. You know, the truth of the matter is that time can be a great healer, and I think that we're going to see, likely later in this week, some amendments to legislation that the government has only proposed a couple of weeks ago. My concern is that if we don't take the appropriate amount of time on Bill 8, we'll also wind up there, and that's why it's just so critically important that we make the most of the processes that we have established in the Assembly to ensure that we can provide proper reflection. One of those processes that is in place, Mr. Speaker, is the process of committee. It's a good process. It allows for expert testimony. It allows for many minds to provide input into this legislation, and my guess is that members of the current backbenches also could provide some quality feedback at committee, so I hope that that's what can happen.

I might just correct the record. My hon. colleague there mentioned that they didn't see it until Friday. He was way off, sir. It was Thursday, the day prior, that they got to see the bill, so I just wouldn't want people to have the impression that we were stretching any information here. It was Thursday, the day prior.

His point remains extremely valid when it comes to the need to ensure that school boards can have a voice on a piece of legislation that is going to dramatically impact their ability to bargain, the issues that they're going to be able to or not be able to bargain on, and the fact that they bring a very unique voice that only school boards can bring. We have school boards from rural Alberta. We have school boards from urban Alberta. What is a local issue in Carbon, Acme, and Linden might not necessarily be a big issue in Edmonton-Centre or Edmonton-Glenora or all of the other seats that take up the capital or Calgary or Red Deer or Medicine Hat or all of the larger cities. If those school boards don't have a voice at the table, Mr. Speaker, in the first round of consultations on deciding what's local and what isn't, we miss an opportunity to ensure that all Albertans are represented in what is a critically important bargaining negotiation.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Would anybody like to speak to the amendment? I'll recognize the Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms McKittrick: Well, Mr. Speaker, thank you. I am so happy that we're talking about public education and the role that school trustees have in the Legislature. When I think of my role as a school trustee in the past and the focus that I had to have on how well our students did and focusing all of the resources on the classroom, I am so happy that our government has introduced Bill 8 because Bill 8 is going to help school boards ensure that the most resources possible are focused on the classroom.

I just wanted to remind everyone in the House about the amount of consultation that the Minister of Education has had. I think that it's been mentioned in this House before, but I think it's really important that we know how many hours the Minister of Education has spent with each school board. He spent two hours with each of the 61 school boards, and I had the pleasure of being with the Minister of Education as he met with the francophone boards. So school boards have been consulted, and they knew that the government was looking at different ways of ensuring that in the next round of collective bargaining the process would be smooth, that it would ensure that every school board could meet their budget and that the teachers were fairly compensated.

3:50

The other thing that I think is important in this bill and why I don't think that we should be supporting the amendment that was proposed by the hon. member is that the bill leaves a lot of the

details to be discussed between the school boards and the ATA and the government. It doesn't preclude the role of school boards and their input into the important decisions that will be taken on this bill. The bill really wants to make sure that for the next round of bargaining there is a process in place that will make it fair and easy for all of the school boards to be able to meet their budgets when agreements are made with the ATA.

I would like to urge all members to not support the amendment. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Anyone under 29(2)(a)? I recognize the Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just a quick question for the hon. member. I respect your experience in education. I had 13 years around the world – kindergarten to university, three countries, and various subjects areas – yet I'm still learning a lot today. I've learned a lot in the last 11 years in this Chamber. I wonder if the member is familiar with the plethora – and I don't use words like that every day. But there are so many types of committees, not committees but types of committees, that I've seen in the last 11 years, too many for me to count right here and now. We've had numerous iterations of cabinet policy committees and special standing committees. It's a very, very long list.

But when it comes to all-party committees, I can tell you that – say what you will about the previous government – that was a creation of this previous government, and private members, especially, and opposition were absolutely delighted with their creation. It was unprecedented. It allowed an opportunity that had never ever been there for extremely important voices of elected representatives to be heard, not only them, not only those on the outside ring of the government side but all across here and much further to all elected representatives beyond these chambers, to places like school board rooms coming here, those folks who hear from parents and students and teachers, ATA, et cetera, every day.

Don't we want to hear from them on this? That's really my question. What do you think, Member? Should we take a little bit more time and get this right? This is not a hoist amendment by the hon. Wildrose member. This is not hoisting it. This is saying: send it to the committee. If the committees were not made for a purpose exactly like this, shall we disband all-party committees and not hear from private members and elected representatives, individuals, and stakeholders from across the province on any issue? Over to you.

The Acting Speaker: Any other members like to respond under 29(2)(a)? I'll recognize the Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you. I'll be really quick. The Member for Sherwood Park mentioned that this bill would offer more resources in the classroom. I was just hoping you could explain to me how that works.

Ms McKittrick: Having been involved in collective bargaining in a number of organizations within the school system, I know that the sometimes long and laborious processes that individual boards sometimes need to undertake to achieve a collective agreement take time from my role as a school trustee, which is to ensure that the resources are going into the classroom. I see that this bill, by the way that the TEBA will be structured, will free a lot of time for school trustees to focus more on their role to ensure quality education in the school system rather than for 61 boards to sit individually and bargain with their individual teacher representation. That's why I meant that this bill, by the way that it is structured and by creating the TEBA organization, will allow school trustees and their staff to

be more present and to ensure that resources are going to the classroom rather than spending more on bargaining.

The Acting Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a). Please go ahead, Member.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The question that I have for the Member for Sherwood Park is – I guess we're making an assumption here that this is what the school boards want. Their role is to make sure that the money that is being spent fits within the budgets that they have been provided. I question whether the assumption is not flawed, that school boards would want to not be involved in that process. I question whether or not that's what they want. In fact, from what we're hearing, school boards are saying: slow down so that we can at least find out if this is something that they need and will be good for them. I don't think that it's a difficult ask. In fact . . .

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Would anyone else like to speak to the amendment itself? I recognize the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to this amendment asking that this be sent to the Standing Committee on Families and Communities. I guess what I want to speak to here is just that I know that for some us, people in this Legislature that have an education background, perhaps we understand some of these issues and some of the underlying nuances of bargaining as it's been done traditionally, but I think that probably many in this House, who have not had any kind of a real impact or ability to engage in the education system, may not understand these things. I think that the Standing Committee on Families and Communities allows more reflection.

Yes, it's going to allow the school boards a chance to have a little more time to reflect and to look at this minister's work and to look at this process, but I think that this House needs to do a little bit of homework as well, and I think this committee is a perfect way of doing that. It's tasked with the idea and the focus of digging into these kinds of issues and coming back to the House with recommendations and with ideas. I think that this would be a perfect opportunity for a committee like this to deal with something that's – I mean, this is very, very important. We're dealing with people's livelihoods here. We're dealing with how they feed their families and the kind of working conditions that they face. How are we going to approach coming to mutual agreement on the kinds of issues that teachers and schools and school boards face with regard to the monies and how they're going to be spent? I think this committee would be a perfect place for us to study that.

I think it's important that this committee take a look at the history of bargaining in this province. I'm not sure that everybody in this House understands the concept of, really, what in many cases is called local bargaining and why we've done that in the past, the advantages and the disadvantages that have come from local bargaining.

We know that some of the school boards in this province are in agreement that maybe we should pursue a different model. Well, it seems and it would appear, if we take a look at the ASBA and the PSBAA, that both of those organizations still seem to and have chosen to support the concept of local bargaining. While we understand that the minister has gone to a lot of work in consulting at the front end of this and has proposed a two-tier system, we probably need to take some time as a House and as a Legislature and especially on this committee to take a look at the benefits of local bargaining versus the benefits of this new model of bargaining.

4:00

We know that there have been issues. That's pretty clear for anybody that's been involved in education. We know that in 1994 there were problems with local bargaining before, and I think there are probably some individuals in this House that were in education at the time and realized that at the end of a new bargaining model, they were down 5 per cent at the end of the day.

That new bargaining model was an attempt to address several issues: one, the reality that the government of the day believed that they needed to get control of the spending in education and believed that a new model was needed to do that, but secondly, they saw inequities. They saw inequities in the funding between school boards and that this was creating a problem with educating our children, so they needed a new model. One of the things that the government did, that maybe some of the members here are not aware of and that this committee could help educate us on and look into these issues, is that the government took the taxing powers of the school boards away. They collected the money from property taxes and put it into a collective pot and came out with money that would be per-pupil funding for schools.

Now, you know, that was a pretty big introduction of change in the model of bargaining and in how we were going to do things, and I think that if we're going to move away from that – honestly, the minister knows that we've had some conversations in the past. There have been some issues with this model of bargaining, and we just have to take a look at the fact that the last two collective agreements have been done provincially rather than purely locally. There maybe needs to be some discussion as to how we could change this model, but I believe this committee needs to take a look at and consider the issues that may be brought up by school boards in this province.

If we're going to have success with a new model of bargaining, it would just appear to me – as a teacher I understood this. As a teacher I understood that if I was going to have success in my classroom, I had to be able to ensure that my students were engaged in their learning, that they had a positive relationship with me, that the parents understood who this teacher was that they placed in charge of their kids, that they had trust and confidence in me as a teacher, and that my principals all understood that I was teaching the curriculum and that I knew how to engage my students with different pedagogy to ensure that they would have success. It's a model of education that engages all of the major stakeholders and makes sure that they're a part of the process so that at the end of the day our students are educated and confident and able to partake in the society that they live in.

Well, I believe that if you're going to have success with this model of education, this bargaining model, we're going to need to make sure that all of the stakeholders are heard, that all of the stakeholders are considered, and that we have a bargaining model that at the end of the day has the support of all the major stakeholders. I knew that that was the success for me in my classroom, and I believe it's going to need to be done here if we're going to have a successful bargaining model. I believe this committee could call in school boards. This committee could ask for their concerns and then listen to their proposals for how we could make this a better bill and then bring these back to the minister with the idea of creating a law that will stand in place not just for a few years but for many, many years, serving the parents, the students, the school boards, and the teachers that make up our education system.

Now, I think that this committee could – and I really wonder sometimes. I know that for somebody like myself, you know, the shadow minister of Education: yeah, sure, I have to dig into this bill, and I have to try to understand it. I believe it's important for

the people on this committee to also understand the nuances in this bill. I think they even need to be able to understand that this formalizes a province-wide two-tier system of bargaining, that the provincial table will address the broader issues, the issues, as it states in the bill, for those that have significant monetary expenditures and for those where all of the school boards would share a common concern in that area. But if we don't start to talk about these kinds of things, how are we going to make wise decisions in this House? I believe this committee could help in that education process.

It's important. I mean, we have been talking in a very short period of time so far with school boards, and they're expressing concern over what would be a provincial issue. Based on the criteria that are in this bill, how would you determine what is a provincial and what is a local issue? What kinds of issues really are not significantly monetary? Which issues, if they affect one school board, wouldn't affect all of the school boards, and how do we determine that?

There is some concern as to the kinds of things that would be set up by a two-tier model here. I think that as a committee we could start taking a look at that. We could start looking at the kinds of recommendations after we've listened to some of the experts on this issue, and we could then come back to the House with some recommendations.

Mr. Minister, you said that the bill came out on Thursday, if I'm correct. Yeah. You know, really, we've only had Friday, and for those of us that continued – and I think that's probably all of us in this House – working on Saturday and maybe even Sunday and into yesterday and today, there have been only four or five days that we've had the opportunity to actually sit down and consider this.

I know that I've talked with school boards that are saying: listen, we're not even prepared to meet as a school board until, you know, the 15th or the 16th of this month. That's a significant problem for them. For something that's as important as this, why not give them the opportunity to sit down and talk as a school board to be able to see where they fit into this, whether they can actually live with this? The timeline is an issue here, and it's not because there was a lack of consultation. I'll give the Minister of Education his dues here. You went out and talked with the school boards ahead of time, and that's a really good thing.

I'm going to draw again a little bit of an educational analogy here. I know that in my classroom when we sat down and we started to take a look at an issue, we would brainstorm, we would talk, and we would try to focus our conversation on the issue under discussion. Then we would perhaps send them out to do some research. They would go out, and they would look at various sources. Some might go to the library, go to the shelves and see what we had in our stack of ancient library material. Some might go out and interview some people in our community that were pertinent to the issue. Others would go onto the famous Internet, and you could see how much time they actually spent on topic. At the end of the time they would come together, and they would look at their research. They would discuss the value of the information that they had discovered. Then they would talk with each other and see how it met the issue of the day and what ramifications would come out of that.

I guess that's the process that I would urge the minister to use right now and to use the committee as a part of that process, a part of gathering the research and information. Find out from your stakeholders what they really want, where they fall. You know, there's a lot of hard work that's gone into this, and maybe the government isn't willing to simply shelve this for local bargaining. On the other hand, maybe they are willing to take a look and see some of the concerns and address some of those concerns by

amending this piece of legislation with the recommendations that come from this committee.

I would suggest that this is a very reasonable step in the process of consultation, that this amendment should be supported by the House, that it can look at the various issues that have been brought up, whether the two-tier model is what the boards want or not. They can take a look at some of the problems that the school boards have with this model, and they can even, perhaps, ask the school boards about some of the regulations that could be made after passing this bill so that they can do some forward thinking once they've considered what this bill is going to look like after and if it's passed by this House.

I think that this is an amendment that we could speak to in the positive in this House. I believe that this amendment is a reasonable amendment. I think that it sends it to the right committee. This is the committee that should deal with it, the Standing Committee on Families and Communities. I would encourage this House to vote in favour of this amendment.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Under 29(2)(a) would anyone like to make a comment or question? I recognize the Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

4:10

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, coming to grips with this bill as I am, I appreciate the previous speaker's insights, and I guess I would ask: if this was to proceed, would there be any conditions under which he feels it could proceed?

Mr. Smith: Thank you for the question. I'm assuming that what you're referring to is: are there any conditions after the committee has met?

Dr. Swann: No.

Mr. Smith: Okay. Are there any conditions, then, during the committee?

Dr. Swann: Are there any conditions that would, through amendments to this bill, in your view, allow it to proceed and satisfy the concerns that boards have around this review?

Mr. Smith: Thank you very much. Okay. Mr. Speaker, I know that when we've talked with some of our school boards, they have voiced some concerns and some suggestions that they would like to see. Assuming that the government is not willing to pursue and go down the path of going back to pure local bargaining, if they are going to have a two-tier model, they, for instance, would like to see TEBA included in the first round of discussions so that it isn't just the government and the ATA that will be setting out the criteria and the issues that they wanted to negotiate at the beginning. TEBA, as one of the major stakeholders of this process, should be involved from the very beginning. That just seems to me to be a reasonable and fair position to take, that if you've got the three major stakeholders – the government, the teachers represented through the ATA, and the school boards that represent the parents and the students and that represent how money is spent within education – they would be a part of that very first process.

You know, we've had some discussion with some that are concerned and wondering why the Auditor General would not be a part of overseeing TEBA. There is a section in there that needs a little more clarification, and maybe that's something that this committee could look at and ask why the funds expended through the negotiating and bargaining process that TEBA and the government

and the ATA would be a part of – why would those things not be under the purview of the Auditor General? That might be something that we would want to see discussed, and maybe the committee could come back to this House with some recommendations one way or the other with some reasons one way or the other on those kinds of issues.

You know, one of the problems that many of the school boards that we've talked with have come up with is just that this bill deals with the process of negotiation and that many of the issues that surround this process are fairly vague. So we'd like to see some clarification, perhaps some discussion, about some of the regulations that would accompany this. For instance – and it's been alluded to already in this House – the minister has the ability to appoint to the committee that will represent TEBA at the negotiation process. Why? Who would that be? Why would the people that represent TEBA not be from purely the school boards? Why would he see an issue with wanting to have to put in people that may not have anything to do with the school boards?

Maybe we misunderstand, but those are the concerns that are coming out of the school boards. I mean, one of the biggest problems that we have, I think, sometimes in life but also in this House and as people is that sometimes if we don't understand something, we fear it.

Mr. Mason: That's Bill 6 in a nutshell.

Mr. Smith: Well, you know, you may be correct. The member is absolutely free to have his opinion on that issue.

You know, if we could take the time in this committee to answer those kinds of questions or to ask and to work with the minister through this committee to answer those kinds of questions, get rid of some of that fear, then perhaps this would end up with a bill that is really very successful and meets the needs of the educational establishment.

Have I answered your question?

The Acting Speaker: We only have seven seconds under 29(2)(a), so perhaps I'll just proceed along and ask if anyone would like to address the amendment. I'll call on the Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In the time that we've had this bill, I've had a chance to reflect on it a little bit, not a huge amount. One of the great things about being the only member from my party and also one of the challenges is that we get to speak about absolutely everything.

Mr. Cooper: What's your party position on this?

Mr. Clark: Well, my party position – I may release a shadow Bill 8. We'll see. It's barely gone 4 p.m. today, and there are many, many hours left in the day for us to do some work.

Having said that, based on research that we've done looking at other provinces, other jurisdictions, at the end of the day likely we will support Bill 8. But I have tremendous sympathy for the idea of sending this to committee because there is a lot of work yet to be done on this. There are many questions yet to be answered.

You know, the overall consultation: it's been said many times in this House today – and I think the Minister of Education deserves some credit and praise for his extensive efforts to consult and meet with school boards and travel the province and talk with folks. But the question here is: what exactly was the question that was asked in that consultation? Was the question, "What would you like the process to look like?" or was the question, "What would you like the two-table process to look like?" It's a little bit like when my children were younger. The question wasn't: what would you like

to eat? The question was: would you like peas or carrots? You're having a vegetable. That's been determined. It seems like there's a sense of this. There's some sensitivity – and I think rightly so – particularly in rural Alberta, but around the province, about a bunch of unanswered questions, about . . .

Mr. Cooper: The defender of rural Alberta.

Mr. Clark: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills rightly identifies me as a defender of rural Alberta. Absolutely right. Absolutely right.

But, you know, I think the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon also raised a good point, that where there's a vacuum, there's uncertainty and that we fill that uncertainty with fear. In this case I think it is, in fact, a framework with gaps that are to be filled through regulation. I worry that that may be becoming a bit of a theme for this government as it was with past governments.

The worry that has been expressed to me by school boards is that there's a one size fits all on the way from this negotiating process. There are significant differences between boards around the province, within and between not just rural and urban but within and between urban and within and between rural boards as well, around very important operational matters of how the school boards operate, around teaching hours, around lunch supervision, and around many, many other issues. In fact, I've met with representatives of some school boards earlier today. They raised some of those issues with me. I've asked them to please provide further input to me on exactly what their concerns are, because I want to learn more about this. As has been identified earlier, we do an awful lot of learning in this place.

Sending this to committee gives us an opportunity to reflect, recognizing that there's a timeline here, that time is relatively short. We need to get into that collective bargaining process, but we do I think have time here to get this into committee.

When all those questions are answered, I likely will support Bill 8 because it is something, as I understand, that is generally a direction that is going around the country. But I rise in support of the amendment. I think it's important that we take some time to reflect.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Under 29(2)(a) would anyone like to comment or ask a question? I recognize the Member for – oh, darn. Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills?

Mr. Cooper: Yes. I know that it's very forgettable, and for that I have no malice.

I was just wondering if the independent Member for Calgary-Elbow would mind passing along to us just a sense of how many school boards he might represent in that constituency there and the sort of breadth of the opportunity he might have for input. I mean this genuinely, not in any sort of joking way. Like, give us a sense of just the type of, the amount of feedback that you think you might receive or that you could receive and the school boards that affect the beautiful constituency you represent.

4:20

Mr. Clark: Well, first off, to the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, I think it's important to read the word "hooray" into *Hansard* if we haven't had an opportunity to do that. So hooray for the question.

You know, I think it's important, not just as leader of a party but, I think, for all of us as representatives in this House, that we represent not just the people who have elected us in our individual constituencies but that we represent, ultimately, all Albertans. Yes,

while the two major school boards represented in Calgary-Elbow are the Calgary public school board and the Calgary Catholic school board, large school boards, there are charter schools in Calgary-Elbow, there are francophone schools, and there are private schools in Calgary-Elbow as well, so there is a breadth there.

You know, earlier today I met with representatives of half a dozen rural school boards from not just surrounding Calgary but around the province as well, so we're certainly doing our homework and our research. Ironically, on this particular topic I've only spoken with rural school board members. I haven't actually had the chance to speak directly with any school board representatives for the large urban boards in particular, that make up most of the schools in Calgary-Elbow, but I've asked our team to reach out, get their perspective as well. But I think that speaks to exactly why this amendment is a good idea: to give us the time to reflect, to learn more, to talk with more school boards, not just in our own constituencies but all around the province as well.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any further questions under 29(2)(a)?

Dr. Swann: I'm just wondering if the hon. member knows – and this is for my information. What's the deadline for negotiations, and what kind of timing do we have? I'm in a dilemma around this because I share some of the concerns on this side, and I'm just not sure what kind of timeline we have. Does the hon. member know when this has to be completed?

Mr. Clark: I don't know that, but perhaps the Education minister can rise under 29(2)(a) and let us know.

The Acting Speaker: Under 29(2)(a).

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. I think this is important. We're trying to sort this out using this venue as a mechanism by which we can sort things out. An important piece of information that everybody needs to know – I'll form this in a question, somehow, like *Jeopardy!* – is that after December 31 the individual school boards can start individual negotiations with each individual local. So after this December 31 the whole notion of having this TEBA board, which is, by the way, guys, just to sort this out – I mean, it's an employers' board. It's the school boards' board, is what it is. It's not the teachers'. It's the teachers' employers, so they employ the teachers.

The terms of reference would be set by the school boards. It is a school board representative body that would do the one table, which would be wages – right? – the big one, then we would be there as well because we are the funder. That's a good way to do it. After December 31 – and we had a fair bit of time here. I'll talk more about the consultations and just the breadth of what we did and how we did it. After December 31 we can lose that opportunity to even execute this concept. That's something to think about, everybody, for sure.

The Acting Speaker: Other comments under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, would anybody else like to address the amendment? I recognize the Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Sucha: Just think of the cable company and you'll remember.

I'm going to be brief on this. This is my major concern about this amendment and sending it to committee. I know the committee process can sometimes take a long time, especially depending on how detailed you go into it. The minister already alluded to this in detail, that we're on a limited timeline here. Negotiations are very complex. We need to start planning. We need to develop the TEBA board. We need to figure out which is going to sit on which part of

the local and the provincial bargaining tables. I'm afraid that if we do this, if we move forward with moving this into committee, we aren't going to be able to develop this properly, we aren't going to be able to do a proper negotiation model, and down the road what will end up happening is that we could lead to strike actions, which would not be good for any students. This could lead to us having a very unfair deal.

With that being said, with as much briefness as I want because I know that time is very valuable, I would encourage this House not to support this amendment.

The Acting Speaker: Again under 29(2)(a), any response or comment? I recognize the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To the Member from Calgary-Shaw: have you actually talked to any school boards in your jurisdiction?

Mr. Sucha: I've talked to all my school boards in my jurisdiction.

The Acting Speaker: Under 29(2)(a), anybody? I recognize the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you. For the question. I understand the December 31 date, but I think that it might be somewhat artificial. I think that we should also say that the contract expiry date is not until July 16, which is seven months out, somewhat. Is that not correct?

Mr. Sucha: As the member alluded, the negotiation process can start in April, so we actually don't have as long of a window to start this process. We ultimately don't want to do work without a contract as well.

Mr. Orr: When does the current contract expire?

The Acting Speaker: Sorry; I just want to interrupt. That was a second question, and I can't allow a second question.

Mr. Orr: Okay.

The Acting Speaker: Would anybody else like to – I recognize the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Just a couple of comments to the member. Just for clarification's sake, I'm curious to know, following on from my hon. colleague from Lacombe-Ponoka, when that contract does expire. I might just add that there are lots of ways that we can manage through the committee process in terms of putting reasonable timelines on it.

The other questions that I might just ask, one being: when does the contract expire? The other: this House sat approximately 35 days ago for the very first day, and I wondered if the hon. member knows if this bill could have been presented before the House at that time and then allowed more opportunity for discussion amongst school board trustees so that we wouldn't be in this time crunch.

Mr. Sucha: Well, to be fair to the minister, as many of the members in this House have alluded to, he was meeting with members of school boards until about the end of October, so a lot of primary discussions were happening during this time. Then, ultimately, the bill had to be drafted by his team, which would give some time for that as well. Then there's research that's done with the drafting of this bill, so subsequently amendments and changes are being made as well. I don't see how this bill could have hit this House before last Thursday.

With that being said, going to the second question, all the contracts are up for expiry at the end of August as well.

The Acting Speaker: Under 29(2)(a)? I recognize the Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Given that there hasn't been true local bargaining in about 15 years, I wonder if the member could just talk about if he thinks that the current system is broken, and if so, if he thinks that this is a way to move forward in having two tables, one to discuss local issues and one to discuss provincial issues. Of course, the biggest provincial issue, I'd say, is funding the actual collective agreements that get negotiated. Would the hon. member think that this would be a way to work in partnership to address both local and provincial issues?

Mr. Sucha: I apologize for using the analogy that has been used countless times in this House during this subject, but one size does not fit all, and that's what two tables is all about. It's recognizing that we don't want to sacrifice the negotiation piece when it refers to things like salaries but that there is a divide between issues that impact certain rural boards and urban boards, and even certain urban boards have different challenges as well. I can tell you that the francophone board in Calgary has only two schools, so there is a large gap in distance compared to local Calgary public schools, that have two in one community.

You know, at the end of the day, it's prudent to have a model that recognizes that there are certain individual challenges for every single board and also recognizes that when it comes to negotiating things like salaries, we are all kind of in this together and that we have to make sure that we get the best deal for all Albertans and for all children.

4:30

The Acting Speaker: We are done with 29(2)(a).

Would anyone like to address the amendment? I'll recognize the Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll try to be brief. I support the amendment. I think that one of the toughest things about sitting on the government side of the House is looking at a motion that comes from this side of the House and deciding: is that going to help me or hurt me if I support it? That would be a fair question, and members on the government side would be right to start out suspicious about that.

The problem, Mr. Speaker, is that some of it actually comes to help, and this is one of those things. When governments get in trouble, very often it's when they don't take the time ahead of the legislation to actually talk to Albertans, the ones affected by the legislation, and make a decision on that. Again, when legislation goes through without that – one of the few things that can actually save a piece of legislation if it's brought forward before the consultation is adequately completed is a motion like this, to get it to committee. In fact, in this current session there are a few pieces of legislation that would benefit from a trip through the committee system.

An Hon. Member: Bill 6?

Mr. McIver: We're not on Bill 6, but, yes, it comes to mind as a random example.

This is another case where, government members, your government might actually benefit from allowing this to go through the committee process. I think that this is an important piece of legislation. I have no reason to believe that the government's

intentions were anything less than good when bringing this forward. Nonetheless, some of the communications that have come through my office from school boards would indicate that they haven't been talked to in a way that they would acknowledge as consultation. Again, a good way to cure that would be to take some time in the committee system.

Lots of benefits for government. You get us on this side of the House on the record in committee. Think about the benefits of that. You get to take submissions from other people should the committee decide to do so, and some of those people could be school boards or organizations that the school boards belong to. You could really build a case for why the legislation is a good idea, and you might even come up with some good ideas for amendments through committee that you would be happier with, yourselves and your government. I think that it could improve your chances of having a piece of legislation that you could be proud of down the road, that you wouldn't get a lot of stick for because people don't like it, something that'll work.

That's why I'm supporting the amendment. I would politely, I hope, request that members of the House consider doing the same. Thanks.

The Acting Speaker: Under 29(2)(a) I'll recognize the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad that the hon. member rose to speak to this. The hon. member has a lot of experience in this House, and it was while the hon. member was in government that standing committees were established. I would like to ask the hon. member if he could elaborate on the value of putting bills to standing committees for the sake of the MLAs that are elected in this House who don't have a lot to do with crafting legislation. There is this process of standing committees that was brought to this House, and I'm a little bit surprised that the members opposite who are part of the Standing Committee on Families and Communities are not supporting an amendment that gives them something to do to directly impact a piece of legislation that is so profound, really. It's going to completely transform the bargaining process in this province, yet they don't appear to want to participate. Could you elaborate on the value of such participation by all of the members of this House that belong to these standing committees?

Mr. Mason: Ask him how many times they did it.

The Acting Speaker: Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know what? We all come to this House with value. We all have intelligence and thoughts, that could have value, that we bring to a process. As the hon. member asked, I'd say that this really will give you a chance to put a mark on something that matters. The Education budget is the second-biggest in government. This is to do with the process for bargaining on that. The collective wisdom is very often greater than the wisdom of the few.

It was also while I was up that I heard from the Government House Leader. Well, he didn't have the floor, but I heard it anyways. He said: ask them how often they did it. Mr. Speaker, that was a good question. It was out of order, but it was a good question because I would say – that was part of my comments to members on the other side – that we probably regretted sometimes when we didn't send things to committee.

That's why when I opened my remarks – one of the toughest things when a motion like this comes, particularly for the government members, is to think about: is this good for me, or is this not good for me? The things that went poorly or in a bad way when we

were in government were some times when we didn't take the time to put something through committee. And, yes, it did happen sometimes when we didn't consult enough on the front end. Those are the things that come to bite you – those are the things that come to bite you – at election time, when you notice it, when you really notice it. That's what I would say.

To the member that asked the question, I think there is great value. It's great to go back to your constituents and say: I helped bring this amendment forward on this piece of legislation, that actually made it better. I think the issue of fairness, from the Member for Calgary-Shaw, was mentioned. It will be something that's more fair, more balanced between the rights of the taxpayers to get a good deal and the rights of the teachers to be paid fairly. It all does start with the empowerment of the legislation.

The shorter answer is: absolutely, there's value. All members of the House will have an increased chance of bringing that value. All members of the House would have a chance of having something to take back to their constituency, to say: "See? This is what I did. This is what I worked on, and I'm proud of it, and this is why you're paying me." So I would say: don't waste this opportunity. This can be a very good thing for all parties here if we put this through the committee.

The Acting Speaker: Under 29(2)(a) I recognize the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Member for Calgary-Hayes, thank you for your insights. Because you've been here a lot longer than at least this MLA and because you were on the government benches at one point in time, I guess my question could go to you. I'm not even sure if I could put it to a minister at this particular point in time because I don't know the rules of the House that well, so I'll put it to you, okay? Here's the question. We know that the Education Act was passed by the previous government and has not been proclaimed for many, many, many years, yet the education system has continued to move on, and . . .

The Acting Speaker: I'm sorry; 29(2)(a) is now done.

Would anybody like to address the actual amendment itself? I recognize the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you. Yes, I would like to speak to the amendment. Well, I will say that I am in favour of the amendment although, truthfully, I'm not really sure where I stand yet on the actual bill. I think there's a lot of consideration that needs to be given to this. There needs to be time for understanding to come to a good position on it, not just for myself but for the members of this House and particularly for others. I do think there needs to be time for consultation.

4:40

I would like to reference a letter that is actually dated today. It's addressed to the Minister of Education. I don't expect that you've had an opportunity to see this because it is addressed today – it'll come to you – but I do think that it has some interesting content, some interesting points. It comes from one of the school boards in my riding, actually from the chair of that school board. He says that he's actually very concerned about Bill 8, and I would like to just identify some of his concerns because I think they're important for the House, and I'd like them on the record.

He says that in the brief consultation held in September the trustees felt that the steps that were being taken would lead to the "continual erosion of the rights and responsibilities of school boards." Be that as it may – I don't know; I just report what he is

saying. We have seen more authority being gathered to the central body of government, to cabinet, so his point may be worth taking.

Then he says:

In the absence of local autonomy, we may see rural education taking [yet another] hit as labour solutions that work in the city don't . . . fit in rural communities.

I think that he raises a very important problem there, that a centralized, single, fits-all solution to this is not going to be helpful in some situations.

He says also:

Should a provincial model be initiated, it was our board's position that during the preliminary consultations that the [Alberta School Boards Association] should be the body that represents our boards.

These are questions that a school board is raising. These are their concerns. They want them as their bargaining agent.

Then he says – and I think that this is an extremely important statement. He says:

We have further concerns that the preliminary consultations were simply not framed as the basis for the development of Bill 8, and [we] believe they shouldn't be used as such.

I'm hearing the members on this side of the floor say to me: yes, we went and consulted; yes, we went and talked to them; yes, we've listened to them. But here I have the chair of a school board saying that he didn't quite realize the discussion was really about Bill 8 and that it shouldn't be taken that way.

Although I think that the members opposite believe they have fully consulted, what we're reading is that they don't feel that way at all. They have serious concerns about that. They simply do not believe that the consultation – "the preliminary consultations," he calls them, "were simply not framed as the basis for the development of Bill 8." If they didn't realize that you were building Bill 8 out of your conversations with them, that in their mind at least is not real consultation, and they feel that it would be unfair that it would be used in that context. He says:

In this context, we believe Bill 8 does not reflect the feedback provided in that consultation.

Maybe you listened to a few things from them, but they feel like you haven't given any accountability to it. You haven't figured any of their comments into what you've gone ahead and done anyway.

He says:

These are but a few of our initial cursory concerns.

Then he talks about:

Given your apparent timeline for the [progress] of Bill 8, we are additionally concerned about our inability to dialogue and [have any further consultation] on the significant . . . shift this bill proposes.

Now, I can understand that. If they feel like they didn't know that they were really talking about Bill 8 and now they have no other opportunity to comment on that, then they feel like they have been overridden. They have not been listened to.

Having not seen your proposed legislation prior to November 25th, which is probably the disputed Thursday that we've been talking about,

it contains measures not anticipated from the preliminary consultations facilitated by your staff.

I think that you believe that you consulted with them, but I don't think that you did it in a way that they understood what you were expecting to do with all of that. They certainly don't feel like it was valid or that it was legitimate. They feel like they had the bill dropped on them on November 25 and then had no opportunity to respond to that.

He says:

In agreement with many fellow boards, we believe that locally elected school boards representing local constituents, and

addressing local issues, should be given more than a few days to review proposed legislation affecting one of the primary responsibilities of school boards.

We realize and he realizes that the government is saying: yes, we've consulted; yes, we've listened. But I would suggest to you that your process of consultation is not being effective with the people that you need to be listening to. We've seen that with just about every bill that's come forward.

I mean, as I said, I'm not sure the direction this bill should take. I do know that this school board does not feel like they have been consulted. They feel like there was a little bit of a process so that it could be called that but that nobody, in fact, listened to them. I just pass on to you the reality of a school board in my riding.

He says:

We trust this discussion will occur prior to the passage of Bill 8. While I appreciate your Board Chairs teleconference of Friday, November 27th, having not had any further opportunity to meet or share our concerns with you, we would look for every opportunity to discuss Bill 8 with you prior to its further progression.

This needs to go to committee. I mean, if you really want these people on your side, they need an opportunity to actually talk about the bill, not just a general sort of nice conversation. There is real concern with this, and I think it needs to be considered.

They have a couple of very specific questions they would like answers to. First: "In drafting Bill 8, what was the process employed by your office to analyse the preliminary consultation feedback from Boards?" They feel like it hasn't been listened to. Second question: "Were any boards additionally consulted in the drafting of Bill 8?" Thirdly: "What is the rationale for the proposed TEBA to exist outside of the ASBA, the association currently representing all 61 School Boards?"

My friends across the way, I don't have a position yet, but I know that this is a school board that does not feel like you are listening to them. I have to say that consultation, sending it to committee, would be the only responsible thing to do. It would be the only right thing to do. I spent a lot of time in past years dealing with and working together with democratic kinds of groups, small agencies and associations, where board members sometimes precook decisions before AGMs and things like that. Then they set it all out and expect the members to vote for it, and too often the individual members feel like: well, it's already decided; what's the point of me saying anything? I think this is how the school boards are feeling at this point in time.

On the weekend I was at a public event, and someone came up to me and said: I actually voted NDP, but what's happening there isn't real NDP; they're not true NDPs; they've forgotten the word "democratic" in this whole thing; these people aren't democratic; they're not doing democratic things. This is what this individual said to me. He said: real New Democrats wouldn't do this kind of stuff.

I have to ask: why is it that they're suddenly losing the D, the democratic? It leaves me and school boards wondering and questioning, and quite honestly I do have to question why. Is it catering to the ATA at the cost of school boards? Are there ulterior motives? Why the rush? I mean, if there's not a willingness to be open, not a willingness to consult, it leaves us beginning to suspect: okay; what's going on here? Is it that you don't really want to hear from the school boards, they're a bothersome nuisance, you just want to do what you want to do and get it done? Is it about bulldozing it through so quick that nobody has time to respond, so that your agenda is completed? I don't know. Is it that you don't trust the school boards and their comments? I said it yesterday, and I'm going to say it again: the right thing done in the wrong way will never produce the right results.

4:50

I do commend the minister for having made an effort to consult. It's more than we've seen on some of these other bills. But I don't think the school boards feel like they have been consulted with. I think the process is rushed. I think there are a lot of people in our province that don't understand what the huge rush is to shove all this stuff through before Christmas. It leaves people thinking there's something fishy here, and I have no idea what it is because, as I said, I'm not sure where this bill should even go. But I do know that in most social institutions people understand that procedure is often as important as content, and when procedure is abused and misused, it never, ever can lead to a good result.

So I have real concerns about pushing this through in a haphazard and in a quick way. I think some of the other members have spoken it well. This needs to go to committee. I would beg you to take it to committee for your own good. We're not trying to trick you into something here. This is the way process should go. When it doesn't go this way, well, somewhere down the road it will backfire, and don't say that you weren't warned.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Under 29(2)(a) I'll recognize the Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, I'll try to use this opportunity to . . .

Ms Hoffman: To help.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah, to give a hand, right?

Once again – and I confirmed it again – in regard to the consultation, certainly, we did do lots, and I'll speak about that more. I have, for example, the agenda of the full-day meetings that we had with the school boards. The first item was establishing a bargaining association. Another discussion item was province-wide, two-tier bargaining. Number 3: level of government involvement and employee representation. So it was very clear what we were doing. That was just one layer with experts that I thought were very, very good, and then I came around, too, and a similar process was followed.

Sometimes people don't like to see the results of how things come out. Perhaps, you know, that's what I have to work with, right? I mean, that's part of my responsibility, to ensure that we're working through. That's why, in fact, we did make some modifications over time with this bill to make sure that the two tables – number one, again, very clear: it's the teachers' employer bargaining association. So it's the school boards that are represented with the TEBA, right? Then they're negotiating with the teachers, so that's kind of how it's split apart.

Again, I confirmed it again because I wanted to make sure. By December 31 a number of school boards can start negotiating on their own, okay? That's why the day that I was – well, probably a couple of days after I was appointed the Minister of Education I started on this process and set up the consultation that I did, and we're continuing on with that as well.

We have another set of consultations that are happening that I'll describe later when I make some final comments. There are three more in Calgary and Edmonton here in the next few days, just to clarify some of these issues, because, you know, I really do believe in collaboration. It's very important to have people functioning together to see that this will be an opportunity for all the local issues to be negotiated in a clean and clear and concise sort of way and have the funder there for the wage negotiations. What appears at those two tables is up to the TEBA, which is the school boards as

well as us and then the teachers on the other side. That's negotiated straight up like you would negotiate any other parts of the contract, okay?

Again, I'll finish with a question, of course, just because that's kind of what it's supposed to be. I hope that you might understand that December 31 is a real deadline by which the whole idea of having some central bargaining would potentially be extinguished. Certainly, we've seen that in the past. In the last 15 years or so, you know, you had the bargaining breaking down. We need to control costs, right? It's very important to do so. That's the biggest reason we have, to have the wage part of this and so forth under provincial, so that the actual funder is at the table to make sure that things don't spin out of control like they have done in the past, where individual boards went with something big that we couldn't afford. They call it a whipsaw effect in negotiating. So I'll end with a question. Have you ever heard of the word "whipsaw"?

Thanks.

The Acting Speaker: Would you like to respond to that?

Mr. Orr: Just to say thank you and I realize it's a complex process. As I said, I still have not totally made up my mind. I'm just passing on what I think one school board has said. I do appreciate you're working on it.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Anybody else under 29(2)(a)? I recognize the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: For the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka. We've heard from the minister that there was this consultation process that took place through the summer with different school boards across the province. Now, if a joint letter was to come from the school boards across this province, a number of them, begging the minister to slow down and send this bill to committee, do you suppose that the responsible thing to do would be to do just what the school boards have requested and send this bill to committee?

Mr. Orr: Well, I can't answer for the minister, but I would say that if I was in that role, I would in fact do that.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: We are finished with 29(2)(a).
Would anybody else like to speak to the amendment?

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: I recognize the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to the amendment to Bill 8. With all due respect to the Education minister, I represent four school boards, and that's why I'm standing today, because all of the school boards that I've talked to in my constituency want me to ask you to slow this down. Despite the fact that you may have consulted with them in the past, I think that they think they've been involved in a little bit of a shell game here, and they would like to speak to you again about Bill 8.

I'll just share a couple of comments. I actually just got off the phone here about half an hour ago with one of the school board chairs. She feels that this is being rushed. They've had no chance to look over and discuss with other boards, and there is a significant difference between the input that the school boards indicated and what the minister is now saying. That is their feeling. That's their words, not mine. They don't feel that a three-minute phone call on

Friday provided anything new compared to what the minister had said before to them. Again, with all due respect, sir, I think the school boards in our province deserve to be heard, and that's why I would promote that this would go to committee and offer some further discussion, further opportunities for them.

Just a couple other comments that we have. It says:

We understand that there is consideration for second and third reading to be completed and the passage of this legislation into law ... We believe that, as locally elected school boards democratically chosen to represent our students, their families and our constituents, we should be given more than a few days to properly review the proposed legislation and to provide you with our recommendations on Bill 8 prior to being passed into law.

They don't feel that they were consulted on Bill 8 as it's proposed.

Another note that I got from them says:

We have done our analysis of it and are very concerned indeed ... Quite apart from that analysis though, is that we believe that it is unreasonable and disrespectful to locally elected school boards, for the Minister and the Government to rush to pass this legislation. A reasonable amount of time must be allowed for us to review it, and then to provide the opportunity for us to be engaged in meaningful consultation with the government on what we believe is best for our students. It really doesn't matter what our own individual opinions are now. We need the time and the opportunity to review, discuss, and then decide on our position going forward.

Another comment from another board.

We want longer term agreements (4-5 years) that protects local relationships with a finite amount of money that could be negotiated locally. We do have concerns of what the TEBA would look like? Who would be the representatives (would we be assured a rural voice)?

So there are a number of concerns from the school boards that I think we need to address before we push this thing through second and third readings.

5:00

Again, I would challenge the members opposite and the members in the House before we even vote on the amendment or on this bill to consult with your school boards and see what they're thinking. Do they feel that they've been properly represented and that the prior consultation actually was consultation on Bill 8? You know, after that, if we can get this thing through a little bit more discussion and I can consult with my school boards, I will vote on their recommendation because that's what we were elected for. It's not up to us to stand here and portray our opinions. It's the opinions of the boards and the schools that we represent, the teachers that we represent, the students that we represent, the communities that we represent.

For that reason, I would like to just slow this down. Let's go back and talk to those school boards, make sure that they are aware of what they were actually agreeing to prior to this summer.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Are there any members that have a question for the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills?

Mr. Cyr: To the member. You talked about consulting. What exactly is it that you did to consult with your local boards? Did you call them? Did you send them e-mails? Did you send them letters? What exactly is it that you did to consult with your boards? That's my question.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much for the question, hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, my neighbour. Actually, I did quite a few things. I made phone calls and sent e-mails asking for their

input. On Friday morning, actually, prior to the three-minute warning that they got about Bill 8, I consulted with them, and they hadn't even had a chance to call in for their 11 o'clock meeting yet. They're all very concerned that their voices aren't being heard and that they're not being represented or that they're being misrepresented, actually, and they would definitely like further consultation on this before it's passed.

Thanks.

The Speaker: Any other questions for the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills? The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you for that. Again, I'm using this 29(2)(a) in the broadest possible way, but I think it's probably helpful. I think, again, I just want to reiterate the importance that if we do want to have a table for province-wide wage negotiations, you know, that if we go past December 31, we end up in the same trap that has happened before, where individual school boards can start negotiating on their own. I mean, that's a very practical concern. Certainly, the legislative process that we have here, whether it's rushed or not – certainly, I will again in my closing comments explain or reiterate just how we went through the consultative process, both myself and my staff, in two different waves of consultation.

I don't want to get into this too much because it's not fair, but it can go two ways, right? Of course, if they are looking for more time, then by December 31 the whole thing becomes redundant anyway because some boards will start negotiating, and then, you know, the province-wide thing is gone for negotiating wages anyway. So you have got to think of it that way, too, right? People might just say: well, we'll just stall, and we'll take a little more time. And then – poof – of course, that window is gone, and then we're in trouble.

Again, for the sake of negotiating the big-ticket items with the second-biggest ministry, it's very important that you have the funder at the table, right? We've learned that over time. You know, we've never managed to achieve that, but I think that for the sake of fair negotiations for the workers' side and controlling costs for the province of Alberta, everybody who lives here and the school boards, for those two main things, that's very important – don't you think? – to try to achieve.

We have some time here now. I mean, this is a legislative process that we interact in with each other.

Certainly, we've set up some other opportunities as well: the Edmonton International Airport tomorrow from 1 to 4 p.m., the Calgary Clarion Hotel on Thursday at 9 a.m., and we have the Fantasyland Hotel on Friday at 10 a.m. for further direct interaction with my department officials. So I think that will be helpful as well.

You know, it's important to not confuse what this bill is trying to do, either. Please understand that it's just the how; it's the framework that the actual negotiations, what they negotiate, will hang on. It's a way to empower appropriately all of the 61 school boards with their own independent entity, that will be a statutory corporation. They will vote for their members to represent them on the negotiating team. It's pretty good, really. If you have all 61 there, then, of course, you have the representation there, so that's probably a fair way, a practical way to go.

It's not like we haven't thought about it carefully, and it's not like I haven't consulted quite a lot as well, you know. I really feel as though we can move ahead here using this time, which is also a bit adversarial sometimes. This is an interactive process that we have set up here as well in the Legislature.

Thank you.

The Speaker: I'm afraid, hon. members, that the time has passed for 29(2)(a).

Are there other members who would like to speak to amendment R1? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today because I want to discuss further the consultation that we need to see when it comes to legislation that passes through this House. We can legitimately pass Bill 8 fairly quickly, but the question is always: should we?

Right now we've got a newly formed government, and I understand that they want to change the world within six months. It's admirable to see that they want to make change, but if they're not doing the appropriate consultation or putting the appropriate thought into the fact that we've got a whole province to run, then we end up with angry stakeholders out front holding a massive demonstration against our wonderful Legislature here.

Now, it comes down to the fact that we keep hearing about a mandate. They're voted in. They've got a mandate. I don't remember seeing this as part of their platform. I could be wrong, but I don't remember seeing that. So Albertans haven't been aware that they wanted to change the collective bargaining process, they aren't aware that they're going to change this process within two or three weeks, and they're not aware of the repercussions of this.

What we need to be looking at is the fact that this is – and this has been stated over and over again – the second-biggest ministry that we have. The second-biggest ministry. We have a total budget of \$8.9 billion spent in this ministry. Now, \$7.6 billion is put to operations, most of which would be salaries and wages. Is this something that we want to rush through? We've got billions of dollars – billions of dollars – going through Education, and we're pushing through without proper consultation the wonderful TEBA.

Now, I believe that in the end we're hearing from stakeholders, that the minister has consulted some, but they were bringing a lot of concerns to the minister in these meetings. When you bring a lot of concerns to meetings, sometimes you don't understand exactly what it is the government is looking for.

5:10

Bill 8 is intended to formalize the two-table bargaining model. The first table is for items negotiated by the province. We understand that because this is so large, the province wants to be able to put their thoughts into the wages, and they should because this is, again, the second-biggest ministry. The fact is that what we've got are the salaries of the teachers. Our teachers are valued. Our principals are valued. Our trustees are valued. Our superintendents are valued. Everybody in the process is valued. We all also want to put our students first.

The fact is that the second table is for our local decision-making. This is for operational, pretty much nonspending or non major spending. Now, what we need to be looking at here is co-operation. We hope to see that these two different tables co-operate with each other. How are we going to get these two tables to co-operate with each other when they don't even understand what their roles are in this? The fact is that by rolling this out so fast, we really have pushed on what we feel the new process should look like, and we're just telling them what needs to be done.

Again, we've seen this before with Bill 6. We didn't consult; we introduced. That needs to be the big part here, that this needs to go through the proper process. For such a large amount of money that we have got going through the government on this, we need to make sure that our taxpayers are protected, our stakeholders are protected, Alberta's students are protected. What we need to be looking at is making sure that we go through the proper consultations. We need to make sure it goes to committee so that it gets debated in a

reasonable way. The minister has already stated that it is adversarial and that the reason this has been put in place is to make sure that we put through complete legislation and don't need to fix it for the next four years.

Now, the only consultation that preceded this bill would have been through meetings with the minister and his staff and the board members in October. However, the preliminary consultations were not framed as the basis of a development tool to build Bill 8; therefore, the bill does not reflect any consultations with the stakeholders at all. Again, what happens is that we see over and over again that our government goes out, they bring an agenda forward, and then what happens is that they decide that their agenda is what is best for Alberta and that the stakeholders don't need to be talked to at all. This pattern that we're seeing of the government leaving out stakeholders comes down to the fact that the opposition, the stakeholders have a purpose. Pushing something through fast and furiously defeats that.

Now, what we're looking at here is a bill that literally hit our laps on Thursday. The fact is that when we're looking at these bills – and they're moving through so fast – really, we need to question: is this appropriate? Is consulting after the fact appropriate? It is not consultation when it leaves out important details like the structure of the TEBA, and all issues raised centrally will not have been settled by the time this bill goes through. The implications of this bill are unknown, and more consultation needs to happen. This is something that we repeatedly keep telling the government and that they repeatedly continue to ignore.

This bill comes into effect on January 1, 2016. Fast and furious. Fast and furious. Once again the NDP are rushing legislation. We know that any appointments made to TEBA may be highly political and divisive. I would like to know who will be making these appointments. Will this association become another place where NDP government just pushes through their agenda?

We know that this type of situation could lead to, possibly, serious outcomes as government maintains that they should have a formal seat at the bargaining table as 90 per cent of education funding comes from the government. We now ask the government to slow down. Slow down. Speeding up the process, your process, will only cause concern and can be considered undemocratic, which you've heard consistently throughout the opposition.

We know that most boards will not even have the time to meet before this bill is passed, and this just isn't fair. The fact is that we're putting through a bill at a time when there are going to be holidays. It could be that maybe some of these boards don't even meet until January, until after this bill comes into effect. The school boards are asking that you please slow down. A three-minute conference call with the minister is not enough time, and it is the only time they have had since the bill has been tabled.

Wildrose is committed to consulting with our boards, which you've just heard from my colleague just in front of me here. We have written our schools, we have e-mailed our schools, and we've called our schools on the phone. Now, that's consultation. That's actually going out and hearing what they have to say. You actually are hearing letters that were written since Thursday to MLAs because they care. I can only assume that the members across are getting the same letters that we're getting. The fact is that these letters that are coming in are all saying the same thing: there was no consultation; too fast; slow down. Slow down.

This is exactly what we're seeing with the farmers. This is exactly what we're seeing with the rest of the bills that are being pushed through this House. The fact is that we're moving too fast through these. Many of these bills have billions of dollars of spending. They do not have the scrutiny they need.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that the NDP government please slow down the process and hold consultations with them and then go to committee with this so that in committee we can solve a lot of the issues that are coming forward before they become issues, instead of regulating it after the fact.

In the end I'm here to ask everybody in this Assembly to please vote for this amendment. This amendment is important. It is time we start seeing some bills go to committee, which we have not been seeing other than my colleague's bill, Bill 202. Bill 202 was to promote democracy in Alberta.

An Hon. Member: Bill 202 is the local food.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you. I've been corrected. Bill 204? [interjection] Thank you. Bill 203. Apparently, I need education on the names of the bills. It is hard to keep up with the bills because we are not doing the appropriate consultation that it takes to get them through the House.

In the end, Mr. Speaker, I urge and ask everybody in this House to please vote for this amendment. Thank you.

5:20

The Speaker: Any questions under 29(2)(a) for the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake?

Are there other members who would like to speak to amendment R1? The Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Respectfully, on the amendment, I mean, certainly, I can appreciate many of the comments here. You know, it's very important – and I know that perhaps there's someone trying to do this. It's not going to work – right? – because I have the evidence that we did lots and lots of interaction on this bill. Don't try to presume that we didn't do consultation. If you do so, that's at your own peril. You're only as good as your credibility if you're actually speaking the truth, right? So don't go too far there.

I'm just saying that people have other reasons to say: well, just give us more time and so forth. On December 31 the whole idea of having some provincial bargaining is gone. So if you want to push it on, then that's what's going to happen as a result.

Respectfully, I don't support this amendment because I would like to get this job done and make sure that we are in fact negotiating both in good faith and to make sure that we keep a close eye on our public finances. This is a public contract. It's the first contract for public workers. That will set a precedent for all the other negotiations. It's very important that we have the wages negotiated at a table where the funder is there. Just try to think of that, okay? Please.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. minister, were you speaking under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Eggen: That was on the amendment.

The Speaker: On the amendment.

Mr. Eggen: Yes, it was. Thank you.

The Speaker: My apologies. Any under 29(2)(a) for the Minister of Education?

Are there any other members who would like to speak to amendment R1?

Hearing none, the question is called for amendment R1, which is an amendment to Bill 8, Public Education Collective Bargaining Act.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment R1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:24 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Hanson	Schneider
Clark	Hunter	Smith
Cooper	MacIntyre	Starke
Cyr	McIver	Stier
Drysdale	Orr	van Dijken
Ellis	Pitt	Yao
Fraser	Rodney	

5:40

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Ganley	McKitrick
Babcock	Goehring	McLean
Bilous	Hinkley	McPherson
Carson	Hoffman	Miller
Ceci	Horne	Nielsen
Connolly	Jabbour	Phillips
Coolahan	Jansen	Renaud
Cortes-Vargas	Kazim	Rosendahl
Dach	Kleinsteuber	Sabir
Dang	Littlewood	Schmidt
Drever	Loyola	Sucha
Eggen	Malkinson	Sweet
Feehan	Mason	Turner
Fitzpatrick	McCuaig-Boyd	Woollard

Totals: For – 20 Against – 42

[Motion on amendment R1 lost]

The Speaker: We are now back to debate on the main motion.

Are you speaking to the main motion now? Is that correct?

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would request unanimous consent from the House for one-minute bells for the remainder of the evening.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: Is there anyone else who would like to speak to the main motion?

Hearing none, bringing closure, the hon. Minister of Education. Is that correct?

Mr. Eggen: Yes. That's right, Mr. Speaker. I mean, this has been a very interesting process, certainly. Everyone should just take a step back and see it for what it is. We have a bill before us that we are debating, and we have a bill before us that has certain things that we all need to learn about, okay? Those are very important aspects of the legislative process that we're passing through here in second reading. Everyone can be edified on this and learn more about it, and over the next while we will have a chance to decide whether or not you think it's something that you can vote on or not. That's the way it works.

Certainly, just to try to summarize some of the concerns and things that people have spoken about in second reading here, first of all, in regard to the consultations that did take place in July and August and September and October, all 61 school boards were

consulted as well as the Alberta Teachers' Association, the Alberta School Boards Association, the Association of School Business Officials of Alberta, the Public School Boards' Association of Alberta, and the College of Alberta School Superintendents, in September and October of this year. Then, of course, as I said, I went and visited all of the 61 school boards as another layer of consultation.

Now, with my department – and I'll table this tomorrow, Mr. Speaker – this was the agenda that we used for those department consultations. Discussion item 1 was province-wide two-tiered bargaining; discussion item 2, establishing employer bargaining associations; discussion item 3, level of government involvement and employer representation, which would be the school boards; item 4, dispute resolution process; and item 5, general discussion. I know that people perhaps are not seeing exactly the outcome that they might have wanted, but certainly this was the process that we did follow in complete good faith, quite exhaustive as well, I would suggest, Mr. Speaker.

In addition to that, over the next three days we do have the Edmonton International Airport Holiday Inn tomorrow between 1 and 4 p.m., the Calgary Clarion Hotel and Conference Centre on Thursday from 9 a.m., and then the Fantasyland Hotel on Friday at 10 a.m. Certainly, people can either be phoning in or they can actually attend these further consultations as they wish. I invite all MLAs to come to be part of that as well. It could be quite an edifying experience as well.

Again, I can't emphasize enough how important it is for everyone to understand where we're at with those consultations over these last six months and then moving to December 31, which is the deadline by which a number of school boards can start their own local bargaining process. So even if you thought, "Hey, maybe I could go for this table way of negotiating wages," that window could easily close by January 1 because people start negotiating. This is a pattern. I'm just basing this on a historical pattern over the last 15 or 20 years where certain individual local school boards would jump the gun and start the process and then create that whipsaw effect, Mr. Speaker, that I described before, where perhaps they think, "Oh, we'll go for a big contract because we want to keep our teachers happy," and then we end up with something that we can't afford.

Mr. Speaker, at the crossroads of this very important legislation is for us to make sure that we have a fair bargaining process for teachers but also that we are taking direct responsibility for the scarce public funds that we have available to us as a government. We all know what the circumstances are. We debate it every day. We, you know, indulge in hyperbole about it and so forth, but the reality is the reality. It's that the wages of our public service, not just teachers but the whole public service, are a very considerable part of our overall budget. The funder needs to be at the table to execute a proper negotiation of these things in a reasonable manner. If we're not there, we've seen a long history where negotiations have gone south or sideways and we end up paying a whole awful lot more than we can afford. We've never been in a circumstance where we have to be considering this in a very, very serious and sober manner.

Just be reminded. Don't get lost in, you know, the weeds of talking about consultation and trying to tie it to other things and no consultation and so forth and so on. The stakes behind this one in regard to collective bargaining with two tables are very, very high in regard to the future of funding and solvency of how we conduct this government. So please, everyone, consider that in the best way possible but in the most sober way possible as well if you can.

5:50

Certainly, in the many interactions that I have with school boards – and I will continue to do so, Mr. Speaker – and with the teachers and the public in general, too, I'm always looking for a way to find collaboration and to find consensus. Never has it been more important than with this particular piece of legislation – right? – because it's involving a lot of money, not just teachers' wages but, as I say, a precedent for the public service in general. So let's all remember that, please.

Also, it's important to read the bill and, if you need any further explanation, to get further technical briefing and/or explanations from myself, from my ministry staff, and so forth to see exactly what this is. This is, Mr. Speaker, a mechanism for how we conduct ourselves through bargaining. It's not what we are bargaining. If you can get that distinction through – it took me a while to figure that out, too, quite frankly, but once I got it, we know that we use fair, equitable processes of collective bargaining every step along the way to, one, establish the teachers' employer board association as a statutory corporation that has a representative assembly from all the school boards; 61 school boards vote for who goes on that board association. We will be at the table as well in the TEBA so that we have the funder there directly negotiating whatever comes to that table. Now, what is decided to go to that table, again, is decided and negotiated between the Teachers' Association now and then the employer board, which is the school boards and ourselves. Again, we use proper negotiating, which could involve arbitration, as to what goes to the main table for wages and what goes to the local table.

I know that school boards – and I sympathize because this has been a long process since 1993, I think, or before, when they lost their powers for taxation, right? But this is a way to make sure that

further erosion of school board power along the way is at least stopped somehow because then you have the table that you can negotiate local conditions. That could be quite substantial. I mean, please don't think that this is just going to somehow bring all the wages up to one place. You have different wage levels at different places around the province with each of the school boards. I mean, that doesn't change. Things move up and down, but the regional variation doesn't change.

Also, there are many substantial things that can be negotiated that are inherently local in nature: northern living allowances, certain accommodation for substitute teaching in different places, other individual conditions that can be quite substantial and involve the local school board as well. The Alberta School Boards Association helps local boards along the way to engage in those negotiations, and that's very important as well. Certainly, we're not excluding. We are trying to make it clear how this process takes place and trying to make sure that we have fair negotiations and we keep a close eye on the public purse, Mr. Speaker, because that is a very important job that I cannot compromise.

So based on that, Mr. Speaker, I hope that people might consider this bill and help to support it. You will all feel better for it as well. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill 8 read a second time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We've had a good debate, made good progress, and I believe that we should adjourn until 7:30 tonight. Thank you.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:55 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday evening, December 1, 2015

Day 26

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

First Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, December 1, 2015

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 6

Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act

[Adjourned debate November 25: Ms Sigurdson]

The Speaker: Is there a member who would speak at second reading? The Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This has been an interesting week. I have had the privilege of being able to speak with many, many people in not only my constituency but many people from constituencies all across Alberta. I've had the privilege of being able to look into the eyes and get a sense of the concern that farmers and ranchers have over this bill. It's overwhelming when you think about the outpouring of concern and the actual outpouring of solidarity that we've seen for our farmers and ranching brothers and sisters, and it's heartwarming to know that Albertans still know where the foundation and the bedrock of this province is. I count myself blessed and lucky to be able to associate with them.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this is a bill whose intention was farm safety. I want to first of all say that I want to thank the NDP for trying to make farms and therefore Albertans safer. I applaud their efforts. Everyone wants to be able to do their job in the safest manner possible, and farmers are no different. No one wants to put themselves in danger or put others in a position that could endanger another life. Luckily, we have a great province, that we live in, and our farmers rank per capita just as safe as in other provinces.

In fact, British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and Alberta all have a fatality rate ranging from .09 per cent to .13 per cent, with Alberta being the lowest – the lowest – of these three provinces. This is something the NDP forgot to say in their press release. If we take a look across Canada, the highest fatality rate is seen in Quebec and the Atlantic provinces, with a total of .17 per cent, almost twice as high as Alberta's. It's important to note that Quebec has had OHS regulations on the farm since 1979. This would bring into question whether a government-led safety initiative will indeed help our farmers more than a farmer- and rancher-led initiative.

Now, I do not want to present these statistics to minimize the loss of life in any way or to reduce these lives to mere numbers because that's not what it's about. Every person deserves safety. I agree. However, it is extremely important, Mr. Speaker, to remind this House how proud farmers are of being among the safest in the country, and that's something that needs to be said. Albertans do their very best to ensure that their lives and the lives of their families and employees are kept as safe as possible. Albertan farmers have done very well in a challenging and difficult occupation. Make no mistake. Farmers and ranchers know that, but they go into it with their eyes open, knowing that because they love it, they will continue doing it, and they instill this in their children.

I know that farm safety is important on family farms because, truthfully, no one cares more about the safety of their families than the moms and dads who run them. This is something that I understand as a father and that I think everybody in here, as a father or a mother, would understand. There's nobody – nobody – in the

world that cares more about the safety of their children than the moms and dads. That again has to be said. I heard that quite a bit over the last couple of weeks. Parents and grandparents will do everything possible to ensure that their children are kept as safe as possible, and every day across this province there are thousands of families doing a fantastic job of raising their own children safely on farms and ranches while instilling in them the values and virtues that have carried farming as an industry and way of life for generations and generations.

Now, I had the privilege of living on a farm for two years when I was growing up. It wasn't a large farming operation, but I understood the value of work. This is where I learned how to work and the value of a work ethic. When I got older, I got into business. I got into a construction company, and I found out that there actually is a difference between someone who has grown up on the farm and someone who hasn't. I found that they were some of the hardest workers that I ever was able to have the privilege of working with, and there's something to that. If we want to stop that, if we want to curtail farming parents' and ranching parents' ability to instill this kind of work ethic in their children, I think it is shameful, Mr. Speaker, absolutely shameful.

I got to the point where I would ask one question in interviews: where did you grow up? If they told me they grew up on a farm, I would stop the interview and say: you're hired. That goes to show how very much we appreciate the work ethics that our farming and ranching moms and dads are instilling in their children. We do not want to let that go.

On the other side of the coin, the government, while perhaps well intentioned, may not be accomplishing their goals in the best interests of families when creating this legislation even though it may look good to them on paper. This is why consultation is so critical. To make sure we get things right before we implement this legislation, we need to consult with farmers and ranchers. These are the professionals; these are the people who have generations of best practices. They've been taught the best practices, passed down from generation to generation. I'm not aware of a single farming parent who would dispute the need for safety for their children, neighbours, or employees, yet I am flooded with parents, who happen to be farmers, who are telling me to do everything I can to ensure that this legislation will not hurt their family farms and their family's way of life.

Now, Mr. Speaker, my job as an MLA and as the representative for my riding is to listen to what my constituents want me to do and to take those concerns with me to this House. This is the same job description for every single member in this House. I would like to point out that for the 13 others on the opposite side of the House who have farm families represented in their area, I think it's extremely important that you pay attention to this. These are some of the numbers in the ridings that represent the farming and ranching areas of the province: for the Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, 1,955 families represented there; for the Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley, 1,528 farm families represented in there; for the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, 1,430 families. There are 13 of these ridings that I could name, but I won't because there's lots more that I want to say, and the reason that I don't want to say the numbers is because that doesn't really show the face of who I'm talking about.

7:40

One of the dangers, I guess, of passing legislation so far away from the trenches is that they don't get to see the faces of those people who are working in the trenches every day. It's very easy, I believe, to say that this is a great project, that this is great legislation, that it'll work. Yet we have heard over and over again

– and I won't be tabling these today – the petitions. The names that I have are coming in daily. I get this every day. This shows the resolve of farmers. In reality, Mr. Speaker, if farmers were for this, I wouldn't have thousands of names. It just would not happen. Yet this is an indication of where we are on this legislation and the resolve that farmers have.

My job is not to blindly follow ideology. My job is to do what is best for my riding and for the families living there. The other day I had the opportunity of being able to put together a town hall meeting. In 24 hours we were able to send out information via Facebook and social media. Within 24 hours, Mr. Speaker, we had – we thought we were going to get maybe 20 to 30 people – 184 people jam-pack the house that we were in.

I had an opportunity of being able to look into the eyes and to hear the stories of the people who will be affected by this legislation. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that I learned something that I haven't seen before, and that is that you can go after someone's livelihood, but when you go after someone's lifestyle, that's when it becomes personal for them. This is a lifestyle for farmers and ranchers and the children that grow up on these farms and ranches. They want to stay. They love it. This is something they love to do. This isn't about just livelihood; this is about lifestyle. When you go after the lifestyle, I think that you've tackled something that I believe will come back to bite you.

Right now my job is to tell the members opposite that this farm legislation is not something that families in my riding want. The message was fairly clear the other day, I thought. The message, if they haven't heard it, was: kill Bill 6.

Mr. Speaker, when you came into this Chamber the other day, I made sure that I came in that door so that when you were coming in this door, our times would be the same so that the members here that didn't go out and talk to the people and look in their eyes, like I did, would have an opportunity to be able to hear them chant their resolve. Their resolve was crystal clear: kill Bill 6. Kill Bill 6.

Now, British Columbia and Saskatchewan, our neighbours on both sides, have exemptions for family farms and legislation that acknowledges the unique differences between various agricultural operations. They understand the difference and have been able to clearly demark the difference between a commercial operation and a family farm. The reason why they've done that is because they understand that there is a difference, that the magnitude, the economies of scale are different, and because of that, you cannot apply a solution for a commercial operation to a small family farm. It just doesn't work.

We hear this quite a bit from people: agriculture has been a vitally important part of this province's history and economy from our beginning and even earlier. Safety is a laudable goal, but let's consult with the tens of thousands of experts in the field whose families have farmed and ranched for generations. We need to give them that dignity, show them that we believe in them, not legislate them out of an industry. Believe that these farmers have the best interests of their families and their children, and do not legislate them out of this industry. This is not fair to them. This is not something that they want, yet we keep on hearing the government say that this is what they want. Fifty-four members of this House believe they know more than the thousands of people whose names dot the pages of these petitions. I am here to tell you that they don't know. The guys in the trenches do know, and we need to start listening to them. I invite the members opposite to listen to them.

If there are concerns, it certainly cannot hurt to get them straight from the source. Why is the NDP omitting something that both B.C. and Saskatchewan include in their legislation? Why is the NDP omitting something that every family-operated and -run farm in

Alberta is begging for? Why is the NDP not listening to what the people want and not knowing the best practices of other provinces? Why is the NDP not doing the job they were elected to do, which is to listen to the constituents and follow their advice? Mr. Speaker, it is amazing to me to think that not one person in this government, that has put this legislation forward, is a farmer, yet they're trying to tell farmers how to do it better. The hypocrisy of it is incredible.

I'm not sure what members across the aisle, particularly those who represent some of Alberta's largest farming regions, have been hearing from their constituents. It'd be interesting to hear them get up and chat today about some of the letters that they've been receiving. I doubt that our ridings are the only ones that are receiving these letters. Mr. Speaker, I think that it's important for us to get clear disclosure from the members on the opposite side about the letters that they're receiving. I think that would be illuminating.

In any case, I would like to tell you what they have been saying to me. Now, this is a letter, Mr. Speaker, that I don't plan on tabling today. Again, these are letters; these aren't just petitions. These are actually letters from concerned constituents. I'd like to just read you a portion of this because I thought this was touching. Again, to talk about the numbers does not give this justice. It does not serve the people. We want to be able to put a face to this because if you're not willing to look into the eyes of the people who you're going to be affecting, then I want to be able to bring their faces to you today.

Mr. Speaker, if you'll indulge me, this is from a lady by the name of Kayleen Neilson. It says:

Dear Sir,

Please fight for the amendment or end of Bill 6! I was raised on a ranch, and my husband and I are raising our children on a ranch. It is a way of life; much more than just a job, and unless you have experienced it personally, you really cannot have any idea of what that means. But I will try to enlighten you. It means that you often start your day at the crack of dawn, work hard all day with (hopefully) a quick lunch break, a quick supper, and eventually heading in to exhausted but proud sleep after dark.

And I'd like to punctuate that. Mr. Speaker, these individuals, these farmers and ranchers, are proud of what they do. They love to do it. Again, we need to make sure that we know the faces of these people. They love to do what they do.

And then starting over the following day. It means that you glance at the thermometer on your way out the door, but the fact that it says -30 C or +30 C makes no difference in your plan to work the day, except perhaps in how you dress. It means that you work one or two or three extra jobs away from the place, so that you can feed your family but still keep the agricultural upbringing. It means that you make do with whatever you have to get by (old machinery, tools from your grandfather's time, boots with worn out soles...). It means you rely heavily on friends, family, and neighbors for help – you help them, they help you. A simple, but effective arrangement.

I love the way they put that: a simple but effective arrangement. There's no contract. There are no lawyers involved. There's a simple handshake. This is the sort of thing that made our province great. In fact, this is what made our country great.

7:50

Mr. Speaker, I have had the privilege, the great privilege, of travelling many parts of this world. I can tell you that in the places I've gone, when they describe Canada or Alberta to me, they say that the one thing they love most about us here is that we are honest with each other, that when we say we're going to do something, we do it. That kind of work ethic, that kind of honesty in business relationships is not easy to find in the world. People come here just

for that. They love that. This is something that I think we forget about.

It means you rely heavily on friends, family, and neighbors for help – you help them, they help you. A simple, but effective arrangement. It means that you put up with poor cattle/grain prices, restrictive laws and rules. . . .

Let me punctuate that one: restrictive laws and rules.

. . . poor weather, bad luck, big vet and gas bills, a ridiculous amount of operation debt, etc.! . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, thank you.

By the way, a reminder to everyone to make sure that we don't have our phones on.

The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As someone that was born and raised on a dairy farm my whole life and then managed the farm for 35 years after that – on the dairy we had usually at least five employees or more but the odd time fewer – I understand it. I get it. Safety is number one. It always was. You know, in all those years we had one incident on the farm. I think the guy was from a city down east, and he smashed his finger. He put his finger where he shouldn't have. I had my six-year-old son work there forever and never have one injury, but he learned as a young kid what to do and what not to do. Age doesn't mean anything; it's experience and the way of life.

Mr. Speaker, I don't take this lightly, though. As I said, safety is number one, and everybody, all farmers on all farms, supports safety and improvements that we can do to make farms safer. You know, it's not about legislation. Legislation isn't going to make any farm safer. I don't think that legislation will save one life. It's about outcomes and how you can make the farms safer. Legislation won't do it. I mean, the previous speaker quoted some great statistics. Around the country, obviously, this legislation hasn't necessarily made other provinces any safer. In fact, Alberta's numbers stand up very well without legislation.

So I think that, rather than legislation, education is the best way to make farms safer. You know, whether it's ag societies or 4-H clubs, we can help by putting that there. The government has given money to ag societies, and they wouldn't get grants unless they could prove that they had done work on farm safety and education around the country. But even all the education will never guarantee a hundred per cent that nobody is ever going to be hurt on a farm. That's just what happens when you work out in an environment with unknowns.

Mr. Speaker, I don't think that any farms, not many people anyway, would argue against OH and S as far as coming out, if there was a serious incident on a farm or, God forbid, a fatality, to do an investigation and try and determine what went wrong and what happened so that people can learn from it and maybe prevent it from happening in the future. That piece of OH and S isn't bad, and I don't think anybody would disagree with that.

You know, I think that our government had talked about it for quite a few years. Everybody said, "Yeah, you talked and you talked and never did anything," but that's because we were listening to the farmers. We would be brought legislation like this, and we would say, "No, that's too far; that's too much," and take it back. I think that we were getting close to bringing stuff forward, but we'd been consulting with industry for years, whether it was the Cattle Feeders' Association or different associations that actually run the feedlots, and had input. We'd been taking that input, and, yeah, maybe we should have done something sooner, but we were taking our time to get it right and consulting with everybody in the industry.

You know, it's been said before as well that one size doesn't fit all. I mean, I think everybody wants protection for farm workers. That's paramount in the big feedlots and in big industry, where there are lots of employees. There should be a safety net or an insurance program to cover the family or the person if something happens, but that doesn't necessarily mean WCB.

On our farm we had our own private insurance plan, Mr. Speaker, and then we had WCB because we did some off-farm work for a while. We were forced to have WCB to work in the oil patch, so we got it, but I can tell you that it was so much trouble and so much hassle and so expensive that when I quit working in the oil patch off the farm, we cancelled WCB and went back to private insurance.

When I did have the one casualty on the farm, where the guy got his finger smashed, we didn't have WCB; we had private insurance. But we didn't even use that. I took the young fellow to the hospital, we covered all his bills, I brought him home, and I bought him an airplane ticket to go back and visit his family in Ontario. We paid his wages a hundred per cent at the time, and we covered all of his costs. Within a week he was back on the farm, saying: "I don't like it in the city. I want to be here. I can't stand sitting around doing nothing." So he would start poking around the barn and doing light duty because he had his hand bandaged up. We paid him the whole time, and it wasn't long before he was back on full duty. I mean, his finger is a little gimpy, but it's still there, and it still kind of worked. WCB would have been – you know, he would have been back to work before the forms got filled out and he actually got a cheque from WCB, and he'd have suffered for a while without any kind of income. So WCB isn't the answer to everything.

I do know that that's not fair. I know that WCB has come a long way in the last few years, and it's a lot better than it used to be. When I first was elected to the House as an MLA, those first few years, most of the complaints to my office – all my girls did was handle WCB complaints. It wasn't a good program, obviously, but I'll give them credit that in the last few years the complaints are down, so they must be doing a better job. That's usually how you gauge how good something is doing. If you don't get any complaints, it must be all right. But as we see this week, when people complain or are upset about things, then something must not be right in the mix there.

Like I said, with OH and S and some insurance it doesn't have to be WCB, but you could make it mandatory, that anybody with farm workers has to have some kind of a level of insurance coverage. It could be specified.

You know, I think there are some good things that can come out of this, but as has been said before, it just went way too far too fast, without proper consultation with industry. We've seen that. Now my office is jammed with e-mails and phone calls, and we saw the steps of the Legislature yesterday. Obviously, this isn't what the farm community wants, and it must not be right for them even though people sitting in this House think they know what's right for the farm community. They don't know what's right for them. I don't agree with that, Mr. Speaker. Something has gone sideways here.

I think the legislation could be broken down into four parts. You know, there's too much in there. There's the Employment Standards Code, the Labour Relations Code, the OH and S Act, and the WCB regulation. It's almost like an omnibus bill, with too many things kind of jammed in there all at once. I think that if we started out slower and consulted more and eased into this, it could be the right thing to do for Alberta farms.

8:00

I know there was stuff said about – and I'm not here to blame ministers or bureaucrats or anything, but I did go to the original briefing on this bill, Mr. Speaker. I think I was the only MLA. No,

actually, I'm wrong. Dr. Swann was there. I got the information and the papers, and it says right in there that the legislation would apply to your farm members. Down further, under number 3, it says that OH and S would apply only when children are helping out on the commercial operation of a farm. That's when kids are working on the farm. It basically says that. It was there in writing in the detailed briefing when this bill was presented, so to say that it was the bureaucrats misrepresenting it, or whoever was misrepresenting it – I'm sure the minister had seen this briefing material before it was out there and knows what it said. I did notice that it's been taken down off the website now, so there must be something there that wasn't quite right.

I know there's going to be lots said over the next few days and into the night here, and it's going to be repeated, and I'm not going to repeat myself too many times. You know, the member before me did a really good job on comparing some stats across the country. I think one serious incident or fatality – even one – is too many. We can't say that we're good and we're happy with the numbers, but we'll do the best we can. I don't know if this legislation is going to save anybody on the farms, Mr. Speaker. I think common sense, education, consultation, and everybody working together is the way to get this job done.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

House leader of the opposition, do you have a question under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Cooper: Yes, on 29(2)(a).

The Speaker: Please proceed.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wondered if the hon. member might just briefly comment. He's been in this Assembly for quite some time, and I'm just curious to know if there has been a time when he has been present where he's seen such a level of engagement on a bill, perhaps in terms of total amount of people coming to the Legislature to express some of their opinions and engage in the process.

Mr. Drysdale: Well, obviously, Mr. Speaker, what's been happening yesterday and in the last few days, I wouldn't say that it's unprecedented, but since I've been here, that's probably the biggest crowd I've seen out there. Whether it's good or bad, I don't know. I wasn't able to go back to my constituency last week because we had a committee meeting on Friday, so I didn't get there. But I can tell you that this weekend, when I go back home, there's a gathering in a local community hall that will be filled with farmers. I don't think I'll have a very enjoyable evening, but I'll be able to talk to lots of friends and neighbours, and I'll tell you what: it's going to be the buzz of the night. There won't be a whole lot of laughter and fun at the community Christmas gathering. There will be some pretty upset people, and I'm going to try and explain to them what's going on.

The Speaker: Any other questions to the member under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You mentioned about this legislation or this bill being taken off the website. What did that normally mean when you were in government? Can you go a little further with that?

The Speaker: Sorry, hon. member. I'm having difficulty hearing you. I couldn't hear you.

Mr. Cyr: I'm sorry. I'll repeat the question. How about I actually face the Speaker. Sorry about that, Mr. Speaker.

What does it usually mean when you take down a bill or information off the website? Does that usually mean that something is wrong, and has it happened in your experience in government before?

Mr. Drysdale: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to speculate on what's going on. Everybody knows that there are amendments coming to this bill. I mean, it's been in the media. We haven't seen them yet, so we're trying to guess what they are. Obviously, they've had second thoughts over there, and they're going to amend things. Maybe they want to take down information that was up there because the amendments might contradict that.

From what I gather was said at the meetings – there was a meeting in Grande Prairie. Of course, we were in the House debating the bill, so I couldn't go there, but I heard lots about it. There was a lot of information given out then that contradicts what's in this stuff, and I heard today that in Red Deer what the minister was saying was contradictory to what was in print. Maybe that's why they took it down off the website as well.

I'm looking forward to the amendments coming forward. Like I said, we do need to do stuff to make things safer on the farm, so maybe we can try and make this bill better. I'll be waiting to see what it is. Obviously, it's changing from what they had up there.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Taylor: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to ask the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti if he could expand a little bit more on that omnibus bill that he was talking about, and why he thinks it's a bad idea to have this omnibus bill.

Mr. Drysdale: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I said, there are different parts to this bill. Omnibus means, you know, there's a whole bunch of stuff wrapped up into one bill, and some of it gets lost in there, the employment standards, and when the bill passes, they won't have the regulations and all of the details. Even with what we've seen there, they may change it. There was nothing specific indicating what age limit they've decided for kids. I've heard 12, and I've heard eight.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hadn't anticipated speaking this early in the debate. But I will happily take the opportunity, certainly, to speak on a topic that has, I would say, in the rather short time that I've been here, rivalled any in terms of the level of engagement from my constituents and not just from my constituents but from Albertans all around the province.

Mr. Speaker, as I've probably bored the Assembly enough with – as you know, I'm a large-animal veterinarian – I was in mixed practice in Lloydminster for close to 30 years. But perhaps what people don't know is that I was actually born and raised in Edmonton. I'm a city kid.

I was exposed to farm life as a child. My uncle and aunt and my seven cousins farmed between Sangudo and Barrhead, in the Gardenview district between the Paddle and Pembina rivers. We would go out there on Sundays usually. It all depended on whether or not it was a day that my father, who was a butcher, was doing farm butchering, an open-air abattoir out on the farm. Perhaps that's where I got my initial interest in anatomy. I can't actually speculate. But I will tell you that it was interesting.

Some years later, as a teenager I worked on a small farm near Ardrossan, and that was when I first got the taste of working with animals that were large animals. Prior to that, I had actually planned on going only into small animal practice, but my employer at that time teased me. He said: you don't want to be a poodle mechanic; you want to be a real veterinarian that looks after real animals. I had my first exposure to horses. Prior to that, I was actually quite frightened of horses, but as a 14-year-old I had a lot of experience working with horses. I found that I really enjoyed them and that I also enjoyed cattle. I think that's where I was first exposed to cattle. I did some work with cows for those two summers.

8:10

Then some years later, after two years of agriculture here at the University of Alberta, I went to the University of Saskatchewan to do my four years of study in veterinary practice, graduating in 1983. I will tell you that it was during the time I was at school, when I was exposed to the opportunity to work with large animals and work with farmers, that I became enamoured with mixed practice, as we call it, multispecies veterinary practice, that and all of the James Herriot books, which I thought were really, really cool.

In 1983 I moved to Lloydminster, but I was still very much a city kid. I'd worked for a couple of summers in veterinary practices. One summer I worked in the city of Camrose, and that was where I had my first exposure to the dedication of farmers that have animals. It was fascinating. It was a real watershed moment in my life. That was when I realized that the clock doesn't matter. The calendar doesn't matter. Whether it's your birthday or your anniversary or the weekend doesn't matter. Your work is dictated by the animals you care for.

That was a philosophy that I adopted early on in veterinary practice and had throughout my veterinary practice. Animals have a very poor concept of clock or calendar. I will tell you that right now. The number of times that I was called away on calls, especially on, you know, the birthdays of my sons or on my anniversary or at other times, was just something that happened. What I learned, though, is that farmers put the needs of their animals ahead of their own. They put the needs also ahead of their own not just in the case of animals but of the crops that they tend, the land that they are the stewards of.

I learned some very profound lessons as a young veterinarian. I started practising when I was 22. As a young veterinarian I gained a lot of experience. I would even say, especially in those first five or 10 years of practice, that I learned a lot more from my clients than they learned from me. One of the lessons that I remember, that one of my clients, who's now passed on, told me, is when he said: son, one thing that we learn is that if we look after our cows, our cows will look after us. You know, that was a lesson. He said: we look after our cows, and our cows look after us.

That was, I think, at the same time that I had unfortunately suffered the first death of a patient. Well, I felt terrible. I felt terrible about it. It wasn't really my fault, but it was just one of those things that happens. And this same client put his arm around my shoulder, and he said: son, if you're going to have livestock, you're going to have dead stock. It was one of those lessons. It's simple, very clearly said, a lesson that I'll never forget.

So I say all these things, Mr. Speaker, because the appreciation for what farming is all about is one that can only be gained over time. I would actually say that probably until I had practised for five to 10 years, until I had been married to my wife, who's a farm-raised girl, for five to 10 years, it was only then that I think I really gained an appreciation for the level of dedication that farmers have to their work and their lifestyle.

Working with kids in 4-H clubs was absolutely a joy for me. One of the things they had me do quite often was judge public-speaking competitions, which I really quite enjoyed. I worked with the students, and we talked a lot about different means and the things that they learned by directly doing them, by putting the trust and the confidence in these young people. That is why, I would suggest to you, there is so much concern over this legislation, especially from the 4-H community, because 4-H is one of those institutions in Alberta that is so highly prized. I can remember going out to my cousins' place when I was a youngster and seeing their trophy cases filled with 4-H trophies and being jealous because the only trophies I had at home were for my prowess as an accordion player, and that was just kind of geeky by comparison. Mr. Speaker, it was something, you know, where you gained this appreciation for the 4-H movement.

Over time, I want to say, I have gained an appreciation for farmers, for the farming way of life, for the fact that, really, farmers were a big part of the reason why our business, our veterinary practice, was successful, why it remains successful to this day. The whole concept of, "You look after your cows, and your cows will look after you," we extended and essentially just changed one word. I said to all of my colleagues: if we look after our clients, our clients will look after us.

Now, in the course of this debate we've heard quite often that Alberta is the only province that doesn't currently have farm safety legislation. You know, I sometimes worry about that justification. Alberta is also the only province that doesn't have a sales tax. One would hope that the fact that we're an outlier on the sales tax front doesn't stimulate this government to saying: "Well, gee. We've got to come into line with all the other provinces."

The one thing that I will say, Mr. Speaker – and it's a thing that I think we can agree on – is that one of the aspects of this debate that really bothers me is that the impetus behind a lot of this debate over the last 10 years was due to a specific fatality where the farm worker in question was not readily compensated, his family was not readily covered for the injuries, in this case the fatality, and it's been mentioned that sometimes that involves taking legal action. I think that there is broad agreement amongst all parties that employed farm workers on large commercial and corporate operations should have some sort of financial safety net to look after them and to look after their families in the event of an injury or death. I think that's something that we could get agreement on and probably move forward on.

There's a second area that I think we have broad agreement on, and that is that currently we do not have a mechanism within this province for doing adequate reporting of farm incidents, accidents, and fatalities. There isn't a way to go in and do a proper investigation as to how and what could be improved to prevent that from happening down the road. Most farmers I talk to, even those that are vehemently opposed to Bill 6, say that that makes sense to them, that it makes sense that that is a provision that should be there.

Mr. Speaker, I think there are areas that we could move forward on, that there are broad areas of agreement, and I would prefer, rather than trying to – and I'm going to use a football analogy; we just had the Grey Cup. Rather than throwing the long bomb and trying to score a touchdown right off on day one, we would be better off running the ball up the middle and making some short passes and making a few first downs and moving the ball down the field gradually, making the progress we can make and that we can all agree on.

You know, this was the approach that was taken in some of the other provinces as they introduced farm legislation. What you have in that scenario is that you have the introduction of something to a group of people who are fiercely proud of their way of life. If you

cannot sense that from the letters you've been getting, the calls you've been getting, the demonstrations on the front steps – if you can't sense that, then I'm sorry; you're political antennae need adjusting. Okay? You need to have a real adjustment as far as where things stand, what you're hearing from constituents.

Let's be very clear as we have this discussion. Farmers are not against the concept of farm safety. It's been said before and it will be said again that they are absolutely committed to keeping themselves, keeping their children, and keeping those that work for them as safe as possible. To suggest otherwise, quite frankly, is insulting to farmers. I have heard that, and I've heard that from a number of people, and I find that that just lowers the quality of debate, so let's flush that away right away. Let's at least agree that farmers aren't careless about safety issues. You know, that very suggestion really bothers me.

When we move ahead with this, I think one of the things that we really should do is move forward on those parts that can be agreed on. There are some that can be agreed upon. I'm not sure that we can adequately change the current legislation because the problem with the current legislation – it's such a short piece of legislation. It's enabling legislation to remove the exemption from four separate pieces of legislation, codes, and regulations. It removes right now that exemption and throws the farming industry wide open to every single regulation, every single stipulation within those four acts, regulations, and codes. If you wonder why farmers have been concerned and are now being accused of misinterpreting the legislation, it's because the information they have been given has not been adequate so they know exactly how this legislation will affect their farm. That is a failure of communication, Mr. Speaker, that has plagued the government in this particular initiative.

8:20

The whole way the government has gone about this particular piece of legislation is seriously, seriously flawed. The consultation process has already been talked about as to just how bad it is. There's no question that the consultation process has some very significant problems. There were 500 people in Red Deer today. Most of the other meetings were full. Now the halls have been expanded. That's a good thing that they are, but a number of those sessions are already full. I'm hosting a town hall session in Vermilion this Saturday. I know that 325 people can go into the seniors' centre, and there are concerns that there won't be enough space for the number of people that are coming. People care, and they care deeply about this.

For this consultation process to be happening essentially after the legislation is passing, that pattern by itself does not engender trust. Legislating first and then consulting after the fact: that just simply does not engender trust. I will tell you that in any relationship, whether it's a personal relationship, a business relationship, or a political relationship, once trust is broken, it is very, very difficult to rebuild. If trust is broken – it only takes one thing that breaks trust – it then takes months, years of consistent trustworthy behaviour, behaviour that is undertaken with integrity to rebuild that trust. Anybody who has been through a situation where the trust has been broken within a relationship – business, personal, political, whatever type of relationship – will know that this is true.

So the trust has been broken, and it now is left to the government to rebuild it. I would suggest with respect to the government that if you want to rebuild the trust with farmers, the best way to do it is going to be to pause this process and indicate that you will actually, meaningfully, respectfully listen to people, and while you're at it, it might not hurt to admit that you didn't do a really great job from the outset.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any questions for the member under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I found it very reminiscent, I guess, some of the sage comments that the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster talked about. One of them was the sage saying about the cattle. I remember another old saying regarding the tail of a cow and the economy. I was wondering if that member could recount that for the Legislature this evening.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, I have to confess that my knowledge of western idioms is nowhere near what the knowledge of the Member for Drumheller-Stettler is, but I will tell you that there are a number of things that are of concern to me. I wanted to go back, if I might, for just a second to the whole flawed consultation process and not just consultation. We've heard repeatedly that this legislation will pass and that a lot of things will be worked out in regulation. That's a way of doing business that has come under some very heavy criticism in the past in this very House.

In fact, the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, when he was in opposition, on December 10, 2014, stated:

What we were looking for is to defer this bill into the spring to ensure that it includes everything that it should to maximize protection for condo owners and consumers. Many issues, Mr. Speaker, that should be dealt with in this legislation as far as what impacts condominium owners on a day-to-day basis aren't being dealt with in the legislation, and this was probably one of our largest concerns. They're being left to regulations.

Well, Mr. Speaker, you can take out the words "condo owners" and put in "farmers" and you've got a perfect substitution. That was from the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, and there are many, many other examples that we will bring forward in debate where the whole process of legislating first and allowing things to be left up to regulations, regulations that are developed and passed behind closed doors, not in the light of day, is not the level of transparency that this government ran on. That's what they promised. They promised that they would do things differently. In point of fact, they are doing things exactly the way our government did, and I would say that it is a very good way for all of you folks – well, what's left of you, at least – to occupy these chairs over here in three and a half years.

I'd like to close by just quoting from an e-mail that I received from a client. He states:

Going forward, I expect that we, like many others will simply take the chance that an inspector is not going to pop by, or that they will get lost on the way out to our farm. We may simply resort to processing calves on long weekends or evenings when the OH&S office is closed. I will be very surprised if we limit our children's eagerness to help and work alongside us or resolve to quit helping our neighbours. In essence actions speak louder than words, thus rendering the legislation a moot point. I can't speak for other friends and neighbours, but I suspect the vast majority of us will be knowingly contravening the law of the land. I would suggest that in a democracy this is a sign of poorly thought out legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I can't add much to that.

I urge this government: press the pause button. You know how it's done. Press the pause button, and let's not push this bill through with such haste.

The Speaker: Are there any questions under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Nixon: Yes. Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Just real quick for the member. I know that the member is not in his first term in this

Assembly, and many members are, of course. Maybe if you could elaborate a little bit on how big a reaction this is compared to normal. Lots of members won't have anything to compare that to in the short time they've been in the Legislature. Maybe you have some advice for some of the rural backbencher MLAs in the government.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, I realize that time is very limited. It is by far the largest of any issue that I've dealt with, and that includes some very controversial issues that came up in the last Legislature.

I'm not going to presume to offer advice to the government members, whether they are in cabinet or private members. They will no doubt receive advice from their House leader and from their whip and from the Premier as far as how they should vote. Certainly, that advice has been very closely followed thus far, based on the voting record.

I would suggest, though, that as far as the overall size or the volume of letters, e-mails, that sort of thing, by far – by far – this is the largest issue that I've dealt with in the roughly three and a half years that I've been an elected member.

The Speaker: Any other questions under 29(2)(a)?

To the motion itself, the hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's somewhat reminiscent of some of the things that we've done in this Legislature to stand and to speak to some of the legislation that's before us. In this case it's very near and dear to my heart as a lifetime agriculturalist, I might say, agrarian involved in the agrarian community for my lifetime. Actually, in the early years of my career, just out of school in 1972 I made a decision whether I would be working in the oil patch or in agriculture. The gentleman that I was working on the pipeline with told me that our next job was going to be in Red Earth, and I thought that I'd really rather stay at home and be involved in the farm. We had a chance to expand the farm operation, so we did, and I was fortunate enough to marry my wife, Dianne, who was a high school sweetheart, and we raised two fine kids there.

I actually got to introduce my son Jay in the Legislature as a young man, 24 years old, who knows the value of a verbal contract. In a modern society, modern-day, verbal contracts are difficult to come by, but I made a lot of my career phoning people or getting a phone call in the middle of the night saying that the grasshoppers were chewing their backside out and they needed – in 2002, particularly, myself and a very good friend from near Wainwright spent a good part of the summer sitting in ag planes dispensing chemicals to help those farmers save their pastures so that they didn't have to haul their cattle out.

8:30

I can appreciate some of the comments from the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster about livestock. Livestock just, for some reason, don't know how to read a watch. They don't know what day it is. They do know if there's snow on the ground, if it's 30 below, if the grass is green, or if there's no water in the water trough. They don't care, you know, about what's going on.

I want to talk to you and to the members of the Assembly about the potentiality of Bill 6 and its possible unintended consequences. A good friend of mine made comment of how his farmhouse is situated. If you enter in the back door, Mr. Speaker and other members, and you would turn to the left, that's where his farm office is, but if you turn to the right, that's where the kitchen is, and that's where a lot of the business is done.

They are concerned about the potentiality of OH and S entering the facility to inspect the paperwork and everything because in the closet right there they have a goodly number of predator control devices. Some of these predator control devices are found in the back of the truck and out in the shop and in the tractor in the springtime when they're calving because those predator control devices keep the coyotes away from the baby calves and they keep varmints controlled. Going forward, there might be unintended consequences that this legislation might bring forward in that regard.

This legislation is somewhat vague in the full definition of an agricultural producer. What is an agricultural producer? In some municipalities people with as few as four chickens, I understand, can keep them in their backyard. Now, you know, that may lend to the private member's bill – I believe that it was Bill 202 – about local food production. But is that a definitive agricultural producer? How do we do that? I had my research assistant today look up the definition of an agricultural producer in B.C. because it's been touted by members on this side of the Chamber and others that B.C. has exemptions for small family farms, but I can't find out what that definition is.

What my researcher did find, Mr. Speaker, was that in Saskatchewan, a much-touted and highly agriculturally driven province, OH and S is under the current act, but there seem to be as of 2014 several exemptions. The friends that I know from Saskatchewan had never even seen one of these farm police, as they call them, or grass police, as some people call them in the grass industry. My researcher writes down: exempts farming and ranching from the section on trained operators for powered mobile equipment, describes that farms and ranches over 10 employees must have an occupational health and safety program. Now, that's over 10 employees, and that's, you know, a significantly sized farm operation. It could be construed to be a factory farm.

Now, again, the Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park, with her private member's bill, talks about a production where they have an intensive vertical operation there. I believe it's a greenhouse operation. They may have more than 10 employees. I don't know. I appreciate the fact that it's local food production. I visited a farm in Coaldale just this summer, intensive agricultural production. They are producing what they believe to be either all the broccoli or all the cauliflower for the Calgary Co-op, and under the roof of the greenhouse they're going to, hopefully, be producing all of the green peppers. But all that is supposed to be done with the mandate of safety. Nowhere did I see or hear in talking to any of these people that were they openly flagrant about the exhibition of safety.

Again back to Saskatchewan. It prescribes that farms and ranches with more than four or fewer than 10 employees must have an employee representative and must set out in writing who is the supervisor of the worksite. It goes on to explain who these people are and what their job description might be. Mr. Speaker, they do have some legislation. In the potentiality of this government's motions coming forward, it's just a broad description. They are now coming forward after some consternation by Albertans in demonstrations like in Red Deer and Grande Prairie and just the other day out at the front of this illustrious Chamber. There is a lot of vehemence being brought forward.

I took particular enjoyment in one person out there. I think his name is Buddy. He chortles a lot. But he was wearing the sign: kill Bill 6. Apparently, Buddy made it past Thanksgiving and did not find it to somebody's Thanksgiving dinner table. As a result of that, Mr. Speaker, I penned a column this weekend, and it says that even in strong winds sometimes turkeys can fly. Some of you may remember, if I could embellish a little bit, a TV series called *WKRP in Cincinnati*, and during that show they exhibited an unsafe

procedure where they were actually throwing frozen turkeys out of the airplane.

An Hon. Member: They were live turkeys.

Mr. Strankman: Well, they weren't live when they hit the ground, for some of those people. You know, we need a little levity in here sometimes, and I'm hoping to provide that.

Safety, though, Mr. Speaker, is not a laughing matter, as somebody who has been involved, not unlike the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti, in a situation where somebody put their hand where a post pounder found it. That was not a personal experience. One of our members advises that you shouldn't put your fingers where you might not put something else. I've always found that to be a valuable rule. A valuable rule.

Mr. Speaker, again, getting back in seriousness to the Saskatchewan WCB now because they do have exemptions there, too. Even though they have WCB legislation in the province, they have exemptions for dairy farming; feedlot or livestock yard operations that are not in connection with an industry within the scope of this act; fur farms – I don't know how many fur farms they have in Saskatchewan; grazing co-operatives; land clearing, brush clearing or stumping not in connection with an industry, again, within the scope of the act; livestock brokers; mobile farm feed services or portable seed cleaning plants, which they have a lot of in Saskatchewan; pig farms; poultry farms; and trapping. So, Mr. Speaker, we've been told that they do have coverage, but they have a goodly number of exemptions. That is what I believe is being asked by the people that we've seen come out to these functions to demonstrate against that. They would like to have definitive input.

Earlier on it was asked, again, of the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti if in his time in the Chamber he had seen occasions when there was legislation that was brought forward that was not, I believe, popular with the citizenry or was found to be unpopular, and some of those pieces of legislation were bills 19, 24, 36, and 50. That, at one point in time, Mr. Speaker, was the battle cry almost for the Wildrose candidates because a lot of that legislation was brought forward without full consultation by Albertans, and once Albertans found out about that, they were enraged.

8:40

Last winter I read an article – I believe it came from the *Edmonton Journal* – saying that there's nothing that engages Albertan voters like good, old-fashioned anger, and I think that's what we're seeing out there, some people who are concerned. If it turns to anger – a lot of people in this Chamber may not know that this member after the beginning of our session the other day went out and actually spoke to the rally group out there. I told them that they needed to tone things down, that they needed to be respectful and peaceful in their demonstration. I was fearful that the security guards out there might have a lapse or someone else might have a lapse, and their presentation would not be respectful and democratic. That's what they have a right to do. In a democratic society they have a right to make their positions known. In fact, the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View has a private member's bill that actually talks about recall. It's an attempt to bring democracy forward in a good fashion.

Mr. Speaker, we had several forums. I mentioned bills 19, 24, 36, and 50. I happened to be in the Chamber when the Premier at that time was bringing forward his first bill, and it was much touted as a property rights bill, but it turned out to be the retraction of Bill 19, and Bill 19 had never actually been proclaimed. That's part of the choreography of what can go on in this Chamber. Some legislation

can be passed in here, but if it does not achieve royal assent, it's not law.

In this case there was much ado. I still remember to this day – and I think the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat and the Member for Livingstone-Macleod may remember – that the bill that was presented to us by the pages was the equivalent of an eight and a half by 11 piece of paper, and we were looking at the front and the back and the sides and trying to figure out if that's all it was. This was an important piece of legislation brought forward in a democratic situation, in a democratic Chamber like we have, and this is all that was being presented to the people? What kind of a shallow piece of work was that?

To have these people come anywhere from four to six hours and take goodly time out of their personal lives – Mr. Speaker, I had constituents from the south end of my constituency. The Roes and the Griffiths came. I introduced them as guests to the Chamber. They had kids in swaddling clothes. These kids were two and three years old. These people have legitimate concerns about how those children will be exposed to the lifestyle that they believe is important as agriculturalists. These folks are ranch people. They don't have any more aspiration to be in this chair, really, than I ever sought to going forward.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Hon. member, a question under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the privilege and honour to know the Member for Drumheller-Stettler's family. I visited his farm three years ago, when I spent some time campaigning with his son. I want to ask the member specifically about the consultation process adopted recently by the government of the day about the climate change report or, in other words, the carbon tax grab or whatever you call it. The government has taken credit for showcasing that as a successful bill they brought in, implementing their agenda about protecting the environment and whatnot, and they lined up all the stakeholders. But in this particular case, all those stakeholders are missing. They can't take them into confidence. Being a lifelong agrarian, I want to ask the Member for Drumheller-Stettler how he feels about this whole thing, being treated as a second-class citizen. What are your views about that?

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strankman: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member from Calgary. It is somewhat disconcerting although at one point in my agrarian career I had a rash on my wrists from handcuffs, when I got in trouble for hauling a little bit of wheat one day.

I want to speak though to that, specifically, because many people don't understand how change occurs. It's taken me a long time to understand how change really occurs. Many times change does not occur from within. This government is going to make a lot of change, and this government has a mandate at this present time to make a lot of change, but this government is going to realize that the democratic method that got them here is also the democratic method that can take them out of this Chamber. Mr. Speaker, it is an important thing to know and understand and recognize just what I said, that change does not necessarily occur in this Chamber. Change occurs outside the Chamber.

There are a lot of people – and I myself was one of those people – that asked for and requested change. I have great respect for the member bringing forward the royalty review, and I have great respect for the member bringing forward a carbon tax, et cetera, for their view, their democratic view to effect change, but, Mr. Speaker and to the member from Calgary, in three to four years there is

going to be a chance for I'll call it redemption, I guess, by the voters, and at that time that will prove the truth of what Albertans feel. That is the responsibility, and it's somewhat onerous.

I've seen it through two cycles, both with the Progressive Conservative government that was in power and now with the NDP government in power in this province. I'm viewing it with cautious optimism and with the greatest respect for Alberta voters. In this case we have rural Alberta voters who are highly frustrated with what's going on here because of their perceptions, correct or not, about the presentation of a piece of legislation that's going to horribly affect their farms.

There are those that say that this is the beginning of something as inconsequential as a simple piece of legislation, and that may well be true, Mr. Speaker, but you look at some of these other jurisdictions, and I read off the exemptions from only one other province. Beyond that, there may be and can be a whole host of unelected and unintended consequential regulations. That is the danger that is being brought forward by the people that you see at these meetings and that you see on the steps of this Chamber and of this building. People are concerned, not necessarily about the legislation but about the regulation. The regulation is as important as the legislation.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this evening to talk about Bill 6. I'm a city boy, but I have a little bit of farm experience. I certainly threw some bales for my grandfather, when I was younger, on his farm in southern Ontario and actually spent two full summers in the tobacco fields, which is a different kind of experience, so different that Stompin' Tom Connors actually wrote a song about that called *Tillsonburg*. As the phrase goes, "My back still aches when I hear that word." I won't sing, you'll be glad to know.

I also spent 25 years in the meat business, starting off at the time when I was a butcher, which is why the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster thinks of me as a father figure, as he mentioned earlier. I thought, when he was telling the tale about his father open-air butchering, that that's probably where the saying comes from that sunlight is the best disinfectant.

Mr. Speaker, during my 25 years I was probably in every packing house in western Canada and, really, was in contact with agricultural product at the end of its production and was aware of how much care farmers had in the process from the gate to the plate, as they say, from the farm gate to the plate, and how much they care.

8:50

I'm going to give you some of my own thoughts, but someone on the steps of the Legislature said it way better than I ever could, and her experience is way better than mine ever will be, so I got her permission to get her remarks and read them to the House. For those that are interested, I'm going to table them tomorrow because everybody should read these. Her words:

My name is Coral Robinson and I live on my family cattle and grain farm 3 hours Northeast of Edmonton with my husband and two small children. We are fortunate enough to be keepers of land that has been in my family for three generations. We have one employee who is treated and respected as family. We would never ask him to do anything that he [feels is] unsafe. He chooses to work for us because farming is his love as well.

I just want to make one thing clear here today. We are not farmers against change, and we are not farmers against safety regulations in the farming industry. We are here today because

Bill 6 will change the lifestyle of thousands of very real families like my own across Alberta by January 1, 2016. We simply want to be heard by the Alberta government before Bill 6 becomes legislation. Why does it have to be pushed through the Legislature at breakneck speed without consulting with the people who are most affected? We are here asking for the Alberta government to stop Bill 6, right now and come and get to know us. Did you know that not one of our ministers pushing this legislation has made a living farming?

If they had, they would realize that there has to be a distinction between family run farms and industrial farms which are operated by employees. The family farm is our home. It is where we live; it's where we work, and it's where we play. It is where our children will grow up and learn life skills that they are fortunate to learn on the farm. It's where our neighbours and friends gather when we need help, with the only payment, a good meal and maybe some drinks at the end of the day. The family farm is a unique way of life. It's a business because it has to be. It is a lifestyle first, which involves hard work, long hours, risks, love, and family. You could not possibly understand the work, the passion, and the life that comes with it, unless you live it. Bill 6 will regulate when I can teach my children our very lifestyle. It will regulate if my neighbours, family and friends can offer a helping hand when we need it most. It will regulate the hours worked in a day when we are harvesting and snow is in the forecast. This is not something that should be rushed through and passed before our MLA's go on Christmas break. This is over 100 years of lifestyle and tradition of farming families that is now going to be regulated. These are families who have passed knowledge and passion for farming down through several generations. Can we not take time to get this right?

[The Premier] and her supporters have painted safety on the face of Bill 6. I will tell you this. Safety of my family in my home and on my farm is the absolute most important thing to me. I know my three year [old] does not understand what OH & S legislation means. What she does understand is the love she has for everything farming. What she could understand is educational material directed toward her age group focusing on the dangers and hazards that are on the farm. What she won't understand, is not being able to bear any responsibility on the farm until she is 12, and even after she is 12, she is allowed to spend only two hours on a school day doing what she has longed to do since she started walking and talking (but only after I've obtained a permit from the Alberta government[]). If the government truly wants to save lives of people on the family farm, why not try to educate rather than regulate? We truly believe in safety but what we don't believe in, is being told when our children can have chores and responsibilities at our home.

Our urban friends; I want to try to relate to you how this group of people feels here today. Bill 6 is like you giving me a blank cheque to fix your car. I know nothing about you but I assume things like, you have a fancy car so you have a lot of money. I assume that you use your children, maybe even putting them in harm's way to earn your money to have your nice car. I am telling you that I am going to fix your car fairly but I am not going to tell you what I have found wrong with it. I am simply going to fix it and write the amount of money you owe me on the cheque. You are not allowed to dispute this amount. If Bill 6 passes through the Legislature in the next couple of days (just over two weeks after it was first proposed), it is like that blank cheque for farm families. At this point, there is no distinction between family farming operations and industrial farms which have several employees. [The Premier] claims that there will be distinction but she is going ahead on passing Bill 6 right now as a standard blanketing program. How can we trust that our lifestyle will be protected through proper consultation after this Bill is already law? I forgot to mention when you brought your

car to me to get fixed that I in fact am not a mechanic, I am a gardener and I have never fixed a car in my life.

I want to leave you with a few realities of the family farm which are near and dear to my heart:

For the 75 year old grandfather who still has 30 cows left on his farm and the only reason he keeps them is because he is afraid if he sells them, he will have no reason to get out of bed in the morning; he has made his money and this is his retirement; this is his life and all he knows. His children and grandchildren help him when it comes time to bring in the cows or process calves. To them, and him, this is not work: this is love, happiness, pride, and a reason to get together after months apart. At the end of the year, he has to sell his calves and there is a business transaction, but this is not business. How do you regulate that?

For the husband and wife who work 12 hours a day at their day job and come home to 3 hours of chores to make sure their cattle are fed and taken care of. They built their farm from the bottom up. They are trying to afford their life and love of farming. This is their home; not their job. How do you regulate their hours of work in a day?

For the dad who picks up 'mom and the kids' on a Sunday afternoon with the side by side to go check cows; this is a family day. This is not work today; it is love and life but to OH & S this would be work. Where do you draw the line? How do you regulate that?

Bill 6 is not cut and dry. There is no possible way that the proper boundaries and regulations can be set by January 1, 2016 while respecting our rights as families to live our lifestyle at our home. This is the wrong approach for family farms. We believe in safety and we believe that there is a place for OH & S in the farming industry BUT there is one special and unique distinction that should be made, and that is the family farm. Other provinces have this distinction and Alberta should too.

Those words are better than anything that I could say because this is a woman that has lived the farming and ranching lifestyle, and we should listen to what she is saying.

Mr. Speaker, I've heard from the Minister of JSTL that they talked to people and this and that, but the fact is that that's not what farmers or ranchers are saying. I can tell you that when I was minister, along with the agriculture minister we did talk to farmers and ranchers. The likes of Page Stuart and Bryan Walton were leading almost every producer group in Alberta, and we were making progress. We were getting quite close to the point where safety legislation, regulations could have been put in place on the farms and ranches with the advice of farmers and ranchers. They would have embraced the legislation, which means that they would have lived by it. People will support that which they help to build.

My colleague talked about: you know, if you put a law in place that people don't follow, maybe it's not a good law. Maybe it's not a good law. If you actually bring them along and help them write the law and let them help government understand what needs to be in the law, then farmers and ranchers will embrace it, and government will have a lot fewer problems with enforcement, with inspection, with all of those things, because people will live up to a just law. One of the best ways to make sure that it's just is to actually consult with people who live the life that you think you're trying to regulate.

Mr. Speaker, there was a big protest out here this week on the steps of the Legislature, the biggest I've ever seen. You know what? Our friends across the aisle that are now in government: lots of them were out here carrying signs. But the fact is that half the people that were carrying signs with them were professional protesters. Certainly, a lot of them were, and they could never generate the type of enthusiasm that was on the steps of this Legislature this week,

not by local Edmonton people that have a garage full of signs but, rather, by people from all over Alberta, honest, hard-working, decent farmers and ranchers, children, families. Whole families came. There were kids in diapers, and there were people that were very experienced in life, seniors. They were all here with a common purpose, not to say to the government, "Leave us alone" but just to say: "Talk to us first. Talk to us first. Listen to us. We'll work with you. We believe in farm safety."

In fact, Mr. Speaker, as has been said here in the House tonight, Alberta's record on farm safety is an enviable one in Canada, better than most provinces'. You know what? I believe that my colleagues across the aisle are good people and that they're trying to make the world better. I believe that. They're just going about it the wrong way. If you think you're going to save lives and injuries on the path you're going, you're confused. What is being contemplated may not save a single life or a single injury because Alberta's record is already amongst the best in Canada without the legislation. So I don't know where the magic is going to come from when you have got people with the best safety record, to a large degree. You know what? There are some things that need to be fixed, and the farmers and ranchers know that. They just want a say in making it better. They do. It's not an unreasonable request. It isn't. All they're saying is: talk to us first.

9:00

The government could do that several ways. They could put a pause on this: no more readings until they do that. They could send it to committee and invite farmers and ranchers to address the committee so they could learn what things there are. They could kill Bill 6, talk to people, and come back with a better informed bill.

Mr. Speaker, again, I'm sure government means well – I'm not going to cast aspersions on them – but the signs are all there of bad legislation. You've got meetings, including tonight in Red Deer, where you've got a government official saying one thing, and the pieces of paper they're handing out say something completely different. This baby is not cooked. It's not even half baked. Again, I know the intentions are good. I get that. You know what? The results could be good if they'd just slow down a little bit. It really would not be that hard to do. It really wouldn't.

You know what? I'm sure everybody on our break between 6 and 7:30 – what did we do? We ate something. Why don't we just spare a thought for the people that provided that food? Good people. Good people that feed the rest of the planet. Yeah, you know, they make a living at it. We should be proud of them, and they should be proud of themselves. Why would we make it more difficult for them to feed us? Why would we unreasonably make it more expensive for them to feed us?

You know, one of the advantages that Alberta can have just being part of Canada is that almost everybody says that it will be one of only six or seven countries in the world that will produce more food than it can itself eat. Why would we not try to make the most out of that instead of hobbling the people in that field?

Certainly, you know, out of a policy difference – and it's a really serious policy difference – the current government is going to lock billions of dollars, if not a trillion dollars, of value in the ground with coal. There's talk by some of them about locking billions of dollars of value in the ground in the oil sands and other places. Why not let one of the things that you haven't decided to lock in the ground yet, which is plants and animals – why not let them thrive? Why not let the people that produce that do that? Why not let that create more jobs for Alberta families? You know what? You'll even create more jobs for city folk.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: We're under 29(2)(a).

Mr. Schneider: Under 29(2)(a). As I listened to the Member for Calgary-Hays talk about this bill, I was wondering as I sat here – I was sitting at the time; now I'm standing, as you can see – if a gentleman like the Member for Calgary-Hays, that has been in this House for several years and has seen bills come and go and been part of constructing bills and amending bills and had all of that kind of experience, could expound and give us an idea, if you had the opportunity to write this bill from the beginning or to change this bill, of what would you do to make this bill better so that the farmers of this province would be proud of their government?

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, it's a good question, and I'll frame it for the government-side members as a cautionary tale.

An Hon. Member: Keep it simple.

Mr. McIver: No, no. Listen. I'll congratulate them. Again, you'll like the first part of this but maybe not the second part quite so much. There is a reason that you're over there and we're over here. We made some mistakes, Mr. Speaker. We did. Some of the mistakes we made were in rushing legislation. You make enemies when you rush legislation. You make enemies that remember when you rush legislation. You make enemies that remember when you don't consult with people, when you regulate their way of life or the way they make a living without actually doing them the courtesy of a proper conversation. That is the mark.

With all due respect, it took us, you know, four decades to have people throw us out of there. If you like what you do now, don't rush to that 44-year mark in six months, okay? Don't do that. I'm trying to help you here. Right now I'm the best friend you've got with what I'm telling you. I am. Don't rush to the finish line if you want to stick around, or we'll be happy to go back there. Believe me; we'll be happy to. If you want to save yourselves, this is good advice.

What the hon. member says is the mark of bad legislation: the mark of bad legislation is when a minister stands up in the House and says, "We've consulted everybody," and then everybody they were supposed to consult says, "No, you didn't, and we're not happy at all about it." Our government did that a few times, particularly in the last year or two. That is a sign of a government closer to the end of their life than the beginning. Folks, you've only been here six months. Don't do this if you want to stick around. Again, we'll be happy to go on the other side. I know there are other people here that would be happy to go on the other side. But this really has the marks.

You know what? Again, in your own ridings you've got what is reputed to be, I think, 11,000 farms in ridings that voted for people on your side of the House. Without those 14 seats, it's going to be a lot harder to hang onto that majority. Without the 11,000 votes times three or four family members times all the friends they have, that's really going to make it hard to keep those 14 seats in three and a half years. It's not in my best interest to give you this excellent advice. But you know what? I love Alberta. I love farmers and ranchers. I love to eat. So what choice do I have? What choice do I have?

To the hon. member: I would say that these are marks of bad legislation. When you've publicly got the Premier throwing the

bureaucrats under the bus and you've got the minister responsible for the legislation under the bus, when you've got the biggest protest we've seen out here in years from people that don't protest on a regular basis, these are not good signs. To answer the hon. member, I'd say that from what I've seen – and I don't feel like the old man on the mountain, but I guess there are not a lot of people that got re-elected the last time around, and this is only my second term – from the experience that I've had, this has all the marks of something that will bring a government closer to the end of their existence rather than the beginning.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under 29(2)(a). I agree. You made the statement that the people on the other side of the House are basically good people and have the right idea. In your experience what is the best move forward for them on consultation?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak against Bill 6. You see, I was elected to represent the people of Grande Prairie-Smoky. During the past week I have received more e-mails, more phone calls, more texts than I've had since I've been elected. In fact, I've received more in the last week than in the total six months that I've been elected. Those communications were unanimous in that they all speak against Bill 6. Each one of those speaks with passion, with intelligence, and with respect in their call for this government to withdraw Bill 6.

9:10

I'd like to read a quote from a letter from one of my constituents, Travis.

For 98 years Alberta's farmers and ranchers have circumvented the onslaught of self-righteous, meddling, bureaucratic socialism, proving that industry, communities and families can exist and thrive based on simple yet fundamental principles of personal freedom and liberty. No farmer is opposed to the safety, the wellbeing, fair wages and fair treatment of their employees. What we are adamantly opposed to is the socialist ideology that the small group of ruling elitists knows what's best for other people's personal affairs without any consultation, and using force and intimidation to compel others to submit to their philosophies.

You'll notice, Mr. Speaker, "consultation." That's very important, and we'll see this repeated over and over again. We'll also see that no farmer is opposed to safety, and that's something that we hear over and over again from the farmers in our communities.

He goes on to say:

In a free society people are free to think how they choose and are also free to try to persuade others to agree with their way of thinking. Through persuasion and discussion different ideas are traded, weighed, and developed.

Actually, I would say that that would be a definition of consultation there.

He goes on to say:

A consensus is arrived at with all parties compromising and learning and, although imperfectly, they will eventually agree to a course of action.

Your government has chosen instead to arbitrarily decree a course of action, devoid of that free discussion, and to declare that those who are thus affected will have no freedom of choice, no freedom of democratic say in the matter and you will use force of law and the fear of bureaucratic or legal retribution to quell dissent.

Mr. Speaker, Travis has a very good command of the English language, as you can see. He speaks very eloquently and very respectfully to this government in his request for consultation. Of course, none of this takes away from his desire to see safety on the farm.

Now, I've just heard recently that in the phone calls that constituents have been making to ministers' offices about Bill 6, some of them, from what I understand, are being forwarded to OH and S and over to WCB. I also understand that the Premier's office phones sometimes are not getting answered. Sometimes they're not returning phone calls. I can understand that due to the volume of phone calls that must be coming in, they're having difficulties responding properly.

Now, this should serve as an indication that something is wrong. But, sadly, we hear that the Premier is doubling down and has promised that this bill will pass. Unfortunately for the people affected by this bill, with the government in place having a majority in this House, the Premier will be able to do whatever she wants. What's truly unfortunate is that the members opposite that represent rural ridings will not be able to represent their constituents, and that's sad. It's sad for democracy, and it's sad for the constituents that they're here to represent.

I want to read from another letter, from Terry and Maureen.

We are writing out of desperation and frustration as this government, which is supposed to be working for us, seems to not be listening to the very stakeholders this Bill 6 is supposed to be for.

Now, we heard in Grande Prairie loud and clear. Anybody that was there knew exactly what the mood of the room was and what the consensus was. When the question was asked, "Who is against this bill?" every single person in the room put up their hand. Every single person. So that would send a pretty clear message, I would think, to the members of this Assembly of the feeling of what's happening in rural Alberta.

Terry and Maureen go on to say:

We do not have fences marking out boundaries around our home to differentiate between what is deemed yard and what is deemed to be "commercial." The whole quarter section is our home, from the farm equipment parked in my driveway to the tools and farm items stored in our basement, tight to the fence line with our neighbors to the south and west of us.

They go on to say:

I ask you, is that a reasonable piece of legislation to pass?

I urge you all to go online to the Farm Safe handbook if you haven't already, and read it. I did last night and it was laughable. To document every aspect of everything we have to do around here to be stewards of the very land we sweat and toil on, which ends up in the food chain that will eventually feed Alberta families in cities, towns and in the country, actually is frightening.

These people, Mr. Speaker, are doing the research. They're studying. They're trying to learn what could affect them with this legislation.

They go on to say:

We are afraid for our civil liberties being taken away. This is not a job for us, it is a lifestyle choice as we could sell up and move to town. But we don't want to. We love farming our little farm. Oh and by the way, we do not make enough cash flow off of the 80 acres we actually have in crops to make it work so my husband also works full time to keep this place afloat. This is a dedication of a way of life he has known his whole life. It's not a job as I have said, it's our way of life. I am pleading for some common sense to prevail in regards to Bill 6 and withdraw it totally from being tabled.

Mr. Speaker, here's a couple that write this letter out of desperation and frustration with this government. They're not asking for anything unreasonable here. Like others, they're asking for consultation. They're concerned about safety, too. They don't want to see anybody hurt on their farm.

Now, the other day I was talking to a couple of my constituents. They're an older couple that has farmed their whole life. When they heard about Bill 6 and its implications, the wife asked the husband: so should we just quit now? Can you imagine having to have that conversation about your life, about the career you have chosen, all over a government bill that was brought forward without consultation with the very people that will have to live it daily.

Now, here's a question from a concerned farmer, Nico.

I have a question about bill 6 and the proposed rules for farmers and ranchers. Sometimes we get casual labour just for the day to process cows, and I pay them at the end of the day. How am I to pay WCB on these workers who may show up only once every year or two for about 8 hours? Can a farm pay into a "casual labour fund" – based on historical payment towards casual labor for a year – to cover these casual workers?

We both know this is going to pass; I just want to make sure it is workable. We already pay for WCB on workers that we produce T4 slips for, so I do not mind paying WCB. That is not the issue with me or I suspect most farmers. It is the details of this legislation that could be troublesome.

Mr. Speaker, you see here that we have a classic example. This farmer already covers his regular workers with WCB, but he needs to have his questions answered. Unfortunately, even if he shows up at an information meeting, he will most likely not get his questions answered. You know why? Because this government doesn't know what the rules are. What they want is a blank cheque, and then they want to make the rules afterwards. Why should he trust this government? What has the government done to encourage that trust?

Now, I want to go on to a letter from Rosanna.

I've watched our farm grow from nothing. It takes passion. Determination and a lot of hard work. Long hours. Many long hours. These are hours worked out of necessity to have a successful year. We fight the one thing no one can control, and that is weather. We work when we can and as long as we can, because that is the key to survival.

Mr. Speaker, farmers don't have control over a lot of the things that they are subject to in their business. They don't have any control over the weather, and it's something that's always on their mind.

9:20

She goes on to say:

If we shut down after X amount of hours, it would mean watching our crops get rained/snowed on and most likely even left out on the ground. Which leaves them worthless, and us without our yearly income. I don't believe our workers are mistreated, underpaid, or made to do unsafe activities. We try to take care of them, appreciate them, and pay them well. We know better than anyone the dangers and risks. We do not put ourselves, our workers, or our children in a dangerous position. We understand the operation inside and out. We understand the machines. We understand the need to be very well informed, trained, and always, always aware of what is going on around you. There is no need to have someone who is "trained" to monitor us, inspect us and control our operations.

Mr. Speaker, that's why the farmers of Alberta keep talking about this word "consultation." They want to be consulted because they know better than anyone the risks on their farm and how they could alleviate those. All they're asking for is, simply, consultation and to be able to work these things out.

She goes on to say:

This would just financially drain family farms that already have small profit margins. Some years, no margins at all. I don't believe even 1 person who has never grown up on, or owned a farm, could ever understand the dynamics, risks, dangers, safety, and overall operation of a farm. It is not something you learn in a book. It is something you learn growing up around it, watching, doing, working, observing, and riding. It is more than a job. It is a way of life.

How many times have we heard that, Mr. Speaker, that it's a way of life? It's not just a job. That's why these people are so passionate when they show up en masse to protest things like Bill 6. It isn't just a job.

She goes on to say:

A way of life that we have worked hard to obtain and keep. One that we want to pass on to our children. This way of life instills in youth an incredible sense of work ethic, and the ability to work hard and never give up. It also teaches values and principles that cannot be learned so well from a book. We are a community that will always band together to support and help each other out. Don't change that. That is one thing still good in this world. Stop Bill 6. Remember who puts food on your table and thank a farmer instead.

Stop Bill 6. Those who attended the rally on the steps of the Legislature yesterday heard the term over and over: kill Bill 6. If this government is truly listening to the people, I would say that they would have no choice but to act on what they've heard, but we don't see that, Mr. Speaker.

I hear some say that there is misinformation regarding this bill. Maybe there is, but the truth that is spelled out in black and white is scary enough. Farmers are resourceful, intelligent, and willing to work with government regarding any concerns they have. All they have to do is consult with them, work with them, talk with them, meet with them. That's what has to be done.

I'm going to go on to a letter from Jay:

Personally, I'm not a farmer or a rancher, but I share many Albertans' concerns regarding this bill. I'm aware of the implications it places on the hard working farmers and ranchers in our communities . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any questions for the hon. member under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: I heard a lot about farm families in there, and it seemed like there was just so much passion, you know, from the people that are speaking to you. I was wondering if you had any more stories to share.

Mr. Loewen: Mr. Speaker, as a matter of fact, I do. Thanks for that question there.

I'll go on to what Jay was talking about. He says:

We all know someone, or have family members who choose this lifestyle to make ends meet and enjoy their lives.

Another concern I have is how this will affect hunting, shooting, recreational vehicles (quads, ATVs, Skidoos, etc.) on private farmland. Will the same rules and regulations apply to the average citizen who wishes to go hunting or do other lawful activities on privately owned farmland?

Mr. Speaker, these are all important questions that are left unanswered.

Again, when they show up at these meetings to have questions answered, it seems like there are no answers. In Grande Prairie the most common thing said was: well, we don't know; we're not sure. I guess that in Red Deer today the most common thing was: well, there are some amendments coming. Unfortunately, nobody knows what's going on. The people sent to these meetings don't

understand what's going on, and it seems like even the people that do speak at these meetings contradict themselves over and over again. That's not helpful. That doesn't help the people that are concerned about their livelihood. That doesn't help them with their concerns at all.

I do want to make sure I fit in one letter here. This is from a 17-year-old girl named Megan. She says:

My name is Megan . . . I am a 17 year old high school student residing in Northern Alberta. I have been raised on the farm my whole life and am going on my 9th year as an active 4-H member.

This is the letter that she actually wrote to the Premier. She says:

Please note that attached to this letter are photos from across the province gathered from my 4-H friends and Family. They have come from as far south as Calgary and as far north as Manning.

I am responding to the issues brought up by the proposed Bill 6. I must say that any tolerance and patience I had in this government, let alone the faith I may have had, is completely gone. The first straw was the attack on the oilfield, and now this.

Now, remember, Mr. Speaker, that this is a 17-year-old high school student.

An Hon. Member: Smart girl.

Mr. Loewen: She's a very smart girl. I know her.

I'm a bona fide "Farm Kid." I grew up hauling hay, chasing cows, and moving cattle on horseback. My workday was never limited to 20 hours a week like a part time job, nor 40 hours like a full time job. Farming for me is, and always has been a way of life.

A farmer does not check in and check out, wake up is my check in and when I go to sleep the work doesn't end. There are no scheduled breaks, it's not the typical 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. day with 2 coffee breaks at 10:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. and lunch at 12:35 p.m. We work until the job is done. During calving season someone in our household is up at 3 a.m. and out checking the cows.

My way of life is something that I cherish and to impose a law that restricts my way of life is not something I can stand for. I know I speak for a large majority of family farmers when I say that this Bill threatens that way of life. To say that the government has support of the farmers in my community is a broad lie and an insult, one I wouldn't dream of making.

To make myself perfectly clear, on the farm I was taught "common sense" a trait that doesn't seem to be as common anymore. To expand on that I have never been asked, told or forced to do work that I believe is unsafe on the farm. Even if presented with a situation I have been equipped with the proper tools to defend myself, stand for my rights, without the need of new legislation. This view would have probably been brought up if any of the MLAs in the NDP Party came from a farming background. I know this to be true, which gives me the validation to say that because of this fact the NDP government is not qualified to be dictating the affairs of the local farmer.

Remember that this is a 17-year-old girl, a high school student.

The government cannot expect the farming community to respond positively to a Bill that causes unnecessary hassle, paid out of our pockets, that threatens our livelihood. When combined with the shift from "chores" to "child labour." I'd have to ask the government to show their work. Where on any typical farm have those two words been synonymous? I strongly believe that the values that I have learned on the farm are imperative and fundamental. Some of the best times I have had were when I spent an entire day on the farm with my Dad, or rode in the tractor with my Papa. These skills include work ethic, determination . . .

Speaker's Ruling Question-and-comment Period

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

You mentioned that your constituent referenced the point of patience. As the hour gets later, my patience gets somewhat tested. I want to remind all of the members, particularly, of the following, 29(2)(a). I quote an excerpt from it: “to allow Members to ask questions and comment briefly on matters relevant to the speech and to allow responses to each Member’s questions.” Could I ask you all to please read this again and make sure that we practise this as we move forward.

9:30

Debate Continued

The Speaker: I believe the next member is Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is really an honour to speak to this bill, as it is an honour to speak to all bills in this Assembly. Now, I may not be from rural Alberta, but I know a bad bill when I see one. This is actually not a rural issue or an urban issue. It is an Alberta issue. It is a fundamental issue of how a government goes about passing legislation and how, in fact, a government consults or doesn’t consult the people who are impacted by a certain piece of legislation.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Let me tell you this. As an MLA representing an urban constituency, I want to let everyone in this Assembly and through you all of your constituents know that urban Alberta has got your back because this is not an issue of urban and rural. This is a fundamental issue of fairness and democracy, and there is a lot of concern about this bill that I’ve heard from my constituents in Calgary-Elbow. It is not an issue that impacts people just in rural Alberta.

Now, there’s an extended way that we are all impacted no matter where we live. As it’s been said many times, if you ate today, thank a farmer. Absolutely, that’s true. But there’s something more important than that. Albertans all around this province, from inner-city Edmonton and Calgary, Red Deer, Lethbridge, rural Alberta, and even from outside of Alberta, as I’ve heard from my cousins and relatives in Saskatchewan, are wondering what the heck is going on, wondering what the big deal is about Bill 6. The minute they learn a little bit about it, they say: “Well, that doesn’t feel right. That just doesn’t seem right. What in the world are we doing here? Why are we rushing through this?”

Now, I want to be very, very clear that farm safety is important to me, and I think that it’s absolutely important to every single one of us in this House. We want people to go home safe at the end of the day. We want people who work in paid employment on farms to be safe, to have access to compensation, workers’ compensation, and we want people to make sure that proper standards are applied. We want every single person, whether they’re a paid employee, whether they’re a family member, whether they’re hired help, whether they’re an uncle from across the fenceline, to be safe on a farm. But what I haven’t seen and what I’m very, very curious to know from the government side is: what are the numbers? What problem are we trying to solve here?

Early on tonight in the debate the Member for Drumheller-Stettler quoted some statistics and indicated that, in fact, Alberta’s numbers of injuries and fatalities on the farm were, in fact, no worse than other parts of Canada. Now, I don’t know that to be definitively true. I’ve heard it here in the House tonight. I’m going to do some research, but I would hope that the government would also have done that research and could tell us definitively what problem we are trying to solve here. What is the scale of this problem? Tell that to this House. Tell that to Albertans. How big

a problem is that, really? I’m learning here. I’d like to know. I’d really like to know.

One farm fatality is too many. I think we would all agree with that. Any injury is too much of an injury. That’s not something that any of us want to see, but how do we go about solving those problems? Before we go to solve a problem, we need to identify what the problem is. We need to understand the scale of the problem, understand the nature of the problem. Do that research; present it here to this House so we can all make sure we understand how that works. I noticed that every speaker this evening has been on this side of the House. I’d be really interested to hear what the government caucus has to say on this issue and would love to hear what the rationale is and some of the details because I genuinely care about people’s safety in this province.

With the bill itself I have significant concerns, which have been talked about previously. What this bill is, when we look at it, is a very thin bill. It is a shell of a bill that says that at some point in the future the government will pass some regulations that do some things. We’ve heard some pretty concerning things of what Bill 6 might do. It might regulate 4-H. It might mean that kids can work only limited hours. It might mean that once equipment is a certain age, you can’t use it anymore. Well, Bill 6 doesn’t say any of that. Nowhere does it say that in Bill 6, but nowhere in Bill 6 does it not say that. When there’s a vacuum, when there’s a lack of information, in rush judgments. We have no leg to stand on. When someone says, “Greg, this bill regulates 4-H,” I can’t point to anything in this bill and say, “No, no, no; that’s not true; look here; it says right here that it doesn’t do that” because that’s not what Bill 6 says.

Now, we hear that there are some amendments coming, and I look forward to seeing those amendments in committee, but until such time, unfortunately, speculation is going to be rampant, and, my friends, that is on this government for allowing that to happen.

Now, I’d like to compare what happens with Bill 6 with the work that the environment minister did on the climate consultation. You all know, I think – I’ve been very clear in this House – that I think very highly of the process that the environment minister went through in creating a panel with very clear terms of reference, an expert panel that included stakeholders from industry, that included stakeholders from environmental groups. They had a very broad public input process. The outcome of that process: while I don’t agree with absolutely everything in that, we can’t argue that the process that was followed was a very strong and very sound process.

I sincerely hope that the royalties process is the same thing. There are expert people who are in charge of that panel. They’ve consulted widely across industry. They’ve held public consultations. In fact, up until December 4 we as Albertans can submit our input to the royalties panel. I’ve done that. I hope everyone here does the same thing. The outcome of that work product: I don’t know if we’ll all agree with it or not, but we won’t be able to quibble with the process that they used to come up with those results.

Let’s compare that to what has happened with Bill 6. Now, you’re the NDP. We know you’re going to legislate in this area. That’s not a surprise. What is a surprise is exactly what’s in this bill or what’s not in this bill. I would really encourage you to reflect on why we had 1,500 people on the steps of this building protesting and concerned about their livelihoods and concerned about family farms. We haven’t had that on the climate panel, and there’s some very bold policy coming out of that climate panel that is going to fundamentally change how Alberta operates. That’s a big deal. It’s important. It’s important to the future of this province, and it was taken seriously by your government. You should be given credit for that. Why haven’t you taken Bill 6 seriously? Why haven’t you taken the family farm seriously? Did you just think: “Well, it

doesn't really matter. We're just going to do it anyway"? This is a lesson, and I think it's an important lesson for all of us in this House to understand, not just on the government side but for all of us to understand. It sure feels like you're taking rural Alberta for granted. It sure feels that way.

As we get towards the amendments, so far what we know of these proposed amendments are two bullet points in a news release. So getting closer, there's talk of exemptions for family farms, but there were some exemptions earlier on this evening listed out in other jurisdictions – our neighbours to the east, in Saskatchewan – some of the specific areas that are exempt from family farm regulation. It raises questions for me. What if someone brings in hired help for a couple of days to help fix fences, to move cattle, or to help during calving season? What if you accept payment in kind? Will you have to get WCB or OH and S for that? Will you still be able to use equipment? What if you bring somebody in to use equipment? None of these things are clear. To simply say, "We're going to pass regulations at some point that cover these things," it just leaves so many questions that I really believe this bill needs to go back to committee. We need to either pull the bill entirely and do a proper consultation or at least send it to committee.

So as it stands, I can't support this bill. I care very deeply about the safety of all Albertans. I care deeply about farm safety, but this bill is ill conceived. It needs to go back to the drawing board. At the very least, we need to send it to a committee, we need to study it extensively, we need to consult Albertans, and that may mean killing this bill entirely and starting again.

I guess I'll conclude, Madam Speaker, by just saying that what Bill 6 lacks more than anything else is respect, respect for the people who are impacted by the provisions of that bill. That is a fundamental tenet of any legislation.

9:40

You have to consult, but what does consulting mean? Consulting doesn't mean telling; consulting means asking. Consulting is a two-way process; it's a dialogue. I think the government would find that had you consulted on this bill, we wouldn't have had 1,500 people on the steps of the Legislature. You wouldn't be receiving angry e-mails and phone calls and letters in your constituency offices. I think that you have the opportunity to make this right, and I encourage you to do that.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. MacIntyre: Madam Speaker, I am just so thrilled to hear from the Member for Calgary-Elbow that the good folks in Cowtown, the city folks, the urbanites in Cowtown, that do like to wear cowboy boots though they've never maybe stepped in what cowboy boots step in, are supporting the stand of the farming community against this bill. I am just thrilled. Thank you so much, hon. member.

I would be interested to know from the hon. member if he can recount to us maybe some of the comments of the Cowtown folks that he has spoken to, the city dwellers who have the backs of our farming communities and are supporting our farmers in opposing this very ill-thought-through bill that has not consulted the experts in farm safety, the very farmers themselves.

Thank you.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Having grown up in Calgary, being born and raised there, I've spent a lot of time at the Calgary Stampede. It is, I think, an important part of our western heritage. It's not working on a farm – I acknowledge that – and there are some other parts of the Stampede that are not purely related just

to our western, agrarian roots. But one comment, I guess, that I can recount to the House was that after the Member for Calgary-Hays had made some comments, someone – he used his name, obviously, as opposed to his seat – said to me: I have a hard time believing I'm agreeing with the Member for Calgary-Hays; this is a first.

An Hon. Member: He's learning and growing.

Mr. Clark: They're learning and growing, I guess.

You know, it's a process issue, absolutely. There is some concern over the process that was used here, or lack of process, as it relates to Bill 6, but there is something more fundamental than that. What I'm hearing from people is that they're saying: "Well, a family farm is different. It's different. It's not a regular workplace. It's not an oil sands site. It's not a drilling rig. It's not a welding shop. There's something else. There's something different about it. It's home. It's home." We understand that.

I don't claim, by any means, to speak on behalf of all of urban Alberta, but as a representative of an inner-city, big-city constituency I can tell you that a lot of the folks that I've talked with have expressed exactly that, saying: I'm starting to understand what the big deal is with this because there are some pretty fundamental things about what it means to be Albertan. So they have a lot of questions, and hopefully I've fairly represented those in my statement tonight.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. To the Member for Calgary-Elbow again: you mentioned the Calgary Stampede, and I think that's very, very important to Calgarians and Albertans and Canadians. It's a tradition that's gone on for a very, very long time. I'm just wondering if you have any idea how this new legislation is going to filter down through the years and how it's going to affect the Calgary Stampede.

Mr. Clark: Well, that's a good question. I don't know. I mean, what I know is that I remember that my relatives from Saskatchewan would come in, and they'd bring their polled Herefords in. They'd come for the Stampede show, and that was great. We got to see them. My cousin gave me her fifth-place ribbon to keep. I thought that was a pretty big deal.

But, you know, in all sincerity, we're taught to respect cultures, all cultures all around the world. I have a tremendous amount of pride in Alberta's multicultural society. Our culture is western heritage. That's who we are. That is who we are. We shouldn't ever apologize for that. That is absolutely who we are, and I maintain that. You know, my exposure to that is through my family on my mom's side, who still farm in Saskatchewan to this day.

You know, the Calgary Stampede is a lot more than a midway and Cowboys nightclub. It's an awful lot more than that. I think it's really important to remember what it is and what it represents, and that is a tangible reminder every day in the big city of Calgary about our western roots. It's not such a stretch to think that people in Calgary would be concerned about this issue because we still identify with that ranching and farming heritage.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you. To the member a further question. The issue about rodeos is actually . . .

The Deputy Speaker: We are back on the main bill. I want to call on the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am very happy to rise and speak to this legislation on behalf of the farmers in the beautiful riding of Innisfail-Sylvan Lake. The majority of our farmers are within the county of Red Deer, some in the county of Clearwater. We have mixed farms, and we have ranchers. I have heard more from my constituents on this bill than on any other issue, in fact on all the other issues combined. Many of my constituents were here at the Legislature the other day. More were at the meetings in Red Deer. Some brought some four-footed friends along. There were a few turkeys there.

An Hon. Member: With feathers.

Mr. MacIntyre: There were some with feathers.

My constituents have voiced pretty consistently their concern about the speed with which this bill and other bills – but we're talking about this bill – is being run through this House. That's number one.

Number two: the fact – and it's a sad fact, Madam Speaker – that this bill was crafted by people who are not experts in farming. They may be experts in a lot of things, but there was nobody who crafted this bill from the farming community. They are the experts, especially the family farmers. They are the experts in farm safety. They have been the experts in farm safety for a long time, and the statistics that my colleague quoted earlier are statistical proof of just how well Alberta farmers have been operating safely in this province. We have the best statistics in the country. Surprising? Not really, not if you would take the time to go and live and work on a farm. Go through the four seasons and see all of the things that farmers do to ensure safety for themselves, their families, their workers, and for all of the living creatures whose lives they are responsible for. Safety doesn't just involve people.

Like all Albertans, farmers want to make sure that we in this Legislature get this legislation right, and they do not trust this government to do so because they have not been consulted appropriately. This government has a pattern of legislate first and so-called consult second, and that's not genuine consultation whatsoever. That is actually very dictatorial, and it has no place in a democracy. They want to make sure that their voices are heard. We had 1,500 or more of them on the steps of the Legislature.

I want to applaud the Hutterian Brethren for coming out. Members opposite may not know who they are. They were also at the Red Deer rally. You've got to understand that this is a religious order that is pacifist – they have a 500-year history of staunch pacifism – to the point where they have been persecuted for being pacifists, yet this bill was felt by them to be so draconian that they, you know, almost against every fibre in their being, came to that rally.

9:50

I was shocked to see the Hutterian Brethren there. I happen to have a long history with the Hutterian Brethren. I have worked for them as an employee of the Hutterian Brethren. I know them very well. They're a wonderful people, pacifist to the core, and they were here. I was very surprised to see them here and very surprised to receive a text from my constituency office manager in Sylvan Lake, who was at the Red Deer rally, saying: the brethren are here. She, too, was surprised.

That's the level of concern that the farming community is feeling about this bill, which they have not had input into. No input into this. It's shameful. Now, the Hutterian Brethren don't vote, but I'll tell you something: that can change. That can change if you push them into a corner. We'll see. I mean, they came to this rally, for crying out loud.

Farming and ranching are fundamental to Alberta's economy and culture, and this is as true today as it has ever been for generations. Our province grows wheat, barley, canola, alfalfa, oats, peas, and many other crops. We raise cattle, horses, chickens, pigs, and children by the boatload. We grow vegetables, berries. We have orchards. We have wineries right here in prairie Alberta. We have apiaries. We have the best honey anywhere. The abundance that our farms and ranchland provide feeds our province, much of our country, even many parts of the world.

There is a lesson that the other side, the members opposite, need to know: do not bite the hand that feeds you. Do not bite the hand that feeds you. They are feeling like their hand is being bitten, bitten by an insensitive government that isn't listening to the people. The hon. member – I'm sorry; Calgary-Hays, perhaps? – gave some fatherly advice. Bless you for some fatherly advice. We old guys like to do this from time to time. He gave an appropriate level of warning to the other side based on his own experience of what happens when a government is insensitive to the needs of the people. They're not government anymore. Three and a half years will go by mighty fast. Mighty fast.

There are 43,000 farms in our province, representing hundreds of thousands of farmers who, Madam Speaker, are the experts on farm safety, who have not been listened to, who have not been consulted and feel insulted instead. Much of our population in this province, though not on the farm at the moment, comes from the farm. Many children now living in the city have come from the farm, and they vote. [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: We're not in committee anymore, hon. members.

My apologies. I was so engrossed in what you were saying that I didn't notice.

Mr. MacIntyre: Oh, my goodness. I've never had such a captive audience before unless they were my students. They weren't allowed to leave, so I could bore them to death.

That said, it is important to note that farming is not even solely an aspect of rural life. We have urban citizens that are increasingly rediscovering the satisfaction of growing plants and raising critters for food, from backyard chicken coops to community gardens, and municipal governments are even encouraging this shift in some places. They are becoming farmers. The reason for that is because it's a beautiful way of life. It's not a job. This Assembly is considering a private member's bill to even encourage local food production because Albertans recognize the value of farming, the personal value of farming.

Given that farming and ranching are so very important to Albertans, it would seem self-evident, well, at least to us over here, that we should carefully consider how we can best protect the people who work so hard doing that job, and rather than legislate and not consult, we should consult and then see if the legislation is even needed in the first place.

At these rallies that we have seen, Madam Speaker, the one that was held out here on the front steps, I took note that the Member for Calgary-Northern Hills was at that rally, on the outskirts of the rally, in a safe place around a planter, not too close, I suppose. Nevertheless, I know that that hon. member heard from the farmers, and we heard from the farmers. In fact, I was walking down the steps over here, and I could hear the farmers chanting from inside the Legislature here, with the big doors closed outside. What do you suppose I heard, I know that that hon. member heard? Kill Bill 6, kill Bill 6, over and over and over again.

We have heard the hon. ministers, at least two of them, say the following phrase, "We have heard from the farmers loud and clear,"

but not one of them said what they heard. I believe that maybe they're embarrassed to say what they heard. I know that the hon. Member for Calgary-Northern Hills heard: kill Bill 6. I guess my question to the hon. members on the other side who have farmers in their communities would be: are you hearing "Kill Bill 6," and if you're hearing it, are you bringing that story to caucus, or are you so ideologically blinded that you refuse to speak up on behalf of the people who put you in those seats over there?

Now, I just received a message here a little bit ago, Madam Speaker, that there are a great number of people actually watching this Assembly right now. There must not be a game on or something, but they're watching. They're watching to see what's going on, and the one thing that they will notice is that there's hardly anyone speaking about this bill on the other side. [interjections] No one, yet some of them have farmers.

So for the benefit of those who might be watching, the Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose has at least 1,955 farms in his riding. You can reach him at 780.672.0000 in Camrose and 780.352.0241 in Wetaskiwin. You might want to phone him and let him know what you think about Bill 6, people.

The Minister of Energy, the Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley, has 1,528 family farms in her riding. If you're watching – I wish I could do that number thing across here like they do on YouTube – just phone this number. It's 780.835.7211 or 780.837.3846, and let him know what you think about Bill 6. Their e-mail addresses are available on the legislative website.

Madam Speaker, I'm aware of the lateness of the hour. [interjections] Take it to the end? Give them some more?

Well, the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville has 1,430 family farms in her riding, and if you're watching, you can call these numbers: 780.992.6560 in Fort Saskatchewan, 780.632.6840 in Vegreville.

An Hon. Member: She's not standing up for farmers.

Mr. MacIntyre: No. The question that I would like all of you viewing tonight to ask is: are you standing up for farms; are you saying, "Kill Bill 6" in your caucus?

Well, Madam Speaker, it is now 10 o'clock, and perhaps we should move to . . . [interjections] No? Don't move? Keep going? [interjections] My colleagues want to keep going. I guess we'll keep going.

An Hon. Member: Just say the numbers a little slower, though, so they can write them down.

10:00

Mr. MacIntyre: Oh, they've got to write them down. That's true. Sorry, all you folks at home.

The Member for Leduc-Beaumont, who's here tonight: 1,255 family farms and has yet to speak up about this bill. If you're watching, you can reach him at 780.992.6560.

An Hon. Member: That's not the right number, actually. [laughter]

Mr. MacIntyre: Suffice to say, Madam Speaker, the laughter that you at home are hearing is the members on the opposite side, that seem to be mocking the serious reality of this draconian legislation, and they have not got the intestinal fortitude to stand up to this silly bill and vote it down.

Thank you, Madam Speaker. I will sit down.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments for the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. S. Anderson: Would the hon. member across from me actually like the number? Because I have been talking to people. I was just responding to an e-mail as he was speaking, and I was listening. So if you would like the real number, no problem. Every second of every day I'm open to listening to my constituents, and I've been talking to them every day so far. It's 780.929.3290.

The Deputy Speaker: Any further questions or comments for the hon. member under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, I'll recognize the hon. minister of environment.

Ms Phillips: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd move to adjourn debate until tomorrow morning.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Ms Phillips: Madam Speaker, I'd move to adjourn the House until tomorrow morning.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 10:04 p.m. to Wednesday at 9 a.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday morning, December 2, 2015

Day 27

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

First Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

9 a.m. Wednesday, December 2, 2015

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Deputy Speaker: Good morning.

Let us reflect. As we begin another day in service to the wonderful, hard-working people of this province, let us do so with patience, empathy, and a positive attitude.

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 4

An Act to Implement Various Tax Measures and to Enact the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to move an amendment on behalf of the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board. I have the appropriate number of copies. I'll wait until they're distributed.

The Chair: All right. This will be known as amendment A1.

Mr. Bilous: Do you want me to proceed, Madam Chair?

The Chair: Yeah. I think you can go ahead.

Mr. Bilous: Sure. Colleagues, as you know, Bill 4 includes the so-called 1 per cent rule, which limits in-year operating expense increases to 1 per cent. Section 7(2) of the proposed Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act, which is part of Bill 4, provides a series of exemptions to the 1 per cent rule for specific purposes such as emergencies, disasters, and the cost of new collective agreements.

Section 7(2)(e) was intended to provide an exemption for unbudgeted spending of reserves by entities like Alberta Health Services, postsecondary institutions, and school boards and also to allow them to spend incremental in-year revenue. This provision was included in Bill 4 given that the new budget format includes these entities on a line-by-line basis, consistent with the government's year-end financial statements. Unfortunately, section 7(2)(e) as currently drafted does not make it clear that school boards are exempted from the 1 per cent rule.

The proposed amendment A1 will correct this error. Schedule 1 is amended as follows: (a) in section 7(2)(e) by adding “, a board under the School Act” after “Financial Administration Act”; (b) in section 16 by striking out “1(1)(b)(iv); 10(1)(b)” and substituting “1(1)(b)(iv); 7(2)(e); 10(1)(b).” These small changes make it clear that section 7(2)(e) also applies to school boards.

Going forward, it's the government's intention that spending of reserves by these entities be factored into the government's budget in advance.

Those, Madam Chair, are my comments with respect to the amendment. I encourage all members of the House to support this amendment for the purpose of clarity.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's an honour to rise today and speak to the first amendment to Bill 4. I believe this amendment is made with the best of intentions and made to fix some of the errors in the bill. We're in the stage now where we can take a bill and make goodwill changes to the bill and amendments to it, and I thank the Deputy Government House Leader for acknowledging that this bill needs improvement. By the government's own admission Bill 4 is flawed and is not perfect and should not be put on a pedestal.

This amendment will find the support of the Official Opposition. It is a common-sense amendment to give some of our arm's-length agencies and institutions the flexibility that they need under what used to be the Fiscal Management Act. You will find the support of the Official Opposition for this amendment, and I would encourage all members to support it. But I would encourage members of the government side to acknowledge this as a sign that Bill 4 is not perfect and to consider reasoned amendments to the bill as debate progresses.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would kind of concur with what my hon. colleague just finished saying. This makes it less bad, in my opinion, which is an improvement, so thank you for the improvement. What it doesn't do – and there's a recurring theme here. I feel like a broken record, but unfortunately the government keeps teeing this up for us. It doesn't replace genuine consultation with the people most affected. It doesn't. There it is. The amendment is an improvement. It just is no substitute for actually talking to the people that you're legislating most directly upon.

Consequently, at least in my view – I don't know whether our whole caucus is going to go that way or not – this is an improvement. Again, I'm going to be a broken record now, but there is no substitute for real consultation.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I have significant concerns with a couple of sections of this bill, and section 7(2)(e) is one of those sections. While I concur that this does make it less bad, to pick up on the theme of my friend from Calgary-Hays, has anyone talked to school boards on this? Is this something that is coming as a surprise to our friends in school boards, and will they be wondering what this means in terms of their reserves?

I have a larger question about this section itself. The words at the end of section 7(2)(e) say, “unbudgeted additional revenue.” That, to me, is tremendously vague. In fact, I intend to bring an amendment later this morning to address that problem with this section. What does unbudgeted additional revenue mean? Is this a loophole so that the government can simply allocate money to school boards or postsecondary institutions or health care as a way of breaking if not the letter then the spirit of this act?

I have a tough time supporting this amendment because I don't believe section 7(2)(e) is appropriate at all. So I cannot support this amendment.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to the amendment?

Seeing none, we'll call the vote on amendment A1 as proposed by the hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Chair: Back to the bill. Are there any further comments, questions, or amendments with respect to the bill? The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Good morning, Madam Chair. It's a pleasure to have you in the seat this morning. I appreciate your remarks as we had the opportunity to reflect. I believe that they concluded with something about a positive day. I think we have the opportunity this morning to work together collaboratively, to do what we've been sent into the Assembly to do, and that is to represent Albertans.

9:10

I know that members opposite sometimes like to make accusations about the opposition, but one of the things that the opposition is committed to doing is providing good ideas, reasonable solutions, and amendments to pieces of legislation that can strengthen the legislation that's being proposed by the government. We saw that last week with the opposition proposing a number of amendments to some of the estimates. We've seen the opposition proposing amendments to bills to send them to committee. On a few occasions we have seen the government and the opposition work together just as we did moments ago. The opposition supported an idea of the government, which is evidence that not everything that the government does is bad.

Now, the bill that we're debating is not that good, but the idea to amend it and make it less bad is a step in the right direction. This morning and perhaps into this afternoon, depending on the flow of debate, we have the opportunity to provide a bunch of those positive, common-sense type of amendments that will strengthen Bill 4, that will work towards ensuring that some of the key values that Albertans hold dear and have held dear over many generations in this province are upheld, and that can reflect some of the things that are important to Albertans. None of the amendments will stop the government from doing the things that they've spoken about doing but will put some parameters around their decisions and around those things so that Albertans can have certainty and the government still has enough rope in order to do what it needs to do.

I look forward to a really great morning and perhaps afternoon around some of the discussion about these amendments, and I encourage all members of the Assembly to thoughtfully consider the fact that the opposition also has some reasonable ideas and can add to the debate.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you to the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, the Opposition House Leader, for his comments. I will begin by discussing the need to amend this bill in general, and then I will be speaking specifically to proactive amendments that the Official Opposition will be making.

As we've just seen a few short minutes ago, no bill is perfect. There is no such thing as a perfect bill. There is no such thing as a perfect piece of legislation. There's good legislation, and there's bad legislation. Good legislation can be made better legislation, and bad legislation can be made, as the Member for Calgary-Hays has said, less bad.

What the Wildrose Official Opposition will be doing today is making amendments that make this legislation less bad. It's not like cough syrup, that is good for us but tastes bad. It tastes bad, and it's bad for our health. But we're going to do our best as the Official Opposition to make constructive amendments to this legislation to move it in the right direction. The government has now admitted through its own amendment that this legislation requires improvement. The government has admitted that their bill is not perfect and that it could be made better. Rather than make it better, I'm here today to make it less worse.

With that, I'm going to introduce a series of amendments, which I'm sure the members across will enjoy debating with vigour. Madam Chair, I will introduce our first amendment to the bill. Would you like me to read the amendment?

The Chair: Sure. Go ahead.

Mr. Fildebrandt: I will move that Bill 4, An Act to Implement Various Tax Measures and to Enact the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act, be amended in schedule 1 in section 2 by adding the following after subsection(2):

(2.1) The Contingency Account may only be used for the purpose outlined in subsection (2) if it has not already been used for that purpose in each of the two immediately preceding years.

Members, this is a common-sense amendment to ensure that what we've been doing for many years comes to a halt within the next two years. Once we went through a painful round of austerity as a province to get our budget under control. Previous governments had spent recklessly and broke the bank, and tough spending reductions were required to get the budget under control. We balanced the budget, and then we paid down the debt, and then the government of the day began to save.

They put money into the sustainability fund, but the sustainability fund was never intended to be able to support the government's operations for a decade. It was meant to be a short-term rainy-day fund. It was meant to get the government through a rough patch: if we had a large flood in Calgary, if we had wildfires in Slave Lake, if we had a recession in 2008. This was meant to be a short-term rainy-day fund to get us through a rough patch. It was never meant to be a permanent Band-Aid for long-term structural deficits and to paper over structural problems in the government's finances.

Since 2008 the government of Alberta has not balanced the budget once. Since 2008 the government has run consolidated deficits. In fact, the government even had to change the definition of a balanced budget to pretend it was running balanced budgets. But every single year our net financial assets have declined, every single year of the last eight years.

Under Premier Klein and later Stelmach the sustainability fund hit \$17 billion. That handsome savings account allowed the government, though, to paper over its long-term structural fiscal issues once it ran deficits. Since 2008 that fund has been drawn down year after year, and this year it will finally run out. A rough patch can last a few years. But if we are spending more revenues than we are taking in, then we have a long-term problem that must be fixed.

The sustainability fund two years ago was renamed the contingency account. I suppose the name "sustainability fund" became a bit embarrassing when it proved to be less than sustainable as it almost ran out. But we've been papering over both consolidated and operational deficits for eight years now.

This amendment proposes to ensure that the sustainability fund, now called the contingency account, is only allowed to be used as a short-term rainy-day fund, that the government cannot build it up and then run another decade of deficits. Deficits may be appropriate

in times of emergency – floods, fires, significant recessions – but they are not appropriate on a permanent structural basis. We have an obligation to taxpayers in this province to be responsible with their money. We have an obligation to young Albertans to not only stop taking on debt but to save for their future. If we are using the contingency account for more than two years consecutively, then we're not doing our job. We're not doing our job if we can't balance the budget on a long-term structural basis.

9:20

Now, this amendment does not preclude the government from continuing debt financing, which is a different topic entirely. It still allows the government to run consolidated deficits, but it means that on the operational side the contingency account cannot be used for operational deficits for more than two years. This puts a safety valve on the government's financial structure. This ensures that if the government wants to run a deficit, if there is an emergency, if they have a good reason for running a deficit one year, they are forced to have a plan to get back to at least an operational surplus within two years, let alone a consolidated surplus, again, one which we have not run in eight years. This is a common-sense amendment.

The members across have said that they want to balance the budget. I'm not sure I believe their plan is particularly realistic. I'm looking at the Member for Calgary-Currie: he's never going to forget that. I'm not sure that the plan to balance the budget is particularly realistic, but if the government members opposite believe their own plan, if they believe that we will be back in surplus in that time, then they should have no problem voting for this amendment.

This still allows the government to run consolidated deficits – something which will drive me nuts, and I'm sure you'll hear lots from me for the next three and a half years while you do so – but it puts limits on how long you can draw down the contingency account. Actually, that shouldn't be a big problem because we'll be out of money in the contingency account this year anyway. You won't be able to draw it down. It's going to be empty.

This is an amendment to fix a long-term problem. When the Wildrose balances the budget in five years, we're going to start putting money back into the contingency account. When we get back to a balanced budget, we should start reinvesting into the contingency account. [interjections] I'm very happy to see that the members across are bright-eyed and bushy-tailed and ready to debate fiscal policy today. That brings joy to my heart. Question period started early today.

While the contingency account is going to be out by the end of this current fiscal year, when we do get back to a balanced budget, the responsible thing to do is to start reinvesting in the contingency account, not up to \$17 billion so that the government can paper over deficits for a decade but up to a figure in the \$5 billion range. That account should not again be used to allow the government to paper over long-term structural problems. If we get back to a balanced budget, we need to rebuild the contingency account to an appropriate level so that we can cover off deficits for two years in the event of an emergency and then begin to reinvest in the heritage fund once again, something that we've been guilty of as a province for a very, very long time.

This is a common-sense amendment that will require no sacrifice of this government during the term of this Legislature. They don't intend to balance this budget until the next election, and even then – mark my words – they're not going to do it because their revenue projections are not even close to accurate. Even if they were, they still don't plan on balancing the budget until 2019 anyway, so the deficits that they will run between now and then will be financed

100 per cent through debt financing and not through drawing down the contingency account.

This amendment will not effectively come into force for at least some years to come, but it will fix a long-term structural problem with our finances. Governments in the past have with the best of intentions put money into the contingency account, once called the sustainability fund, and just used that when times got tough to run deficits but then never actually did the tough work necessary to get back to a balanced budget.

I know the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud has talked about countercyclical economics and the need to run deficits when the economy is down. Even Keynes would say: run deficits in bad times, but run surpluses in good. Keynes never recommended permanent deficits. This is an amendment that I think Keynes would support. I think the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud is nodding in support. That's a good sign.

I will conclude my opening remarks on the first Official Opposition amendment to Bill 4. I'd encourage members across to give this serious consideration. This is not an amendment that will affect the operations of the government in the term of this Legislature because, as I said, the budget is surely not going to be balanced at any time during this Legislature. Even then, it allows for two consecutive years of deficit financing for operations through the now contingency account. It will not affect anything you do for the rest of this Legislature, but it is a good, common-sense, long-term safety valve on the finances of the province.

Now that the members across have admitted that this bill needs improvement, that it needs to be less bad, I ask them to keep an open mind to this amendment and work together with the Official Opposition and all of the parties in this House and do what Albertans sent us here to do, and that is to try to find some common ground and work together. We don't vote against anything just because it comes from the government, and we hope that you will not vote against anything just because it comes from the Official Opposition. Let's do what Albertans sent us here to do and work together.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. Having read the amendment and listened to the debate from the hon. member, I think that I need to correct the record on a couple of things.

Part of the problem with this amendment is that it's built on flawed assumptions. The hon. member said twice, at least a couple of times, during his speech just now that the budget hasn't been balanced in eight years. Well, the fact is that it was balanced last year. Now, I know that the hon. member will never agree with me on that, but you know who does? The Auditor. Folks at home listening, if they're wise, don't take anything that I say at face value and don't take anything the hon. member says at face value and maybe don't take what anybody says in this House at face value because it's always worth checking the facts. But I'll tell you facts that are worth checking are the ones that the Auditor approves, and the Auditor says that the budget was balanced last year.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Nope.

Mr. McIver: Yes, he does. So one of the biggest problems with this particular amendment is that it's based on a flawed assumption that, essentially, the Auditor doesn't agree with.

The other issue that I have – and the hon. member made some good points – is that the contingency fund, if there is money for it, is useful for things like emergencies, disasters when they come up.

None of us want those things to happen, but the fact is that they do. We've seen examples of it in the last few years: a major fire in Slave Lake; a major flood in High River, Calgary, southern Alberta; some areas of northern Alberta as well had flood damage all at the same time. While I actually appreciate the hon. member's intention to have money in the contingency fund – that's a good idea; thank you – I also know from previous things he said that the hon. member isn't in favour of debt, but this thing could actually lead to the government taking on more debt if that bright, shiny day comes where the government actually has money in the contingency account, and I didn't see any evidence that the government plans on doing that in the budget that they have on the table.

The fact is that should the government use money one or two years and then you have a disaster for one year, then the government, if they pass this, wouldn't have access to the contingency account during the very year when they have a disaster. Should the government use the contingency account for one year, and then there's a disaster two years in a row – we hope that never happens, but we all know that it could. We get forest fires. We get other fires. We get all manner of things.

At the end of the day – and I know that the intention is good; I know that the intention is to make the bill either better or less bad, depending upon your point of view, but I don't think that this particular amendment quite meets that standard. So I won't be supporting it, and I hope I've explained reasonably well why not.

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

9:30

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Chair. First of all, my thanks to the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks for this amendment. I'm rising in support of the amendment for a couple of reasons. I want to talk about the longer term, the bigger picture. Obviously, if we dip into the contingency fund, which used to be the \$17 billion sustainability fund, two years in a row, we have a structural deficit. We have a situation where we're spending more than the revenues allow, and of course that's inflationary. That's a hardship on the next generation. It's a situation where, you know, we need to ensure that here representing Albertans, working Albertans today, the next generation, we look in reality at how this overspending causes situations.

I look at the debt that Alberta has taken on in the last few years in spite of our record revenues, and I want to compare it to the reason we're here and where another jurisdiction is at. The education, the health care, the transportation, and the welfare that we're here to provide Albertans: of course, every tax dollar we take from hard-working Albertans competes with these other important requirements. I want to talk about the situation in Ontario for a second, where they face \$11 billion or \$12 billion a year in interest. Education, health care, transportation, and welfare must compete every year with this \$12 billion in interest expense. I remember reading a report some time ago that indicated that in Ontario they spend more on interest than they spend on advanced education and job training combined, which makes me think you could have two York universities, two Carletons. We could have all kinds of job training. But, instead, that money is paid to bondholders. That money is paid to capital markets. That money is not put to the use of citizens.

I want to talk about where Alberta could be for a sec and why we need these structural reforms, why we need proper oversight on government spending. Of course it's hard. It's hard for government to say no when there are important needs, but I want to talk about the value of what savings could be instead. Of course, we're looking at a situation where a year or two ago royalties were \$8

billion or \$9 billion. This year, if I remember the number right, it's somewhere around \$2.8 billion in royalties, a significant drop for the treasury of Alberta and the services we can provide, never mind the hardship that is providing for Alberta employees, Alberta families, and Alberta communities. Again, the opposite – the opposite – of spending more and more, spending our savings is what the interest could do, you know, for our economy instead.

I think back to the previous administration, especially the last eight or nine years, and the spending. I think back to where we could have been if we'd have just saved \$100 billion or \$120 billion in the heritage trust fund instead. I understand AIMCo makes 7 per cent, 7 and half per cent a year as an annual average. If we'd have saved about \$120 billion, that would be that \$8 billion or \$9 billion that could easily replace royalties, which could easily fund the health care, the education, the welfare, and the transportation, that over 4 million Albertans are counting so desperately on, and the sustainability that gives us better value, that gives us better opportunity to plan long term. How easy would it have been to have saved \$120 billion? I understand that royalties in the last 44 years were some side of \$275 billion.

I remember reading a report that suggested that if the previous government would have just let compound the approximate \$35 billion in interest that the original \$17 billion that was put in the original heritage trust fund in 1976 – if they'd have just let that compound, it alone would have grown to \$200 billion. Instead, this money was put into operations, and this money was put into government spending instead of the discipline – the discipline – that the last government, the discipline that this House could have shown over those 44 years that would have leveled out this situation, the situation that Albertan families, employees, and communities are facing now.

I look at how we as a House need to do things with equity and fairness. Absolutely, we a hundred per cent believe in supporting front-line workers. Absolutely, the stories roll in about how private companies and private employees are taking it on the chin right now and what that's going to do to our communities.

Alberta released yesterday – and I believe these are year-over-year results for where our economy is at. Exports are down 25 per cent. Agriculture receipts are down 4.8 per cent. Manufacturing: a 15 per cent drop. Wholesale sales: 9.8 per cent drop. Home sales in Alberta are down 25 per cent.

So we contrast this with a motion from the Official Opposition and our shadow minister of Finance, who wants some oversight and control on spending, on the ability to make sure that we get value for tax dollars.

I will take some exception with what the leader of the third party was saying about the budget being balanced. We get into this discussion of: do we count capital spending, what does the Auditor General think, what do other jurisdictions do, and do we actually borrow money to save money and take the risk of that? The fact remains, colleagues, that until five years ago, I think, Alberta was able – able – out of our annual revenues to pay for our operation expenses and our capital expenses. That is the comparison that I prefer to look at. Just a short five years ago the Alberta government was paying for operating, capital, and not putting the next generation of Albertans deeper in debt.

Reports are out there, and I did a report as Infrastructure critic called *On Time and On Budget*, that I tabled to the House, that showed how the last government had increased spending in the last eight years 54 per cent, more than population growth and inflation would have warranted. If our last government in that time period would have held spending increases just to population growth and inflation, a very, very reasonable measure and standard by many business interests and by many other jurisdictions, it would have

been 54 per cent less spending, a total of \$41 billion, \$41 billion that we could have saved for future services for Albertans that need them.

So when the Wildrose opposition and our shadow minister come across with a thought-out amendment that says, “Let’s put the brakes on not controlling how we look after our finances, to provide health care, education, welfare, and transportation, to fund front-line services, to ensure that we don’t get the next generation, you know, deep in debt at a tremendous loss of services or a payment of interest to wealthier Albertans, Canadians, and people around the world,” it’s with caring and concern for being able to pay for front-line workers and protect the next generation.

I want to end by – it was mentioned that: oh, if we roll into the third or fourth year and we have a disaster, we might have to pay for that anyway. I remember a couple of budgets that I looked at that the last government had put forward, and I can’t honestly remember what the new government’s budget said a short time ago, but it appeared to me that we’ve been consistently underbudgeting what these disasters were costing us. We have historical records as to what disasters cost Albertans year after year. It’s imprudent and it’s improper not to budget properly for that. Use the information, put it in the budget, and let’s make sure that we protect Albertans’ needs: education, health care, welfare, and transportation. Let’s put in the mechanisms that allow us to control spending so we don’t put the next generation deep in debt at a loss of services.

Thank you.

9:40

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Rodney: Well, thank you very much, Madam Chair. I’ll keep my remarks brief. I was very, very proud to serve in this Chamber at a time when we built up the sustainability fund to \$17 billion. That did not happen by itself. The truth of the matter is that when a lot of folks see that number, they think of the heritage trust fund. I trust that everyone in this Chamber knows those are two very different funds, and I’d ask every member of this House and all Albertans: do they know of any other jurisdiction in the free world where there is a \$17 billion fund? At least there was a \$17 billion rainy-day fund, as some referred to it. There isn’t one. It’s important that we differentiate between the two, and we appreciate that we do have the two.

I do have to react, though, to the point that was made a short time ago, how easy it would have been to save about \$120 billion. Well, if it was easy, I’ll tell you that it would have been done. This is a comparison to Norway, which is nonsensical. A question I would have is: when you have the population of Red Deer moving to Alberta every year – and it’s cliché, but it’s true – people don’t bring their roads, schools, and hospitals. They don’t bring their services. Yes, they bring their taxes, but how can you possibly keep up with that? That’s a question that I would have.

But I want to get back to this comparison to Norway. Norway’s taxes – news flash – are sky high even in comparison to what this NDP government is proposing.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Don’t give them any ideas.

Mr. Rodney: No. I don’t want to give them any ideas.

But let’s just take a look back. Until a very short time ago Alberta enjoyed the lowest taxes of any jurisdiction anywhere, yet we had the \$17 billion plus the \$17 billion between the two accounts. Norway is a country. They don’t have to pay equalization payments and transfer payments. That does not apply. If you had been keeping track, it was \$10, \$15, or \$20 billion that was sent towards Ottawa that we did not receive. If we kept those, we would have had way

more than Norway, but Alberta is a province, as you know, and we are part of Canada, and this is constitutionally binding. This is something that we simply must do as a good member of Confederation.

I appreciate that the mover of this amendment has a great intention, that the rainy-day fund is to be used for rainy days and other similar circumstances. It’s a good idea. It’s simply not flexible enough. That’s the problem that I have with it. If we have a huge fire one year and a devastating flood the year after that and a terrible drought the next, I guess my question would be: are the people who suffer from the problems in years 2 and 3 simply out of luck? That’s not the Alberta way. That’s not what that’s for.

I would trust that forever we would have enough money to pay all of our bills and we wouldn’t have to use the rainy-day fund for things like operations, right? I completely understand about how you build in a downturn because of all of the costs going down, whether it’s the people who are going to be working there or the hard costs for materials, et cetera, but the fact of the matter is that a rainy-day fund should be there. It should be used only in rainy days, but it should be respected as such with flexibility.

So it’s a good idea, just not quite enough flexibility, and I would ask to call for the question unless there are other speakers.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Well, I thank the Member for Calgary-Lougheed and the leader of the third party for their comments. Actually, they’re well received, but I respectfully believe that they’re perhaps not understanding the full meaning of the amendment and its implications. When I spoke about the contingency account being a good tool for disasters, it does not affect the Fiscal Management Act, now renamed the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act, a rather Orwellian title. It does not actually affect the ability of the government to borrow or use the contingency account for disaster spending. Disaster spending is a special section of, again, what is currently the Fiscal Management Act, which is in place and which will be grandfathered into the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act. Nothing in this amendment changes the disaster-spending section of that act. So under this amendment the government could draw down the contingency account, running deficits for two years, but if a disaster happened in a third or fourth year, it would still have every single legal mechanism at its disposal to spend for disasters. Nothing changes that part of the act.

Right now governments already budget for disasters. One thing that I’ve long believed we should do is budget more realistically for disasters. We normally spend approximately \$400 million to \$500 million a year on disasters. Some of that might be because governments like to reallocate money around because it does allow for unbudgeted spending during the fiscal year. But regardless of that rather separate argument, we should be budgeting realistically for disasters to begin with.

Beyond that, this amendment in no way affects that part of the act which gives the government the power to spend for disasters. So if we hadn’t any money left in the sustainability fund, or contingency account, which is now running out, we would still be able to draw it down for another two years. If in that third year we had a significant natural disaster, nothing would preclude the government from being able to draw down the remaining funds in the contingency account if there were any or to go to capital markets to borrow to cover off that disaster spending.

The Member for Calgary-Lougheed and the Member for Calgary-Hays, the leader of the third party, would be very well placed with their concerns about this amendment if that were the case. So I would give them friendly counsel to reconsider that because I would agree with them if that were the case, if this were amending parts of the act which would prohibit the government

from disaster spending beyond the contingency account. I would give friendly counsel to reconsider their position in light of their arguments, reasoned if well founded. I would urge them to reconsider their arguments as this amendment does not in any way impinge upon that section of the act.

Thank you.

The Chair: Other hon. members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would urge all of the members in this House to consider voting for this amendment. This is something that was started by putting surpluses into a sustainability fund. Over the first few years of a boom under Stelmach it hit \$17 billion. Only a few billion were put into the heritage fund by Klein, none by Stelmach.

What we're seeing now is the fact that we're going to be running massive deficits going into the unknown future. I understand that we've got projections that we could possibly hit a balanced budget in five years; that's what the government is putting forward in their projections. But to be clear, we're not getting any paperwork or any backup on how exactly they're coming up with these radical assumptions of increased revenue that we're going to be looking for.

9:50

Now, we did see the implementation of a possible carbon tax. What we're hearing from the Premier is that they're planning on spending it all. Even if they were depending on additional funds coming through on this newly announced carbon tax, all we're hearing is that additional spending is coming forward. The question is: are we going to be balancing the budget any time?

This is why this amendment is so important. The intention of this fund wasn't meant to just continue to draw down every year because we can't make operational spending. It comes down to the fact that what we're looking at is that it's something that we need to be using in times when we have low oil prices, for instance. I understand that now is a good time to be looking at using the contingency fund, but the problem is that bad times have been happening for the past eight years, so we've been looking at drawing down a lot of this contingency fund. The thing is that we need to be looking at protecting this fund because in the end, if we use all of the fund, there won't be any contingency funds left.

Now, we're hearing from the NDP; they keep going back to this mandate that they were given by Albertans. I don't remember the mandate from the NDP platform saying that they were going to blow through our contingency fund. By voting down this amendment, they're voting against maintaining a contingency fund. This troubles me to no end. We could end up with no protection in the future.

Since 2008 the government has been using the fiscal gap that has been developing, and we're seeing that this fund is continually being drawn down. We're amassing debt as well as drawing down this contingency fund. We're not only seeing our contingency fund being drawn down; we're also seeing massive debt coming into place. What troubles me is that we're also looking at implementing a massive amount of debt in five years. This is in the government's projection. They're looking at creating a monster amount of debt. We're looking at \$47 billion of debt. We probably won't have a contingency fund at the end of that five years. Where is the accountability from the NDP when it comes to protecting Albertans' contingency fund here?

Now, the contingency fund is really only meant for short-term deficiencies in income. This appears to be something that was not

implemented when it first came forward with the original legislation. My colleague that put this forward is using foresight to show that this is something that we need to put forward to make sure that we actually start to put money forward for our future generations. In the end, we are accountable to our children. Someday my children are going to come to me and say: "You were a member of the Legislature. There's no money left from when the times were good. Why, exactly, is it that you didn't get up and speak in defence of us?" I am going to say that on December 1, 2015, I stood with my colleague . . .

Some Hon. Members: It's the 2nd.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you.

An Hon. Member: We fought this thing on December 1, too. It's okay.

Mr. Cyr: Yes. We're still reeling from Bill 6.

The fact is that I will be able to say to my children that on December 2, 2015, I stood up to protect the contingency fund and that those voting against trying to protect the fund were not looking out for Alberta's best interests in the future.

Going forward, we need to be addressing the fact that contingencies are always being put into place to protect Albertans, and as we draw down these contingencies, we need to be looking at the fact that our predecessors, who may not have been perfect, were actually using some foresight when they created these funds. Over the next five years I see nothing in the budget to actually start putting money into a contingency fund. Not only are we going to be drawing down on this, but we're also not going to be putting money forward for our children.

I understand that we do have the Alberta heritage trust fund. That is separate from the contingency fund, and this is money that is going to be moving forward. I am proud to say that I sit on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Committee, and we do want to be stewards of that money. Why are we not being stewards of our contingency fund when we want to be stewards of the Alberta heritage trust fund? We are actually responsible to Albertans to make sure that some of this money that we are making now gets moved forward into the future. We're all trying to make sure that in the end what we're looking to do is to make Alberta a better place, and the only way to make Alberta a better place is to make sure that we protect the ones that come after us.

I guess my fear is: should this fund cease to exist, are we going to be able to maintain the services and the front-line workers that we have today? There is no way to make sure that there are funds available in the future. Let's be clear. We need to be looking at the ability of our front lines to bring services forward. I understand that the only way that we can do some of these services right now is by possibly drawing down the contingency fund, but we do need to be making sure that we are spending within our means. This is where Wildrose has been very clear that instead of bringing in massive spending increases, we need to be looking at possibly going into our management and making cuts or through attrition going into the bureaucracy of the current government, making sure that our government is sustainable while reinforcing our front-line workers because in the end the front-line workers are what is important to all Albertans. I guess the point that I'm trying to drive down to is that spending this entire contingency fund isn't protecting our front-line workers.

10:00

To wrap it up, I would like to say that I support my colleague in this amendment. I support what he is trying to accomplish with this.

He is trying to bring accountability to government, and for that I would like to thank my colleague.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other hon. members wishing to speak?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A2 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:01 a.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:

Barnes	Hanson	Panda
Cooper	Hunter	Pitt
Cyr	Loewen	Smith
Fildebrandt	Orr	

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Gotfried	Miranda
Babcock	Gray	Nielsen
Bilous	Hinkley	Payne
Carson	Hoffman	Piquette
Clark	Horne	Renaud
Connolly	Jansen	Rodney
Coolahan	Kleinstauber	Rosendahl
Cortes-Vargas	Littlewood	Sabir
Dach	Loyola	Schreiner
Dang	Luff	Shepherd
Drever	Malkinson	Starke
Drysdale	McIver	Sucha
Eggen	McKitrick	Sweet
Ellis	McLean	Turner
Feehan	McPherson	Westhead
Fitzpatrick	Miller	Woollard
Totals:	For – 11	Against – 48

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Chair: Back on Bill 4. Are there any further comments, questions, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Chair. It is fun to rise a second time. We'll see if we can find a few more fiscal conservative votes in the House on this one. I'm going to be putting forward another amendment to Bill 4. Would you like me to read the amendment?

The Chair: Go ahead, hon. member.

10:20

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Chair. I will move that Bill 4, An Act to Implement Various Tax Measures and to Enact the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act, be amended in schedule 1 in section 3(1) by striking out "15%" and substituting "7%." This is a reasoned amendment to, as the leader of the third party put it, make this bill less worse. This is an amendment to lower the higher debt-ceiling level that the NDP government is proposing to a lower threshold of 7 per cent of GDP.

In 1993 former Provincial Treasurer and Finance minister Jim Dinning, a man whom I have great admiration for and who is possibly the greatest Finance minister this province has seen, put

forward the Government Accountability Act and the Fiscal Responsibility Act. In there he put forward reasonable limits on our debt limit, on the reporting of that limit, and basic accountability measures to ensure that politicians' spending did not get out of hand, that the debt we were taking on would be limited to a reasonable amount.

Circa 2008 those acts were continually watered down. They were watered down further in 2012, when the Fiscal Responsibility Act and the Government Accountability Act were repealed. Jim Dinning said in '93 that if any subsequent government were to repeal or even water down either of those acts, legislators would have to look Albertans, quote, in the whites of their eyes and explain to them why they deserve subpar government. But those acts were first watered down and then repealed. The Government Accountability Act and the Fiscal Responsibility Act were replaced with the Fiscal Management Act.

The government is now proposing to replace the Fiscal Management Act with the Orwellian-named Act to Implement Various Tax Measures and to Enact the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act. If there is fiscal planning here, it is planning for more debt and more deficits. It is planning to recklessly increase our debt limit still further. The debt limits that have been proposed continuously in this House have been fictitious.

The U.S. Congress raises its debt ceiling nearly every year. The politicians come together, they pat themselves on the back, and they say: we're setting a limit on the debt. A year later they meet again, and they do it all over. They continuously raise it up. The debt ceiling goes up, and the bar of government goes down.

The new government is now proposing a 15 per cent of GDP debt limit. That'll be approximately \$50 billion of debt. Financial institutions have said that the NDP is likely to blow through this, that they're not even likely to balance the budget by the time they hit the 15 per cent debt-to-GDP limit. There is no consequence for going over that debt-to-GDP limit. If we are going to take as a given that this government is going to continue to take on debt, then there should be a more reasonable limit on the level of debt that they take. Fifteen per cent is an unacceptably high debt burden for the most prosperous jurisdiction in North America to be carrying. Fifteen per cent of GDP, or \$50 billion of debt, is an admission of fiscal failure. It is an admission that the government has no plan to ever balance the budget.

As I've discussed, our net financial assets have declined as a province for nearly a decade now. At some point we have to turn that around. At some point we have to balance the budget. The further we go into debt and the deeper we dig ourselves into a hole, the longer it's going to take to get out of it. Fifty billion dollars of debt will be difficult even for a fiscally conservative government to dig us out of within a decade. Now, if the members across will allow me to embellish for a moment, in a sense I'm asking them to make it a little easier for the Wildrose to make us debt free in a few years. I'm asking them to dig the hole a little less deeply for us to get us out of in a few years.

We're proposing a reasonable limit on the debt. Seven per cent of GDP is still too high. Zero per cent of GDP is too high. We are the most prosperous jurisdiction in North America. There is no reason that we should not be able to balance our budget. There is no reason that we should have \$50 billion of debt but a mere \$17 billion in the sustainability fund. So we're proposing a reasonable compromise, not that we believe that 7 per cent of GDP is reasonable but because we believe it is less unreasonable than 15 per cent of GDP.

I ask all members of this House to give it serious consideration. If the members across have any real intention of balancing the budget, then they should have no problem voting for this

amendment. This will still allow them to take on gross amounts of debt in the next few years, but it requires them to stop taking it on before this Legislature is dissolved before the next election. It means that they have to put their money where their mouth is, that if they actually believe that they can balance the budget before the next election, then they should be able to vote for it.

Now, they've changed their balanced budget date promise three times already. They changed it once during the election, they changed it once immediately after the election, and they changed it again just a few weeks ago. I've got 20 bucks for any member across who is willing to bet me that they'll change it again pretty soon. I'm looking for Calgary-Currie.

In all seriousness, Madam Chair, this is putting reasonable restrictions on the power of the government to borrow without end. A 7 per cent debt limit still vastly increases the powers the government is giving itself to borrow and to spend, but it is giving fewer proposed powers than they are proposing to give to themselves. This is fiscally responsible.

This is not just fiscally conservative. This is not just something that those of us who believe in limited government support. This is something that Tommy Douglas would support, a prairie populist socialist who believed in redistribution but understood that you need to balance the budget to do that. Tommy Douglas believed in balanced budgets. Tommy Douglas knew that you couldn't take on debt without end. He knew that if you wanted to distribute wealth, as the NDP likes to do, you still have to balance the budget at the end of the day.

So this is not just about fiscal conservatism or limited government; this is about fiscal responsibility. All members of this House who want to go back to their constituents and look them in the whites of their eyes and explain to them why they're willing to take on \$50 billion of debt without any plan should vote against it, but members who want to go back to their constituents and look them in the eyes and say that we did what was right will vote for this amendment.

Madam Chair, I encourage all members of this House to vote to lower the debt ceiling that the government is proposing from 15 per cent to 7 per cent. It is the fiscally responsible thing to do.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

10:30

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to rise today in support of this amendment, and I actually rise because I'm in support of any amendment that curtails the spending that this government has been willing to do. Any measures that provide checks and balances on a government, I think, always serve the best interests of Albertans.

I think about where we were 12 or 15 years ago, when I was proud to be an Albertan. We had no debt. We had a plan for our children's future. We had hope, and because we had this, Madam Chair – and it wasn't found in other provinces and other parts of the world – people came to Alberta in droves. This is the reason why we had not as good – \$18 a barrel: that's what we did this on. Today we're at \$45 a barrel, and when you can't balance your budget on the third-highest income that your province is seeing ever, then you've got a problem. You don't have a debt problem; you have a spending problem. You have a spending problem, not a revenue problem. This is the problem.

The problem that I see with this government is that they adhere to the concepts of Keynesian economics. There absolutely is a plethora of information out there now that shows, Madam Chair, that Keynesian economics have done the world no good. Greece.

We have record debt throughout the world, the depreciation of every currency in the world, yet these governments and our government to this day seem to be holding tenaciously to the idea that we can spend ourselves out of the problems that we have.

Madam Chair, really why I got involved in this in the first place was because I became a grandparent. I was very concerned by what we would be able to bequeath to our children and grandchildren. I was concerned about the state of affairs that they would have to be given, and I thought that it's important for us to be champions for the people who don't have a voice yet, those people who aren't 18, those people who aren't born yet. It has to be a sustainable program that we provide for our children's and grandchildren's future. If it's not sustainable, there's another word for it. It's called a Ponzi scheme. It is not able to continue for the future. Yes, there might be lots of bells and whistles and it might look fantastic, but it's not something that is sustainable, and it will not allow our children and grandchildren to be able to inherit something that we would be proud to give them.

This is the number one reason why I decided to get involved in politics, because our children and grandchildren deserve a champion. They deserve someone who will be able to stand up, even though they don't have a voice today, for their future. There are many countries throughout the world, Madam Chair, that are not willing to put their children's and grandchildren's interests first. Now, the members opposite can laugh and scorn all they want, but at some point – at some point – this debt has to be paid off.

So I'd like to take this a little bit differently. I'd like to take a different tack on this. The new Alberta way: we've changed the wording from the Alberta advantage, which I was very happy with and millions of Albertans were happy with. The Alberta advantage allowed us the opportunity to prosper. This is what the people wanted. Now, if you compare what we did with other provinces, we were light years ahead of them, and we were proud about being Albertans. In fact, it was so amazing of a juggernaut economy that the rest of Canadians decided that they needed to come here. This is why we had 100,000 people moving in every year.

The new directive or the way we're going to describe Alberta is called not the Alberta advantage but the Alberta way, and this is now being described by the NDP government as the right way. My question is: if we get ourselves into debt – it sounds like the die is cast. Nothing but the crying needs to happen now. So if they have the ability to diversify, as they say they want to do – they want to move away from the roller-coaster ride of the oil and gas. Given, it has been a wild roller-coaster ride, for sure. But if they move away from the oil and gas sector and move into other sectors and then get themselves into serious debt, what assurances or what precedents do we have that that new economy that they're touting will actually be able to pay off that debt in the future? What assurances do we have that the economic approach that this government is trying to present to us actually is the proper go-forward plan, the plan that will allow us to have the financial stability that our future generations deserve?

I don't see any precedents. I have seen no precedents. I would love to see the studies that these guys are building their platform on. In fact, every single time, Madam Chair, that we've asked this government to give us an economic impact study, which is a forward-looking approach to their plan, they've said: stay tuned; as things roll out, we'll let you know how it's going. That's dangerous.

You know, as much as I would like to be someone that helps – and we've talked about that. [interjections] I think that we have a situation where this government is definitely ideologically based. I think they have great ideas. I think they have the . . .

Mr. Cooper: Point of order, Madam Chair.

Point of Order Decorum

Mr. Cooper: Madam Chair, I rise on 23(j), language or whatever. We have a very long morning. I appreciate a very good heckle from time to time. I think as we move forward – we've got a morning all the way till noon to spend together. I just think that perhaps we could try to keep the banter down on all sides of the House. I wondered if you might agree.

The Chair: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Madam Chair. First of all, this isn't 23(j). The member on this side did not use abusive or insulting language.

I think, though, that the opposition House leader's point is that members are getting very excited and very passionate about what we're discussing, which is great to see. I think that there isn't a point of order here but that members on all sides of the House can maybe be a little more respectful of the speaker.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. members. I was actually just at the point where I was going to remind everyone that the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner did have the floor. So please be respectful of the person who is speaking.

Thank you.

Continue, hon. member.

Debate Continued

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Chair. I do appreciate the concern that I'm hearing. I really am not trying to say things that are inflammatory. I'm trying to tell you that my concern is real, my concern for those people who don't have the opportunity of being able to vote, don't have the opportunity of being able to say: "This is what I want you to do for my future. This is the hope that I want you to be able to give me. This is who I want to champion."

10:40

I'm asking you to support this amendment, which allows us to still be able to provide the front-line workers that we all need and want in this province. Teachers and nurses and doctors play an integral role in our workings in our province. We respect them. We honour them. We know that they need to be able to have proper remuneration for their work. I don't think we've ever said anything different. What we're saying is: let's make it sustainable; let's make it something that does not put undue burden on future generations. That is called a Ponzi scheme. Simply put, it is not sustainable, and we have to get back to a model that is sustainable, not one that we think might be sustainable but that actually in the past has shown that it is sustainable, and that is making sure that you don't spend more than you have.

In this situation this is actually a compromise. This is a compromise. It's not something that I would – I am not a person that believes in getting into debt. I was so happy to be an Albertan, proud to be an Albertan when Ralph Klein, with his big white stetson hat, stood up and said "Paid in full" with a big sign. Now, I appreciate that getting out of debt, that having the lowest taxed jurisdiction in Canada creates a juggernaut of an economy so that everybody wants to get involved in it and have a part of that Alberta advantage. I understand that. So we supercharged the economy because of policy, not because of an \$18 barrel of oil. Let's be clear about that. It's because of good fiscal policy. That's what made them come. You build it, and they will come. This is the sort of thing that we need to get back to. If you build opposite to that, they

will leave, and then our pie will shrink. We won't have any opportunity of being able to provide for those services that we hold near and dear in this province.

The province has some of the best trained doctors and nurses, some of the best trained teachers. I respect them. I used to teach. I taught for two years, the proudest two years I ever had, and I made the least that I've ever made. I'm glad that teachers do make more so that they can provide for their families. I think it's important. But, once again, the model has to be sustainable. We need to take a look at this and say: are we overspending in terms of our operations? Now, I get that capital expenses are important. I am in favour of some debt for capital spending because oftentimes when you put a dollar into capital spending, you get \$7 out. That makes financial sense to me. Now, that is an investment.

But when you go into debt or you deficit spend for operational spending, that's dead money. That's like taking your credit card and going out and buying your groceries or your filet mignon or whatever you buy on your credit card. It's dead money. This is the sort of thing that we need to make sure we stay away from. I am one hundred per cent in favour of this amendment that my fellow colleague has brought forward because it is a way of being able to say: let's put in some checks and balances, let's put some thresholds on the spending ability of this government and all governments in the future.

The United States has been struggling with this for a long time. Every single time we hear of them saying: we're going to shut down the government because they want to raise the debt threshold. I think that the 7 per cent is reasonable. I'd love to see it lower than that. I'd like to see it at zero, to tell you the truth. I'd like to be able to see us actually have a rainy-day fund that is robust, that allows us to be able to go through those difficult times, those peaks and troughs in any economy, but we're not in a situation now. We've blown through that rainy-day fund. So I understand that we have to take it from where we're at now, which is that we're going to have to deficit finance.

This is why I think that this is a compromise that's a prudent compromise. It's that we are taking a look at our scenario that we're at right now, not wishing that we were at a different scenario, and I'm in favour of this compromise. I do wish that we had not gotten to the point where we were having to even look at 7 per cent, let alone 15 per cent.

Madam Chair, I've had the opportunity of being able to, I think, articulate my concerns with the general budget and my appreciation for the amendment that has come forward to show the fiscal restraint that every reasonable government should be looking at. I thank you very much for the opportunity to be able to speak on this matter today.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I rise to speak against this amendment. There are a couple of things that the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner said that I have a real issue with. He talked about the fact that he was proud to be an Albertan. I'll tell you what. I am now and I always will be proud to be an Albertan. Whether any of us agrees with what policy is passed or not passed in this House, I am fiercely proud to be an Albertan, and I always will be.

The other thing I take issue with is the discussion of the fact that you don't believe in Keynesian economics, but then you went on to say that capital spending can return \$7 to \$1 invested. That, my friend, is the definition of Keynesian economics.

Lest our friends on the government side get too excited, I have some significant concerns with the amount of borrowing this

government plans to do. The 15 per cent debt-to-GDP ratio in and of itself is a reasonably prudent limit, but what I want to be really clear with the government about is that that is not the only factor that credit-rating agencies use to determine Alberta's credit worthiness.

There are five factors that the Dominion Bond Rating Service, DBRS, uses, debt to GDP being one of them, the cap at 15 per cent. Of those five factors, so far so good for Alberta.

The real GDP growth rate is another measure. Unfortunately, Alberta's real GDP growth rate is forecast over the next three years to be below the national average. That's one strike.

The surplus-to-GDP ratio should be a 2 per cent threshold. We want a 2 per cent surplus-to-GDP ratio. Unfortunately, we're now at negative 1.9 and not predicted to recover until 2018. That's strike two.

Federal transfers as a percentage of total revenue. Currently, we are above the threshold level of 15 per cent at 16 per cent and not anticipated to recover until 2018 at the earliest. Strike three.

Point five: our interest-costs-to-revenue ratio, a 5 per cent threshold. Based on the forecast projections in this budget, we'll exceed that in 2019. Strike four if there is such a thing. That's a significant concern.

What happens? What happens if Alberta has our credit rating downgraded? Our interest costs go up. Has this government done the math? Has this government actually done the calculation, a sensitivity analysis, to find out what it will cost should Alberta find itself in a position of having its credit rating downgraded? According to the Minister of Finance in estimates the answer is no. You haven't done that work, and that scares me a great deal, Madam Chair. Our team has calculated that Alberta will face an extra \$700 million in debt-service costs alone by 2019 if we, in fact, suffer a 1 per cent increase to our costs of credit.

Now, having said that, this amendment specifically talks about reducing that threshold from 15 per cent to 7 for a couple of reasons. One, I think that capital spending in a time of economic downturn creates jobs, builds the capital infrastructure that we need in this province. But, also, the fact is that it is but one of five factors at least that we need to consider.

Given that, I will be voting against this amendment. Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The Chair: I'll recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'd like to speak to the amendment. One of the things I'd like to talk about is that when we're talking about this 15 per cent threshold, to me, that threshold is reasonable. I mean, even at 15 per cent Alberta's government's debt-to-GDP ratio would be half the weighted average of the other provinces combined, which to me seems reasonable. Also, the 15 per cent ratio – you know, we're talking with the ministers here – is the ratio that's regarded as a reasonable and manageable limit by our credit-rating agencies. During other debates in the House that comes up rather often, and we still have a triple-A credit rating, and there's been no indication that this 15 per cent plan would do anything to harm that.

10:50

Going forward, you know, Alberta still remains a great place to invest. We have sustained tax advantages over other jurisdictions, and the investments that we make today will lay the foundation for a more diversified, stronger economy. I've also heard from the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner that he was against all government spending. It was his opening line, and then he later

went on to say: build it, and they will come. You know, part of what this 15 per cent limit allows us to do is some spending on infrastructure for things like schools and roads and the things that Albertans need.

The members opposite also suggested that – you know, a previous Premier, with a stetson, held a sign, "paid in full," that the debt had been paid back. Well, unfortunately, that debt was paid back not by saddling Albertans with debt but by saddling Albertans with crumbling infrastructure, that, I would say, the last election was fought on. The reason why we're bringing forward our capital spending plan aggressively is to correct those errors.

The previous debt was an infrastructure debt, and I believe that the 15 per cent number is reasonable. Reducing it to 7 per cent, I think, would unnecessarily hamper the plan that we are putting forward and would unnecessarily hamper Albertans in regard to the schools, the roads, for me personally in Calgary the ring road, cancer centres, and a variety of other infrastructure needs that every single MLA in this House hears about from their constituents and that need to get built because previous governments had not invested in infrastructure.

I will not be supporting this amendment. Thank you.

The Chair: Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Chair. Well, this is an interesting day. We have an amendment here to take the government's planned 15 per cent debt-to-GDP ratio down to 7, made by the member that a few minutes before that said that zero per cent was too much. Here's what's interesting, Madam Chair. The mover's colleague the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner said what I thought was a reasonable thing to say: some debt is fine to build infrastructure. So there seems to be a split in the party there about: what is their party's position? We heard two very divergent opinions within about a half hour in the House from seats two rows apart.

I would submit to you that I would agree more with the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner. That is the position that our party, when it was in government, took, that some debt was reasonable to build infrastructure, but you had to have a reasonable plan to pay it off. Madam Chair, that's where our party stands, really, in the middle of the extremes over there and the party over here. The party over there wants to build things, which is great, and wants their borrowing essentially unfettered, which isn't great, and has no plan to pay it back, which isn't great. Our party's plan always was to borrow reasonably, build the infrastructure as you could, and have a reasonable plan to pay it back.

Now, the party making the motion likes to take the position that they don't want any debt, and they talk about how they'd like \$120 billion back, but they don't like to talk quite so much about which roads, schools, and hospitals they would unbuild to get there. That is why Albertans are looking for a more reasonable position, a position that I would submit to you that our party . . . [interjections] Madam Chair, we heard from the party over there that they were concerned about a good heckle but didn't like it when somebody was trying to make somebody not get heard, and here we are trying to be back to where you can't be heard.

Again, that's part of the inconsistency, Madam Chair, to say one thing one minute and something the next minute and hope that Albertans won't notice, but Albertans do notice. They do notice. They notice that they want hospitals, schools, and roads, and they don't want runaway debt. There is that zone in the middle that our party, when we were in government, always aimed for and we still advocate for today. That's where we're at. You know what? I think that this motion, Madam Chair, actually moves us closer to there.

I would say to the mover that maybe he's having a weak moment because this seems like fiscal conservative lightweight compared to what he usually says. Having said that, it's an improvement on where the government was going to go, with 15 per cent. In fact, I'm surprised that he didn't go lower than this, but this is an improvement on what the government's plan is now.

I can see my way clear to support it because it does get us closer to the place where the PC Party has always been, where we believe in a reasonable amount of debt to build the hospitals, schools, and roads that Albertans need within the range that they can afford and pay back in a reasonable amount of time, not zero debt.

I've said in this House before – and I'll say it again because I think it's worth saying – that telling Albertans that we're going to pay cash for your schools: tell your six-year-olds to wait till they're 16 so we can pay cash for the school, and then they can start grade 1. I know that the party over here doesn't want that, but that's the problem that they have. You can't say, "No debt," yet you're going to build things at the same time. They're just not consistent with reality. [interjection] Yeah, they are. Albertans know that. Albertans know that.

I do like the party over here, the fact that they want debt controlled although, as we heard this morning, there's a divergence of opinion within the party. Sometimes they take a hard line – all debt is bad – and sometimes they take a more reasonable line like we heard here this morning. A little bit of debt to build infrastructure and paying it back in a reasonable amount of time are the right things. That's the PC position. Thank you. I appreciate that.

That, I think, is the position where Albertans are, but I will say to the government members that I don't think that Albertans are at the point to have runaway debt with no plan to pay it back, to take on debt that amounts to a year's income for the government and only have a week's income from the government available to pay it back, because, essentially, you can't pay it back.

I also have sympathy for some of what the leader of the Alberta Party said on . . .

Mr. Clark: The surplus.

Mr. McIver: Yes, the surplus. It's important to be in a position where you actually can afford to pay your day-to-day operations in a reasonable way.

On balance, this has been an interesting discussion, but at the end of the day I find myself finding the motion from the Wildrose Party Member for Strathmore-Brooks to be an improvement on what the government put forward in the legislation. When the time comes, when you call for it, Madam Chair, I intend to vote in favour.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to speak in support of this amendment. Presently the government is proposing a 15 per cent debt-to-GDP limit. That's \$50 billion. I'm sorry, but that's just too high a limit. This amendment proposes a 7 per cent limit, which is \$25 billion. Twenty-five billion dollars is a lot of money. I believe that's the highest debt that this Alberta government will have ever been in. That's a record debt. I don't see where the problem is with a 7 per cent limit. I think that's very reasonable.

I think that what happens in government is that we get used to talking about millions and billions of dollars like it's nothing, but I think we need to realize that this is taxpayers' dollars. This is hard-working Albertans' money, that we are caretakers of, and we need to respect that. We need to spend every dollar wisely. This government that we have here now is bringing in a budget where there is absolutely no restraint shown.

11:00

Now, here in Alberta we're the envy of the country and maybe even the world because we're blessed with abundant resources. I'm here to say right now that I'm proud to be an Albertan. To have the Member for Calgary-Elbow suggest that the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner is not a proud Albertan, I take great exception to that, and I know he takes great exception to that, too. That was something very disingenuous to say. It was a cheap political shot. He in no way indicated that he was not proud to be an Albertan.

Now, the members opposite laugh about \$50 billion of debt. It's too bad that the people of Alberta can't have a camera there watching them laugh at \$50 billion of debt, laugh at the loss of jobs, laugh at Bill 6. I wish that the people of Alberta could see that.

There have been some comments today about deficits and the different types of deficits and how the Auditor General views things with deficits. We can keep this simple, very simple. This government, the Alberta government, has been spending more than it has taken in for eight years now, and this government's plan is to do that for another five years. Now, we can call that whatever we want – you can twist things around and call a surplus whatever – but I know that in my household when I spend more than I take in, I'm in the hole. That's the way every other Albertan views that, too. When I go into the bank and I say that I've spent more than I've taken in the for last eight years and that I want to do it for the next five years and that I want to borrow some money, I'm going to get laughed out of there. We need to realize that what I consider a deficit is spending more than I take in. That is a deficit, and that's clearly the definition that most Albertans would see, too.

Now, we've had some scoffing go on about how much money we could have saved with the heritage trust fund. It's at \$17 billion. I've seen some figures here that suggest that had we not taken the interest off that \$17 billion over all this time, we could have \$300 billion saved right now. Can you imagine? Three hundred billion dollars. And we have \$17 billion. What I want to remind everybody is that interest can work for you if you have money saved. You take the interest and you acquire more interest from that interest, compounding interest. Then your money can work for you. But when you're in debt, the interest works against you. It's a burden. I don't want to see Albertans burdened. I don't want to see my children and grandchildren burdened with this debt and the interest that we have to pay.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to the amendment?

We'll call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A3 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:04 a.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:

Barnes	Gotfried	Panda
Cooper	Hanson	Pitt
Cyr	Hunter	Rodney
Drysdale	Loewen	Schneider
Ellis	McIver	Starke
Fildebrandt	Orr	

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Gray	Nielsen
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Babcock	Hinkley	Payne
Bilous	Hoffman	Piquette
Carson	Horne	Renaud
Clark	Kleinstauber	Rosendahl
Connolly	Littlewood	Sabir
Coolahan	Loyola	Schreiner
Cortes-Vargas	Luff	Shepherd
Dach	Malkinson	Sucha
Dang	McKitrick	Sweet
Drever	McLean	Turner
Eggen	McPherson	Westhead
Feehan	Miller	Woollard
Fitzpatrick	Miranda	
Totals:	For – 17	Against – 41

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Chair: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. It gives me pleasure to rise at this time to move an amendment. I have the requisite number of copies for distribution. While the copies are being distributed, I'll give some background remarks to this particular amendment.

11:10

The amendment appears rather long, but in point of fact the salient point of this amendment is at the very bottom, where it deals specifically with operational deficit. In my discussions with constituents and in other places around the province the area that has created by far the most concern is the abandonment in this budget of the 20-plus-year-old policy of not borrowing for operations; in other words, running a balanced budget. In some years even running a balanced budget on the operational side means dipping into the contingency fund. You know, in point of fact, I guess it could be argued that it's not truly balanced. That debate is one that I think we could have at another time, but it means that operationally, basically, you have the funds to pay for day-to-day expenditures and that you're not borrowing for day-to-day expenditures.

I think one of the things that fundamentally separates the various parties within the House is how debt is to be handled and the idea that there is good debt and bad debt. In my view, good debt is the kind of debt that is an investment and that will pay off in the long run in terms of building the economy and providing the necessary infrastructure for public services going forward. That, to me, is good debt in a number of ways, not the least of which is that it means that infrastructure that is needed – schools, hospitals, roads – can be built when it's needed or at least closer to when it's needed and that we don't have the situation where the economy has a false brake placed on it because of lack of critical infrastructure.

You know, just in that regard, I'd like to make mention of a conversation I had with a state legislator when I was on a Pacific NorthWest Economic Region trip to the capital of Alaska, Juneau, in January. Parenthetically, it was interesting. There were a number of different members of our caucus who travelled to different things, and I found it somewhat humorous that I was chosen to go to Juneau in January, but that was the nature of the beast. It was very interesting, though, in that I met with the chair of their state Legislature's finance committee, and I also met with the state's Governor.

We often hear about Alaska and its permanent fund. The permanent fund is now somewhat in excess of \$50 billion. We talked a little bit about operational spending versus capital spending. I asked the question: "You've got a \$50 billion permanent

fund. Do you borrow for capital expenditures? Do you take on capital debt? You've got this huge permanent fund." The reply I got from the chair of the finance committee of the governing party was: "Well, of course we borrow. You'd have to be a moron not to borrow for capital." I found that an interesting statement. I said, "Well, why would you borrow when you have all this cash in the permanent fund?" They said: "But the permanent fund is earning us 6, 7, 8 per cent, and we can borrow at 2, 3 per cent. Basically, what we do is that we borrow, we build the necessary infrastructure, and we go from there." Now, I would argue, based on my casual observation from being there for two or three days, that they don't do nearly enough borrowing for critical infrastructure. My assessment of the infrastructure in Alaska was that it was woefully inadequate, but that's a discussion for another time.

The discussion that we're concerned about today and the discussion that Albertans are vitally concerned about is the notion of borrowing for operations. This, to me, is a fundamental fiscal error. Operations need to be funded out of day-to-day revenues, and even in the worst-case scenario, where day-to-day revenues have a precipitous fall, as we're experiencing this year, there needs to be contingency fund savings to pay off and to be able to soften that blow.

We hear about a shock absorber quite often from the other side in describing this budget. Well, the purpose of having a contingency fund is so that you indeed do that shock absorbing. My concern with this budget is that we're going to hit rock bottom on the springs in less than a year and a half, and then the shocks are gone. Then the shock absorbers are no longer in the vehicle that Albertans are riding in, and every bump that we hit we are going to feel very, very firmly because the \$8.3 billion that was turned over to this government by the previous government in the contingency fund will have been blown through.

I just want to clarify that for my friends in the Official Opposition when they say that we've blown through our savings. In point of fact, at the time that this government took over, there was \$8.3 billion still in the contingency fund. Granted, not as high as \$17 billion, when it topped out, but still \$8.3 billion. Now, the rate at which they're depleting that fund is frightening, I would certainly agree, and it's a concern to Albertans. Not only will the \$8.3 billion be gone, but there is absolutely zero plan to rebuild the savings whatsoever over the course of the next three years.

Operational deficits are indeed an enemy to all of us. Operational deficits do not assist us. They're bad debt. They're debt to run your day-to-day operations. In terms of your day-to-day household expenses, it's borrowing money to keep the lights on. It's borrowing money for day-to-day expenses, and that simply increases the spiral of debt and deficit.

You know, we here in this party call ourselves fiscal conservatives, but we're also fiscally pragmatic people. That means, when we're pragmatic, that we take on reasonable and judicious levels of debt for capital spending, for capital investments, and we have a plan to pay it back. That does distinguish us, I think, from both the party of the Official Opposition as well as the government party in terms that there it's borrow for everything, here it's borrow for nothing, and we're saying: no, no; Albertans believe we should borrow judiciously for those things that you need that will build the economy.

Madam Chair, borrowing for everything, especially borrowing for operations, is not a good plan. Therefore, this amendment calls for that, and I would encourage all members to support the amendment as presented.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm going to speak to this amendment in a forward-looking way. Sometimes this House – and I'm a guilty party to this – focuses too much on the sins of the past. Certainly, the vast majority of people who count themselves as Wildrosers today counted themselves once upon a time as Ralph Klein Conservatives. Certainly, there was a divergence of opinion at some point.

When I speak about historical examples, I'm not meaning to dwell on the past or to try and hurt in any way the current members of the third party but as historical lessons. We also speak favourably of much of the past as well. We don't necessarily mean it as a commendation for the third party either. We speak favourably of the past for some things, but we also condemn the past for others. We're not going to try and play the blame game today. We need to focus on going forward, what the government today is doing, so bear in mind that when I speak of historical examples here, it's meant as lessons from the past for the future.

I thank the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster for bringing this amendment forward. I believe it's meant with the best of intentions; however, it is quite problematic. The new government has inherited a small contingency account relative to its historical levels, but it has also inherited \$14 billion of debt and a trajectory that would have taken on significantly more debt. There is good debt, and there is bad debt, and I think we may differ in our opinions of good debt and bad debt.

Now, governments like to say that, well, businesses take on debt, so we can take on debt, too, but when businesses take on debt, smart businesses take on debt for assets that earn a return. A widget maker might buy a machine that helps him make widgets, and that can earn a return. When governments take on debt, the vast majority of that debt is for assets that do not make a return. They might be valuable assets in their own right, but they do not earn a financial, tangible return. Schools might have long-term intangible returns on them, fire stations might have long-term intangible returns on them, but they are not cash assets. Assets that make returns are assets like, for instance, a toll road that would earn a cash return. That would be a more reasonable comparison to private-sector debt taken on by businesses. If an asset does not earn a financial return, then by a business definition it is not good debt.

11:20

This amendment does make this bill slightly less worse, but it does perpetuate something that could potentially make it worse. Again not intending to offend members of the third party, we've had a significant problem in this province for years now where we've changed the definition of a balanced budget to make it called balanced. I would be enthusiastic about this amendment if the word "operational" was stricken out and replaced with "consolidated." When your net financial assets decline, you're running a deficit. When you are poorer one year than you were the year before, when you have less money to your name and more liabilities to your name on net, you are running a deficit.

Now, nothing under that definition of a deficit, net financial assets, precludes a government from borrowing as long as they're saving more in that year than they're borrowing. That is change in net financial assets, and that was a tried-and-true definition of how we calculated the fiscal health of this province through most of the 1990s. It was straightforward. You could disagree with the government's policies of the day – are they spending too much, or are they spending too little? – whatever side of the fence you stood on, but at least you knew where the government stood.

We attempted to address this issue around operational deficits in our first amendment put forward by the Official Opposition. For reasons I don't fully comprehend, members that I would hope to

agree with on some things could not find themselves agreeable. My concern with this is that limiting this merely to operational allows governments to pretend that that's the only measure that matters. That's the problem. It matters more than just our operational spending. This year our net financial assets will decline by a record \$8.7 billion. That is the largest deficit in the history of this province. When I say \$8.7 billion, I almost feel that I have to put my pinky to my lip; \$8.7 billion. It is by far the largest deficit in the history of this province, but that's not just an operational deficit. That is our consolidated deficit. That is our net change in financial assets.

If you run an operational surplus but you're borrowing \$8 billion a year, even to do good things with that money, it's not sustainable. You can't do it forever, and you can't continue to tell Albertans that you're somehow running a surplus when you're borrowing more money than you're saving year after year after year. Eventually you've got to pay the piper. Eventually the bill comes due, and unfortunately we see no interest from the members on the other side to ever pay the bill. They're interested in letting someone else clean up the mess when they've left office. They just want to kick the can down the road forever.

I would encourage more members of the caucus that put this forward to speak to the issue. It tears me in different directions. It makes Bill 4 slightly less worse on paper, but my concern is that if we focus only on operational, we miss the big picture. We miss the forest for the trees when we focus only on operational and not the consolidated budget. Even if you believe in taking on debt, you can't do it forever. Eventually you have to pay. You have to balance the consolidated deficit.

I thank the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster for his comments. I may not agree with them all or even many of them, but I believe they're thoughtful, though, and meant with the best of intentions. I would encourage a member of that caucus to perhaps provide more context and tell us why the fiscal conservatives of this party should consider supporting this amendment.

Thank you.

The Chair: I'll recognize the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, followed by Calgary-Currie.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Madam Chair, very much. You know, while my Teutonic friend up the way here and I share some background things, we do have some differences in some areas. I will say that this whole debate as to the difference in determining whether it's a consolidated deficit or an operational deficit – you know, I come from the business world. I fully understand the separation between a balance sheet and a statement of income. To mix the two, as he is doing, is certainly not a practice that is done within business. It's certainly not a practice that's done within municipalities. When we present these budgets to municipalities, they understand full well the idea of an operational budget, and they understand full well the idea of a capital budget and capital expenditures and that sort of thing.

You know, I suspect that in the time that we have to debate here and given that in Committee of the Whole we can go back and forth and speak as many times as we like, we're not likely going to come to agreement on that issue. So I'm going to just say, "You know what? We're going to agree to disagree on that side of things."

I do want to take issue, though, with a comment that was made. I just find this one absolutely astounding. From time to time we get some absolutely astounding comments from over here. The astounding comment that we got this time was that a school is not a good investment, that it doesn't provide an economic return. The suggestion that you cannot, you know, get a direct dollar return on investing in things like schools is, to me, just astounding. One of

the things that we have as a huge economic advantage in this province is the fact that we have a well-educated workforce. In order to have an economy that can produce at a rate as our economy does, a GDP per capita that is 50 per cent over the national average, part of the reason we can do that is not just the energy we have in the ground. It's the energy that we have above the ground. That energy, quite frankly, is fuelled by our young people who are trained in, I still say, some of the best schools in the country. Obviously, you always want to strive for improvement.

The other thing that we have is outstanding postsecondary institutions in this province. We have world-class universities and colleges in this province. We have universities and colleges and research institutions that do world-class work that bring researchers from around the world. All of that – to build those universities, to build those colleges, to build those schools – costs a certain amount of money, and that's largely supported by government funding. We're saying that it makes sense from time to time to borrow to do that because, quite frankly, if you wait until you've got the cash between the cushions of the couch, you're going to have to wait a long time.

I'm no fan of debt, just as my friend from Strathmore-Brooks is not a fan of debt either. You know, as a personal example, I was debt free up until about six years ago, when my two sons began attending university and decided that they didn't want to live in residence anymore.

An Hon. Member: And then you took this job.

Dr. Starke: Yeah. And then I took on this job. That didn't help.

You know, they went to university and didn't want to live in residence anymore, so my wife and I along with our sons purchased properties both in Edmonton and Calgary and – oh, my goodness – we took on debt. We were no longer debt free. You know what? It was the right thing to do. It was the right thing to do because we're building equity, and they have a place to live. Do we get a financial return on that purchase? Maybe one day. Maybe. We'll see. Possibly. But the truth of the matter is that those are investments that you make. No, we're not debt free anymore. And you know what? I'm okay with that. It was a smart debt, and, yeah, we have a plan to repay it. We will eventually repay that debt, and we'll get there. In the meantime we have a place to live. Best of all, we bought a two-bedroom place for my son, and I moved in with him when I got elected in 2012. They talk about kids moving in with their parents; well, I pulled the switch on him. I'm really glad we got a two-bedroom place because I punted him into the smaller bedroom.

11:30

Ladies and gentlemen, we can have this discussion for a long, long time, Madam Chair, about debt, good debt or bad debt, but it's just astounding to me this notion that investment in critical government infrastructure – governments aren't supposed to be in the business of business, or at least that's what we get told over here on a regular basis. Governments shouldn't be picking winners and losers. They shouldn't be in the business of doing business, right? Governments don't inherently invest in things that make money – we get that – because if they did, then they'd be in the business of doing business. But governments do invest in the things that fuel an economy and in the things that improve quality of life.

The things that improve quality of life in Alberta, I would submit to you, are infrastructure like roads, schools, hospitals, and other critical infrastructure that Albertans need. We can have an argument back and forth as to whether those investments at certain times in our past kept up with the growth of Alberta. I think that's

a discussion that we could get involved in. But the bottom line is that with the growth we are still experiencing – despite the economic downturn, we're still the fastest growing population province in the nation – we need new infrastructure, and borrowing needs to be done to do that. I think there have to be some limitations on that, and there obviously has to be a plan to pay it back.

This particular amendment, Madam Chair, deals specifically with operational deficit, the day-to-day expenses and the day-to-day revenue. My concern is that in Bill 4 we have made a departure from the policy that day-to-day expenses shall not exceed day-to-day revenue, and we're even allowing day-to-day revenue to be augmented by contingency funds, so we're saying that we recognize that there are going to be some years where it's going to be hard to make that balance but that with careful and judicious use of the contingency fund, you can still make the balance work.

Quite frankly, I'm again astounded by my hon. Teutonic friend up the way that he would suggest that it's a bad thing to not balance that spending. You know, to me, that strikes me as a little bit contradictory to what their stated objective is, and that is living within their means.

Madam Chair, I would certainly encourage members on all sides of the House to consider supporting this. I would even encourage members of the government caucus to consider supporting this. I think that a lot of your constituents would like to see you adopt an approach that is somewhat more prudent and somewhat more cautious and, indeed, allows for some flexibility in operational spending because you still can dip into the contingency account but not drain it completely in the space of less than a year and a half.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Calgary-Currie, followed by Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Madam Chair and the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster. Hearing you talk, it appears that we maybe have some things in common, which is always encouraging. You spoke about the need for the government to invest in the things that Albertans need, and you talked about items like capital in schools, which we've often on this side of the House chatted about as well. With those things like schools and roads and other capital expenditures, there also needs to be the professionals that Albertans rely on in order to staff those schools, hospitals, police stations, and so on.

For me, with this amendment, you know, I understand where the member is coming from. I don't think I necessarily agree with the limitations. When we have a situation like we're in currently, where we've had a very dramatic drop in the price of oil, which previous governments have used as a very large portion of our operating budget, when that suddenly shrinks, we have \$6 billion that all of a sudden we need to find. There would be multiple ways you could deal with that. One of them would be to dramatically cut back on services or dramatically increase taxes.

Now, we just had an election, where all of the various parties put their platforms forward. Our party's platform was that we would act as a shock absorber in times of economic downturn, and other parties had various versions of their platform which suggested that we don't do that. I think Albertans spoke very clearly on what direction they wanted the government to go on this matter.

So, for me and my constituents, I would say that I will not be supporting this amendment because I believe it would adversely limit the government's ability to act as a shock absorber in times of economic difficulty. I think Albertans want us to act as a shock absorber in times of economic difficulty, so unfortunately I will not be supporting this amendment.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I was briefly encouraged there by my constituency neighbour from Calgary-Currie. I thought maybe you were edging towards voting in favour of this amendment right to the end there. You had us right there, right at the end. It was a surprise ending.

Dr. Starke: No. It's not that big a surprise.

Mr. Clark: Yeah. Maybe not that big a surprise.

I rise to speak enthusiastically in favour of this amendment. I think it's thoughtful and absolutely appropriate. I think debt is totally appropriate if it's well managed. Capital debt is absolutely appropriate if it's well managed. We've talked about this at length. Government is government; business is business. Those are two different things. We get a return, a social return, on investment in appropriate infrastructure: in schools, in hospitals, in flood mitigation, in transit, in roads. All of those things provide a return to our society and to our communities, and for investing in those things, the government is to be commended. I'm absolutely onside with those things.

I would challenge our friends in the Wildrose caucus – hello; nice to see both of you – to tell us how you would do it. What, specifically, would you cut to ensure that the budget is balanced? What, specifically, would you do? You may or may not be aware that we in our caucus put out a shadow budget. We did. It's true. All of us – all of us – in the corner here put out a shadow budget, detailed, three full PowerPoint slides of numbers. It is a remarkable thing to behold. But the point is that we are very clear and very specific about what we would do. What we do in that shadow budget, my friends, is that we bottom out precisely as my hon. colleague from Vermilion-Lloydminster says, and we do not at any point borrow for operating in our shadow budget, which I think is absolutely vital.

I note that in today's *Calgary Herald*, updated precisely at 8:36 a.m., is a headline that says that oil prices may not rally until 2017. Uh-oh. What happens? What happens? This budget presumes that our top line revenue in this province increases 28 per cent between this fiscal year and 2019-2020. How does that happen if oil prices do not increase substantially?

I also note that the budget projections on west Texas intermediate for 2017 are \$68 a barrel.

Mr. Rodney: How about western Canadian select?

Mr. Clark: Well, I don't have western Canadian select on my PowerPoint slide. However, I'm sure that if we did some math, we'd find out. Regardless, western Canadian select is also down significantly.

An Hon. Member: Welcome back.

Mr. Clark: I can repeat some of the things I said earlier if . . .

Mr. Cooper: It's okay. We heard you.

Mr. Clark: All right. Perfect. But now I've lost my place. Here we are.

I think what this amendment does and why I'm so enthusiastically in favour of it is that it creates a floor below which the government cannot go, and they need to then make hard choices, very difficult choices about spending. That does not need to mean significant cuts to front-line services. What it does mean is fiscal discipline. It means strong management. It means getting more with less, just like Alberta households are doing, just like Alberta

businesses are doing. All around the province it means doing more with less, and I want to see much more of that from this government; otherwise, we're in an awful lot of trouble.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

11:40

The Chair: Any other speakers to the amendment?

Seeing none, we will call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A4 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:41 a.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:

Barnes	Fildebrandt	Orr
Clark	Gotfried	Panda
Cooper	Hanson	Rodney
Cyr	Hunter	Schneider
Drysdale	Loewen	Starke
Ellis	McIver	

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Hinkley	Nielsen
Babcock	Hoffman	Payne
Bilous	Horne	Piquette
Carson	Kleinsteuber	Renaud
Connolly	Littlewood	Rosendahl
Coolahan	Loyola	Sabir
Cortes-Vargas	Luff	Schmidt
Dach	Malkinson	Schreiner
Dang	McCuaig-Boyd	Shepherd
Drever	McKitrick	Sucha
Eggen	McLean	Sweet
Feehan	McPherson	Turner
Fitzpatrick	Miller	Westhead
Gray	Miranda	Woollard

Totals: For – 17 Against – 42

[Motion on amendment A4 lost]

The Chair: We're back on the bill. Are there any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill?

Mr. Fildebrandt: Madam Chair, I'm sure the members opposite are very pleased to hear me rise again with another helpful amendment.

Some Hon. Members: Hooray.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Unfortunately, this is not going to be a puffball question.

"Hooray" is copyrighted by the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. He will be coming for increased royalties soon.

The last amendment, put forward by the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster, was an attempt to make the bill less bad. It was not an amendment that we were fully in agreement with, but it was one that moves the ball in the right direction or actually, in this case, holds it where it is against the direction the government wants to go. Alas, there are more votes on the government side, but it is our duty as the opposition to put forward thoughtful amendments to the budget and to Bill 4 enabling that budget.

With that, I will come to my latest and greatest amendment to this bill. I will table another amendment to this bill.

The Chair: Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that Bill 4, An Act to Implement Various Tax Measures and to Enact the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act, be amended in schedule 1 in section 3 by adding the following after subsection (2):

(3) A Bill that proposes to increase the ratio of debt to GDP referred to in subsection (1) may not be introduced in the Legislative Assembly unless the increase in the ratio is approved by a majority of the electors who vote in a referendum under this section.

(4) The Lieutenant Governor in Council may order a referendum under this section and sections 4 to 11 of the Constitutional Referendum Act are deemed to apply.

(5) An order under subsection (4) is deemed to be an order under section 5 of the Constitutional Referendum Act.

In English, Madam Chair, what we are saying here is that if the NDP government or any subsequent government wishes to raise the debt ceiling beyond the 15 per cent that they are proposing right now, they will have to go to the people to do it. We are proposing to move this soft debt ceiling, a ceiling so soft that we are now looking like the U.S. Congress regularly raising our debt ceiling irresponsibly, to a hard ceiling. We are proposing that if the NDP believe their own rhetoric and that they will only go to 15 per cent of GDP and not exceed that in debt, they should put their money where their mouth is. They should be willing to go to the people for their approval.

The debt ceiling is not a laughing matter. Well, actually, perhaps it is because it's so flexible and we change it so regularly now. But it shouldn't be a laughing matter. It should be serious. If Albertans truly support taking on more debt to finance the bloated spending of this government, then the NDP could go to the people and ask for their consent in a referendum.

11:50

This amendment will put teeth on the debt ceiling. It is supposed to be an absolute limit, not a target or suggestion for the Minister of Finance or the government of the day to change willy-nilly whenever they're going to get close to it. This eliminates the temptation to overspend and puts the power of the debt ceiling in the hands of Albertans. It takes it out of the hands of politicians and puts it in the hands of the people, who will actually pay for it. Albertans deserve to have a say on whether or not we incur more debt, which eventually they will have to pay back. The people in this House may find it easy to vote for this and for that, but the people outside this House, who have to pay for it, may have a different view.

This government did not campaign on taking on \$50 billion of debt. They have no mandate for it. They never said to Albertans during the election that we'll balance the budget in 2019-ish. They never said that we would take on \$47.4 billion of debt-ish. They never said that we would raise the debt ceiling to 15 per cent of GDP-ish. They promised Albertans a balanced budget in 2018. They never said that we would take on this kind of debt.

Now the NDP are trying to vote themselves a new mandate and give themselves one that the people did not give them. Well, if they want to do that, it's difficult to stop them with the numbers in this House. We can't defeat their budget. We can't defeat their bills although there is one that is going to come mighty close, I think.

But they can vote to show confidence in their own proposal. If the government members were to vote to require a referendum to raise the debt ceiling beyond what they're proposing, then they would be showing confidence in themselves. They would be showing confidence that they believe they'll actually not exceed 15 per cent or that if they do, they will have the support of the people to go beyond that.

DBRS has predicted, however, that the government will run right through their debt limit by 2020, one year after the next likely election. It is a certainty that unless oil prices have a massive recovery, they will not meet their revenue targets. The Parliamentary Budget Officer in Ottawa has projections that are wildly less optimistic than the government's.

Now, they've brought forward the largest tax increase in the province's history, a \$3 billion carbon tax on everything, a backdoor PST that they have no mandate for, a tax that they never told Albertans they would impose on them, that they will make middle-class and working-class Albertans pay in a non revenue-neutral structure. Perhaps that will help them to meet those wild revenue projections. If the members opposite believe that they can meet those revenue projections and not exceed 15 per cent of GDP, then they should have every confidence in voting for this.

In summary, what we need here is to ensure that the debt ceiling is not a glass ceiling, that can be easily broken whenever the government feels it's convenient. The debt ceiling should be something that we take seriously, not something that we amend every year or two. I hope and will work and fight to ensure that this government does not exceed its 15 per cent of GDP debt ceiling, but I fear that they will. If they have confidence in themselves not to do that, then they can vote for this. Let's take a critical decision like this, that is made too casually by politicians, out of the hands of politicians and put it straight to the people.

I encourage all members of this House to vote for this amendment. Thank you.

The Chair: Hon. members, pursuant to Standing Order 4(3) the committee will now rise and report.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Cross.

Miranda: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 4. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Bilous: Yes. Madam Speaker, I move that we adjourn till 1:30 this afternoon.

[The Assembly adjourned at 11:56 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, December 2, 2015

Day 27

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

First Session

Wanner, Hon. Robert E., Medicine Hat (ND), Speaker
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Feehan, Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (ND), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Ellis	Taylor
McKitrick	Turner
Renaud	

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

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Carson	Hunter
Connolly	Jansen
Coolahan	Piquette
Dach	Schreiner
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Anderson, W.	Littlewood
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Drysdale	Stier
Fraser	Strankman
Hinkley	

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Coolahan	Nielsen
Cooper	Schneider
Ellis	Starke
Hanson	van Dijken
Kazim	Woollard
Loyola	

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Clark	Rosendahl
Dang	Stier
Drysdale	Sucha
Horne	Woollard
Kazim	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, December 2, 2015

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Are there any school groups for welcoming today?
Hearing none, the hon. Member for Red Deer-North.

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to rise today and introduce on your behalf two friends of yours who reside in my constituency of Red Deer-North. I would ask that Mr. Buzz Vander Vliet and Ms Wendy Klassen, who are seated in your gallery, rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade.

Mr. Bilous: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour to rise and introduce three absolutely fantastic constituents of mine, the Lewin family: Joel, Jennie, and Sapphira. They're here and have been quite excited to view the Magna Carta and have been talking about it for quite some time. We'll be enjoying that this afternoon, I would imagine. I would ask them to rise and please receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly Sharon Stevens and her daughter Jodie Stevens. Sharon is a long-time supporter of mine, and she was my community assistant when I was an alderman for the city of Calgary. She's also an arts activist and the executive director of the Alberta Media Arts Alliance Society. Sharon also works at International Avenue BRZ on 17th Avenue, helping to animate that avenue. Jodie is currently working as a customer service rep at Access Calgary, a specialized transportation service. She volunteers her time as an advocate for people with mental health challenges in Calgary. I'd ask them both to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Ms Woollard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly several members of our caucus outreach team, led by director Garett Spelliscy and joined here today by Angela Liu, Ewar Jalal, and Mustafa Ali. I'd like to welcome them. The outreach team works hard to ensure that our caucus is supported as we work to connect with our constituencies, whether it's through events, meetings, or even pancake breakfasts. I'd ask them all to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.
The hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw. No guests.
How about I try Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: I'm here, Mr. Speaker. It is a tremendous honour to rise and introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly the two people who keep my constituency office ticking over. Jodi Christensen and Simone Lee are here as part of the constituency

team, winter session. It is a tremendous honour to introduce them to you. In the six months that we've worked together in our constituency office, we've developed one heck of a team. I would ask that they please now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Northern Hills. No guests today?

Well, I do know, as I've got a lot of cards, that I'll start here. The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed an honour to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly two farm housewives from my constituency, Tanis and Lynne Longshore. If they would please rise after I introduce my marvelous constituency assistant, Laura McDonald, who also, I believe, is in the gallery today. I'd ask that they please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you one of our constituency assistants from the Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo and Fort McMurray-Conklin constituency office, Meghan Sereda. She has a background in environmental technologies, and she was born and raised in Fort McMurray. This is her first time observing a session. I'd like her to please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

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

Mr. Malkinson: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Christopher McMillan. Christopher McMillan has contributed to numerous NDP election campaigns over the years and is also an advocate for various social justice issues in Calgary. Christopher is also one of my CAs and is a wonderful asset to my office. Those of you who have ever seen me speaking in my local riding will notice that I often speak a lot more poetically and with more enthusiastic use of a thesaurus. Part of that would be Christopher's fault. I'd like him to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome for all the work he does.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Schneider: This is regarding a tabling. Sorry, Mr. Speaker. My writing is . . .

The Speaker: Mine is absolutely perfect. They never have to . . .
[laughter]

How about we try the hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly some of the strongest advocates for health care in the great constituency of Airdrie. Please rise as I say your name. I believe you're behind me. Michelle and Jeff Bates. Michelle is first and foremost a loving mother, who has suffered a great tragedy due to the lack of an urgent health care facility in Airdrie. Mr. and Mrs. Bates lost their son Lane, an avoidable tragedy. They are joined by Michelle's mother, Lucinda de Klerk. Michelle is the chair of the Airdrie Health Foundation and is here today to urge the government to build a 24-hour emergency care facility in our community. Mackenzie Murphy. Mackenzie is Miss Teenage Airdrie, and she's an antibullying and mental health advocate. Kim and Kim Titus. The Tituses lost their

son, who also was one of my childhood friends, to suicide earlier this year. They are embarking on a campaign to remove the stigma surrounding mental health. They are also joined by other members of the Airdrie Health Foundation, Dr. Tammy Paulgaard-McKnight and Stan Grad, a member of the Alberta Order of Excellence, who is a tireless advocate for entrepreneurship, leadership, and philanthropy. She's also joined by several hard-working community advocates. I now ask all of Airdrie that is here to stand and up and please receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a great pleasure for me to rise and introduce to you and to the House a neighbour and friend, Cheryl Cortina, who comes from the beautiful hills of the northern Philippines. She's been here for several years and is now a permanent resident, working as a nursing assistant in long-term care. Nursing is her passion, and she continues to support her family and her 12-year-old back in the Philippines. Cheryl, rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not sure if I see my guests here, but I'd like to introduce them on the chance that they're behind me. It's my honour today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two guests joining us from the CNIB, John McDonald and Ben McConnell. John is the executive director and regional vice-president of the CNIB, who recently announced the My Wish Is advocacy campaign, asking Albertans to tweet their support for the visually impaired using the hash tag #mywishis. Ben is a strong advocate for his community and the CNIB who is currently finishing his articling after recently completing his law degree at the University of Victoria, and he is also a motivational speaker. John and Ben are also both constituents from my wonderful constituency of Stony Plain, and if they're here, I'd ask them to both stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

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

Ms Kazim: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Janice Fraser. Janice works as my constituency assistant at the Calgary-Glenmore office. She is a very hard-working and dynamic woman who has been performing her duties diligently to serve Calgary-Glenmore. I'm proud of her work and would like to thank her for her excellent services to the constituents of Calgary-Glenmore. I would now ask her to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is an honour and a privilege to introduce to all the members of this Assembly a special guest of mine in the gallery this afternoon, Miss Terri-Lynn Skinner. In grade 7 she became the vice-president in the Britannia junior high school Kiwanis group. Now in grade 9, this is her second year as president, and for all three of those years many activities for the students at Britannia have come to life and fruition through her tireless and dedicated efforts. She is an excellent ambassador for all the students in Alberta and is willing to serve in roles of leadership. I ask that she now rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: West Yellowhead.

Mr. Rosendahl: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you two of my constituency staff from Hinton, my constituency manager, Kathleen Westergaard, and constituency assistant Leah Sedgwick. If they could please rise and receive the warm welcome of the House. I'm not sure that they're in the gallery behind me.

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

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly three guests from the Autism Edmonton society. Since 1971 Autism Edmonton has been providing services and support to people in the community who are living with autism spectrum disorder. Autism Edmonton has become known as the go-to source for families, individuals, and professionals looking for information about autism. Joining us in the gallery today are Hendriatta Wong, the executive director of Autism Edmonton; and Susan Angus, who is a director of Autism Edmonton. Joining them is Gino Ferri, chair of Act Now for Adults with Autism. I ask them all to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I suppose this is my first introduction to the House. We know I don't like to speak here too much. I want to introduce to you and to the members of this Assembly, if they could rise, my two constituency assistants, Heather Pigott and John Hilton-O'Brien. John was a founding member of the Wildrose Party, helped to write our constitution many, actually not too many, years ago, I suppose. John is my assistant for Strathmore. Heather is my assistant for Brooks. They've been swamped by e-mails, phone calls, and petitions coming to the office over the last few weeks, and I really want to thank them and recognize them in front of the House. I'd ask this House to give them its traditional warm welcome.

The Speaker: Welcome, to all of you.

Are there any other guests to be introduced today?

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to rise today and introduce someone who is very important in my life and in the lives of the people of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. She has been a faithful servant of the people of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills and, in fact, Albertans through her work as a constituency assistant. This summer I had the pleasure of marrying her. That came out wrong. I had the pleasure of performing the service in which she was wed. I'm not sure, but my wife, I think, is coming today as well, so things could have got awkward quickly. Anyway, we should just move on and ask Brenda Berreth to rise and receive the traditional welcome.

The Speaker: I was wondering, hon. member, how you were going to account for the three children.

Members' Statements

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

Farmers

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On the eighth day God looked down on his planned paradise and said: I need a caretaker. So God made a farmer. God said: I need somebody willing to get up before dawn, milk cows, work all day in the fields, milk cows again, eat

supper, and then go to town and stay past midnight at a meeting of the school board. So God made a farmer. God said: I need somebody with arms strong enough to wrestle a calf and yet gentle enough to deliver his own grandchild, somebody to call hogs, tame cantankerous machinery, and come home hungry. So God made a farmer. God said: I need somebody willing to sit up all night with a newborn colt and watch it die then dry his eyes and say, "Maybe next year," and I need somebody who can shape an axe handle from a persimmon sprout, shoe a horse with a hunk of car tire, someone who can make harness out of haywire, feed sacks, and shoe scraps and who at planting time and harvest season will finish his 40-hour week by Tuesday at noon and then, in pain from tractor back, put in another 72 hours. So God made a farmer.

God said: I need somebody willing to ride the ruts at double speed to get the hay in ahead of the rain clouds and yet stop in midfield and race to help when he sees the first smoke from a neighbour's place. So God made a farmer. God said: I need somebody strong enough to clear trees and heave bales yet gentle enough to tame lambs and wean pigs, someone who will stop his mower for an hour to splint the broken leg of a meadowlark; it had to be somebody who'd plow deep and straight and not cut corners, somebody to seed, weed, feed, breed, and rake and disk and plow and plant and tie the fleece and strain the milk and replenish the self-feeder and finish a hard week's work with a five-mile drive to church, somebody who would bale a family together with the soft, strong bonds of sharing, who would laugh and then sigh and then reply with smiling eyes when his son says that he wants to spend his life doing what dad does. So God made a farmer.

Thank you.

1:50

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

Farm and Ranch Worker Legislation

Mr. Jean: I want to thank the agriculture minister for the commitment he made to farmers yesterday to work to stop Bill 6. The ag minister attended a town hall in Red Deer, and did he ever get an earful. He now knows first-hand what a mess the government has made with this. He admitted to the farmers that this is an odd way of making laws. He later told farmers that he would advise the NDP caucus to pull the bill. When is the Premier going to listen to farmers, listen to ranchers, and now listen to her agriculture minister and kill Bill 6?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. This is a prime example of the kind of miscommunication that's being spread around this issue.

I have to say that I want to thank the agriculture minister for showing leadership and coming to the meetings as well as the Minister of Municipal Affairs and the Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour. I think that they've been treating the individuals who have been raising valid concerns with the utmost respect as opposed to what's happened with the staff from the office of the MLA for Chestermere-Rocky View, who referred to one of the people who wrote in about concerns as not superliterate. I think that's disrespectful, and I hope that the Leader of the Official Opposition asks the member to apologize.

Mr. Jean: I am prepared to apologize for this government in their handling of Bill 6.

It is so clear that this government just doesn't understand farming and ranching. Family farms and ranches may be small, but they are very sophisticated operations. They pay attention to markets and commodity prices. They pay attention to taxes and organize themselves to minimize their tax bill. They put family members on the payroll and give them T4s because that's the smart thing to do. That's just one of the many reasons why this government's amendments won't work. When will this government admit that it doesn't know anything at all about farming or ranching and kill this bill?

Ms Hoffman: I know that when you make a mistake and you disrespect somebody and you call them illiterate, you should apologize, Mr. Speaker. I am shocked that the member opposite will not take responsibility for what was done and apologize to the person who's been raising valid concerns in a way that they wanted to reach out to elected officials. Apologize, and let's move on.

Mr. Jean: Right now the jobs minister will be at a Bill 6 come-and-be-told meeting in Okotoks. It won't be pretty. There will not be enough space for all of the ranchers that want to attend. Convoys of farm equipment actually started going there this morning at first light. The minister will hear that everyone involved in agriculture thinks this bill needs to be pulled. She will hear that this government just doesn't get it. Tomorrow farmers will once again rally at the Legislature. They want this NDP government to kill the bill. Why won't the minister listen to farmers and ranchers and kill Bill 6?

Ms Hoffman: The meeting is ongoing. The meeting was moved to the parking lot to accommodate all of the people who wanted to attend. I have to say that that's respectful, Mr. Speaker. When you show up, you have a dialogue, and you treat people with respect as opposed to calling them illiterate. That is the way to actually consult with people and to make sure that you find good solutions. [interjections] The members know that when people have asked us to put things in writing, we're prepared to do that. We have amendments that we'd like to propose. We need to get to the committee stage so that we can amend the bill and put in writing exactly what this bill means.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I don't know where it came from, but I've heard members' first names used. I want to remind you about refraining from that. It was on this side of the House, by the way.

The second question. The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Energy Policies

Mr. Jean: Albertans know that government should not pick winners and losers. It now appears that this is exactly what happened with the climate change panel. There is a media report that four oil companies got a side deal in exchange for endorsing the Premier's initiative. When combined with the royalty panel hinting that some segments of the energy industry will be wiped out by these royalty changes, it means that many Albertans should be very worried about their jobs. How many energy sector jobs were sold down the river by this government so that the Premier could have window dressing at her announcement?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. I have to say how proud I am that this government was able to pull together two groups that have typically been on opposite sides of an issue for a very long time. That's what leadership is. You get people together who have competing interests, and you find ways to move issues forward. It didn't happen when the member opposite was in Ottawa. It didn't happen with the last

government when they were in power. We brought together environmental NGOs and industry, and we've got a plan moving forward that they're proud to support.

Mr. Jean: The cracks are showing. The oil well drillers say that the carbon tax is rotten. Several industry leaders and companies were left out of the negotiations with the NDP, and to pull it all together, Albertans are getting hammered with a \$3 billion carbon tax that's coming in the back door. It's a PST; let's face it. When governments pick winners and losers, when they dole out special favours to their friends, when they don't consult with everyone, that threatens investments and jobs in Alberta. Why is this government continuing its risky ideological experiments, that are putting so many Alberta jobs at risk?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. There is no secret here. Our plan is public, and it enjoys public support from a wide range of diverse people, groups, and companies, as you could see by the support that was on the stage with the Premier when the announcement was made about how proud we were moving forward. The only person standing alone here is the member opposite.

Mr. Jean: That's how it works when you ask questions. You stand by yourself.

The government has to be aware of the genuine anxiety of the energy industry to the comments coming from the royalty panel. The suggestion that some segments of the energy industry would not be competitive after this NDP government brings in royalty changes is alarming, to say the least. When any segment of the energy industry disappears, that means the loss of thousands and thousands of good Alberta jobs. We've already lost 65,000 jobs this year because of this government, and the government has to avoid job losses. That's your job. Will the Premier promise Albertans that nothing coming out of the royalty review . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Only the opposition thinks that Albertans should not get fair value for their resources. Only the opposition thinks that we should not work with industry to modernize our climate change strategy, to modernize our royalty system for the 21st century, for Albertans today, and for Albertans tomorrow. We are working in partnership. That's what leadership is. Opposition is doing their job in criticizing it even when we get it right. I don't know why they hate oil and gas so much.

An Hon. Member: Why do you hate oil and gas?

Mr. Jean: I don't. I just hate big, corrupt politicians.

An Hon. Member: Worst of all hate corrupt politicians. [interjections]

Mr. Jean: I didn't say that. We all hate [inaudible]. Don't we all hate [inaudible]?

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

The Speaker: I'm sorry. Did I hear a point of order?

Mr. Mason: Yeah.

Alberta Health Services

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, the Health minister has doubled down in her support for Alberta Health Services even though the support directly contradicts the views of her colleagues the Minister of Infrastructure and the Premier herself. Perhaps the Health minister has forgotten her own words on social media before being elected. I quote: people are telling me they want strong, local representation; let's learn from the bad AHS superboard move. To the Health minister: did you suddenly change your mind on this, or did you decide that it was easier to stop listening to the people?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. We made it really clear during the election that our number one commitment was providing stability to the health care system. We've talked to a lot of Albertans about how they feel moving forward. I've certainly had opportunities to review perspectives. Staff have told us that they want to show up at work in the morning knowing who they'll be reporting to in the afternoon. We're going to make sure that we continue to have systems in place to support stability within the system and not create more chaos.

Mr. Barnes: We're amassing quite an impressive list of ministers who were against AHS before they were for it. The Health minister is trying to claim that her conversion to superboard support was based on stability, but Albertans know that AHS is as stable as a house of cards. Just last week the first order of business for the new board was continuing the revolving door of CEOs and administrators. Will the Health minister agree with the colleague right beside her that this is yet another demonstration of systemic inefficiency and administrative chaos?

2:00

Ms Hoffman: I want to thank the CEO of Alberta Health Services for her service to Alberta, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank her for treating the employees, that she's been working with very closely, in an open and transparent way, and part of that is, when you've decided that it's time to move, letting everybody know. I have to say that I really appreciate the professionalism that she's brought to the position, and I wish her all the best moving forward.

Mr. Barnes: Even the outgoing CEO admitted to tensions between her and the board and ministry. For example, the office of the Privacy Commissioner has said that patient record violations are an epidemic in this province. After AHS employees were disciplined for inappropriately accessing patient data, the nursing union called on the CEO to resign, and since September Alberta Health Services has been in a bitter labour dispute with the AUPE. When will the Health minister acknowledge that it's not her calling the shots but the NDP's union handlers?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That certainly is not the case. The buck stops with the minister's office.

I have full confidence in and I've heard nothing but praise for the new Alberta Health Services board that we brought in. We have experts who were former deputy ministers for the government of Canada. We have an expert who was running the Canadian Institute for Health Information. We have an expert in harm reduction, who's been a nurse practitioner working on the front lines in Edmonton. We have experts from the University of Calgary who are coming together and making sure that we have the very best system moving forward. I think that we deserve to give them an opportunity to get

it right. They just had their first meeting yesterday, Mr. Speaker. [interjections]

The Speaker: I'll just check with the table. It was my understanding that there was some time left for the minister. [interjections] Hon. members, the Speaker decides the time here, no one else.

The hon. leader of the third party.

Farm and Ranch Worker Legislation

(continued)

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As an elected official and a former cabinet minister I know that when a minister makes a decision, tables a bill, or speaks in this Chamber, that minister is responsible for the outcome. We had the Health minister today and the jobs minister yesterday or the day before say that the buck stops there. The Premier, on the other hand, blames public service staff – official channels, as they call it – and her ministers and throws them all under the bus for errors around communicating Bill 6. To the Premier: will you show the leadership that Albertans deserve and at least two of your ministers have articulated . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. Your time has run out.

In answer to the question, the hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The Premier is showing great leadership. She's showing leadership on the international stage by going to Paris and standing up for Alberta jobs and standing up for our global economy. She certainly is happy to acknowledge when a mistake was made. There were errors made in communication through official channels. We all own that, and we're getting it right moving forward.

Mr. McIver: Well, maybe the minister can send a memo to the Premier because she needs that message.

The Minister of JSTL spoke yesterday about how we are witnessing "democracy in action" while at the same time Albertans were kicked out of a consultation meeting. Given that for democracy to work, all the people need to be in the room to have their voices heard, will this minister do what is necessary to make sure that everyone that wants to be listened to on Bill 6 will actually be let into the room and then heard?

The Speaker: The Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Unfortunately, the room capacity at the space we were at yesterday could not accommodate everyone, which is why I went outside and stood on a bench for two and a half hours to listen to those farmers, to give them an apology for the miscommunication, and to share with them our commitment to moving an amendment forward to ensure that farm families will not be covered by that bill. We listened to every person that went there, and I'm very proud of the action we took in making that happen.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. McIver: Thank you. Now that the minister has admitted bad planning in the room size, they can do better in the future.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to agree with the agriculture minister when he remarked yesterday that it is odd to introduce a bill first and bring in the rules later. To anyone on the front bench over there: do you support Bill 6 in its current form, or do you think that maybe you should, as the agriculture minister says, acknowledge this isn't the right way to do it, talk to farmers and ranchers, and put it on pause until after that is done?

The Speaker: The Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. We certainly promised better protection for paid farm and ranch workers during the election, and we believe in following through on our commitments. We have heard from farmers loud and clear what their concerns are around protecting the family farm, and we are sorry for that stress. As a result, we will introduce amendments to ensure that farm families will not be covered by this bill. But everyone agrees that safety for paid workers is important, and this bill is focused on bringing those . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Affordable Housing

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Winter is upon us, and with the arrival of beautiful Christmas we also see the arrival of snow. Ice and frost may be enjoyed by many of us, especially those with a home, but it can be a matter of life and death for those with low-income families and without a home. The Alberta plan to end homelessness remained in the lurch for the past four years, and cash-strapped municipalities are all but begging for help. To the minister: at a time when cities are struggling to address the housing needs of Albertans, how can this government justify leaving them high and dry?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the important question. We are making investments in affordable housing units. They haven't met current need. We've inherited over a billion dollars of deferred maintenance and renewal costs, and the stock itself isn't meeting the current demand. I'm proud that we're moving forward with adding more than 800 new social housing and seniors' lodge units as well as renovating and replacing more than 1,900 units across Alberta, but we do need to do more. I'm excited that there is a new federal government, who seems to share a commitment to affordable housing, and we have a new provincial government. We'll work with our municipalities as the three orders to serve the citizens, that we are all responsible to.

Dr. Swann: The province's failure to provide affordable housing is forcing cities to turn to private funders in the middle of a recession. In Calgary the Resolve initiative has brought in private investors to raise \$120 million to build affordable housing for 3,400 vulnerable and homeless Calgarians. To the minister: should municipalities now expect to depend on the private sector, and how does this really develop a sustainable housing plan?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have to commend the Albertans who roll up their sleeves and pitch in and do everything they can to make sure that they are supporting one another, and this is an example of that. I want to thank industry for stepping up. I also have to say that we are investing \$164 million in affordable housing, so that's \$25 million over the actuals from last year. We know that there's need for additional supports in the system. We're certainly moving forward on having a thoughtful plan, but this isn't something that the provincial government is going to do on its own, that the municipal government is going to do on its own, that even the federal government is going to do on

its own. We need to work collaboratively to make sure that we take responsibility and support people in their most basic human needs.

Dr. Swann: This is a fundamental responsibility of government. Given the tremendous savings that it would mean and a commitment to humanity, if housing first means anything, the government has to commit more to housing, not only badly needed infrastructure but investment over the long term, to reduce the costs of homelessness in human terms and in financial terms.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. This morning we listened to amendments that would have required us to make sure that we didn't have any deficits. This is the type of reason why we sometimes need to run deficits, because turning our back on people who are literally out in the cold is not an answer. I do look forward to bringing forward a plan in collaboration with all parties in this House that we can proudly support moving forward.

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

2:10 Renewable Energy

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's new climate leadership plan will strengthen our economy and make Alberta one of the most environmentally responsible energy producers in the world. Many constituents are proud of the government's leadership on this important issue but are worried about having a government setting high goals and not actually being able to follow through on them. To the Minister of Energy: is the recently announced 30 per cent renewables goal an achievable target?

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, absolutely. During the climate change panel, the work they did, they worked with the Alberta electrical system operator, known as AESO, to ensure that plans could be handled. The AESO is a widely regarded body within Canada and has a good core of competent people. They are very confident that this can be established in the next 15 years. So a 30 per cent target is absolutely in range.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that current renewable energy capacity, be it wind, solar, geothermal, or even biomass, all differ greatly, depending on the technology being implemented, to the same minister: what renewable technologies will be able to meet these targets?

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Well, as I mentioned, we have a competitive electricity market, and this will foster competitive forces as we green the grid. We have an abundance of natural resources here in our wind, solar, geothermal, and biomass, and we will be looking at all of those. In the short term we expect to see some action in wind and solar in competitive options, and we'll have more to report on that.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that we are competing for investment for renewable energy, again to the same minister: are we confident that private companies will invest in Alberta under this new architecture?

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you for the question. Very confident. Last week I was in Calgary for three days meeting with industry. We've set out the what. Now we're looking at the how. We met with companies like Enbridge, TransCanada, Suncor, Capital

Power, TransAlta, just to name a few. With companies like these ready to invest as well as ones from around the world, we are confident there will be no shortage of companies. In fact, I was joined on Monday by ATCO, AltaLink, Enbridge, Acciona, and EDF to announce the next steps in our renewable plan.

Urgent Health Care in Airdrie

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, close your eyes and imagine it's after 10 p.m. and a loved one suddenly needs urgent care. For those of us from Airdrie, the worry and fear is that we will not make it in time: will the baby be born on the Deerfoot on our 45-minute commute, or will my child die? This government's critical lack of infrastructure care is hurting communities like Airdrie and resulting in senseless deaths. Can the Minister of Health explain to my constituents here today why a community of 60,000 people does not have access to a 24-hour health care facility?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I grew up in a community that was 30 minutes away from the closest hospital, actually 50 kilometres, so it was 30 minutes away. I have to say that when I was on that highway, I knew that there was a light at the end of the tunnel. It would be nice if it was closer to home; I need to acknowledge that. I have been in conversations with the mayor, and I will be visiting Airdrie on December 14. We have had very constructive discussions. My office has also been in touch with project proponents, and we've met with some of them in person, and we'll continue to learn more.

Mrs. Pitt: It's sad that a lot of those conversations haven't made it my way or to those involved.

Mr. Speaker, given that Alberta Health Services is cutting front-line workers and fired Dr. Kyne, one of Airdrie's leading health care advocates in our community, who was fired for standing up for our community's long overdue needs, and given that this action comes as a direct insult to the community members here today, will this minister correct the actions of Alberta Health Services, reinstate Dr. Kyne, and provide the people of Airdrie with around-the-clock health care?

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, we've talked about how inappropriate it is to bring up somebody's HR situation in this House, and I stand by that.

In terms of what has happened, there was an individual fired, there was a contract that was not renewed, but I am not going to get into the specific details because it's not fair to either party, Mr. Speaker, and I think that the members opposite owe due respect to the individuals involved not to bring up personal matters with regard to HR in this House.

Mrs. Pitt: It's inappropriate this the Health minister will not take responsibility for her own department.

Mr. Speaker, given that this government created the 2015 budget and given that the Minister of Infrastructure emphasized during question period yesterday that spending \$1 billion was not as important as keeping Albertans safe, again to the minister: why has your government ignored the people of Airdrie and their safety by keeping us out of your capital plan?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Let me be crystal clear. I had nothing to do with the HR situation. The HR

situation is between an employer and an employee, so I want to be very clear about that.

In terms of the questions that have been asked around the capital plan and specifically a facility for Airdrie, I need to work with evidence for all communities. I understand that there is a clearly expressed case for why the proponents believe they should be the top priority. I also need to weigh the evidence from all communities throughout Alberta. But no matter where you live, you should be assured that you have the right care in the right place at the right time by the right health professional, Mr. Speaker.

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

Farm and Ranch Worker Legislation (continued)

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. While opinions on Bill 6 differ, members on both sides of the Assembly, up to and including the Premier, are in agreement that the communication has been an unmitigated disaster. We have the Premier blaming unnamed government officials and information sheets, that I will table, with what is now misinformation appearing and then disappearing off the government website. To the minister of labour: the buck stops with you. Given the level of confusion that you have created surrounding Bill 6, why are you still forging ahead with this clearly flawed piece of legislation?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I know we don't typically talk about that somebody is not in the House, but I want to say in this circumstance that the minister of labour is meeting front line with farmers to ensure that she understands their concerns.

Mr. Jean: Point of order.

Ms Hoffman: I'm happy to make sure that I pass along the feedback that's been raised.

In terms of moving forward, we're absolutely willing to bring forward amendments to ensure clarity on this matter, Mr. Speaker, and we hope to do so later today in committee.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the minister for that because given that we've been assured by the ministers of agriculture and labour that Bill 6 was written only after extensive consultation and with widespread agreement from farmers and given that now the government admits that the bill needs to be amended, to the minister: exactly whom did you consult with while you were hastily preparing the amendments?

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, I believe that consultation was going on for about 10 years while that party was in government, and one of the reasons why the consultation happened is because there was a tragic farm incident, the Chandler incident. A father was lost. There have been calls for years to do something to offer the same protections to farm workers in Alberta that they have in every other province. So the consultations continue to happen with hands-on farmers today. It's been with industry so far under this government, but past government consulted as well.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that many newly elected members of this Legislature are bewildered by the legislate first and draw up regulations later and given that one the most baffled by this process is the minister, who is the self-proclaimed champion for Alberta's farmers and ranchers, who said yesterday that, and I

quote, it is an odd way of doing things, to the minister of agriculture: if you aren't comfortable with how you're proceeding and given the overwhelming opposition from the very people for whom you are supposed to be champion, why are you ramming Bill 6 through?

Ms Hoffman: Since the tragic death of Kevan Chandler in June 2006, Mr. Speaker, 122 others have died in work-related incidents on farms and ranches in Alberta, and they're the people that deserve to have these protections and the safety moving forward.

Just to be very crystal clear, this is about farm and ranch employees. This is not about family members. This is not about friends. It's not about volunteers. We're going to make sure that we have a crystal clear explanation of that in the amendments that we plan to bring forward.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

2:20 Rural Health Care

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Currently rural hospitals have high numbers of ER visits from patients who cannot get an appointment with a regular family physician. Many physicians are not even taking on new patients because their caseloads are full. As you full well know, ER visits have a far greater cost to the system than clinic visits. To the Minister of Health: can you explain to me and, in fact, all rural Albertans what you are doing to help them with their medical needs in this regard?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for this question. We've appointed what I have to say is a top-notch board for Alberta Health Services, and I couldn't be prouder of the expertise they're going to bring to that organization. As members know, Alberta Health Services oversees hospital operations. Ensuring that they have a stable budget, that they have predictable funding, and that we're not laying off thousands of people by bringing in billion-dollar cuts every year will certainly help this situation.

Mr. Loewen: Yeah. A superboard that you didn't support before. Minister, it's not working, obviously.

Given that the Valleyview community found a doctor willing to come and work in a local clinic and given that this doctor had specialized training in traditional and aboriginal medicine and was uniquely qualified to work with the rural and aboriginal patients in this area, will the minister tell us here today why, even though this doctor made numerous attempts to contact AHS, his calls were not returned and he was allowed to slip through the cracks and was forced to go elsewhere?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Of course, we want to make sure that we have the right care in the right place at the right time by the right health professional. The system that we have right now has flexibility around where people can offer their practice. I am getting used to doing these late-night phone calls. If the member has specific details that he needs to share, he can certainly contact my office at any time, not just in the late hours of the night. We certainly would be happy to have somebody follow up and provide some clarity if it's required.

Mr. Loewen: That's really interesting since this was all spelled out clearly in a letter that the minister received and I was CCed on.

Given that this doctor had practised medicine in Alberta for 11 years, is a Canadian citizen, had practised in the rural locum program in the hospital that he wished to join, and had full hospital privileges in another Alberta hospital, can you tell us, Minister: why does the government have to make things so difficult? Why did he have to apply again for hospital privileges when, in fact, in doing so, his application was forgotten about and caused this community to lose an opportunity to have the health care it deserves?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll be happy to follow up with regard to this specific matter.

In terms of some of the questions that have been asked by that party, there was a question about a 0.2 employee, a 0.4 employee, and misinformation shared around the situation of a hospital where there was water and members opposite said that it was feces. I will be happy to ensure that there's clarity, but there are ways, certainly, to do this. Trying to blow up situations in this House is not the most respectful way to treat health professionals.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Back in June I let the Minister of Health know what was going on with the dialysis bus in Lac La Biche. I was encouraged that she visited and seemed to care about the community. Since then, though, nothing has happened. This wheel-less treatment centre would be an embarrassment in a third-world country. No bones about it; the people of Lac La Biche have lost their trust that the minister will do the right thing. To the Health minister: why not cut the \$700,000 carbon tax propaganda budget and fix this problem?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you for the question, Mr. Speaker and to the member for his hospitality this summer when I did come to see first-hand the situation he was speaking of. I have to say that growing up in a rural community, there were a lot of times we had to be on the highway to go to Edmonton and other municipalities for service. Being able to have service in your own community is certainly an asset. I want to acknowledge that I don't think that it's the ideal situation, but I'm certainly happy that individuals living in Lac La Biche do not have to be on the highway, particularly in the winter, three times a week.

Mr. Hanson: Mr. Speaker, given that when the minister was in Lac La Biche, we discussed the glaring bathtub issue, which is still not installed, by the way, and given that since June there has been plenty of time for the minister to spout hot air on the issue but not hot water for showers and tubs and whereas the minister should know that the showers have now broken down in that hospital, resulting in a temporary set-up in a patient service room, when can we expect her to live up to her title of Minister of Health and actually deliver real results for real Albertans?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for the question. In terms of the specific bathtub sometimes there are specifics that are hard to recall because, of course, we have a significant system here in Alberta. In terms of the specific bathtub, when I did ask the question, I was told that it was operational and had been hooked up.

I will confirm that that is indeed the case because that is inconsistent with what I was informed of by the hospital staff.

Mr. Hanson: Mr. Speaker, there seems to be a real disconnect between this government and rural Albertans. Since July the northeast region of Alberta has been feeling the acute and tragic loss of a great pathologist, and to date AHS has not even advertised for a replacement. Given that the constituents in northeastern Alberta deserve the same level of care as all other Albertans, to the minister: when is your ministry and AHS going to stop dragging your feet on rural health care issues?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you for the question, Mr. Speaker. This government is actually investing in infrastructure moving forward as opposed to what the Official Opposition proposed during the election, which was cutting lower priority infrastructure projects, including \$9 billion worth of infrastructure. I find it very shocking that they would say that we're dragging our feet when they're actually the ones who are proposing significant cuts to infrastructure spending in Alberta. We're going to move forward and make sure that we continue to have the right supports for Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North West.

Sexual Health Education in Schools

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday we saw a historic moment in this Legislature with the vote on Bill 7. I felt particularly compelled by the conversation around educating people about LGBTQ identities. An excellent place to include this is with comprehensive sexual health education. Comprehensive sexual health education is an important tool for Alberta students and an important tool in helping to create an inclusive atmosphere in our schools. To the Minister of Education: can you tell me how you plan to make sure these issues are included in the curriculum?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you very much for the question. Certainly, we know that sexual consent is the law, and we need to reflect that in our curriculum throughout K to 12 and beyond. It's very important, for example, when we have these LGBTQ issues and GSAs, to not just impose laws from above, from Edmonton, but to have it permeate through the education system because that's, after all, the way people internalize values and the way that they act on them and are responsible for them as well. You can make laws, but unless people actually have it in their hearts, then they're not very meaningful at all.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, education and dialogue are the key to understanding. Given that as elected officials we should be aiming to enhance the conversation with actual consultation, will the Minister of Education commit to bringing this issue to the Families and Communities Committee to allow all parties to work with interested people and groups to develop a policy that can be embraced by every school board in the province?

The Speaker: The Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Speaker, and thanks for the question. Certainly, I think it's important that we use all avenues available. As I said before, it's an educative moment not just for our children and parents but for all of us as well. The debate that we had on the Human Rights Act over the last few days I think was an edifying

and educative moment for all of us and for the general public as well. I'm very interested in speaking to the Families and Communities Committee to see if they are able and willing to help me on this because, quite frankly, it's a very big effort, but the results and the gravity of the situation are just as large.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Education minister. I know there are certain people who worry about the risks of legislating social policy in Alberta, but if we're going to work on these issues and be effective, we need to do just that. Can the minister assure the House that there will be real consultation on comprehensive sexual health education that would be available to all Alberta students?

The Speaker: The Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Thanks, Mr. Speaker. I know that, certainly, the MLA asking is very involved in working with these issues. As I said before, I need all hands on deck to ensure that we do have a comprehensive sexual health education program embedded into the curriculum and then also infused throughout all of the things that we do here through the Legislature. Certainly, I am interested in working through this. It'll be a process that involves moving ideas along a little bit, perhaps bumping up against some established values, but at the end it's worth it for our children.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

2:30 Services for Francophone Albertans

Ms McKittrick: Merci, M. le Président. Je suis vraiment fière des députés dans cette Assemblée, où il y a au moins 15 députés qui sont francophones ou qui parlent français.

[Translation] Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to be an MLA in this Assembly, where at least 15 MLAs speak French or are francophone.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta has a long history of contributions made by the francophone community. Twelve per cent of Albertans have French ethnic or cultural ancestor origins. [interjections] According to the 2011 . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, do you have a question?

If you don't have a question, is there a response from the front bench?

Your time is up. Do you have a question?

Ms McKittrick: Yeah, I have a question. [interjections] To the minister of culture: what is your department doing to support francophone and minority language rights throughout the province?

The Speaker: Hon. member, you've got to get more brief with your comments.

Speaker's Ruling Timing in Question Period

The Speaker: There are choices that I have. I can be flexible or be arbitrary. On both sides of the House it's practised, and that's what I intend to do. I also appreciate that these are not always the simplest decisions to make. If I make a choice to allow it, it may be the same on the other side. The question is whether or not I apply it fairly. I intend to do so, and I believe the record says that I have.

Hon. members, when you are asking, making your point, I talked yesterday about your preambles on both sides of the House. They are consuming the very time that you want and need.

Services for Francophone Albertans (continued)

The Speaker: Can I go to your first supplemental question? Do you have it?

Ms McKittrick: Sure.

The Speaker: Quickly, please.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that francophone schools have seen rapid increases in enrolment over the last few years, I'm wondering what supports are available to francophone school boards across Alberta.

The Speaker: The Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. Certainly, we see our francophone community growing exponentially here in the province of Alberta; thus, we are making decisions about expanding our francophone education system to match that. For example, we've been working to expand our francophone capacity in Sherwood Park, in Edmonton, and in Calgary as well, and we're very proud to do so. Our government stands to enrich and expand our capacity and the services that we provide to our francophone community.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that we need to support our francophone community, can the minister detail some of the community efforts and services that are already offered not because of the law but because the government wants to do so?

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, I think we're seeing a great flowering in the capacity for us to offer services in French, not just in terms of education but in regard to health, employment, settlement, legal assistance, early childhood development. You know, the francophone community here in the province, in fact, leads in many ways with their early childhood provisions that they put in their schools. We could learn a lot to do so in our own English public schools here across the province. We're very proud of how we're working together. People are looking to bonjour.alberta.ca as a mechanism by which they can see all of the services that we provide en français.

Government Policies

Mr. MacIntyre: Mr. Speaker, recently the Premier cited that all of the problems that have surrounded Bill 6 have been due to bureaucrats miscommunicating the message around Bill 6. Now, let's forget for a moment that this was a directive from her and her ministers, and let's gloss over the fact that the Premier has no problem throwing her underlings under a bus. To the Premier: since you've singled out your bureaucrats for creating the hot water you're in, have you fired any or asked any of them to resign, or are you simply saying: let them eat cake?

Ms Hoffman: Let me add to the pile. I think that members opposite have certainly embraced the opportunity to spread misinformation.

In terms of HR matters we will certainly be addressing them appropriately, but in this House is not the way that we plan on doing that, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. MacIntyre: Given that both bills 202 and 6 need broad government amendments and the ministers of labour and Agriculture and Forestry have a combined communication budget of \$1.8 million and since all this government seems to be able to communicate are propaganda pieces and misinformation, apparently, does the Premier think that this is an effective use of her politburo's resources if they can't effectively convey a concept to the very people these bills impact?

The Speaker: The Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have certainly made it clear that our government apologizes to the farmers for the stress and anxiety that it caused them to believe that the family farm wouldn't be addressed. That's why we're introducing an amendment just to introduce language to ensure those families can rest assured that families will not be covered by that bill. We will move forward to ensure paid workers are safe, but we do recognize that farming is not just a business but a way of life, and we will respect and protect that way of life.

Mr. MacIntyre: Mr. Speaker, given her own railing against the ineffectiveness of the WCB while she was in opposition – quote, Alberta has the most miserable compensation board in the country, and Alberta workers suffer for it; end quote – why is the Premier now forcing this apparently miserable system upon 45,000 farmers?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This bill is about establishing a minimum standard of protection for paid workers, and it is important that those workers are protected. This bill is focused on bringing protection for paid employees in line with other Alberta workers. Within that, though, we understand that farm and ranch families are a cornerstone of this economy, and we will work with them to ensure that they can still enjoy and protect the way of life to which they are entitled.

Carbon Tax Revenue Utilization

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, we have heard this government sing the praises of their carbon tax both here and abroad. However, what we have not heard are details around how this tax will be indeed revenue neutral. To the minister of environment: given that British Columbia has legislated to return every single dollar it collects from their carbon tax, which is true revenue neutrality, and on your own website returning money from the carbon tax to Albertans is listed last when detailing how the revenue will be spent, why won't you come clean and admit that your carbon tax is not revenue neutral?

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: I think that in the announcement it was made fairly clear that there are going to be two buckets, one to entice industry for technology and one to help consumers who find some of the prices difficult.

Mr. Gotfried: To the minister of the environment, Alberta's own Robin Hood: given that when asked if the money from the carbon tax would be used to reduce other taxes, exactly what B.C. does, this Premier stated that that would not necessarily lead to the kind of change we are trying to generate here while also stating that some people may actually benefit financially from measures within this plan through direct rebates, will you admit that the lack of revenue

neutrality in your plan makes this carbon tax more about wealth redistribution than about tackling climate change?

The Speaker: The Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the question. We're proud of the message that we are sending in cleaning up our environment and changing the behaviour of all of us for our future and for our children's. Every dollar will be put back here in Alberta, building our economy, creating jobs, reducing pollution, and opening up those new conversations for pipelines to be built.

2:40

Mr. Gotfried: Also to the minister of environment: given that this government does not intend to reduce taxes with money obtained through the carbon tax and given that middle-income Albertans now fear that commuting to work, driving their kids to sports, and heating their homes will now place an undue financial burden upon them with no rebates or tax reductions in sight, why does your government think that tax slapping the everyday lives of hard-working Alberta families – again, kicking them while they are down – is the best way to address climate change?

The Speaker: The Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you for the question, Mr. Speaker. Again, our climate change is going to strengthen our economy and make Alberta the most environmentally responsible energy producer in the world. This is important because if we can get those pipelines built, that brings tons more jobs to Alberta and it strengthens everybody and it brings money into our coffers.

Members' Statements

(continued)

Anniversary of l'École Polytechnique Shootings

Ms Payne: Mr. Speaker, on Wednesday, December 6, 1989, 26 years ago, 14 women were murdered in the halls of their engineering school at l'École Polytechnique in Montreal. Fourteen women lost their lives for the simple reason that they were women studying in a nontraditional field. Before opening fire, their killer said: you're women; you're going to be engineers; you're all a bunch of feminists; I hate feminists. Yet in the weeks and months following the massacre the media downplayed the gender-based violence in this attack, saying that it wasn't about women and it wasn't about feminism. We know that this isn't true.

December 6 marks the National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence against Women. On campuses across the country students' unions and women's centres will hold vigils honouring the victims of the Montreal massacre and honouring all of the women who have lost their lives to domestic violence.

Twenty-six years have come and gone. In those years we've seen some steps forward and some steps back. Domestic violence is no longer considered just a private marital issue. Governments across the country, including our own, provide financial support for women's shelters. Yet those same shelters turn away nearly twice as women as they are able to help. Social media has become a tool for misogynists to spew hateful invectives and threats against women in power, including many women in this Chamber and our Premier. Sadly, it is still considered okay in some circles to say: I hate feminists.

Today I rise to honour the 14 women who were murdered in their classrooms in Montreal. I rise in honour of every woman who has faced violence and hatred simply because she is a woman. I add my

voice to the many who call for an end to gender-based violence and an end to social and systemic gender equality. I rise to say that I am a proud feminist.

Economic Development

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, limited government, regulatory efficiency, open markets, a world-class financial centre, a highly educated and motivated workforce: no, this is not today's Alberta. Perhaps it could, should, and will be in the decades ahead, but not on our current course. Many have said that this is Canada's millennium of the Pacific, so perhaps we need to learn something from our friends and trading partners in Asia.

Hong Kong, my second home, has a population of just over 7 million, negligible natural resources, and a GDP per capita almost \$10,000 U.S. higher than Canada. Foreign direct investment is \$15 billion higher than Canada. It has been recognized as the world's freest economy for 21 consecutive years. What drives this bastion of economic success? An entrepreneurial can-do attitude, an unparalleled work ethic, low taxes, robust foreign investment, low unemployment, limited government, regulatory efficiency, and leveraging of human capital against global opportunities.

Does this sound familiar? Yes, this is the Alberta I grew up in, that allowed Albertans and newcomers from across Canada and around the world to strive and thrive, to know and feel what the Alberta advantage meant to them and their families, and to have hope for the success of their children, grandchildren, and for generations to come. Yes, this is the dreaded 44 years that we often hear maligned in this House, and, yes, the Alberta advantage was real. I'm here to tell you that it and Albertans are worth fighting for, and I intend to do just that. Let's do the right thing to protect our planet, but let's do it with the innovative, problem-solving, can-do, entrepreneurial work ethic that we are famous for across this country and around the world.

Alberta, let's take our rightful place as a responsible, resource-rich leader in the global economy, but let us not kill the Alberta advantage in getting there. Most certainly, that is not the Alberta way.

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

Autism Spectrum Disorder

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak about a neurological disorder affecting 1 in 68 Albertans. Autism spectrum disorder is a neurological condition that affects the ability of an individual to form relationships, communicate with others, and deal with abstract concepts.

The province of Alberta has long been considered a leader in children's services for those living with autism and other developmental disabilities; however, when autism is present, it changes the lives not only of children but of whole families. Parents with affected children find their lives turned upside down with worry for their children's well-being, the effect on their other children, or the strain on their marriage.

It is estimated that the costs associated with raising a child with autism is over \$3 million over a lifetime. Given these high demands on the family, the services of community partners are vital. One such partner is right here in Edmonton. Since 1971 Autism Edmonton, previously known as autism society of Edmonton area, has been providing services with support to people in the community who are living with autism spectrum disorder. Autism Edmonton has become known as a go-to source for families, individuals, and professionals looking for information about

autism. Autism Edmonton helps families and individuals navigate their options for services, find vital information, and develop skills and peer support through facilitated activity and discussion groups.

On October 23 I had the great fortune to attend Opening Doors for Autism, a gala held biannually to raise funds for Autism Edmonton, where the total for a single evening of fundraising exceeded \$500,000. This significant generosity will help to provide families with much-needed support, information, and advocacy services.

I would like to extend thanks to the many sponsors and say congratulations to Autism Edmonton, who, like so many Albertans, has decided after 44 years to make a significant change. Congratulations on your new name, Autism Edmonton, and thank you for your service and support to Albertans.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Women Parliamentarians

Ms Jabbour: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In 1917 Louise McKinney and Roberta MacAdams became the first women elected to this Legislature. Since that time, there have been almost 1,000 MLAs elected to this House. Only 99 have been women.

A significant move forward occurred on May 5, when I was proud to join 24 of my female colleagues in the NDP caucus, bringing us the closest any government party has ever come to achieving gender parity. Much work remains to be done, however. There are numerous barriers and reasons women hesitate to put themselves forward to run for public office. Breaking the glass ceiling of a traditionally male-dominated environment, discrimination, intrusive public scrutiny, and the expectations around women's roles in child care and child rearing are just a few.

As Deputy Speaker I'm the Alberta steering committee rep for Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians, a nonpartisan organization that is dedicated to achieving more equal representation of women in government across the Commonwealth. CWP engages in a number of activities such as outreach to young women, mentorship, raising awareness, proposing supportive legislation, and, perhaps most importantly, peer support so we can become more effective in our roles.

I believe we're well positioned here in this Legislature to take some real steps forward in removing barriers and enhancing the ability of women to be successful in the political arena. I'm looking forward to working with CWP, with our new Ministry of Status of Women, and all the women in this House to make some significant gains in that regard and to find better ways to support and encourage each other.

Yesterday we celebrated the inclusion of gender identity language in the human rights legislation during second reading of Bill 7. This is an important and significant step forward for Alberta, but we have a long way to go when it comes to basic human rights for half the population. By working to ensure that women are represented more fairly in our government institutions, we are leading the way towards having a more equal and equitable representation among our legislators, one that better reflects the true makeup of our province and the people we serve.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

2:50

Bo Cooper

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to talk about one of my constituents, Bo Cooper. Bo is only 26 years old and has been

diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia for the third time since 2011. He has used up a lifetime worth of chemotherapy and has exhausted all known therapies in Canada. His current treatment of this medication therapy is in the final days of funding. As of December 10 it will expire, and he will have nothing left to keep this leukemia at bay. His most likely prognosis at this stage is death at 26 years old.

However, there is one last hope. There is one therapy that is available only in the United States. There is a specialist that has been providing a different type of cellular therapy, and in her study she has a 90 per cent success rate for leukemia. She has cured cancer. Unfortunately, it is not approved in Canada. Thus, Alberta Health Services will not pay for this treatment, and this family cannot afford a treatment that runs over half a million dollars. The bureaucracy has lost sight of its mandate to help Albertans and simply sees a paper with a name on it and looks at the associated costs before making its decision. Patients are not statistics; they are people. Denying Bo this opportunity to receive this life-saving treatment is an indictment to our broken health care system. It's a system that's supposed to mean that those who need access to health care will receive access to health care. It's clearly not, and it's not for Bo.

Almost \$20 billion is spent on health care every year by this government, yet Bo can't get a life-saving treatment that he needs from this government. We spend more on health care than any other province in this country, and still people are left behind. It's a broken system funded by a government that thinks spending \$700,000 on a budget public relations campaign is appropriate, the same government that spends another \$700,000 on a PR campaign for a carbon tax. If spending on ad campaigns is fine, then this Health minister needs to tell her department that spending a fraction of that to save the life of a 26-year-old man is the right thing to do.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The Minister of Education and Minister of Culture and Tourism.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of a document that I referred to yesterday during second reading of Bill 8, talking about school board consultations. It just gives an itemization of what we had been doing in our consultations during September and October.

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the requisite number of copies that were referenced by the Health minister with regard to the e-mail that was in reaction to Bill 6.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce two tablings to you this afternoon, and I'd like to go back to the words of the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo just a few minutes ago. He talked about how statistics are not just numbers; they're people. These articles that I'll be tabling today are about people who could be potentially affected by Bill 6. The first article is titled Kevan Chandler Killed in Grain Elevator: Alberta Family Gets Compensation Six Years Later. Some of the text reads: "Lorna Chandler's husband, Kevan, died on Father's Day in 2006."

The Speaker: Hon. member, can you just indicate in a generic sense what options you have and put them to the table.

Mr. Westhead: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. The second article, sir, is: Alberta Farm Worker Fights to Change Labour Laws.

The Speaker: Are there any others?

Mr. Westhead: No, those are the two, and I'd encourage the members opposite to read these to put a face to the bill.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Hon. members, I rise today to table five copies of the page biographies for the First Session of the 29th Legislature, fall 2015, and I know that I speak for all of the House that we do very much appreciate these quiet young people who tolerate us. I would ask that you all give them applause.

Mr. Yao: I have one more tabling, sir.

The Speaker: Yes.

Mr. Yao: I rise today to table the requisite number of copies of a GoFundMe page for Bo Cooper. I ask that all members review the story and consider spreading it on your public media. I know you all have access to such things. It's a sad day in Canada when we have to fund raise for someone's health.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I now would rise to table the requisite number of copies of an 11-page document entitled Cultivating Safe, Fair & Healthy Workplaces for Alberta's Farms & Ranches. This is the informational document that was on the website, that has now mysteriously disappeared, but we're very glad to be able to provide a hard copy for anyone who wishes to read it.

The Speaker: The leader of the third party.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a letter here that a farmer and rancher named Coral Robinson read on the steps of the Legislature. I read it last night in the House, and I promised to table it today, and so it is.

The Speaker: The Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the requisite number of copies of a mother's plea to the Health minister.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings. One is a petition from an organization called Dying With Dignity, with over 400 signatures from people who are calling on the Legislative Assembly to investigate, make public, provide some venues for discussing assisted dying. I'll table those.

Following that, an article from the *Edmonton Journal* entitled Edmonton Affordable Housing Projects Left to Die on the Order Paper.

Thank you.

Speaker's Ruling Timing in Question Period

The Speaker: Hon. members, first of all, a comment from myself. When I made the comment earlier about the 35 seconds and my efforts to try and give the opportunity for all members to include their comments within that period, I in fact, after that, read the

points of order. As I move forward, I want you all to be aware that the 35 seconds will simply apply in very black-and-white terms. If you're not finished, we will use the standing orders which we have in place. That was a mistake on my part.

We also had three points of order today. I will call on the Government House Leader, I think, for the first one.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise under Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j). At 1:53 today the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre referred to members on this side as corrupt politicians. At 492 of *Beauchesne's*, page 149, the term "corrupt" is listed as an unparliamentary word.

Mr. Speaker, It's unfortunate that some members opposite would turn a legitimate difference on policy and a legitimate difference of opinion into accusations of corruption on any side. That is beneath the dignity of the hon. member opposite and lowers the tone of the House and, in my view, is unnecessary and unacceptable. We can disagree most strongly about the direction that we want to go on this and other matters, but that does not suggest in any way that politicians on either side are corrupt, merely that they disagree.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to address the point of order this afternoon. Without the benefit of the Blues, I'm not entirely sure what may have been said or wasn't said. I was aware of some banter going back and forth across the aisle. I don't think it was spoken in this House because the hon. member is a hundred per cent correct that it would be wildly unparliamentary to call members of the other side of the House corrupt. Some of the off-the-sheet banter I heard was a statement around not liking corrupt politicians.

3:00

Again, I'll have to see if it's in the Blues, but at no point, that I heard, was there an accusation made against that side, just that we don't like corrupt politicians. I think that the other side also agrees with that statement. We have not, would not, and will not make an accusation that there is a corrupt politician on that side of the House in this place. That didn't happen today, barring seeing the Blues. That didn't happen today, and it won't happen in the future.

The Speaker: Hon. Opposition House Leader, you're suggesting that we wait for the Blues. If it was said, do I interpret that this would be an apology from you?

Mr. Cooper: Oh, certainly. If it was said that someone on this side of the House made an accusation that said that that side of the House was corrupt, one hundred per cent, unequivocally, I would withdraw that statement. I don't believe that took place today, but if it did, I will certainly withdraw it.

The Speaker: Unfortunately, I did not hear the remark myself, so I would use this opportunity to remind the House that what is called banter, particularly today, is simply not the stature that this group of people ought to set for themselves. It is far too low. I would therefore, I think, need to simply ask that you be more cautious of those comments, and please avoid them at all cost.

There was a second point of order raised by the Official Opposition, I believe.

Point of Order Referring to the Absence of a Member

Mr. Cooper: Yes. We have two separate points of order. For the first one the reference can be found in *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, chapter 4, attendance. If you are looking at the second edition, 2009, it's on page 213. Earlier in question period the Health minister made a statement very similar to: I'm not going to refer to the absence of a member. Something to that effect. I'm without the Blues, but some sort of statement that was very close to: I wouldn't want to refer to the absence of a member; however, in this case they are out of the House discussing this bill. I just think that we have practices, procedures, guidelines, rules in the Assembly for a reason, and to get right up next to a rule and tell everybody, "I'm about to break a rule" doesn't give permission for that to take place.

I just think that we need to try to stay within the confines. Listen, this side of the House has been guilty, and we've stepped outside of those confines from time to time. But I think it is imperative that we honour the traditions of the Assembly. It's my opinion that that wasn't honoured today.

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Yeah. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think the hon. Opposition House Leader has a good point. We will avoid skating close to the edge of the rules in the future.

The Speaker: Thank you.

I'd remind all members of the House to be cognizant of that.

I think there was also a point of order 3.

Mr. Cooper: Yeah. You know, I will withdraw that point of order.

The Speaker: What an excellent idea, hon. member.

Folks, you ought to laugh more and yell less.

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

The Speaker: Hon. members, yesterday afternoon I reserved ruling on a point of order raised by the Official Opposition House Leader. The point of order arose from the following remarks by the Minister of Environment and Parks and Status of Women in response to a question by the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, which can be found at page 712 of yesterday's *Alberta Hansard*. "Had the Official Opposition bothered to engage in the climate process at all, given that they were so busy denying the science of climate change . . ." The Official Opposition House Leader rose under Standing Order 23(j), stating that the minister's comments constituted "insulting language . . . likely to create disorder."

The hon. Government House Leader spoke to the veracity of the minister's statement.

The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster touched on something that caused me to delay a ruling when he mentioned a ruling by former Speaker Zwodzesky concerning the use of the term "climate change deniers." That ruling can be found at page 1719 of *Alberta Hansard* for April 8, 2013. The former Speaker's ruling that the expression "climate change deniers" was presumptively out of order was based on circumstances that existed at the time and what was occurring in the Assembly at the time.

I am not inclined to rule out of order a particular phrase at this time. As members should be aware, whether a word or a phrase is unparliamentary depends on the context in which it is used. As stated in *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, page 619:

Thus, language deemed unparliamentary one day may not necessarily be deemed unparliamentary the following day. The codification of unparliamentary language has proven impractical . . .

And I have a book that thick.

. . . as it is in the context in which words or phrases are used that the Chair must consider when deciding whether or not they should be withdrawn.

To be clear, I'm not sanctioning the use of expressions that deliberately incite members of the Assembly and violate Standing Order 23(h), (i), or (j). On this point of order I'm finding it to be a dispute between members on facts – indeed as *Beauchesne's*, sixth edition, paragraph 494, put it – but want to caution members about using inflammatory language. We all realize that this is a place of sometimes heated discussion and debate. I would continue to ask all of the members to respect this institution and its rules.

I would rule that there was no point of order.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the committee to order.

3:10

Bill 5

Public Sector Compensation Transparency Act

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill 5, the Public Sector Compensation Transparency Act. Bill 5 significantly expands Alberta's existing public-sector compensation disclosure. It is encouraging to see that many members voiced their overall support for the initiative during first and second readings.

I will be introducing a government amendment at the conclusion of my speech, and I look forward to and anticipate amendments being brought forward by the opposition parties as well.

These bodies will have to disclose the names and compensation of employees who earn more than \$125,000 in compensation, including overtime, severance, and bonuses. The threshold is intended to focus disclosure on higher income earners and managers rather than front-line staff. There will be no threshold for board members in the entities covered by the bill. As members have mentioned, these positions have sometimes been criticized or perceived as being patronage appointments. We have also considered that the vast majority of board members do not receive a salary. Instead, they often receive per diem rates for meetings. Therefore, if this bill is passed, all compensation paid to board members of these agencies, boards, and commissions covered under the act will be required to be disclosed. Requiring the disclosure of compensation paid to these positions is in keeping with the principles of open government.

Payments to Alberta's physicians and health practitioners total in the billions of dollars a year. As a result, requiring the disclosure of compensation paid to physicians and other medical professionals also contributes significantly to our goal of informing the public on how their tax dollars are spent. Several physicians raised concerns, as have members of this House, that disclosure of fee-for-service payments would not reflect the actual take-home income of physicians and other medical professionals because of the way the offices are run.

We recognize that physician compensation is complex, and we understand that unique rules will need to apply to the health-sector group. These rules will be developed in consultation with Alberta Health Services and other health entities, physicians, groups like the Alberta Medical Association, other medical practitioners as well as other stakeholder groups. We will take the time necessary to ensure that the regulations are comprehensive, that they accomplish what we're setting out to do, and that stakeholder concerns are heard.

In addition, Madam Chair, the bill enables municipalities and school boards to disclose the names and compensation paid to employees if they wish to do so. Teachers as well as several hon. members have expressed concern with the bill and its effects on school boards and teachers. Specifically, concerns have been raised over the lack of an imposed threshold by government that mirrors the rest of the public sector.

It's important to emphasize that this bill does not mandate disclosure of a single teacher or municipal employee in its present form. Municipalities and school boards are governed by individuals that are elected by the public, and we wanted to respect their autonomy. However, having heard from stakeholders, our government has been working with, I'm pleased to say, all of the opposition parties, including the Wildrose, the Alberta Party, the Progressive Conservatives, and the Alberta Liberal Party, and while we may not agree on all issues, we're working together to improve transparency here in Alberta.

I'd like to introduce an amendment to address concerns raised by the offices of the Legislature. I have what I believe to be the correct number of copies.

Shall I wait while it is distributed, or will I continue?

The Chair: This will be known as amendment A1.

Please continue, hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Madam Chair. The Legislative Assembly offices raised concerns that given their oversight role, reporting or being subject to an audit by the minister could interfere with that mandate. We fully respect and are committed to ensuring the integrity and independence of the legislative offices. These offices also confirmed their commitment to the principles of transparency in public service, including transparency in the legislative offices. Legislative offices will still be required to publicly disclose compensation information in a manner consistent with other public-sector bodies subject to this amendment.

The amendment adds to section 6 of the act subsection (5), which exempts legislative offices from the requirement to disclose or advise the minister of their disclosure. Public-sector bodies, which the offices are considered under the act, are required to make this disclosure both publicly and to the minister. Again, the office will still be required to publicly disclose. They simply will not have to report that disclosure to the minister responsible for the act.

The subsection also removes the responsible minister's compliance and auditing powers. Instead, the amendment provides auditing powers to the office of the Auditor General through a new section, 9.1. The Auditor General will have the discretion to conduct an audit where the Auditor General considers it appropriate. In regard to auditing the Auditor General's compliance with the act, the amendment provides the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices the authority to appoint an auditor. This is consistent with the auditing scheme contained in the current Auditor General Act.

Finally, under the amendment offices are required to co-operate fully with an audit. The results of the audit will be presented to the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices or in one case the

Members' Services Committee. The committee can make the audit results – sorry. It's the Auditor General in another.

With this amendment, Bill 5 is consistent with the existing oversight structure for legislative offices. Any possible perception of lack of independence from government is avoided. Importantly, the requirement to publicly disclose is maintained. I urge all members to support the amendment.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any hon. members wish to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Chair. I thank the hon. Minister of Justice and Solicitor General for participating in the debate on Bill 5. I've spoken broadly to Bill 5 and expressed the strong support of the Official Opposition for this bill. It is a huge step forward. My questions here are genuinely now to solicit a bit of information about these amendments. No technical briefing was provided that I'm aware of. Am I incorrect?

Ms Ganley: If that is correct, then I apologize for that.

Mr. Fildebrandt: I'm not aware of there being a technical briefing, but perhaps there was. It is the first I've heard of these amendments. The Official Opposition often doesn't provide technical briefings to government because we don't expect ours to pass most of the time, but if we do think that there's a chance, we sometimes consult with members opposite to ensure that they're aware of what's coming down the pipe.

I'm going to ask perhaps a series of questions here, not to delay the process in any way but to genuinely find out if these are amenable to our caucus, so if the minister can bear with us. If I'm understanding correctly, the intent of the amendment here is to ensure that the ministries do not obtain any direct authority over officers of the Legislature, which would be, obviously, something that all members here would want to avoid for the independence as officers of the Legislature report to this House and not to ministries. If the minister could take some time to explain that that is the intent of this but that those offices will still somehow be required to comply with the sunshine list or the Public Sector Compensation Transparency Act. How will they still be compelled to comply with the act but not be subject to the authority of ministers' offices? If the minister could speak to that, please.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Justice.

3:20

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Madam Chair. What the first part, part A, does is that it adds subsection (5) to section 6. Essentially, in the act, when people are disclosing, there are two requirements. One is that they disclose publicly, and the second is that they report to the minister responsible for the act that they have done the disclosing. In this case, they will still be required to report publicly, but they won't be required to tell the minister because they felt – and we agreed that they were correct – that having them report to the minister in that way was probably a little bit inappropriate. That's one piece of it.

The other piece is that with respect to agencies, boards, and commissions the responsible minister will have auditing capacity. If an agency, board, or commission discloses salaries or says, "We don't have any at \$125,000, so we're not going to disclose," the minister's office is able to bring someone in to audit that to make sure that that is, in fact, correct. They also felt that it would be inappropriate for the minister's office to be auditing the offices of the Legislative Assembly, so instead the Auditor General will

perform that function except in the case of the Auditor General's office itself, in which case the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices can also appoint an auditor to conduct an audit to determine whether the legislative office of the Auditor General is compliant with the act. In that case, it goes to the committee instead.

In terms of the enforcement mechanism and the auditor appointed under subsection (2), if it's an auditor appointed by the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices, that report will go to the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices. If the Auditor General does the report, then that report will also go to the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices. That will be the oversight body in those cases.

We actually just made one small correction to this, and I just want to make sure that I'm absolutely correct on it. The results can be made public in a "form and manner determined by the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices or, in the case of an audit in respect of the Legislative Assembly Office, by the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services."

Those are sort of the oversight bodies. We've delegated to a committee because they are, we think, with respect to Legislative Assembly offices a more appropriate place.

The Chair: The hon. member.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you to the minister for her thorough rundown through this. I have two questions. I just want to summarize this.

My first question. If it would be appropriate – maybe the chair could rule on whether this would be – perhaps a single copy of any further government amendments could be disclosed to the various opposition parties so that we could kind of take a brief look at it while the rest of the debate is transpiring to try to get some idea of it. I'm incredibly nervous about looking at legislation and voting on it in a matter of minutes. It makes me a bit nervous even if I do believe the honest intent of the legislation. If one copy could perhaps be distributed to each of the different caucuses so that we could look at it. If there are further government amendments to come forward, if that would be appropriate, I think that would be helpful for the flow of debate here.

My second is perhaps my final follow-up question on this. Correct me if I'm wrong. These offices of the Legislature will be reporting to the public, but instead of reporting to ministries, they will instead be responsible to legislative committees rather than to offices of ministers. Am I correct in the assertion that while different agencies, boards, and commissions and other government entities will report to the public and report to ministers' offices, the difference for offices of the Legislature is that they will report to the public but that their responsibility will be to legislative committees as opposed to ministers' offices directly? Am I correct in that assertion or summary of what you've said?

Ms Ganley: Yes, I would say that that is a correct summary of the thing.

Now, in terms of their disclosure, they just disclose publicly, and then if either the Auditor General, in the case of offices that obviously aren't the Auditor General's, or the committee, in cases of all offices, feels that an audit is required, then they'll be the body to do that. They're the oversight body.

We can on a go-forward basis, I think, maybe do a better job of providing some things up front, and I apologize for that. We don't intend to propose any further amendments. Assuming that the amendments from the other side play out the way we have anticipated, then we shouldn't need to make any further amendments – I guess I shouldn't presuppose that – or probably not.

In terms of the amendment currently under consideration, is there a way to move to another amendment? No, there is not. Okay. We're happy with that.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Yeah. The amendment has to be dealt with and passed before we can move on to the next one.

In terms of your request, that's something that you would arrange between the minister's office and the Official Opposition.

Mr. Fildebrandt: I'll just thank the minister for her comments.

I do believe that this is done in the best spirit. Perhaps we'll just work on a bit of communication, moving forward, for amendments. Again, this not being exactly my file, perhaps there was a technical briefing and I was not made aware of it. But seeing this as it is now, I cannot see any reason the Official Opposition would not support it, and I would encourage members of the House to support the amendment.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Madam Chair. Just for clarity, it looks like we're just dealing with offices reporting to the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices, so those six offices. Is that correct? Essentially – I'm not real good with all the verbiage; I'm kind of from the business side and cut through the gobbledygook – we're looking at all six offices being required to report to the committee, and the committee would make the determination on whether or not to make that public. Is that what this is essentially doing?

The Chair: Hon. minister, you wish to respond?

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Madam Chair and to the member for the question. I'll just read out the definition because it'll make it a little bit easier.

- (j) "Office of the Legislature" means
 - (i) the Legislative Assembly Office,
 - (ii) the Office of the Auditor General,
 - (iii) the Office of the Ombudsman,
 - (iv) the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer,
 - (v) the Office of the Ethics Commissioner,
 - (vi) the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner,
 - (vii) the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate, and
 - (viii) the Office of the Public Interest Commissioner.

Those are the ones that we're talking about when we say, "Office of the Legislature," so those are the ones that will be covered. Those offices will still be required to disclose publicly, and they will be responsible to the Auditor General, except for the Auditor General, and also to the committee. The intention is that they will disclose publicly automatically, and then if the Auditor General or that committee were to perceive some problem, they could perform an audit. They are intended to disclose publicly. They just don't report to the minister that that disclosure has happened.

I see you shaking your head, so I will let you get up and ask the question.

Mr. van Dijken: May I?

The Chair: Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. van Dijken: I guess that when we look at 9.1(4), "to the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices" and then we move into 9.1(6), "in the form and manner determined by the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices or, in the case of an audit in

respect of the Legislative Assembly Office, by the Special Standing Committee on Members' Services," what I'm seeing here is essentially that they're being required to report to the committee, and then the committee is determining whether or not to make that public. It looks to me like they're looking for an exemption in reporting to the committee and the committee determining.

3:30

Ms Ganley: I can answer that one, too. Subsection (6) is dealing with the results of an audit in the instance when an audit is performed by the Auditor General and that audit says that, you know, you need to include further or corrected disclosure relating to a statement of remuneration previously disclosed through the audit. So if the previously disclosed statement is questioned in some way either by the Auditor General or by the committee and the committee performs an audit, then this is the procedure for determining whether that new and further disclosure is made public. It's not referring to the original disclosure; it's referring to further and better disclosure as a result of an audit. If that's helpful.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to the amendment?

Seeing none, I'll call the vote.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Chair: Back to the bill, Bill 5. Are there any comments, questions, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Chair. Wildrose believes in public discourse, that it is an important step for openness and transparency towards taxpayer-funded salaries. Indeed, our party campaigned on that, as did the NDP, the idea of a sunshine list. We're pleased to see that this legislation would extend the sunshine list to include Alberta Health Services, most postsecondary institutions, the independent offices of the Legislature, physicians, and other health service providers, including the Alberta Medical Association and other health care entities.

We've had this conversation, but we believe it's important for Albertans to know and have confidence that remuneration provided to those who serve on government-funded agencies, boards, and commissions is fair, that this compensation is determined by merit. The expanded sunshine list will provide the people of Alberta with more confidence in that matter. A sunshine list is designed to shed light on spending that may be deemed as being excessive. It is designed to protect the taxpaying citizens to ensure good stewardship of public finances.

We've had these conversations, and that's why we on this side of the House and I personally can support the threshold of disclosure in this bill. It's been set at \$125,000, and this seems to be a reasonable number.

This bill as it's presently written enables school boards to disclose names and salaries. This is a concern to me personally and to many teachers. Wildrose does not want teachers to be concerned about their salaries being disclosed as an indirect consequence of this legislation. Teachers are the backbone of our education system, and their focus should be on ensuring that students reach their full potential, not on whether their names and their salaries are being disclosed on the sunshine list. When it comes to educators, any disclosures that boards decide on should not go below the threshold of \$125,000 proposed in the bill for agencies, boards, and commissions.

I'm supportive of this bill, but I do think that it could be strengthened to ensure that it meets the intended purpose, to ensure

that taxpayers have the information they need to know where their tax dollars are being spent and also that they are receiving good value for those tax dollars.

After consultation and feedback with stakeholders affected by Bill 5, I would like to introduce an amendment to ensure that teachers are provided with the same threshold limits of \$125,000 as the rest of the public employees in Alberta. I would like to table a notice of amendment through the House. I'll wait until it's passed out, Madam Chair.

The Chair: This will be amendment A2.

You can go ahead, hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Chair. The amendment reads: Mr. Smith to move that Bill 5, Public Sector Compensation Transparency Act, be amended as follows. Section 1(o)(ii) is amended by adding "or by an education body" after "public sector body." Section 10(1)(a) is struck out, and the following is substituted: "(a) the names of those employees of the education body whose total compensation and severance during the previous calendar year is greater than the threshold referred to in section 1(o)(ii)."

The Wildrose Party, as we have said, understands and I think this House now understands that when we're looking at a sunshine list, it is for excessive amounts. Teachers and most employees, wage-earners, don't necessarily need to have their names on a sunshine list. At \$125,000 we agree with the government that this is a reasonable threshold, and we believe that it should be applied to all teachers.

I would ask you to support this amendment.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. member.

Just for the education of committee members, even when you are reading a notice of amendment, it would be inappropriate to use your own name in reading that, so just as we go forward.

Mr. Smith: Oh. Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise also in support of this amendment. I sincerely hope this is a good example of how we can all work together as opposition and with the government to truly improve a bill. Bill 5 as originally presented did an awful lot of enabling of potential – it created a very open possibility for school boards in this case but also other bodies to do some pretty broad things when it came to sunshine lists. What this amendment does is really narrow down that focus to a more appropriate number.

I have some general concerns with sunshine lists as a concept. I'm not quite as enthusiastic about them as our friends in Wildrose. Perhaps I will elaborate on those specific concerns when we get to third reading, but I rise and will speak here in favour of this amendment. Later this afternoon I will be presenting a similar amendment for a different section to close another loophole along the same lines.

Really, I just wanted to rise and thank the members for the opportunity to collaborate and work together on this with members of the Official Opposition as well as the members of the government to do what I think opposition is meant to do, and that's to ask good questions and close loopholes in legislation to make it as strong as it possibly can be for the benefit of all Albertans and, in this particular case, to ensure that we have assuaged the fears of teachers, I think the very legitimate fears of teachers especially, and of others in public education and all education systems that their information will not be shared unnecessarily. There are other ways

of ensuring transparency in education, pay grids and public negotiations being chief among them.

With that, I'll take my place and look forward to hearing from the government. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I would like to thank the members opposite, both the Wildrose Party and the Alberta Party, for working with us on this amendment. We did hear a number of concerns from the ATA and from individual teachers with respect to this bill, and we are happy to support this amendment that they have brought forward to assuage the fears of those teachers and to make sure that they feel that they are properly protected and that their incomes will not be disclosed unnecessarily by this legislation.

I think this has been an excellent example of co-operation on all sides of the House. I would like to thank the House for working with us on this and for the overall commitment, I think, on all sides to transparency in government. I would urge all members to support this amendment.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other speakers to amendment A2? The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

3:40

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the minister for the work that the government is doing to improve the transparency act. I rise to support the amendment to Bill 5. Wildrose has advocated for all agencies, boards, and commissions to be included on the salary disclosure sunshine list. Albertans have a right to know where their tax dollars are being spent. Transparency in government is essential. Only with transparency can citizens fully understand their government's operations.

When the bill was introduced, I did all of a sudden start to get e-mails from teachers with concerns, so I think the work that's being done here is good, and we can support this amendment. That being said, Madam Chair, teachers are unique when it comes to salary disclosure. School boards have negotiated a salary grid with the teachers' union. If you know the name of the teacher and their years of experience teaching, you will already have some idea about their salary. Our educators in our classrooms should not be distracted by the possibility of being on a sunshine list. Feedback received from teachers all around the province shows that teachers are very concerned. The Alberta Teachers' Association opposes this provision of Bill 5, and I do not think there is any need for lists of teachers' names and salaries to be published.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to amendment A2?

If not, I'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A2 carried]

The Chair: We're back on the bill. Are there any further speakers? The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I rise to present an amendment to this bill, section 11. I'll hand around the appropriate number of copies, and with the chair's indulgence and in the interests of moving things along expeditiously this afternoon, I will speak to the amendment while it's being handed out if no one minds.

I'm presenting an amendment to section 11, and I've given away all my copies, so I can't tell you exactly what it says.

The Chair: Hon. member, if you could just wait for a moment until I get a copy of the amendment, and then we can go ahead.

Mr. Clark: Yes.

The Chair: Thank you. Do you have the original?

Mr. Clark: I was given the original, unfortunately.

The Chair: Yeah. That's what I need, the original, please. All right. Go ahead.

Mr. Clark: Shall we try again?

The Chair: Yes.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much. We live and we learn.

This amendment is very similar to the amendment we just passed on section 10, this one applying, however, to section 11, which refers to municipal bodies, municipal authorities. The amendment reads that Bill 5, Public Sector Compensation Transparency Act, be amended as follows: section 1(o)(ii) is amended by adding "or by a municipal authority" after "public sector body," and that section 11(1) is amended by striking out clause (a) and substituting the following: "(b) the names of those employees of the municipal authority whose total compensation and severance during the previous calendar year is greater than the threshold referred to in section 1(o)(ii)."

All of the same arguments that applied in section 10 apply here. It puts a floor under what municipal authorities are able to disclose in the same way that we just did in section 10 for educational bodies.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any hon. members wishing to speak? This will be amendment A3. The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Once again, I'd like to thank the members of the House for working together on these amendments.

The initial intent of the bill had been to provide municipalities and school boards with sort of the discretion to choose what the limits were. We think that it's important that if we're going to impose limits on those entities, the limits are the same for both entities. We know that, certainly with respect to teachers, concerns have been heard, I think, by all members in the House, and I suspect that similar concerns probably could have been echoed by municipal employees about what might ultimately be done with those salaries.

I think this is a great example of co-operation. I'm really happy to support this amendment as well, and I would encourage all members of this House to vote for it.

Thanks.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Madam Chair. I really just have a question here regarding the consultation, perhaps, that went on specific to this particular amendment. We just had AUMA and AAMDC meetings, and I'm wondering if there was any consultation with the municipal districts regarding this kind of thing and

what their input might have been. I don't know, so I'm asking the question.

The Chair: Any hon. member wishing to respond to that question?

Ms Ganley: I'll apologize because I don't have the information directly off the top of my head in terms of how that went forward. I certainly know that initially, I believe, there were some initial conversations with municipalities, particularly with respect to the Minister of Municipal Affairs, but I'd want to confirm that. I mean, in terms of the amendments I understand that they were brought forward by members of the House on the basis of information that they received from third, outside parties. Certainly, those same third parties contacted my offices. It's difficult for me, when we're talking about amendments being made by other parties, to speak to whether or not consultation was done.

The Chair: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to amendment A3?

If not, then, I will call the question.

[Motion on amendment A3 carried]

The Chair: We are back on the bill. Any further comments, questions, amendments to Bill 5? The hon. Member for Calgary-North West.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Chair. I have in my hand the required number of copies for an amendment to Bill 5. I'll give them a chance to be distributed, and then I'll speak to it.

Thank you.

The Chair: This will be amendment A4.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Ms Jansen: Okay. Thank you, Chair. We propose the following amendment to Bill 5 by adding the following after 7(7) to make this 7(8): the minister shall receive a report from the appropriate standing legislative committee about the continued effectiveness of compensation disclosure by no later than January 1, 2019, and every four years after that. A review every four years, we think, is an important part of making sure that this legislation is as effective as possible. As responsible legislators we want to make sure that we regularly review the legislation to ensure that it has the continued beneficial effects in the context of all our legislation, and then we have the opportunity to improve it if we need to.

3:50

I'm explicitly referring this legislation to committee for review. We think this is necessary because in the broader context of over a century of Alberta legislation we have had only one public salary disclosure since 1998. That was by the Treasury Board directive 12/98, and that required disclosure of compensation for the top-rung staff at GOA organizations. As we continue to build on Alberta's public-sector compensation framework, we think it's appropriate for the House to review the effectiveness of the steps we take and just to consider whether the legislation remains current and whether it remains relevant. If we have the opportunity to periodically consider the effects of this act, to evaluate new research and evidence about the entire range of effects and impacts of compensation disclosure, we stay on the cutting edge of this, which I think is important.

We also want members of the public to have the explicit opportunity to pose their own questions and their own comments about how well this system of disclosure fulfills or doesn't fulfill their expectations, which is pretty important, to make sure that it's

doing exactly what it needs to do and that members of the public feel that it does as well. This Legislature takes the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Standing Committee on the road every year. They do that in order to gather information from the public, and that is an important thing.

Future legislators should not have to appeal to political whims in order to review this legislation. This is about openness and transparency. They could still review it sooner if they wish, but we think that four years is a pretty good amount that we settled on. I would certainly hope that you would consider this amendment.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to speak in support of this amendment. I think it's very important that any legislation that's about transparency be reviewed by the people of Alberta on a regular basis. As we know, in the Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee I've made a very similar motion to take it on the road. As the Member for Calgary-North West has indicated, the Heritage Savings Trust Fund Committee travels the province and talks to Albertans. I think that's a very, very important thing for us to do, and I think that when we have a bill that's about transparency, it's important that we take the opportunity and put that into this bill, that we will come back and ask Albertans again what they think. It also gives this Legislature and future Legislatures some accountability to make sure that the bill doesn't have any unintended consequences.

One of the concerns that I have in general with sunshine lists is that when we look at other jurisdictions, there's a wage inflation problem. If I find out that my salary is \$2,000 less than the person sitting in the desk next to me, it's pretty unlikely that the person in the desk next to me is going to ask for a pay cut. It's pretty likely that I'm going to ask for a raise. So there's some risk with sunshine lists.

I think it's very important that as we go down the path of expanding Alberta's sunshine list, we make sure that there are some brakes in legislation and look down the road to say: "Are there unintended consequences? If so, let's deal with them." Let's make sure that we put some formal process in place to ensure that that happens.

I'm speaking and voting in favour of this amendment. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Chair. I won't speak long to this, but I want to thank the Member for Calgary-North West for her thoughtful amendment to the bill. I think it's prudent for us to regularly review legislation, regularly review the things we do in this House. I'm not sure if we would do this for everything we do, but I think that this is prudent. I've long been an advocate for sunshine lists, and I think that even things that we support we should be always willing to question and review and make sure that they are still a good idea after we've passed them into law. I'd encourage all members of the House to support the amendment.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Madam Chair. I actually have a question for the hon. member with respect to this. I, too, feel that this is an excellent idea. I think that, certainly, in this particular case it's important to have some review and oversight of the act to make sure that it's working in the way that we want it to work and that it's having the effects that we want it to have. So I think that that's a

great idea. I just wanted to ask specifically about the committee. I apologize; this may just be my newness to the House. Would this cause a committee to be created? If there's a special committee, does this go to a pre-existing committee, or will the government come forward and work with the opposition to create a new committee?

Thank you.

Ms Jansen: Thank you to the minister. I believe that it wouldn't cause a committee to be created. I think we could give this to one of our committees that we currently have in existence, and it could be handled that way.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Madam Chair. I also have a question. I support in general the intent of the amendment. I'm just wondering if she has any description, as she's put in here "a comprehensive review of this Act" as opposed to just a review of the act, of what's envisioned in a comprehensive review as opposed to just a review.

Ms Jansen: I thank the member for the question. You know, because it's an amendment, I haven't been prescriptive here, so I haven't exactly outlined where we want to go, but I think that's certainly a discussion that we can have going forward. I think certainly that we want input from the public. We want to make sure that the information we're asking the government of Alberta and public bodies to go to the effect of compiling: is it appropriate? Is it sufficient information? We need to be checking that as we go forward. I believe that sort of the idea behind this is that we make sure that we're doing that. The information that we ask to be disclosed, the purpose of it, really, is to help Albertans better understand how we compensate our public servants. We want to make sure going forward that we have that. When we talk about comprehensive, that's the discussion we can certainly have at the committee level.

The Chair: Any other hon. members wishing to speak? The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. McIver: Yeah. Madam Chair, I'm glad to hear that the minister is interested in this and thinks it's a good idea. A hundred years ago, when we were over on that side, one of the pieces of advice that we got . . .

Mr. Cooper: How about six months?

Mr. McIver: It was six months. I know. It seems like a hundred years.

One of the pieces of advice that we got from legislative experts was that most or perhaps all legislation should be reviewed on some schedule to make sure that it remains current – I think the phrase we used for it was evergreening – just looked at once in a while to make sure that it still makes sense. I think that's what this amendment says, and I'm highly suspicious – if the government checks with experts, they'll talk to probably the same people or similar people that we did and probably get the same advice. We think this is genuinely good advice for government and hope that they choose to listen.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to speak in support of this amendment. I especially like that we have this four-year anniversary for a review, and I would like to see that actually attached to almost every piece of legislation that a government ever

puts forward. I think it's a great idea. I'm not all that familiar with some of the language used in these things, but it does say, "a special committee," and I understand, hon. member, that you're amending it now to a legislative committee?

Ms Jansen: I think we're going to strike that out.

Mr. MacIntyre: Okay. Great. Then my question becomes redundant, and we can just throw this to a committee, which is kind of where I was going to go with that.

I'm very much in favour of this. As you all know, we have been – how shall we say? – adamant about referring things to committee. That's sort of an understatement. We have been doggedly adamant to refer things to committee, and I would very much like to see this bill follow that routing. Ultimately, I hope every member in this Legislature will support this bill, that makes good use of the parliamentary processes that we have in this Legislature with regard to standing committees, which are there to do this very good work, that involves each one of us that is perhaps not on the front line of this Legislature. But it involves us backbenchers, and it gives us direct input into the development of good, sound legislation, which is a valuable contribution that each and every one of us who has been elected here can make to legislation.

I'm very pleased to see this amendment, and I enthusiastically support it. Thank you.

4:00

The Chair: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Chair. I think that we'll find support for a friendly subamendment to strike "special" from the amendment. Perhaps I'm mistaken, but I believe we'll find general support, if not unanimous support, to do so as a friendly subamendment.

Ms Jansen: And we concur.

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

Mr. Feehan: Thank you. I'd just like to ask the member a few questions for my own understanding of the timing of these things. You indicate that you would be asking that a review of the act begin on January 1, but I don't understand what that means in terms of when a review would need to be tabled, if there is any limitation on the amount of time that review could take.

Secondly, under section (b) it refers to: "every 4 years after the date on which the . . . committee submits its final report." Is that, again, the beginning of the review, or do they need to submit the next report at the deadline of four years from the date of the initial report?

Thank you.

Ms Jansen: I thank the member for the question. We're prepared to give the government some flexibility on this.

Mr. Feehan: I'm sorry. I missed the answer.

Ms Jansen: All right. We're prepared to give the government some flexibility on this.

Mr. MacIntyre: Just regarding the timing of this and not understanding fully the whole procedures of these things, is the timing of the delivery of the report something that is subject to the government's wishes or the committee's wishes? In the timing of these reports' delivery, in the amount of time that a committee has

to study this legislation, for example every four years, is that window of study determined by government or by the committee?

Mr. Mason: Well, in the hon. member's amendment, unless I'm misunderstanding you, sir, it says that it will begin on January 1, 2019, and that it will "submit a final report . . . within 6 months" of beginning the review.

Mr. MacIntyre: Within six months of that date?

Mr. Mason: Yes.

Mr. MacIntyre: Okay.

Mr. Mason: So that would be instruction to the committee. If they can get it done in four months, great.

Mr. MacIntyre: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other speakers to the amendment? Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just want to say that, you know, there are many times in this House when, sometimes, it gets heated and we're not necessarily seeing eye to eye on things and where we're often at odds with each other and our vision for where we want to go in this province, but it is very refreshing to be able to stand here today and to see the kind of co-operation that's going on here. I know that I would love to speak to this amendment and say that I can support it wholeheartedly.

I don't know. I mean, I'm so brand new to this House that most of the things that go on here tend to go right over my head, and I really appreciate it when the members from the other side of the House sometimes remind me that, no, I can't use a person's name or I can't refer to somebody that's not in the House. You do it gently, and you forgive me for that.

But when I can stand up and I can see the House co-operating, as it is today – I don't know. I mean, I've not been aware of: has there ever been a day in the House when every party has submitted an amendment to a bill that's been accepted in one day? I don't know.

You know, when I stood in front of my kids in my class, I said: please don't judge the House and its effectiveness based on question period, and please realize that when we go into things like the Committee of the Whole, there are often times when they will actually listen to each other and they will talk to each other, and sometimes good amendments and good ideas can come to the forefront.

I think that we can be very proud of what we've done today, and I would just commend the House and ask you to support this subamendment to the amendment to the bill. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Chair. I believe you will find unanimous consent that I move that amendment A4 to Bill 5, Public Sector Compensation Transparency Act, be amended by striking out "special" wherever it occurs.

The Chair: I believe that I can accept the subamendment as long as all members of the committee are okay with waiving the requirement that everybody receive a copy of the subamendment. Agreed? All right.

So it will be SA1, which is a subamendment to strike the word "special" from amendment A4.

[Motion on subamendment SA1 carried]

The Chair: So we are back to amendment A4 as amended. Any further speakers to that? The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, I just wanted to rise one last time and try to be brief, just to thank all members for their co-operation here today. I think we've done some really good work, and I would urge all members to support this amendment. In particular, I'd like to thank the Member for Calgary-North West for her contribution.

The Chair: This is on amendment A4. Any further speakers to amendment A4 as amended?

If not, we'll call the vote.

[Motion on amendment A4 as amended carried]

The Chair: We're back on the bill. The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Chair. I have an amendment to put forward. With your permission, I'll start reading it while it gets distributed.

The Chair: If you could just wait, hon. member, until I get a copy, please.

Mr. McIver: Okay. Thanks.

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. McIver: Okay. Thank you, Madam Chair. The amendment is to move that Bill 5, Public Sector Compensation Transparency Act, be amended in section 7 by striking out subsection (2) and submitting the following:

The Minister shall aggregate and republish all of the information disclosed in accordance with this Act and such information shall be made available to the public including on the public website of the Minister's department.

Madam Chair, I'm hoping that this will be received kindly. Clearly, it's a sunshine bill, so the government has every intention of shining sunshine on the information that they've collected. They've actually committed to do that. Why would they go forward with this in the first place? All this says is something that I hope the government will see as common sense and transparent. Put it in one place where the public can find it. Clearly, the government has said that it's important to collect this information. Clearly, the government has said that it's important to make this available to the public. I just think it would be a nice service to the public if the government would put it all on one website where the public could find it since the whole point is making it so the public can find it anyway.

On that basis, I am ever hopeful. We live in hope. I'm ever hopeful that the government will consider this. They may be intending to do this anyway. I think it's good to make that clear to the public, and I'm, again, hopeful that the government will look kindly upon this amendment.

Thank you.

4:10

The Chair: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to strongly support this amendment. It's a common-sense amendment. Again, the government may have been intending to do so in any case, but I think it's important to write it into the legislation. The original sunshine list, which was done through order in council, created an excellent website, which serves as a resource for those who want to access the information. This would require by law that all of the

different entities coming under the act would bring the information together in aggregate so that Albertans do not have to check 200-odd websites or 200-odd different sources to find the information.

We can look for an example like the B.C. sunshine list, which is technically only accessed through freedom of information, and then I believe that the *Vancouver Sun* has created its own strange website for it. It's a bizarre spectacle, that when people want to access public information, they have to go to a newspaper to sort through for the sunshine list in that province.

I think that this would be a very useful tool. Again, the government may have been intending to do it anyway, but I think that it would be important to put it into the legislation so that all of the different entities that would now fall under it would all have that information aggregated together.

I thank the leader of the third party for the productive amendment.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Madam Chair. And we were on such a roll. I rise to speak against the amendment, and the reason for that is that – we are absolutely committed to ensuring that this sort of information is available out there and is available to the public. We did do some cost estimates on what this sort of amalgamating and creating a searchable database would be, and there was a substantial administrative cost involved as a result. We feel that it is not appropriate, given the shortage of public funds currently available, to direct them in this particular way. You know, we feel that administrative cost is maybe not a thing that we should be increasing substantially at this time, so I would not support the amendment, and I would encourage all members not to support the amendment.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Madam Chair. We were so close. So close. It has been a pretty remarkable afternoon, actually. It is pretty remarkable when this Legislative Assembly can work in the way it does, passing amendments that perhaps the government wasn't expecting, but with thoughtful consideration on the part of the government we have in fact passed those amendments. So I give the government a tremendous amount of credit for their flexibility, for their willingness to accommodate and to listen to what the opposition has to say, and I'd encourage them to do the same on this amendment.

You know, as you read the amendment, "be made available to the public including on the public website of the Minister's department," that doesn't need to be a highly interactive, very expensive, searchable database that you can carve up in a bunch of different ways. It could conceivably be an electronic PDF document. Just put it on there. Here it is. That costs virtually nothing, and it takes about five minutes to do that.

I think that in 2015 and forward it is what Albertans expect. How do I find out what the sunshine list says? I go to the government website. That's what Albertans will do, and to think that they need to file a request to get a physical document – that PDF could be searchable, just by control F, find information, that way. It doesn't need to be a big, expensive process. In fact, it may be an object lesson for the government in finding ways of doing things like this very cost-effectively. It could be essentially zero cost to the government. There are ways, just sitting here at my desk, that I thought of doing that.

I would encourage the government to reconsider their position on this and to vote in favour of this amendment. Thank you.

The Chair: I'll recognize Strathmore-Brooks, followed by Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Chair, and I'll thank the Member for Calgary-Elbow for his comments. As he said, we were so close. Since we're having a productive discussion, I would ask the government to reconsider its views on this.

Most of the costs for this are sunken. These institutions report to ministers' offices, in any case. The information is already being compiled. It is merely putting it into a single spreadsheet. Now, I'm not volunteering to do the cutting and pasting myself, but I don't think that it would be particularly difficult for ministries who are receiving this information. This information is being reported to the ministries, in any case. They will have it in their hands. It would not be very difficult to aggregate it together in the existing website. A website already exists, created in I believe early 2013 if memory serves me correct. It is an excellent, easily accessible website, that this information could be easily plugged into.

Other jurisdictions in our own country that have sunshine lists do this. You could go to the Ontario sunshine list website and search for both the salaries of a minister's chief of staff and a TTC toll booth attendant in the same search. It's pretty easily done. It's done elsewhere.

I like to think that I'm one of the members more concerned with costs in this House. If there are significant administrative costs that are not sunken but are above and beyond current administrative costs, then I would ask the Minister of Justice to table the documents indicating what those costs are. But I would be skeptical of there being significant administrative costs that are not already buried. The ministries have this – we'll have this information, in any case, and the idea is that we merely put it onto the website, compiling it in a single, accessible spot for Albertans to access. I hate to see another third-party organization or news organizations have to do what they've done in British Columbia and have people of our province go to somebody else's website, where someone has hired a computer programmer to aggregate the data for them. Albertans should be able to go to their government's website to find out how much government employees are making.

I would strongly encourage the minister and the government to reconsider the position here in light of the *Kumbaya* atmosphere we seem to have built over the last hour or so.

Thank you.

The Chair: Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you very much. If the minister prefers to stay with 7(2) as it's currently written, I just wonder if you could tell us, please: what is the intent of how you would distribute the information? Quite frankly, a sunshine list that either can't be found or isn't made public isn't really a sunshine list. As it's currently written, it says, "in the form and manner determined by the Minister." So what does that actually look like, please, if you could tell us?

Ms Ganley: Sorry?

Mr. Orr: My point was that 7(2) as it's actually written says that it's entirely at your discretion, which is fine. But my question is: how do you plan to make it public? A sunshine list that is not public or can't be found isn't really a sunshine list. It's at your discretion, but what is your discretion? What's your intent on the manner determined to make it public?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Madam Chairperson. The intention was to have the individual agencies publish their list themselves, so those would be made available on their website or in whatever manner they sort of saw fit to publish that information. I mean, if what we're being asked to do is to essentially take the sheets of information and reprint them online, that's fine. If what we're being asked to do is to recombine all the information by last name and create a searchable database, the costs initially in terms of administrative burden in going forward are substantial and, we think, sort of not worth the additional cost given that someone can simply go to that particular board's website or go to that particular board and get the information that way.

I mean, the intention had been that at some point a website would be developed with links to these other various sites. But in terms of this, which I can only assume is suggesting that we need to bring all the information together and create a searchable database, the cost of that is considerable.

4:20

The Chair: Lacombe-Ponoka, go ahead.

Mr. Orr: Yeah. I do appreciate the sensitivity to costs. I commend you on that. I guess my only question would be: if every board and agency and department is allowed to publish it on their own, do you anticipate any issues of compliance or checking or making sure that they actually do? I have some concerns, I guess, about that.

Thank you.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Madam Chair. I mean, obviously there are methods to ensure compliance within the act itself. In addition to disclosing publicly, the individual agencies, boards, and commissions or municipalities and school boards, as the case may be, are required to disclose publicly and also to the minister, so the minister will know that that disclosure has been made or be told that that disclosure isn't made. If they're not compliant, there are compliance mechanisms in the act with respect to auditing or with respect to ensuring the disclosure occurs. With respect to the Legislative Assembly offices, obviously, we've just amended those compliance mechanisms today. Other than that, I would suggest that it's already in the act.

Thank you.

Mr. Gotfried: Madam Chairman, I just wanted to speak. I understand some of the issues addressed here, one of those being cost. I'm not an expert on websites or anything of that sort, but I've certainly been involved with development of many websites over the years. It would seem to me that if cost is an issue, one website with a standardized template, with a standardized request for information for input so that the information that is being developed by the various organizations, bodies is done in a standard format would then allow for an easy upload into a single website, which could be compartmentalized to allow that to occur.

Instead of having three or five or seven or 10 different organizations loading up information all in different formats, you send the format out to everybody, tell them to use this, push a button, it automatically uploads, and all you have to do is have one administrator ensure that it is uploading correctly. I think the cost argument here doesn't hold for anybody who's ever developed any kind of websites or uploaded information. In fact, a single website would be more cost-effective, easier for people to access, easier for government to administrate, and all that is required is some front-end work to achieve that.

Mr. McIver: Listen. I'm, in fairness, happy the minister is concerned about costs. Thank you. But, Madam Chair, I will also

say that the amendment as it's written isn't really prescriptive. This would leave the ministry the flexibility of scanning the reports and plunking them up there. I appreciate that that's not as good as a searchable, mashable database, but our duty here isn't to information mashers; our duty is to Albertans that want to know what the government has said they ought to be able to know. You know, if the mashers want to take off with the scan sheets, print it, and pay somebody to put in some searchable database for themselves, then that's not the government's expense. It's not the government's problem.

All I'm saying is that hopefully the minister will reconsider what she said because I don't see anything in my amendment that requires a fully searchable database in any particular format. Obviously, if the government found a way to do that, that would be best, but the fact is that I would consider the amendment honoured if the government just said: once a year, when we get this stuff in, we'll scan it and post it.

One of my colleagues said that there are apps you can get for your smart phone for \$5, where you can take a picture of something, and it pops up on the website once you get that automated. I appreciate that the government will probably want to do things slightly more sophisticated than that because it's a pretty big machine.

Anyway, I hope the minister will reconsider what she said when she stood, particularly in light of what we're saying. We won't be criticizing if it's not in the most searchable, most sophisticated database. We're actually kind of trying to save the government from criticism, that people will say: now we have to have sunshine on the sunshine list. It's probably best if people don't have to say that. I hope that the government can see their way clear to accepting what I think is intended to be helpful and I certainly hope a reasonable amendment.

Mr. Clark: A fairly simple and straightforward question for the minister. In the year 2015 and in subsequent years if this information is not already electronic, I'd be very surprised. If you don't anticipate distributing this information via a website, how do you anticipate distributing this information? And what's the hesitation here given the different options that have been presented, which seem pretty reasonably in terms of simplicity and getting this information out there?

Ms Ganley: Well, I think the hesitation in this case is not to publish the information online; we're happy to publish the information online. In fact, we have every intention of making sure that it is as available as possible. The exact mechanism of that hasn't been determined.

I mean, to me, the way this is worded, "aggregate and republish," looks like we're having to aggregate and republish, which I would assume means putting all the information together. I think that I find it overly restrictive in terms of what we have to do going forward, you know, ensuring that that information is widely available and ensuring that the cost is as reasonable as possible. Like I say, I have cost estimates from our technical experts. I was never a person who programmed databases or who was a technical person in that way, so I can only assume that the cost estimates that I have received are accurate cost estimates, and those cost estimates were fairly high.

Certainly, we can commit to having a website where everyone can access the information. I'm just a little bit concerned that this is overly restrictive to the government. I mean, I appreciate the points that you're all making, and perhaps you know things about computers. Certainly, my experience has been that when you're dealing with things of this nature, and I think specifically of the university transitioning – I shouldn't mention specific examples. But specifically when you're dealing with databases of this nature,

they are often much more costly and much more onerous than you expect that they're going to be, or at least that has been my experience. I can but rely on the advice of my technical experts, which is that that sort of thing would be very expensive, and I feel that this is unnecessarily restrictive to the government's ability to pick how to do that.

The Chair: Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm going to repeat something I said earlier. Again, I pride myself as being sort of the penny-pincher in the House. So, you know, if there was a strong argument that this was not cost-effective, I'd certainly be willing to hear it. Can the minister tell us what that estimated cost is, provided to her by her department, before we could vote on this amendment? If it is unduly expensive or burdensome and a cost figure has been provided to the minister, I would love to hear it.

The Chair: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I just want to indicate to the members that having just seen this now for the first time, there are some considerations that the government needs to take into account. For example, in fact, is the best way to make the information public to aggregate it on the website of the minister's department? That is an assumption that's contained in this motion. It's not necessarily something that relates to what the actual best use or desire of potential users is as to where they want to find this information. So that's an unknown question. It's simply an assumption that this is the best way to do it, and there needs to be some additional work done in order to determine what costs are and so on.

The simple fact of the matter is, Madam Chair, that the government is not prepared to support this amendment at this time. At some future date this, in fact, may well be what we do, but we're not prepared to support this amendment at this time.

4:30

The Chair: Calgary-Elbow, followed by Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just want to point out something in the bill itself. Section 7(2) currently reads, "The Minister may aggregate or republish." So the words "aggregate or republish" are actually in the section as it stands now. We're not quibbling on "aggregate"; we're quibbling on "shall" and "may." And far be it from me to cast aspersions or suggest that your government would ever do such a thing, but what if you choose not to? What's the point of this law, of this bill? Given that you "may" aggregate or republish, really, this is perhaps the ultimate loophole in this legislation. You may choose not to publish any information at any point.

As this bill is written, if I'm to interpret this section literally, you "may aggregate or republish any part ... of the information disclosed in accordance." So you may choose to publish the last period at the end of the disclosure. The number 6: you may choose to simply disclose that. I'm not suggesting that you will. I think that there's a lot of goodwill here this afternoon. This bill, for those who feel strongly about sunshine lists – if we're going to have a sunshine list bill, you know, I think that there are a lot of great things in here.

I have some questions and concerns. I guess, you know, as we dig and unpack this section, I think it makes the amendment presented before us all that much more important because, frankly, this could be the ultimate loophole to publishing absolutely no information at all.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Well, I don't think anything could be further from the truth, notwithstanding the fact that it's the government that brought forward the bill in order to extend transparency with respect to this, and that is the intention of the government.

If you look at section 3(1), it says:

Commencing in 2016, on or before June 30 in each year, every public sector body shall disclose to the public and the Minister, in the form and manner determined by the Minister, a statement of remuneration in relation to the previous calendar year in accordance with subsection (2).

Subsection 2 lays out exactly what the information that has to be disclosed is. So there is a legal requirement for the disclosure of this information in the act, and it is not a loophole.

The Chair: Go ahead, Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Madam Chair. The minister spoke of estimates for the cost of this aggregate disclosure and publishing, and I was just wondering if she could table those documents. I pray that there's more than one estimate.

The Chair: Any further comments or questions to amendment A5? Did you have a further comment?

Mr. McIver: Just that I hope the government will take the last 15 or 20 seconds before I close and reconsider. This was genuinely intended to be helpful, and I think that the government is putting themselves at risk of needing to put sunshine on their sunshine list, and I would hate to see that. I think that you've got a chance. You brought forward a piece of legislation, I think, with good intention. You've got what I think is a pretty easy opportunity here to solidify that good intention, and I'd hate to see you lose that opportunity.

Thank you.

Mr. Cooper: Madam Chair, I might just ask for unanimous consent of the House to go to one-minute bells until 6 o'clock.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Chair: On amendment A5, are there any further speakers?

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A5 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:35 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Fraser	Rodney
Anderson, W.	Gotfried	Smith
Clark	Hanson	Starke
Cooper	Jansen	Swann
Cyr	MacIntyre	van Dijken
Drysdale	McIver	Yao
Fildebrandt	Orr	

4:40

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Horne	Nielsen
Ceci	Kazim	Payne
Connolly	Larivee	Piquette
Cortes-Vargas	Littlewood	Renaud

Dach	Loyola	Rosendahl
Drever	Luff	Sabir
Feehan	Malkinson	Schmidt
Fitzpatrick	Mason	Schreiner
Ganley	McKitrick	Shepherd
Goehring	McLean	Sweet
Gray	McPherson	Turner
Hinkley	Miller	Westhead
Hoffman	Miranda	Woollard
Totals:	For – 20	Against – 39

[Motion on amendment A5 lost]

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Madam Chair. I have an amendment to put forward, and I'll give the appropriate copies here.

While it's circulating, I'll just say a few words about it. I think everyone wants to ensure with those agencies and commissions and boards and publicly funded organizations that we have access to information around how they're paid and what role they perform in our public system. That's part of why a sunshine list has been discussed and, in many cases, supported.

I think there are some sensitivities around individualizing the incomes of people. Professionals, especially private professionals, have certainly got concerns about how it will be interpreted, who will use it, whether it can be used by some individuals for purposes that are really to attack or to diminish or to embarrass without full knowledge. Certainly, some of those would be the physicians who have been in touch with me.

This amendment is an attempt to recognize that if you're being publicly funded, there needs to be public awareness of what that public funding is, but it's less important to know who's getting what. In fact, some of the results that I've seen around previous sunshine lists are that when someone notices someone else is getting more, they usually lobby to get equal. So it actually ends up raising the income and the salaries of many of the people, when the goal of this is to try and keep a lid on increases.

This amendment, I think, is an attempt to anonymize, make anonymous, the incomes of individuals but still identify what that professional group as a median income might make. For example, in the case of physicians, if a general practitioner median income is \$250,000 a year, that would become the important information that the public needs to know. We don't need to know that John Man received \$260,000 this year and that Joe Btfsplk got only \$125,000 last year. [interjections] Who is Btfsplk? It came from some cartoon.

An Hon. Member: *Li'l Abner*.

Dr. Swann: *Li'l Abner*, was it? Thank you.

Are we getting off topic here? [interjections] I dated myself. Hands up: how many know who Joe Btfsplk is? About 10 people here. It was a test. I've lost a lot of people. Wow.

Could you bring us back to order, Madam Chair? Where was I?

The Chair: A reminder that the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View has the floor, and we are debating amendment A6.

Dr. Swann: So it may well be that we want to know what GPs in Alberta get. We could see every individual GP and their income for the past year but without a name associated with it, and we could see a median income for all GPs to get an idea of what the standard GP income is, recognizing that we have no idea what their overhead is – how many staff they have, how much in office expenses and so

on – which puts it into a bigger context. We will not know that, and that's part of, I think, what physicians have contacted me about, concerns about a gross number as opposed to a net number and having an individual name attached to an individual salary. Who gains benefit from that?

I think that what we as a public want to know is: are GPs being paid, on average, too much? Are cardiovascular surgeons being paid too much? Do we need to know what this particular cardiovascular surgeon makes compared to this cardiovascular surgeon? I don't think that's the purpose of this, but we do need to know why we're paying so much for cardiovascular surgeons and so little for GPs. That's the important thing. Why aren't we valuing general practitioners more in this culture than the cardiovascular surgeon? That's relevant information. I think that we need to know the median. We do not need to know individual names attached to it, which creates very significant sensitivities in the community, not only doctors but other professional groups as well that are receiving public funds.

I'm recommending that it be anonymized, that we have a median income for that particular category of practitioner, and that indeed it could be the same in some of the other organizations that we're concerned about. We identify the position, executive director, and in this line of work executive directors have a median income of this. We don't need to know the individual name attached to that, but we need to know: on average, what's the median income of the executive directors of these agencies, boards, and commissions, and is it within reason or not? Then we start to make some systematic changes if they seem to be out of line with the rest of the public service.

The Chair: Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Chair. I thank the Member for Calgary-Mountain View for his contribution to the debate. I must now follow the bad habits of the Minister of Justice and be the naysayer. I will speak against the proposed amendment.

I understand what the member is trying to achieve. In probably 99 per cent of the cases we don't particularly care about attaching a name to things, but it is important for reasons of transparency. In the original fight for the sunshine list in the winter of 2012-2013 one of the reasons compelling the government of the day to do it was so that we could find patronage appointments scattered throughout the government. Now, someone appointed to a position paid for by taxpayers: we would not be able to necessarily find out where that person has been plunked down in the bureaucracy or plunked down into different posts. You know, I won't get into too many specific examples here, but a former member of this House, defeated in the 2012 election, found himself a plum patronage appointment in the government. Now, the sunshine list did not appear at that time. We found that information out through other channels. But for the sunshine list to be of use in identifying those kinds of patronage appointments, a name must be attached.

Now, we've had a sunshine list for the core public service of the government since the winter of 2012-13 or the spring of 2013. I cannot recall a single news story from the *Edmonton Journal* or the *Calgary Herald* saying how much John Doe makes working as a policy analyst in the department of agriculture. It's just not of particular public interest. But it's important that we have the information because those capers will exist, hidden throughout the government.

This amendment, unfortunately, takes the sunshine out of the sunshine list. It destroys, largely, the purpose of the sunshine list. There are multiple purposes to sunshine lists. The reason that people want to use it is up to the taxpayers paying the bills of the

people listed in the sunshine lists. It's well intended but, I think, misplaced. The evidence does not support the idea that putting names on a sunshine list will inflate salaries. Quite the contrary. The jurisdictions in Canada that have sunshine lists tend to have, on average, I've seen, slightly lesser increases in public-sector compensation. It's been a few years since I did the study, but I think it was over a five-year period or a 10-year period that I did a study myself a few years ago. I don't believe that wiping the names is going to change that in any way, both pro or con.

4:50

The member is well intentioned, I think. I think he's also intending to protect doctors here, which is admirable, although I do trust the Minister of Justice when she says that a suitable – don't quote me on that. It's in *Hansard*. Don't quote me, *Hansard*.

I do trust the Minister of Justice when she says that suitable regulations will be drawn up to ensure that fee for payment for doctors is not listed as the salaries for those doctors. That would not be an accurate reflection of how much money they are taking home. I believe that is a suitable nuance that can be decided in regulation. Many things should not be decided in regulation but should be directly in legislation, but I think that is enough of a minutia that it could be trusted to be dealt with in regulation, and I think that the Minister of Justice has the best of intentions in that.

While I thank the Member for Calgary-Mountain View for his contribution to debate and while I hate to be now the second person to speak against any amendment in our new-found spirit of co-operation in here, which I suspect will be quickly dissolved in discussions on Bill 4 and Bill 6, I must unfortunately speak against it.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I rise to speak in favour of this amendment for a couple of reasons. Like with teachers and nurses, for doctors, which I know is part of the intent of this amendment, there is a pay grid. Albertans know what overall and particular physician compensation is, and I see, really, no good purpose served by naming names in this particular case.

I'll start by challenging or questioning one of the assertions made by the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, that there is no evidence that disclosure of salaries increases compensation and overall salary costs. In fact, there is, and I have two studies here that my crack research team has unearthed for us, which I'm happy to table tomorrow at an appropriate moment. These are academic papers. The first, *Increased Compensation Costs: an Externality of Mandatory Executive Compensation Disclosure*, evidence from Canada; and the second being *The Impact of Mandated Disclosure on Performance-based CEO Compensation*. Probably these papers are just as exciting and interesting as their titles promise. Most relevant is: "With the imposition of mandated disclosure . . . cash compensation increases more." I will table these at the appropriate time.

I think that the purpose of a sunshine list ought to be to see broadly what the compensation is, but I see no clear benefit in naming names specifically, and I'm sure our friends in the public service would agree with me on this point.

I do want to bring up a serious issue which has been attempted to be addressed in the bill. We've had some discussion, some very important and very moving and very powerful discussion, in this House about domestic violence. I know this is something the government takes very seriously, that I take very seriously. For those people who are at risk, primarily women, I think it must be said, although not exclusively, who may be putting away some of

their money to escape a domestic violence situation, there is a provision in this bill which allows for anyone who's subject to the bill to request to the minister that their name not be disclosed. If their spouse knows their name and specifically what they make, it can be part of what the spouse uses to keep them in a violent situation. Now, for someone to be required to apply to the minister to be excluded from the sunshine list – and in no way am I suggesting that the minister would not grant such an application expeditiously – is one more hurdle, one more barrier, and I think that's important for us to consider in this House as we think about the impact of sunshine lists. It's one more tool that an abuser can use to control that person.

In that vein, in that context, then, Madam Chair, I speak in favour of this amendment, and I encourage the government to please consider passing it. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Madam Chair. Well, sadly, I rise to speak against the amendment as well. Hopefully, the Member for Strathmore-Brooks and I can go back to being friends at least temporarily.

The Member for Calgary-Mountain View has raised, you know, an interesting point with respect to physicians. We're certainly aware and we have been hearing from physicians that their fee-for-service compensation, when it comes in, sort of goes to cover office costs in addition to salaries and that that's not necessarily the same. We are certainly aware of that problem. I myself very recently worked in a situation where the hours I billed – my office overhead costs and library costs were deducted from that. So I'm aware of how people can misinterpret what that means, and certainly we will be working very closely with physicians. I will be working with my colleague the Minister of Health to work out with physicians what is a more appropriate way to do that going forward. So we will certainly be looking into this issue.

In terms of names specifically, I think the Member for Strathmore-Brooks really made the main point here, which is that, you know, we need Albertans to have faith in their public service not just in terms of how their tax dollars are being spent but also in terms of the fact that appointments and hiring are being done on an appropriate basis, on the basis of skills and experience and not on the basis of being a patronage appointment. We do know that those criticisms are out there. There's a substantial number of criticisms with respect to agencies, boards, and commissions in specific, which is exactly what this list covers, so we think it is important for the public to have that information.

I think I would reiterate that the reason we chose the disclosure limit that we did choose is because we are aiming at higher income earners. We're not looking to disclose the salaries of everyone. We're looking to disclose the salaries of those who are in the top bracket, I suppose. I mean, certainly, I'm a person who has her salary disclosed online, and I don't think that that's a particular problem. I think that in order to maintain the confidence of the public not only in how their tax dollars are being spent but in how people are being hired, too, and how people are being appointed to agencies, boards, and commissions, it is appropriate to proceed forward in the way that the bill proceeds.

I do thank the Member for Calgary-Mountain View for bringing forward this point for discussion, but unfortunately I am not able to support it at this time. I would encourage all members not to support it.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd just like to follow up a little bit on the comments that the Minister of Justice made and respond to some of the concerns that the Member for Calgary-Mountain View has raised. Certainly, I have also received many e-mails to my constituency office asking the same question that the Member for Calgary-Mountain View has addressed: why do we need to publish names? It seems to a lot of people in my constituency that this act is more about shaming people for how much they make than actually providing transparency in how much people in the public service and other public agencies make. I just want to respond to those concerns with my own personal experience.

For those of you who are keen observers of the existing sunshine list, you will know that my name appears on the sunshine list for 2013 and 2014. As a hydrogeologist who used to be an employee of the department of environment and sustainable resource development, I made the princely sum of \$103,000 a year. All of that information is now publicly available to anybody who cares to look for it.

5:00

The publication of the sunshine list came at a time when tension between the public service and the government of the day was high. There were many in the public service that felt that there would be serious ramifications to us when our names were published. Then the day came when our names were published with our salaries attached to them, and – guess what? – none of those things that we feared would come to pass actually came to pass. I didn't ask for a raise. Nobody that I knew of in the office asked for a raise based on what other people saw on the sunshine list. With the way the public service salaries work, there is a strict grid system. It's not based on how much the boss likes you, right? You move up according to the grid at the appointed time. So those fears are inflated.

In fact, there were no other serious consequences. My family didn't ask me for more expensive Christmas or birthday presents even though they knew how much money I made. The political party that I'm proud to be a member of couldn't possibly ask me for more donations, because they already phone me six times a day and send me . . . [interjection] Yeah. Exactly. You know, none of those things that we feared would happen as a result of having our names published on the sunshine list came to pass.

The second thing that the Member for Calgary-Mountain View raised was the lack of context. I'd like to just let the Member for Calgary-Mountain View know that everybody who has their name published on the sunshine list already has a lack of context. You know, in my case the salary of \$103,000 is out there without any other context. It doesn't really speak to how much I would get paid in a similar position if I were hired by the private sector or by another public agency. In fact, in many cases, if I were to go and be a hydrogeologist in any of those other agencies or in the private sector, my salary would be much higher. So there's that context piece that's missing.

It also speaks to, you know, how my own personal expenses aren't reflected in that as well. In fact, there is one entertaining story, an interaction that I had with a staff member. I know that she's an avid viewer of the proceedings here at the Assembly, so I'm sure that she'll catch wind of this eventually. She worked in the same office that I did. She made substantially less than I did and refused to share the candies on her desk with me because she knew how much money I earned. She said: you can well afford to buy your own candies. The piece of context that was missing there was that she was a single person who had no children and still lived with the support of her parents – so her personal expenses were much lower than mine – whereas I had a wife in school and three children to support and a house to pay for.

You know, all of those contextual pieces around salary are missing for everybody that's published on the sunshine list. I don't think doctors have a particular concern that doesn't apply to anybody else who's included on the sunshine list.

Just to conclude by reiterating my points, I think people's fears are unfounded. There aren't going to be serious consequences for having their names published on a sunshine list, and those contextual pieces are always missing no matter what information we put on the sunshine list. I think that we need to go forward with the sunshine list as proposed and defeat this amendment.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm going to be brief. I want to thank the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar for his comments. I'm ashamed that an NDP-er has put the case for a sunshine list better than a Wildroser has. I think he very eloquently put forward some very good arguments for this and for why folks should not be concerned.

I wanted to point this out to the Member for Calgary-Elbow, who has raised concerns about government-sector salary inflation as a result of sunshine lists. A few years ago, during the original fight for the sunshine list, I did a lot of research around it, and I wanted to read some very important statistics very quickly. Between 2008 and 2012, if we divide provincial governments into two categories, those with sunshine lists and those without, those without sunshine lists were Alberta, Quebec, Newfoundland, and Prince Edward Island, and those with sunshine lists were B.C., Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick. Those with sunshine lists saw increases in government-sector compensation of 12.3 per cent. Those in provinces without sunshine lists saw increases of 13.7 per cent. This is data from Statistics Canada.

Now, there's a lot more to the context. There's a lot more behind the context of sunshine lists driving it up or down. But I think that fears around sunshine lists being a major driver of government-sector costs going up are exaggerated if not outright incorrect. If they were correct, I'd probably be the biggest opponent of government-sector sunshine lists, but I don't believe that they have the inflationary record expected. When Ontario sees its costs go up by significant amounts, it probably has more to do with the government and the political climate and those kinds of factors rather than if there is a sunshine list or not.

I wanted to just share that data from Statistics Canada with members of the House concerned about that issue. It's obviously an issue that is very, very serious to me, around the sustainability of the cost of our government, and it's not one that I think will be affected by the sunshine list.

The Chair: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to amendment A6?

If not, we'll call the vote.

[Motion on amendment A6 lost]

The Chair: We're back on Bill 5. Are there any further comments, questions, or amendments with respect to this bill?

If not, then we will call the question.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 5 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Bill 4

An Act to Implement Various Tax Measures and to Enact the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act

The Chair: We are on amendment A5, as proposed by the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks. Are there any further speakers to amendment A5?

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Chair. I expect that we will be able to move forward through the House this afternoon with a little bit of speed, but I just wanted to remind the House where we were prior to the break, because I know that there are a number of new members that have joined us here in the Assembly this afternoon that were unable to be a part of the debate. Given that we're just mere minutes away from voting, I wanted to make sure that everybody had the opportunity to know where we're at.

5:10

It's important to keep in mind that the things that we're doing here aren't just for today, but they're also for tomorrow and tomorrow's tomorrow. No one member of this Assembly is bigger than this Assembly. So it's important that everything we do has an eye on that tomorrow as we move forward and plan for the future of the province. I think that this is a good opportunity for us to maybe pause and look beyond, beyond just ourselves and beyond the challenges of today, to some of the risks of tomorrow. Madam Chair, we have seen all over the world in many jurisdictions that as governments grow and spending increases and as we move from crisis to crisis, many politicians in the past have this sense that today's problems are always the most important problems and they don't look for tomorrow.

We've seen the government propose in Bill 4 a debt limit of 15 per cent, which at the end of their plan will include \$50 billion of debt, a level of debt that I don't believe Albertans are comfortable with, a level of debt that we have not seen in generations in Alberta. Those core conservative values of living within your means have been essentially thrown away and discarded for a big-spending, big-government, high-tax plan. So as we look forward to this new debt limit of 15 per cent that's been set by the new government, I think it's wise that there is some preplanning that's done around this 15 per cent. I can only imagine that the House will have the will of the governing party, and as a result we will set a debt limit in this place of exactly 15 per cent, and that will equate to \$50 billion in debt by the end of the government's current fiscal plan.

What the amendment proposes is that in order for the government in a number of years from now to just say: oh, man, the price of oil has been lower for longer, the current economic conditions aren't nearly as good as we'd hoped, or perhaps our revenue projections haven't been quite what we expected – the government of the day can just come and pass another bill to raise the debt limit. Maybe it goes to 20 per cent next time. Maybe it goes 30, 40 per cent. Who knows where it stops?

But time and time again we've seen across many jurisdictions that politicians often have very little gumption to actually look at the spending side of the ledger, put the brakes on, and say: when is enough enough? I think that what this amendment does do is that it provides a little forced gumption [interjections] That's right, not to be confused with *Forrest Gump* but forced gumption.

It puts into place a pressure to look at the spending side of the ledger. It puts into place a stop, a pause that would require the government of the day to go to Albertans, to go to the ones who will actually be picking up the tab, and say: are you okay with us going

past a 15 per cent debt ratio? I think that what we have before us in an amendment that will provide certainty and clarity for the Alberta public that this government isn't just going to continue to raise the debt limit all willy-nilly but that they will only ever do that with the backing of Albertans.

We've seen DBRS – and I know that the government likes to roll this out – predict that we will run right up against our debt limit that they're currently setting without a change in course. What we've seen is that this government is planning to not change course and is planning to run up massive amounts of debt, which will put us right back in the exact same place as we are today, which is unacceptable to Albertans. It's unacceptable to the people of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills. I can tell you that none of them have come into my office and said: thank goodness that at the end of this plan we're going to have \$50 billion of debt. Not one. Many have come in with concerns about \$50 billion of debt at the end of the plan, but not one has come in with praise for this type of spending and this type of debt.

I think it would be wise of the government to put in some checks and balances, some ramifications that would exist in the future so that we can't just turn our backs on the hard work that's been done in the past and turn our backs on the values of Albertans, of living within our means, and that we would turn this over to the voice of reason, and that's Albertans.

That's why I stand in this place fully supporting the amendment proposed by my hon. colleague.

The Chair: Are there any further speakers to the amendment? The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much. I stand to speak against the amendment.

DBRS also talked about the strong financial position and low debt of this government. We have a 4 per cent debt-to-GDP at this point in time, the lowest of all provinces and territories. Even at 15 per cent, Alberta's debt-to-GDP would be half the weighted average of other provinces in this country.

We have a prudent plan to look at bending the curve on expenditures and spending. We have a plan to invest in capital development throughout this province to stimulate our economy. We are going to stick to 15 per cent of GDP. That is sound. That is the lowest in the country. That is a debt cap that is calculated to help us get to where we need to go, which is to build the economy, to protect services, and to move on to build an Alberta that everybody believes will get us back to a positive GDP.

So I hope we are all united in saying that, no, we don't need this amendment. We are going to work hard to stick to the program and go forward. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you to the minister for joining us in debate, although I don't feel that his remarks actually spoke to the substance of the amendment. The amendment was not: should the debt-to-GDP ratio be 15 per cent? The amendment was not: is it a good idea to have 15 per cent of GDP? The amendment was not: comment on other provinces. The amendment is to assure taxpayers that the government will not break its word of 15 per cent of GDP without going back to Albertans first for approval.

5:20

The minister's statements were confused in their facts about having the lowest debt-to-GDP. By the time Alberta has a 15 per cent debt-to-GDP, Saskatchewan's debt will nearly be paid off.

Saskatchewan will nearly be paid in full. Saskatchewan is the new Alberta advantage, unfortunately. By the time we reach 15 per cent debt-to-GDP, which I fear will be even sooner than the minister believes, we will not have the lowest debt-to-GDP in the country.

I'd ask that the minister rise not to speak about if we should have a 15 per cent debt-to-GDP, if that's a good thing or if it's a bad thing, but that he would address the substance of the amendment that is before for us, which is: does he have confidence in his own statement and documents that our debt will not exceed 15 per cent? If he has confidence in his own budget documents and statements, he will support the amendment so that the debt ceiling cannot be easily exceeded and broken by mere legislation. If he has confidence in his own budget documents and his own debt ceiling, the minister will support the amendment.

The Chair: I'll recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Currie, followed by Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like to speak against this amendment. You know, often we talk in this House about the will of Albertans and that we should bring their various points of view to this House. What I see in this amendment sort of seems contradictory to some of the things that we've talked about previously, especially coming from the other side and especially in areas of spending Albertans' money in ways that make sense.

Now, it would seem to me that if we needed to go to a referendum, that would be adding extra expense in the form that we would have to then have either a referendum or have it be in addition to an election. In reality, that is already happening, and they are called elections. It's very similar to the one we had quite recently. You know, the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills actually said that we have no gumption to talk to Albertans about this and our plan. In fact, we do, and we did it in the last election. Albertans chose a plan forward, and we plan to go forward with that.

For those reasons I think that this amendment is unnecessary, and I will not be voting for it. Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead, Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Madam Chair. Just a couple of things regarding the statements that were just made by the hon. member. Yes, elections are the referendum, but I would remind the hon. member that you don't have a mandate for a \$50 billion debt load on our province. You were never campaigning, going around your riding, with a great big placard saying: I'm going to put you \$50 billion in debt; vote for me. Not one of you did that. So to stand up in this House and say that you have some kind of a mandate to put the good people of Alberta, including me, my children, my grandchildren, in this kind of a debt scenario is an absolute fabrication and a misrepresentation of the truth. That argument doesn't hold water.

Now to the hon. Minister of Finance's argument here regarding this issue before the House. I want the hon. members in the House to understand something about this debt-to-GDP ratio that we keep hearing thrown around in the press and in this House. It is a fool's paradise to use debt-to-GDP as the only measuring stick. The reason for that is that in this province, this incredible province, the per capita GDP output of the people of Alberta cruises around \$80,000 or so. It's the highest in the land.

So when you have a province like Ontario, that has about half the GDP per person that we do here, a 15 per cent debt-to-GDP ratio in our province is equal to a 30 per cent debt-to-GDP ratio in Ontario. Do you understand that? That means that a 15 per cent ceiling here would have the same impact upon our people as a 30 per cent ceiling in Ontario. So the problem with having a 15 per cent cap is

that we're realistically – oh, and comparing that cap to Ontario, that has a 30 per cent cap, and saying, "Well, we're only half of what Ontario is," that is absolutely an inappropriate comparator. Fifteen per cent here is every bit as problematic as 30 per cent there. What you're doing is comparing, then, our beloved province with the most indebted subsovereign jurisdiction on the planet. I do not want my province to be another Ontario.

Hon. members, at all cost we must never have that kind of fame. To be the most indebted subsovereign jurisdiction in the world? Good grief. Right now, today, the impact of Ontario's debt is resulting in an absolute migration of investment and manufacturing out of the province, along with their skyrocketing electricity costs. They are losing investment and losing jobs and losing manufacturing on account of that. To mimic them in any way, whether it be their debt-to-GDP, whether it be their energy policies, whether it be – I don't care what policy, do not mimic Ontario. It would be death to our province.

You are putting Alberta at risk, not just a little but in every facet of this province's economy and way of life. You put it at risk by trying to mimic anything in Ontario. Please do not do this. Do not vote against this very sound measure.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any further speakers to amendment A5?

If not, we'll call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A5 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 5:29 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Fildebrandt	Rodney
Clark	Fraser	van Dijken
Cooper	Gotfried	Yao
Cyr	MacIntyre	

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Horne	Nielsen
Babcock	Kazim	Payne
Ceci	Larivee	Piquette
Connolly	Littlewood	Renaud
Cortes-Vargas	Loyola	Rosendahl
Dach	Luff	Sabir
Drever	Malkinson	Schmidt
Eggen	Mason	Schreiner
Feehan	McCuaig-Boyd	Shepherd
Fitzpatrick	McKitrick	Sweet
Goehring	McLean	Turner
Gray	McPherson	Westhead
Hinkley	Miller	Woollard
Hoffman	Miranda	

Totals: For – 11 Against – 41

[Motion on amendment A5 lost]

The Chair: Back on the bill. Are there any comments, questions, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Hooray. Thank you, Madam Chair, for giving me the opportunity to speak, with another amendment to make Bill

4 less horrible. I will introduce the amendment before I speak to it. Would you like me to begin reading it out while it's distributed?

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that Bill 4, An Act to Implement Various Tax Measures and to Enact the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act, be amended in schedule 1 in section 3(2) by striking out "subsection (1)" and substituting "subsections (1) and (3)" and by adding the following after subsection (2):

(3) In any month that the Crown debt exceeds 15 per cent of GDP for Alberta, no member of Executive Council shall receive any salary prescribed under section 43(1)(a) of the Legislative Assembly Act.

Judging by the looks on the faces of members of Executive Council, I'm not expecting the consent of Executive Council. Madam Chair, I see that the Government House Leader is having a violently ill reaction to the prospect of having his cabinet pay docked if they cannot abide by the law.

Now, let's go back just to yesterday. Yesterday we found that the Minister of Finance was – how should we put it politely? – not strictly adhering to the legislation, some might say in severe breach of the legislation. The Fiscal Management Act required the Minister of Finance to produce a quarterly update, every three months, to this House, and while they had introduced the bill, Bill 4, which we're debating now, which would exempt the minister from doing so, this bill has not passed. Therefore, the minister was, as we'll say politely, not sticking to the intent of the legislation. I'm being careful as the Government House Leader looks at me ponderously.

This amendment seeks to put teeth in legislation so that if politicians break the law, there are consequences. This is so that if Executive Council, the cabinet, exceeds the debt limit, breaking their own laws, there will be consequences for breaking those laws. Cabinet must be accountable for their spending, and those responsible for spending beyond their means should face consequences. If any members of this House drive home and they get caught speeding, they don't get pulled over by the police and questioned in question period and then get to go home. They get a ticket, and they must pay a fine. If a member of this House parks somewhere they shouldn't and they don't happen to have an MLA universal Edmonton parking pass and they get a ticket, they don't go to question period and get questioned by a peace officer. They have to pay a ticket. But for some reason politicians can come to this place, pass laws, break them, but they don't have to pay a ticket. There are no consequences for their actions.

We are proposing an amendment to this legislation which has precedent in several other provinces, namely British Columbia, where when members of Executive Council, cabinet, in that province break, I believe, the taxpayer protection act – forgive me if I'm misquoting the exact name of that legislation – members of Executive Council in that province have their cabinet pay docked. It means that if members of that cabinet cannot follow the laws that they themselves have passed, there is a financial penalty attached to doing so until they're back in compliance with the act.

5:40

This amendment will mean that if this government cannot follow its own debt ceiling, they will get a ticket. Taxpayers will give them a ticket, and while they'll still receive their pay as an MLA, they'll no longer get their stipend as a minister. They'll still get to keep their vehicle allowance, they'll still get to keep their housing allowance, they'll still get paid as MLAs, but because they're not doing their jobs properly in Executive Council, that will get docked.

This amendment will still allow the government to exceed its 15 per cent debt ceiling legally so long as the government has to face a consequence for it. It is a minor consequence instead of the effect that it'll actually have on Albertans. Albertans will already under the budget proposed be paying \$1.3 billion a year in interest in just a few years, \$1.3 billion in interest that will be wasted, money put on a pile and burned. While Albertans will see their tax dollars wasted and their own tax rates go up to pay for it, cabinet ministers have no consequences right now for that.

You're proposing to this House a 15 per cent debt limit. Well, you've voted against any attempt for us to lower that limit or to put limits on your ability to increase it. Now we're proposing that if you want to exceed a 15 per cent debt limit, there'll be some consequences. If the Minister of Finance and members of the cabinet are confident that they will not exceed a 15 per cent debt limit, then surely they should have no qualms whatsoever about voting for a few financial consequences for themselves if they exceed that limit. I believe this is reasonable, it has precedent in other jurisdictions in our country, and it provides a real incentive. If the Minister of Finance takes us over the 15 per cent debt limit and he sees his cabinet pay clawed back, perhaps he'll be a little more motivated to get us back under that 15 per cent limit.

When I was a kid, I got \$10 a week in allowance for doing chores around the house. I got \$10 a week. With inflation . . .

The Chair: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, as much as we'd like to hear the story about when you were a kid. However, it is approaching 5:45 p.m., and pursuant to Government Motion 17 the Assembly must vote on the motion for consideration of Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor's speech. Accordingly, the committee must rise and report.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 5. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 4. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Consideration of Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor's Speech

Mr. Connolly moved, seconded by Ms Kazim, that an humble address be presented to Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor as follows.

To Her Honour the Honourable Lois Mitchell, CM, AOE, LLD, the Lieutenant Governor of the Province of Alberta:

We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly, now assembled, beg leave to thank Your Honour for the gracious speech Your Honour has been pleased to address to us at the opening of the present session.

[Motion carried]

Government Motions

Address in Reply to Speech from the Throne

18. **Mr. Mason moved:**
Be it resolved that the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne be engrossed and presented to Her Honour the Honourable the Lieutenant Governor by such members of the Assembly as are members of Executive Council.

The Deputy Speaker: This is a debatable motion if anyone has any comments they wish to make to the motion by the hon. Government House Leader.

[Government Motion 18 carried]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Well, Madam Speaker, I hesitate to give up 15 minutes of Assembly time, but I think it's important, so I would move that we return to Committee of the Whole.

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

Bill 4

An Act to Implement Various Tax Measures and to Enact the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act (continued)

The Chair: Hon. members, we are back on Bill 4, amendment A6. Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Well, I was just saying, Madam Chair – where was I? I think I'll start over.
I will conclude . . .

An Hon. Member: Start from the beginning.

Mr. Fildebrandt: I'm being egged on to start from the beginning. I will spare the hon. members across from that. [interjections]
Thank you very much.

When I was a kid, if I did all my chores, I'd get 10 bucks a week, but if I didn't cut the grass or shovel the driveway or do whatever we needed to do, that got clawed back. One of the earliest lessons we learn as kids is that if you don't do your job, you don't get paid.

Some of that should apply in here, I think. If we're not doing our job for taxpayers, why should taxpayers pay us? If the cabinet cannot do its job and abide by its own law, in the act it is proposing, of a 15 per cent debt limit, then there need to be some penalties. This is in line with what other jurisdictions in Canada have that seek to protect taxpayers. It is something that would serve us well, and I would encourage the Minister of Finance, if he is confident in his own proposals for a 15 per cent debt ceiling and does not feel that he will ever exceed that, that he would vote for this and show confidence in his own budget.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Yes. Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Just in response to this, the hon. Member for Strathcona-Brooks . . .

Some Hon. Members: Strathmore.

Mr. Fildebrandt: That would be a really big riding.

Mr. Mason: That would be really big, yeah. Thanks very much. . . . Strathmore-Brooks – sorry – you know, has made some comments. He suggested that I was horrified, but actually, Madam Chair, it was more sort of a puzzled amusement, I would guess, at this because it's clearly just a bit of a stunt. It's a for-show kind of a motion. I can assure you and all members that this government has no intention of exceeding that debt limit. There are many responsibilities of the government, that it's obligated to fulfill, and it does that. Particular financial penalties for something that just happens to be a poster child for the opposition's issue are unnecessary. It's clearly just something for show, and for the hon. member to suggest that voting against this indicates some nefarious intention by the government to violate the debt ceiling is just simply unfair and untrue, and I would urge all hon. members to vote against the amendment.

5:50

The Chair: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you. To say that this is for show: I think that's not the intention. I mean, if this is something that's not going to happen, it should be an easy vote to hold the House accountable. That's what we all campaigned on, accountability and transparency. If we have the opportunity to show our province and Albertans that we are capable of following through on the promises that we make, I think, and when we do it in the House together like this, it goes that extra bit of distance to show that we are actually capable of doing those things. Deficit spending is a poor economic policy, and I truly believe that it will erode the services that are so important in the long run. Contrary to the government's claims, these are real numbers and real people and real dollars that are being diverted for what? So the government doesn't have to look inward and cut inefficiencies? Any other business has to cut inefficiencies.

An Hon. Member: Or nurses.

Mrs. Aheer: We're not talking about people or nurses. We're talking about looking at inefficiencies. We're talking about looking at the bloat, at what can be cut inwardly, not about people. For a taxpayer, it's an abuse of taxpayer money if you're not improving your operational efficiency in the manner that any other private sector would be responsible to do and, as they would be, held responsible to their stakeholders.

If you're meeting or exceeding that debt limit, there are very real consequences for that. I mean, Albertans are being forced to contribute billions of dollars to servicing debt. Billions. That's getting ripped out of the economic cycle, and these are Albertans' hard-earned dollars, all of ours. The money won't be invested in industry or families or local economies even though it's their money, our money. Nothing new can be produced when these funds

are allocated to debt servicing. There's nothing more that can go into building infrastructure like a road, something that everybody gets to use to get to work, to move product, to be industrious. These are things that influence the economy positively, and they're investments that create a means to work, to be paid, to become a contributing member of society, and that debt servicing interrupts that. It interrupts an important economic driver, and it's a disrespectful management of the funds.

It undermines the proper use of taxpayer dollars. I mean, think about that. We're accountable to all of the Albertans in our province for their money, and we're asking them to just contribute to this, not understanding that we're taking away from the ability to actually create something for them for the long term. This could happen even before reaching the limit, I mean, if the world sees us as an unreliable borrower and an unrestrained spender. We are a resource-dependent economy, and as you know, there are ebbs and flows to this economy that are unique to Alberta. It requires finesse to handle the fluctuations of this cyclical nature of this province and to deal with the volatility of products that we depend on for our revenue.

That 15 per cent debt-to-GDP ratio has typically been used as a benchmark figure, which jurisdictions must stay below in order to qualify for that triple-A credit rating. Alberta, however, being a resource-dependent economy, has a much higher risk classification. Therefore, it's absolutely necessary to stay well below that ceiling of 15 per cent.

The Chair: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt, but pursuant to Standing Order 4(3) the committee must now rise and report.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Ms Woollard: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill: Bill 4. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 4. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.
The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Well, I think that we're a lot closer to 6 now than we were before, Madam Speaker. I'll move that we call it 6 and adjourn until 7:30 this evening.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:56 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday evening, December 2, 2015

Day 27

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

First Session

Wanner, Hon. Robert E., Medicine Hat (ND), Speaker
Jabbour, Deborah C., Peace River (ND), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Feehan, Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (ND), Deputy Chair of Committees

Aheer, Leela Sharon, Chestermere-Rocky View (W)
Anderson, Shaye, Leduc-Beaumont (ND)
Anderson, Wayne, Highwood (W)
Babcock, Erin D., Stony Plain (ND)
Barnes, Drew, Cypress-Medicine Hat (W)
Bhullar, Manmeet Singh, Calgary-Greenway (PC)
Bilous, Hon. Deron, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview (ND),
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Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-Meadowlark (ND)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, Calgary-Fort (ND)
Clark, Greg, Calgary-Elbow (AP)
Connolly, Michael R.D., Calgary-Hawkwood (ND)
Coolahan, Craig, Calgary-Klein (ND)
Cooper, Nathan, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (W),
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McLean, Stephanie V., Calgary-Varsity (ND),
Deputy Government Whip
McPherson, Karen M., Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill (ND)
Miller, Barb, Red Deer-South (ND)
Miranda, Ricardo, Calgary-Cross (ND)
Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (ND)
Nixon, Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (W),
Official Opposition Whip
Notley, Hon. Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (ND),
Premier
Orr, Ronald, Lacombe-Ponoka (W)
Panda, Prasad, Calgary-Foothills (W)
Payne, Brandy, Calgary-Acadia (ND)
Phillips, Hon. Shannon, Lethbridge-West (ND),
Deputy Government House Leader
Piquette, Colin, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater (ND)
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie (W)
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (ND)
Rodney, Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC)
Rosendahl, Eric, West Yellowhead (ND)
Sabir, Hon. Irfan, Calgary-McCall (ND)
Schmidt, Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (ND),
Government Whip
Schneider, David A., Little Bow (W)
Schreiner, Kim, Red Deer-North (ND)
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-Centre (ND)
Sigurdson, Hon. Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (ND)
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (W)
Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC),
Progressive Conservative Opposition House Leader
Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (W)
Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (W)
Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (ND)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (ND)
Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (W)
Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (ND)
van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND)
Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)

Party standings:

New Democrat: 53 Wildrose: 22 Progressive Conservative: 9 Alberta Liberal: 1 Alberta Party: 1 Independent: 1

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Horne	Woollard
Kazim	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, December 2, 2015

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 6

Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act

[Adjourned debate December 1: Ms Phillips]

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and speak to one of the most important bills that this Legislature has faced this particular session. I'm pleased to see the leadership taken by this new government, leadership that was decidedly absent in the last government, who talked about it for years, did all kind of committee meetings, consulted, consulted, consulted, heard many different views, including the international community. It even went to the UN and the Queen of England, who actually sent support to the Farmworkers Union here in Alberta and sent her support for change that was long overdue. The civil liberties group in Alberta and nationally has sent its support, so not only once Albertans learned that we are still in the 19th century with respect to enforceable standards in agricultural workplaces, including the largest industrial operations anywhere in Alberta and right down to the so-called family farm, which actually employs many, many people in many different risky activities.

I applaud this government for having the courage to step forward. I, too, regret the lack of good communication about the family farm and some of the impacts that could be expected on the family farm.

Interestingly, at a reception that I just now came back from, two dairy farmers came up to me and said that they've had WCB, and one of their workers got injured, and they were pleasantly surprised by the length of physiotherapy he was funded for, eight weeks of physiotherapy, which very few insurance companies are prepared to cover. Of course, other insurance companies don't offer the no-fault insurance, where the operator, the owner, is protected from lawsuit. You can't bankrupt a farmer if you get injured because WCB is no-fault insurance.

These two dairy farmers also commented that near Red Deer just last week a 50-year-old man was crushed by a bull, and he's been off work for a week. He's getting back on his feet, but that farmer had no insurance, so this worker has been on his own, struggling. His wife is worried about income. They've got no income this week because he's been off work.

I can give you a number of stories over the years that I've gathered just because I took an interest in this early on after I got elected. I started to hear stories about Mexican Mennonite kids in southeastern Alberta who ostensibly are home-schooled. Their parents get a thousand dollars a year for home-schooling. What they're actually doing in summer months is quite different from going to school, though. They're actually out helping with potato gathering. They're helping with bean cropping. They're helping with animals in some cases. Of course, they're such a vulnerable population in some ways. They have some language challenges. They have some cultural sensitivities. They have some financial problems, and many of these Mexican Mennonite families don't

like to speak up. When they get injured, they just keep it all behind closed doors.

So not only do the children end up being placed at risk because the families need the income – and there are no child labour laws on these operations, so they can slip their children in to help them with the . . . [interjection] Yeah, I can actually introduce you to some Mexican Mennonites, and the chief of police down there in Taber and the head of the school district will tell you exactly what's happening down there.

Then, of course, there's Philippa Thomas, who has been in the news in the last couple of years. She had what looked like a minor finger injury in her workplace, a horse-riding stable in Calgary. It got infected, actually, some kind of serious nerve damage that went up her arm and has continued to go into her spinal cord and caused what's called a sympathetic dystrophy, that has left her incapacitated with pain. She's on long-term pain management, is unable to work, and this has been about 20 years now. They've spent about \$80,000 of their own money on trying to get the help she needs and the rehabilitation she needs and the financial support. Fortunately, her husband has a good job, and they've been able to manage this.

Then the famous story that was alluded to today: Lorna Chandler, whose husband died on Father's Day eight years ago. No coverage for him or the family, so she had to take him to court. She had no money, but fortunately she found a lawyer who was compassionate. For six years they went to court together. She finally got a settlement, and it bankrupted the feedlot that he was working at.

All these incidents and the increased awareness across Canada about the anomaly that is Alberta around farm worker safety, compensation for injury, labour code standards, obviously, child labour issues, have come home to roost. In spite of all these issues over 44 years the previous government managed to just push it to the side because that was their voter base, of course, and many of them didn't want to see a loss of their voter base even if it meant – especially if it meant, I guess – the farmers having to pay a little more than what they were.

They actually have to take out WCB, which is really quite reasonably priced. When I heard some of the prices that they're quoting, it's really pretty small, a few cents per hundred dollars of wage. And, of course, if you don't have an accident, you get a refund from WCB at the end of the year. All kinds of good reasons to take care of farm workers, and most farmers, most operators do that. They're responsible. They value their employees. They take care of them. They make sure they get holidays. No question that this is not a majority of farmers we're talking about or big operators even.

Another interesting anomaly down in Brooks is that the meat-packing plant on the north side of the road employs hundreds of workers, and they're all covered by workers' compensation.

An Hon. Member: Where?

Dr. Swann: The meat-packing plant on the north side of Brooks. All covered by insurance, all covered by WCB, all covered by occupational health and safety standards. You go across the road to the feedlot: 40 Mexican and other community workers there, no compensation, no occupational health and safety standards. Same company, but they can get away with it because the meat packing is not considered an agricultural operation. It's an industry. So there are these interesting inconsistencies that raise questions.

With respect to consultations, in my 10 years here the government of the past has attended many consultations with farmers, and they always came back with the same conclusion:

more education, more education. There's nothing wrong with education. It's an important element of safety and health.

As Judge Barley said after the Kevan Chandler inquiry – and this was unusual, to have an inquiry after a death because occupational health and safety cannot investigate deaths on agricultural operations. They do not have any jurisdiction. Whether you're electrocuted, poisoned, or crushed on a farming operation, OH and S cannot go in there. Sorry. It's out of our scope, so we actually don't investigate many of these deaths. We don't find the preventable changes that we could be putting in place. We don't learn from these accidents, and it's repeated to the tune of, on average, 18 per year, including three to five children every year. Can we do better? Yes, we can.

As Judge Barley said in his decision around the Kevan Chandler case: education is a key element; the other element is legislation. He called for legislation around standards. The government has done consultations. Every agricultural group in Alberta has had some consultations around this issue. The only question is: was the government willing to do anything? Actually, not.

7:40

I have a letter here from the crop sector working group from May 2015 where they talked about the March 23 meeting, the farm safety working group meeting.

In the last several months the most acceptable compromise we can see with this new government is option 1. This involves full coverage under the OH and S Act. With no technical rules initially agriculture's exemption from the act will be withdrawn. Initially OH and S officers would not have any rules upon which to issue orders or apply penalties. The industry in collaboration with OH and S would develop a set of core industry practices within a specified time frame. OH and S officers could then apply those sector-specific rules. This option would give the industry the leeway to work collaboratively on technical rules that could be broad and common to farming activities and specific to farming systems.

That's the crop sector, March 2015.

I've spoken repeatedly with the Alberta Federation of Agriculture. They represent over 40 producer groups. They've been at the table for many years, and they two years ago in their annual meeting said: pass a resolution; we want universal WCB. That's what the Alberta Federation of Agriculture said, and they want child labour standards. They find it offensive that children in southeastern Alberta are working in unsafe occupations just because the families need them to and are not going to school as they're supposed to be as home-schoolers because there are very few people to enforce home-schooling.

Those are a few anecdotes that have led me to the place where I am today, to say that the whole question about the small family farm and intrusion on the small family farm is a red herring. It is a red herring. This is not going to interfere. This is only going to make things safer, and the rub off from the rest of the operations will eventually trickle down to the small family farm. It is not going to impede children being involved in the chores, children being trained.

By the way, I was a ranch hand for five years in my late teens and early 20s. I know some of the risks that are associated with farming and ranching – my dad was a rancher for about 25 years – and will never forget being on the back of a hay bailer when the linchpin slipped out of the tractor hitch and I went careening down the hill in the front of the stack of hay. I was wondering whether to stay there and wait for the thing to catch into the ground and then get thrown off or whether to jump. I eventually decided to jump, fortunately, because that hay bail just did a complete flip, and if I had been in there, I certainly would have been injured if not something more serious.

I was quite game to drive tractors. I loved to drive tractors. I was 17 at the time, so I had some maturity. Gee, I drove on side hills. I didn't know what angle I could handle, so I just kept testing it and testing it. Finally, I said: this doesn't make much sense because if it does tip over, I found out what the angle is that it can't tolerate, but I may not live to tell the story. So many risks. I guess I would say that as a child, as a young person without experience, without much training – I knew how to drive; I knew how to drive a car, and I had driven tractors for several years – I was always testing the limits. I was always trying to do more and wanted to please my boss. For me to say, "No; I can't do that job; that doesn't look quite safe to me," that would never enter my mind, to say no, because the boss, who hired me for the summer, should know what I can do, and if he's asking me to do something that's a little bit extra and dangerous, I'll try it, not really realizing the level of risk that I was taking.

So from that point of view I feel very strongly that getting a sense of what this bill is really about is important and not being distracted by the notion that it will cost a little more. Yeah, safety costs a little more. Workers' compensation, protecting the owner and the ranch hand does cost a little bit, but it protects people from longer term suffering and, really, financial breakdown, financial collapse in some cases. You know, treating staff fairly means in some cases a holiday, in some cases giving them the evening off even though it is harvest season and you want to get through as much as you can, recognizing when people are fatigued and they might be at risk of injury just due to fatigue and acknowledging that. When it's all about production, when it's all about finishing the crop, then safety sometimes comes second, and I understand that. Injuries happen. But let's be reasonable about what are, in the 21st century, decent labour standards, employment standards, child labour, compensation, and occupational health and safety standards. Do we know what is reasonable in the various work sites across Alberta? No. I don't think we do, and we've got a year to find out.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: You're questioning under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Ceci: I am. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View: when you read out that crop sector letter to us that was on your computer, it sounded to me like their recommendation mirrored exactly the approach this government is taking. Would that be your view, or is there something I missed there?

Dr. Swann: I would have to look more closely at what they are agreeing to. They said option 2. I don't remember correlating option 2 with what your government is doing. What I'm saying is that they were consulted in March. They agreed that this would be the direction they wanted to go, one of the two options your government presented. I'd be happy to table that, Mr. Speaker, to let everybody see.

Consultations have been going on. The beef producers have been in consultation with this government over health and safety and compensation issues. I'm sorry; the claim that there hasn't been any consultation: there's been a decade of consultation. This government has made efforts to consult, and it's only been a few months that they've had a chance to consult. They haven't had anything like the 10 years that this government had to consult, the 44 years, in fact, but they've done a credible job in attempting to

get through the tremendous array and variety of ranching and farming operations.

The Speaker: Any other questions? The Member for Calgary-Klein.

Mr. Coolahan: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, hon. member. We share many of the same positions here. You know, I wanted to say, too, that this bill doesn't do anything to – we don't want to change the family farm. Okay? So – listen – we're going to delineate between what it means to be a parent on a farm and what it means to be an employer on a farm.

The Speaker: Hon. member, could I clarify? Standing Order 29(2)(a), please.

Mr. Coolahan: I'm going to ask a question, Mr. Speaker. I'm sorry.

The Speaker: Please.

Mr. Coolahan: I haven't been around as long as the hon. member, of course, but maybe you could enlighten us on this. When a lot of the labour legislation came into being here, when it was written, I'm assuming that a lot of the professions that have some exemptions, like police officers and whatnot, on working hours and working days were likely given basic rights first, and then the consultation happened afterwards, where you can decide what exemptions are required for specific industries.

Dr. Swann: Well, indeed. Almost every bill we pass in this House is incomplete in the sense that the regulations have to follow the legislation. There are details. There are fine points. We always say that, of course, the devil is in the details. Let's wait and see what they're actually going to do.

But we need some guidance. We've got some guidance about this, and with the amendments that this government is going to bring forward, I think that if we're not politicizing this thing totally out of whack, we should be able to move this forward.

The Speaker: Are there any other questions for the member under 29(2)(a)?

Hearing none, the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to rise and speak against Bill 6. It is always a true pleasure to represent the views of my constituents here in this Assembly. I just wish I could be doing so today under better circumstances. Wouldn't it have been nice if the views of all farmers and ranchers could have been expressed before we got to second reading of this bill that so drastically impacts their lives? Wouldn't it be nice if we were sitting here discussing carefully crafted, respectful proposals that were created with the input of our experts in the industry, our experts the farming families? Instead, we are discussing a litany of flaws, concerns, and short-sighted ways in which this legislation does not reflect the way of life you'll see out there on our province's farms and ranchland.

7:50

I'd like to remind my colleagues of Dwight Eisenhower's wise words: "Farming looks mighty easy when your plow is a pencil and you're a thousand miles from the corn field." Well, Mr. Speaker, we're much closer than a thousand miles away from our province's wheat, canola, and barley fields. You see them the minute you head out on the highways in any direction from this building. You know what? You find these shared values within the city limits as well.

Farming influence runs deep in this province. Keep in mind that most urban centres today were once small agricultural towns many years ago.

Mr. Speaker, you and I jointly represent the urban area of the city of Medicine Hat, and I'm sure you're hearing about this issue every bit as much as I am. My office has seen over 1,900 e-mails and letters from deeply concerned citizens of all stripes just since Friday. This isn't a rural-urban issue. I've seen this, and I think you have, too. This is a trust issue. This is an issue of a government more concerned with ramming through its out-of-touch agenda than actually listening – listening – to what Albertans want.

Given the realities of farm life that surround us, how much more inexcusable is it that this government did not bother to go out and consult with those for whom farming runs in their blood? If the government is now surprised by the outcry we hear just outside these Legislature steps, it can only be attributed to the fact that this government never bothered to ask in the first place. And make no mistake: the lives of farmers and ranchers are intrinsically tied to their business and to their land. Their families are not just workers on a job site; they are so much more. They are stewards of the land, the best stewards. They are caretakers of, in so many cases, multigenerational farms that have been tasked through the decades with sharing some of the most valuable skills and values imaginable. Mr. Speaker, the grandfathers and grandmothers of these families came here many generations ago, when there was far less than you now see.

I'd like to share a story from one of the thousands of concerned constituents that I've heard from. As you know, the railway opened up this land to settlers and homesteaders, but in the early 1900s there wasn't much else greeting these people when they arrived. This man told me an incredible story of how his family arrived by rail, then walked 25 miles with all their belongings and children to their plot of land, a plot of land that they had never, ever seen. This man has no recollection of that long, hard walk because he was just a baby at the time. Can you imagine? Can you imagine that, Mr. Speaker?

I hope that stories like this will demonstrate to the NDP members across the floor exactly why the people of Cypress county, the county of Forty Mile, Medicine Hat, Redcliff, Bow Island and Foremost are so darned proud of their heritage. I hope you'll see why they care so deeply for their way of life and what was so painstakingly earned. They carved these fields out of rough, untamed wilderness to provide abundance for all, and provide they did. They provided blessings for posterity as they fed the province, the country, and other parts of the world.

Today we are left with 47,000 farms, and it's with a heavy heart that I say that this number is shrinking. It's shrinking because the local family farm is becoming more and more of a challenge. I can assure you that I've heard this from scores of my own constituents in Cypress-Medicine Hat and many across Alberta, that this government's actions have already hurt our farmers and our ranchers. Sometimes it feels like they and indeed all of the productive sector are being hit from all directions. From drastic labour market meddling to tax increases on their inputs like gas and utilities, they find it harder to build each and every day. They find it harder to innovate and grow every day. They find it harder to prosper, provide, and share their abundance every day.

Mr. Speaker, now we face sweeping, broad, incompletely considered omnibus legislation that makes it harder for our farmers and ranchers to even pass along this way of life to their children. Again the struggles mount. I cannot stand by as an entire way of life, that has carried this great province for so long, comes under fire by a government that is fundamentally out of touch with Albertans' values. They deserve a voice, and if the government and

this Premier won't go out there to meet them, I will bring their concerns here.

I know that we heard about the consultation sessions across the province, but from what I've seen, these have produced many more questions than answers. Government officials seem to be doing more damage control than actually providing an opportunity for constructive input. Any so-called consultation that may occur once the bill has reached its final draft is patronizing, at best, and a meaningless show, at worst. For those lucky enough to get into them – and I can assure you that the Cypress-Medicine Hat meeting filled up within hours – it seems they are more pronouncement sessions than consultation sessions.

Mr. Speaker, the horse has left the barn. It's long gone, in fact, and the government's solution seems to be proudly boasting and making a big show of this government's ability to close the gate.

I'd like to share with this Assembly a variety of concerns I've heard. They are common themes, so common that I cannot believe the government is now so baffled to be hearing them. One constituent, writing about her greenhouse operation, says, and I quote:

Increases projected to minimum wage plus the cost of Bill 6 plus increases in corporate taxes will make greenhouse operations totally unprofitable. Prices received for greenhouse product are subject to supply and demand and have not increased in many years. Last year was our highest production year, with a very low dollar return. The family farm cannot pay wages, holiday pay, corporate tax, loan payments, et cetera, with money it cannot generate. We have recently transitioned our family farm to our children, and we have great fear they will not be able to sustain themselves.

End quote.

8:00

I've also heard from two brothers, ages seven and eight. If I'm not mistaken, they're from the Leduc area, so I'm sure that their hon. member on the government side has seen this as well. Together with their family they've reached out to us because their own government MLAs refuse to speak for them to the NDP leadership. With some help from his mom the first young boy writes:

I like to go and catch my own horse to ride or help move cows. Every spring I look forward to petting and playing with the baby horses and calves. I like fencing during the summer. Living on a farm lets me learn how things work and how to fix them. I look forward to joining 4-H in the future. I hope these chances are not taken away.

His younger brother writes:

I like riding my horse, checking cows with my papa and at my nana's arena. Every year I look forward to feeding the baby calves. In a few years I hope to join 4-H. I hope this isn't taken away.

And still another concerned mother writes:

As parents it's our duty and privilege to raise our children to be responsible, respectable members of society. Parents, children, grandparents, extended family, and neighbours work together to manage the land and provide food for society. It is a wonderful way for our children to learn this responsibility. The family that works together is stronger and beneficial to all of society.

You see, Mr. Speaker, farmers have understood for many years that to be successful, you must rely on your family, your community, and your neighbours. Given this emphasis on community and family do you not think that farmers care every bit as much about safety as we do in this House? Some may see farms and ranches as simply workplaces to be regulated, but I can assure you that these farmers and ranchers see them as their homes first and foremost. They take pride in their operations, and their love for their calling extends to wanting to see their way of life protected

and their families protected. Not one of us here could care nearly as much as a parent raising his or her child to grow up and follow in their footsteps.

To impose vast, ill-defined regulations on these groups is to risk cutting out all those elements and values that make the family farm successful and that have made Alberta successful. Do we restrict the home life of a child who contributes to his family farm? Do we tell neighbours chipping in for their friends that they cannot contribute to the harvest if they first do not meet every single requirement of a complex code that was never written to apply to farms and ranches in the first place?

I've heard this government claim that they will iron out all these complex details and more if you just write them a blank cheque and give them authority to fix all this through rules and regulations. No, Mr. Speaker. Since the election we've discovered a number of previously held NDP ideals that suddenly become – how should we put it? – flexible. One of these previously held ideals from their time in opposition was staunch opposition to the previous government's overuse of the practice of writing broad, undefined legislation, then using regulatory . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Under 29(2)(a), which is to ask questions and comment briefly on matters relevant to the speech, are there any questions for the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat?

Mr. Cooper: Yes, Mr. Speaker. The question I have for the member is: would he like to continue concluding his thoughts?

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, hon. member. In the three and a half years that I shared the opposition lounge with the four members, it is disheartening that a shared desire to have a government that was more open, transparent, listening, and fully consulting has been totally disregarded.

Mr. Speaker, one of these previously held ideals from their time in opposition was their staunch opposition to the previous government's overuse of this practice of writing broad, undefined legislation, then using regulatory authority to carve out the details. These four opposition colleagues at the time were right to oppose this. Decisions of such scope and magnitude were meant to be discussed in public, not behind closed doors. Previous cabinets had become dependent on this way of governing, to the detriment of the province and democracy and, as I heard a bit of last night, to the detriment of the party itself. How things change when you get to the other side of the aisle. It's sad, but that's what it seems.

They asked us to trust them to get it right behind closed doors once the bill passes, but I have to marvel at just how much trust the NDP feels is still out there. With backdoor PST taxes on everything, rapidly hiked costs of utilities, and now attempting to slip this bill past our farmers and ranchers without any oversight from the very citizens it affects, I think it's safe to say that the reservoir of trust has been greatly depleted. Mr. Speaker, if this government hopes to earn that trust back, I hope they will tap the brakes on this bill, hear the concerns of those they govern, and get this right.

It makes me think of before I was elected in 2012, when the PC government had put in bills 19, 36, 50, and 24. Here we are, a new government later – obviously, the voters spoke and showed that it was time for change – and we are doing the very, very same things. In Cypress-Medicine Hat, Mr. Speaker, in our Cypress Centre, in opposition to Bill 36, the last government called a town hall and did exactly what I think this government did in Grande Prairie three or four days ago. They had about 300, 400 landowners in the building, immediately divided them up into five or six smaller groups, didn't give them a chance to convey their thoughts in full, and at the end

of the meeting the government consultant went to the middle of the room, and the words I remember were these. “Albertans, we have heard you loud and clear: kill Bill 36.” Well, we still have Bill 36, but we do not have a Progressive Conservative government.

What I heard from 1,500 people on the steps of the Legislature, what I heard from 1,900 e-mails from Cypress-Medicine Hat and Medicine Hat in just four or five days was: kill Bill 6. We weren’t offered the full chance to be consulted. We are concerned about how this affects our ability to live our lives, raise our families, and share our prosperity with our communities, our neighbours, our country, and the world. I remember before the 2012 election a sign with a line through the PC. Today I see a line through Bill 6 and the New Democrat logo. Are we repeating the past?

8:10

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Under 29(2)(a)?

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) has passed.
The Member for Calgary-North West.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to speak on this bill. I want to say first of all that I believe that in this entire Chamber there’s not a single person that wants a bill that’s going to make life worse for any farm family in this province. I think the members across the aisle know that you’ve got a lot of goodwill here. I think that you guys are kicking butt on the social issues – you are – but you’re not kicking butt on this one. You’re not.

I will say that everybody has a different lens through which they view these issues. Certainly, we’ve got a lot of members from my colleagues over here to the right who come from a rural background, and they get that visceral reaction about this bill from their constituents: thousands of e-mails, calls, that sort of thing. I will also say – and I don’t want to do any inflamed rhetoric here – that there are certainly members across the aisle, despite what some folks say, that certainly have that rural knowledge and those folks in rural areas. I know what you’re hearing in terms of feedback as well. And then someone like me, who’s an urban girl, comes from a slightly different mindset. We all have a different lens, you know. I look at a lot of issues through my lens as a journalist for 25 years and as an urban MLA.

I was lucky enough to go with our former ag minister and spend some time touring the Medicine Hat area. I was particularly taken with some of the things the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat said about his experience in talking to some folks out in that area. In fact, that’s where I had my first television job, at CHAT television in Medicine Hat. I did the news, the weather, the radio, everything. That’s what you do in a small town when you’re starting out in broadcasting.

I had lots of opportunities to talk to people out there. I think that every urban MLA should have the opportunity to do that, to get on a plane, commercial, and go out to some of these rural areas and have those discussions with people. You can call them consultations if you want. I don’t really think of them as consultations. I think of them as going out and meeting the folks that live in your province that have issues in different areas and talking to them, in fact, about some of the successes that we’ve had from our agriculture ministry in the past.

I talked to a guy out in I think it’s the Little Bow area who had a family farm that was failing. He got some grant money from Agriculture Alberta. He switched his crop, and now he’s one of the largest exporters of lentils and hard peas to India. Fantastic stories of success out there. There’s a family farm out that way where they

make a hundred per cent of North America’s catnip, something I didn’t know before. Some wonderful stories I heard out there.

You know, when I listen to those stories, when we visited the folks with the greenhouses out there, I particularly had an affinity for them because there were some good Dutch families out there in the greenhouse business. Certainly, they’ve got a lot of concerns. I a hundred per cent agree with the idea that when you’re working your butt off 16 hours a day in a greenhouse and then you’re hit with a whole bunch of tax changes and things like that that affect your business, you’re going to feel pretty crappy.

I think, you know, that in order to be able to launch into this whole consultation piece, we have to talk about the fact that when we went out on these tours, the idea that we were sitting down and listening to people was one of the most important things we did as MLAs. When my colleague for Calgary-Mountain View talked about the Mexican Mennonite children and the child labour and safety codes and standards, I don’t think that there’s anyone who will disagree that those things are important and that we have to have that conversation. I think it’s an important conversation to have, and I don’t think anyone is arguing that you shouldn’t have that conversation. I do respectfully have a bit of a problem with: the reason the PCs didn’t do anything was because we were worried about losing our voter base. I don’t really like to consider the term “voter base.” I’d like to consider those folks as farm families, who have a challenging job out there, and maybe we shouldn’t call them the voter base. Maybe we should call them Albertan families who are working really hard to make a living and are worried about that living being taken away from them. It’s not politics.

You know, when we talk about a rural versus urban issue, it’s an issue for all of us. What happens in these areas is an issue for all of us. I came upon that demonstration, the protest with the 1,500 families. I walked through the crowd at the back for a little while, and I came upon the agriculture minister having a very heated conversation with a number of farm families. I felt bad for him because I don’t believe for a minute that he had bad intentions with this. I don’t at all. But I also think – and I want to take you back to a little episode from my past that I like to call Bill 10.

An Hon. Member: It’s that week.

Ms Jansen: Yeah. It’s that week.

You know, here was a situation where some folks with the best of intentions came up with a piece of legislation, and we all jumped in there to try and make something out of this dog’s breakfast, and that wasn’t an easy thing to do.

Dr. Swann: These folks may need a brief explanation.

Ms Jansen: Of Bill 10? I don’t think too many people need an explanation of Bill 10. That’s just a hunch.

I’ll say this. Then all of a sudden everybody had their hair on fire and were running around going: oh, my God, let’s throw some amendments in there, and we’ll make this better. In fact, it just became a bigger dog’s breakfast, and the Premier was out of town, so there’s a weird parallel there as well. I remember thinking at the time – and this is a cautionary tale, and I say this in the whole framework of trying to be helpful – that you do have to live with history you make.

There’s going to come a point in time where, we’ve already seen now, that some amendments are coming in. For some of the things that got some of these hard-working farm families so upset, now we’re seeing amendments: “Oh, we actually didn’t mean this. We’re going to do this.” I get that. You’re trying to fix something because you know that it’s flawed, and that’s a natural reaction.

The thing is that as much as we talk about consultation, when we bring something in and then we decide to consult after the fact, you're going to have a front yard full of angry people, hurt people, people who feel betrayed, and people who feel like: why did we have to drive 12 hours here and back to raise our blood pressure on the steps of the Legislature in order to get someone to finally listen to us. That is a problem. We faced it, and you're facing it now.

You have an opportunity, and I say this to all the folks there. I know that there are folks on that bench who are looking at the way this whole process has been unfolding and are saying, "Good grief; we didn't talk to any farm families?" or "We didn't talk to enough farm families?" They're feeling like that was a mistake, and I get that because we lived the Bill 10 experience, and finally, when Albertans stood up and had their say and said, "We're not going to take this; it's not right," we then pulled it. We went back, and a consultation process began.

I think that there is an opportunity here. I believe that intelligent leadership is the ability to say: "You know what? Look, we're all going to screw up all the time." So over the course of the next four years it's going to happen many times where we misjudge. We misjudged on our legislation. We go in with the best of intentions, and then we have to turn around and say: "You know what? That wasn't the right the fit. We tried to consult with as many people as possible." But when the ag minister was standing out front and was talking to these families, families were saying to him, "Who did you consult with?" He was offering a list of the folks that he consulted with, and they said to him, "Well, why didn't you consult with any of the farm families?" He didn't really have anything to say, and I felt bad for him because I'm not sure that he was in complete control of the consultation process, and that happens sometimes.

8:20

So there is an opportunity here. There's an opportunity to pull this, to go back, and to sit down with these folks, who want good legislation. But they know, as we know, that there cannot be a one-size-fits-all policy, that we need to sit down and have conversations. There are some amendments coming down the pipe. I know that my colleagues have some. We have some. I know that you folks have some amendments. That's good, to have that conversation. We're at the end of our legislative session now.

Ms Hoffman: Only if you stop talking.

Ms Jansen: I'm not yet. I'm not stopping yet. I'll stop when the bell rings, and that's my prerogative.

What I'll say is this. There is such a short period of time now to talk about these issues, and I think that there are some important conversations to be had and there's some goodwill to be won back. Why not take a little bit of time and sit back down at the table, let cooler heads prevail, have that conversation, and bring in a stronger bill in the spring session? I think that there's an opportunity there to say – you know, you can say that everyone can shoulder the blame for this. There are lots of folks: "We all should have done more consultation. We all should have asked more questions." But if we walk away now and take some time to consult, then everybody has a chance to have their voices heard. I don't want to stir up any: this bill is doing this, and this bill is doing that.

All I'm saying here is that we have an opportunity here to say: "Look, let's take a closer look at everything. Let's let everybody have their say." We've got 1,500 to 2,000 farm families who stood out front and said, you know: why wasn't my opinion respected and valued in this whole process? They're upset, and they have a right to be heard.

I think that for those of us city folk who are watching this unfold, you know, from my experience in the consultation process I know that – and we've learned the hard way on this – when you present people with a solution before you've articulated the problem, then you've got a problem. That, essentially, is what we have here. This is one of the things that – I will be quite honest – our government was terrible at. We often provided people with a solution to a problem they didn't know they had.

I'm saying that here we have an opportunity to sit down and to have that conversation. It doesn't have to occur over a long period of time. We're back in session in mid-February. I would bet you any money that we could sit down in January, have some very good conversations with people, look at the nuances of this so that we're not looking at a one-size-fits-all policy, talk about the amendments that you folks have on the back burner, talk about the amendments that my colleagues in the Wildrose have, talk about some of our amendments, and, especially, talk to the farm families, who are directly affected by this, and some of the other stakeholders who are now coming forward and are upset. Let's have that conversation in another venue and then come back in the spring session and take another crack at this.

The Speaker: Are there any comments or questions under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank the Member for Calgary-North West for her comments. I thought it was a pretty good insight from one of the veteran members of this Legislature. I thought her comparison to Bill 10 was quite apt, all content aside, in terms of process, in terms of perhaps consultation going wrong and losing track of things and the need to sometimes step back, recognize your mistakes, consult with those whom you haven't consulted with, talk to those who have maybe been your opponents. If she could talk a bit more about her experience in that process. I know that she was intimately involved with it. I think there are valuable lessons for this entire House from that process.

Ms Jansen: I thank the member. You know, I want to talk a little bit about having a large caucus and having those conversations about what happens around the caucus table and all of those voices you have. Everybody wants to have an opportunity to speak to this. You feel the pain of this, whether you live in an urban area or you live in a rural area. I'm guessing that there are some folks on the other side who maybe feel differently about this bill but have been encouraged to vote a particular way and not express the opinion they really feel, because you've been told that you're part of a team, and as part of a team you've got to do what the team wants to do. We've heard that narrative before, and I think that we experienced that on Bill 10. There were certainly folks who had differing opinions but, you know, had that narrative: we've got to do this for the team.

I would say that there's going to come a point down the road where you're going to be in conversations or you're going to be looking at re-election, and folks are going to be saying to you: why did you not speak up? I think there's going to be a come-to-Jesus moment there for you. You have an opportunity now to say: "Look, I'm not being disloyal to my government when I say that I'm not comfortable with this. I'm not comfortable with it right now. It doesn't mean I don't think we're headed in the right direction, but I want to take another crack at this, to go back and look at it again." If you are one of those members who wants that, please, you know, seize the moment and express yourself. At the end of the day, you have to go back to your individual constituencies, and you have to answer to the folks who live in them. Your first job is to be a legislator – a legislator – not a member of a party and not a member of a team. It's to be a legislator.

And every piece of legislation – and I don't vote with my caucus all the time. I think that's obvious. As a legislator, for every motion – and I've voted with the government on certain motions – that comes across my desk, the first question I ask myself is: is this good for the people in my constituency and the people in this province? If I can't answer yes, then I'm not going to get up with the team and support an idea that might be good for their constituents. That's our job, to be legislators. We are elected not by the rest of our team but by the people in our constituency, and we have to answer to them.

I would say in response to the member's question that probably the biggest take-away that I had from the whole Bill 10 experience was to trust your instinct. You are here because you have that political instinct. Use it. Trust it. Trust that inner voice, and when you look at every bill, every motion, every piece of legislation, every amendment that crosses your desk, keep in mind that your first responsibility is to provide good legislation for the people in this province.

Mr. Coolahan: I want to ask the hon. member: is this bill good for paid farm workers and their families?

Ms Jansen: I thank the member for the comment. As I said before, there are good pieces of this bill. I don't think this is a bill you need to throw out wholesale, but I think that there are pieces that are flawed, and there's a consultation process that didn't happen the way it needed to happen. By getting folks back to the table, you can keep the strong pieces, and you can build on the pieces that are flawed. In that way, you go back, take a little bit of time, and take a more measured, thoughtful approach.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I'd ask the indulgence of the House. I've been asked for a brief introduction. I need unanimous support to allow the member to introduce a guest.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: I recognize Calgary-South East. Please proceed.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thanks, members. I'd like to introduce Bill Jarvis. Bill Jarvis ran against myself as a Wildrose candidate in 2011. You know what? It was the first election I ran in, and I must say that he's a gentleman. I know he's a dedicated father and husband. He's been a successful trainer and has trained many professionals. I just wanted to introduce him and ask for the warm welcome of the House. Please rise.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If you'll let me, actually, Bill Jarvis is here representing the Calgary-Foothills constituency office. Thank you, Member for Calgary-South East, for beating me to that introduction.

8:30 Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 6

Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act

(continued)

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, you may be wondering why a guy from Calgary cares about farming.

Mr. Yao: Well, you like to eat, right?

Mr. Panda: Yeah. Being a 30-year oil and gas guy, I was in a dilemma about this bill in the last couple of weeks. When we talk about safety, it's above all. It is nonnegotiable. For someone like me, a member of APEGA, it is unethical to compromise the safety of anyone, whether they're in your care and custody or not. But there are a few things, Mr. Speaker, we need to consider here: trust, fairness, equity for all. What I'm hearing, myself and my constituency office manager, from my constituents is that they feel that farmers are being discriminated against.

It seem this government is applying a double standard for one sector of society versus the farmers. Specifically, I'm talking about the climate change plan. Not very long ago the Premier announced that plan, and she claimed that they had consensus among all stakeholders. She had nice window dressing behind her, lining up all the people from downtown Calgary and environmental activists and so on, but in this particular case the stakeholders are missing. They are coming here to protest, so that moved me to speak in their support.

Also, after hearing from the Member for Calgary-North West that legislators should listen to their constituents, being her MLA – I actually have constituents in this House. After listening to her speech, I suspect I'll be in trouble if I don't speak along the same lines that she spoke a few minutes ago, particularly after she expressed her own experience of supporting bills unknowingly in a wrong way during her last term. So she actually gave words of wisdom to all the new NDP MLAs: pause and do the right thing. I'm taking her counsel, too, on this. I also have an extra benefit of sitting next to veterans like the Member for Drumheller-Stettler, who is a lifelong agrarian, so when he says something, there is credibility and authenticity. I have lots of respect for him.

From my own experience, Mr. Speaker, I grew up in a village in southern India, and my family did farming. Those are very fertile lands there. Unlike in North America, we don't have large-area farms there. By law the size of the farms there are limited to units of 40 acres for a household of wife and husband. I was actively involved in farming. I still have some family land there which belongs to me, so I'm proud to say that I'm a farmer, too. When I grew up, as a kid I worked on the farm helping my dad. I grew up in a joint family with my uncles and my cousins. We all worked together, and every day before I went to school and after I came back from school, I helped on the dairy farm and also the agricultural farm.

So with that background I feel strongly about the issues and concerns raised by the farmers, and I'm not supporting Bill 6 for the reasons that I'm going to explain to you now. Of all the departments that government is administering, agriculture is the most diverse. You know that, Mr. Speaker. You come from Medicine Hat, and southern Alberta is predominantly an agriculture-based economy. That is why it is so stable now as opposed to the cyclical economy of oil and gas. You know what goes on in a farmer's life day in and day out. Safety on the farm is of utmost importance, and the loss of just one life or any injury is simply one too many. We all agree about that. I know that members opposite feel strongly about that, and we are not disputing that. We support them on that. We are here to help. We'll help them to make the bill right.

Farmers and ranchers, we all know, put the food on the table that Albertans and Canadians eat each and every day, three times a day in my case. I remember that every time I have food, and Calgarians are telling me that we should not bite the hand that feeds us. Mr. Speaker, there is no farmer in Alberta who doesn't want their operation to be as safe as possible. Nobody cares more about farm

safety than the moms and dads who operate them and call them home. The gap between the NDP's Bill 6 and common-sense Alberta farmers is that this bill is legislating first and consulting next. That's what I heard from the farmers on Monday.

An Hon. Member: Educate, not legislate.

Mr. Panda: Yeah, educate. Legislation is not the ultimate solution.

Agriculture is a vital part of Alberta's economy, which makes it shocking that the government has decided to introduce legislation as comprehensive as Bill 6 without in-depth consultation. There may be some consultation, but it's not enough. That's what we are saying. According to the NDP plan they'll be implementing this bill and its wide-reaching impacts in less than 45 days from the time it was tabled in this Assembly. Looking at the calendar, realistically, we'll be lucky to have five days of debate in this House before we end the fall session.

For example, these changes include participation in WCB. The WCB is an institution that even the current government has said needs reform. Then why not fix it first before making farmers and ranchers join it. In any case, farmers have been telling us that many of them have private insurance well beyond the scope of WCB and that in many ways it is superior to what WCB provides to injured workers, but Bill 6 doesn't care. Every January 1 they'll be paying for WCB, whether it is better or worse than what employers already have. Has this government done any consultation with these farmers and ranchers to ask how they currently operate when it comes to insurance for their workers? Perhaps, if this government had focused more on listening, they would understand the widespread processes already in place.

8:40

The focus on WCB in this legislation is especially puzzling because on October 30, 2012, the now Premier stated:

What we've heard from a number of members, at least on this side of the House from all three parties, is that we're all very acutely aware that the [WCB] does not function in the way we would like it to – there is a fairly broad understanding amongst injured workers that it's pretty hard to get a fair shake out of the Workers' Compensation Board – and that, really, what we would love to be doing is reforming the system as a whole.

This is from *Hansard*. That's what the current Premier said then, Mr. Speaker.

So if this board is deeply flawed and deserves to be reformed, as the Premier has stated in the past, then why not fix it before forcing farmers into it? Is this government not doing a huge disservice to the tens of thousands of Albertans you're now burdening with forced WCB coverage, especially when Albertans, as she said, can't get a fair shake out of it? The Premier has actively demonstrated against the WCB. So what are we to conclude the government thinks of farmers when this government has no problem making WCB mandatory for them a month from now? With the additional costs through increases in electricity rates, gas taxes, unknown OH and S compliance costs, and now mandatory WCB costs there is no question that this government's policies will be pushing farms out of business. It's just a matter of how many.

Bill 6 doesn't care about that. The manner in which the bill has been proposed, Mr. Speaker, has the appearance of making up the rules on the fly. At the very least, Bill 6 should go to a legislative committee so they can hear from the actual producers and industry members in order to mitigate the possible unintended consequences. The NDP government quite simply cannot afford to neglect consulting stakeholders prior to crafting the legislation. The Alberta NDP government must recognize the distinction between the small family farm and the large commercial operation, which

will help them gain an understanding of the multitude of differences in the way that they function.

What we are seeing is this government, which vowed to be more open and transparent, doing just the opposite. After they came to power, they're just doing the opposite.

This past week we have seen hundreds and hundreds of farmers protesting at the Legislature, at the government's own consultation session in Grande Prairie, and at the numerous town hall meetings throughout Alberta. The grassroots momentum against this bill has yet to peak, Mr. Speaker, has yet to peak. We'll see that tomorrow. We're seeing a strong surge of Albertans demanding consultation on this legislation. The Premier should not make it a prestige issue. We should do the right thing of listening to the farmers and fixing the bill before we implement it.

Mr. Speaker, our provincial neighbours have working legislation models that make clear distinctions between large commercial operators and family farms, that could and should be studied to understand what does and doesn't work. The truth is that farming legislation cannot be a one-size-fits-all solution. That's what the Member for Calgary-North West also said.

What is needed more than anything with farm safety legislation is the time to make sure that we get this legislation right. Alberta has one of the world's most productive agricultural economies, supporting the livelihood of tens of thousands of Albertans. Agriculture is also responsible for a great deal of the province's renewable revenues and billions in economic activity, this even before we count the tremendous spinoff benefits to other sectors, Mr. Speaker. Agriculture has existed sustainably as one of our enduring industries since much before our time, even before our inception as a province. So it is safe to say that all farmers and ranchers would agree that their livelihood is one that goes beyond nine to five – it's not a routine nine to five job – and one that poses many challenges and risks.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Mr. Cooper: Mr. Speaker, my sole question to my hon. colleague is: would you like to complete your thoughts?

Mr. Panda: Sure. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The dedicated people who devote their lives to farming and ranching in Alberta deserve nothing less than the due diligence of proper, proactive consultation on any legislation of this importance. Drafting legislation and then consulting is simply putting the cart before the buffalo, I say, because that's how I grew up. On our farms we had cows and buffaloes back in India. The bulls were used for tilling, so I would say that it's equal to putting the cart before the horse.

Mr. Speaker, now it's all about the fairness. Are we here to just bring some legislation, whether it is complete . . .

Mr. Yao: I don't think he's listening.

Mr. Panda: I'll wait.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I thought you had so much more to say.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, I was just wondering: is it the right thing to ram through the legislation which is incomplete, which is not fair to the farmers, who are feeding us every day, day in and day out, or should we take a pause and then consult them, listen to the experts? That's the right way to do it, and if the government is taking credit for bringing in the climate change plan after thorough consultations with everybody, why not do the same thing with the farmers? Why are we applying double standards? Why are we treating them as

second-class citizens? Is it the fair thing to do? Is it a Canadian value? I don't think so. One of the reasons I moved to Canada is that we treat everyone, including the farmers, fairly, but in this case that's not what I'm hearing.

I suggest and I encourage my neighbouring riding members from Calgary-Hawkwood and my young friend from Calgary-Shaw and other members on the opposite side to do the right thing. In fact, the Member for Calgary-North West actually eloquently explained her own personal experience when she supported a bill which now she has second thoughts on, and she shared something on social media of her pain going through those forceful commitments to support a bill which she didn't actually buy in to. If you are going through the same dilemma, here is your time to speak your inner voice and do the right thing and to be fair to the farmers.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, hon. member. I wonder if you would give us some insight into whether you've ever worked on a farm where there was no occupational health and safety standard or compensation for injury. Have you worked on a farm with that?

Mr. Panda: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Member for Calgary-Mountain View. I know you are a doctor. I'm an engineer. Let's play to our own personal experiences in life. I actually worked on the farm. I don't know whether you worked on the farm or not.

Dr. Swann: Did it have occupational health and safety?

Mr. Panda: I'm coming to that.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I think it best that you direct to the chair.

8:50

Mr. Panda: Thank you, sir.

When I talk about farmers' issues, Mr. Speaker, I am talking from my personal experience, from my own involvement. As a doctor the hon. member might have given birth to babies here, but as a farmer's son I actually helped my dad in pulling out the baby cows and all, so I feel very strongly about farmers' issues.

Coming to OHS, I... [Mr. Panda's speaking time expired]

The Speaker: Hon. members, as the hour gets on I find that the tensions get a little higher as the clock ticks by. My apologies to the member that I wasn't entirely listening to the comments that were going through me to the House, but I was looking for some guidance with respect to a clearer definition of 29(2)(a) but wasn't able to do that.

In the meantime I'd heard three members in the House reference Medicine Hat, so that brought some things – as I thought about 29(2)(a), an old saying came back to me, which was stuck in my 4-H days: head to clearer thinking, heart to greater loyalty. I couldn't remember the third one. Health. Health to better living.

Mr. Panda: You are taking up with the farmers, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that. I am thankful for that.

The Speaker: Thank you. An observation.

The next member is – my apologies for that departure – the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Stier: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and good evening, everyone. It's a pleasure to be here with you tonight and talk about this very interesting bill that we've had delivered to us in the past few weeks in such a robust fashion, to say the least. I have to say

that I'm pleased to get a chance to speak to this proposed legislation.

You know, I don't think I've heard more from my constituents on any other bill since I was elected in 2012. I don't think I've ever seen on TV or on radio – and I asked, actually, some of the very experienced people here that work for this House if they have ever seen anything in the past 15 years, and they said they had not except for one health issue. I believe it was way back when and around 2001. But let me get back to this bill.

You know, I've never seen a bill that looks like this, that is so thin. It is, I see, a white bill like normal, and it has a little bit of stuff in the front that never really seems to mean much to anybody anyway. As you get inside, then you find that there are one, two – there are three – four, I guess there are actually five pages that have caused so much rebellion in this province in so short a period of time. I can't actually believe it. When I look at it, I see that all it is is a bunch of amendments to existing legislation, a bunch of amendments that will cause all of that, and we're trying to ram this through in so few days without giving the key people that will be affected any consultation prior to even bringing this forward. It is absolutely shocking. I am sorry, but I just needed to say that and get it out because it has not yet been said tonight, and it needed to be said.

The constituents are very concerned about the speed at which this bill has been rushed through, as we all know. Like all Albertans they want to make sure that we get this legislation correct, so they want us to take the time to make sure we get it right the first time. That's what I'm going to be talking about. They want to make sure that their voices are heard, that their insights and experience are considered by this Assembly in the crafting of this legislation. Every one of them is concerned that this is not happening. I think we've heard that time and time again in these protests and all of these speeches that we've heard in this House in the past few days. The government is, as I said, pushing this through without considering those voices and the very needs of the people it will most affect.

We talk about 50,000 to 60,000 – I can't remember the exact number – of farms and ranches in Alberta. How many people does that affect? It's not the number that was quoted in the document that was on the website here just a few days back but now has mysteriously disappeared, that was about 11 or 12 pages with all of the rules. It's probably in the neighbourhood of 300,000 to 400,000 to 500,000 people it's going to affect.

Farming and ranching is fundamental to Alberta's economy and culture, as we know, and this is as true today as it's been for generations. Our province grows wheat and barley, canola, alfalfa, oats, and peas. We raise cattle and horses and chickens and pigs, as we all know. We grow vegetables and berries. We have orchards and wineries and honey farms, just to name a few. The abundance of our farm and ranchlands provide the province, much of the country, and even many parts of the world. There are 43,000 farms in the province, as I just said a moment ago, and up to 60,000. Much of our population has some connection to these farms. Much of our population. Not just in the rural areas themselves, not just in the towns and the cities, but all over Alberta people are being affected.

And this said, it's important to note that farming is not just solely an aspect of rural life. Urban citizens are increasingly rediscovering the satisfaction themselves of growing things, growing plants, and raising animals for food, from backyard chicken coops, even, to community gardens. I know they're allowing chickens to be raised in the town of Turner Valley. Well, the town is in my constituency now, Mr. Speaker. Municipal governments are actually encouraging this kind of shift, and this Assembly is considering a

private member's bill to encourage local food production because Albertans recognize the value of farms.

I've received, as I'm sure all the members of this Assembly have received . . .

Dr. Turner: Safe farms.

Mr. Stier: The Member for Edmonton-Whitemud wants to interrupt, I gather, but I'll continue on without answering your stuff.

I received, as I'm sure most of the members here have, hundreds of letters and e-mails from Albertans asking the government to slow down and to consult with stakeholders before ramming it through. You would think that these all came from rural constituents only, but that is simply not the case, actually. I would like to quote a letter from a self-identified Edmontonian.

I appreciate the intent of Bill 6, and daresay even support the spirit of it, but it is short-sighted and requires much more consideration and time than it is being given. While I truly believe the desire is to protect farmers, their families, and their employees, in its current state it has the potential to do more damage than good to farming communities.

Given that farming and ranching are so important to Alberta and Albertans, it would seem self-evident that we should carefully consider how we can best protect the people who work so hard doing it. Rather than legislate and consult, we should consult and then legislate. It makes simple sense. You don't plan a house without going out to the people who want the house to see how many rooms they want, to see how many bathrooms they're going to need, to see how many cars are going to be needed in the garage. For a government that was swept to power on the promise of change, this seems more like the same old, tired, top-down, well-known, best style of governing that Albertans thought they had shown the door.

I want to stress that no one – no one – in this province opposes safety on our farms. Opposing this bill is not opposition to the safety and security of our province's farming community. Not one farmer, not one rancher, not any MLA thinks that farms should be less safe. Not anyone wants to see themselves or anyone working with them to get hurt. No one cares more about safety on farms than the moms and dads who own and run them, and I'm sure members on the other side of the House would not disagree with that. This is not in dispute, and neither is our concern that all employees can go into work every morning knowing that they will be afforded protections to ensure they'll be returning to their families at the end of the day.

While this government may have some good intentions towards a goal that is shared by all, then, we don't believe this government's actions towards attaining that goal are the appropriate ways, nor have they been fully considered. By the way that this bill is written and the way that the other side is rushing into it, it concerns me, and it concerns my constituents.

Number one, there are no provisions to differentiate large commercial farms from small family farms. It's not in these five pages that are in that little pamphlet we got.

Number two, there's no distinction between a feedlot and a hobby farm.

9:00

Number three, there are no provisions recognizing the long days that calving or harvest necessarily bring with them. [interjection] No, it's not there, Minister of Municipal Affairs. It is not. They've taken it off the website. It's gone.

Number four, there is no recognition of the role that children and teenagers play growing up on family farms, helping with chores around the property, and learning about farming safety and life from their parents while doing so. There's no guidance for distinguishing

the home from the work site on family farms, where each is so often blended into the other.

There's no recognition of the long culture of neighbourliness in our farming communities, where everyone helps each other as they're able to do so that they can get everything done and finish ahead of their deadlines. How neighbourly can you be when helping out might hit your neighbour right in the pocketbook?

My constituents and I just have so many questions on this bill. By the way, my constituency has 22 towns. That is 22 communities, 14 councils. Not one public hearing was scheduled in my constituency – not one – and it is the largest and most choice farming area and ranching land in Alberta. There are not a lot of answers forthcoming from the government. The government should know better.

The Premier said the following when announcing the royalty review, quote: we have outlined a mechanism that includes transparency, consultation, a careful, considered approach that takes into account the fulsome contribution of our industry partners. Well, let's talk about that. Firstly, a considered approach, Mr. Speaker. That is what she promised to our oil and gas industry. Why should our farming families be treated differently than big oil and gas companies? Why? Why, Premier? Why should they do that?

Secondly, consult before you legislate, Mr. Speaker. If the government had made efforts to consult with farmers and ranchers before they introduced this bill to the House, they wouldn't be worrying about miscommunication on it, but they're sure worried about miscommunication on it now. The government could have chosen to do right by Albertans and gone out and held town halls and consultations and asked for advice while they were formulating the bill. Certainly, this bill and all the thought that might have gone towards it would have been started some time ago. You would have thought that would have allowed them time to go and do that. But they chose not to, and now they're surprised by the backlash that their arrogance and their mistakes have caused.

They shouldn't be surprised since they themselves so often commented on the previous government failing in exactly the same way. If I may, I'd like to quote the current Government House Leader, who said the following just last December on a different piece of legislation, Mr. Speaker. He said:

Because of the clear problems we're hearing about this bill and the utter lack of notice and complete consultation with all concerned stakeholders, we would like to see the legislation delayed.

He said that. He said:

It's been pushed forward too fast, and not everyone has had their voice heard.

One of the members that is in the room this evening on the government side has heard those quotations before because he was sitting with the Government House Leader when he said that. I see him shaking his head a little bit right now. I couldn't agree more with him, Mr. Speaker.

I don't understand how the other side can't understand that our concerns with this are not with the intent of the legislation but with the way the government wants to legislate. I hope that common sense will prevail on this matter and that this government will send this legislation to committee, where it can be studied, reflected on, and where Albertans can testify and advise on it. We've talked about this throughout this week in question period and through other statements. It is where this House can get it right the first time if we do that. There's no need and no excuse for sowing the confusion and discord that has rocked our province on this issue, especially an issue where it should be so easy for all of us to find agreement.

What is their reason for not wanting to consult ahead of time? Why don't we take this extra time? Can anyone over there bring me a valid reason to bring this into effect without doing . . .

Dr. Turner: Seventeen farm deaths per year.

The Speaker: Hon. member, through the Speaker, please.

Mr. Stier: Again the Edmonton-Whitemud member wants to interrupt, Mr. Speaker. If he wants to bring that up, he can do it all the night. I don't really care, but, you know, we'll finish the speech. Thank you.

The moms and dads on our farms are more concerned than anyone about safety, and if this government had engaged with them, consulted with them, and drafted legislation with them in mind, there wouldn't be demonstrations on the steps of this building, there wouldn't be thousands of letters pouring into the constituency offices, Mr. Speaker, there wouldn't be hundreds and hundreds of people driving up the highways in their farm machinery to come to this Legislature, and there wouldn't be hundreds lined up at the door when this government could not even plan to hold proper meetings and actually book rooms that would hold more than 40 in some cases.

Our party has advocated for weeks, since this started up, on the education. Earlier on the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View had mentioned that for 10 years the past government had talked about education. They did that for a reason: because they were right. If they're going to have safer operations, people need education. You were right, hon. member. They need that education.

There's no disagreement that safety and a fair workplace are deserved by everyone in the workplace. This means that we can do it in many ways, though. We have choices. We can have insurance, yes, but we can have choice in that insurance. We can have different companies proceed with that.

The Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To my hon. colleague here: the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View spent some time telling this House that the government of Alberta has been consulting with farmers for 10 years and that it's enough. Could the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod please explain to me and to this House, especially the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, how it could be that with that 10 years of consultation, we had 1,500 farmers on the steps of this Legislature claiming that they had never been consulted? Could you explain to us how there have been thousands and thousands of e-mails and letters, thousands and thousands of farmers attending these rallies who are all saying the same thing, "Kill Bill 6; it's going too fast, and we have not been consulted"? How could this possibly be if there have been 10 years of consultation as claimed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View?

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

Mr. Stier: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake for that question. It's always strange to me how people can make statements about previous governments and not have been participating directly in them and say that they fully understand what has taken place.

We've had so many statements regarding consultation, and so many times we've heard from various entities that consultation was done for years and years and now is the time to go ahead and smack in legislation. Well, how can you say that you have consulted on the

legislation currently when you're not talking about the same type of considerations? We weren't talking about this before. So I don't think it's fair for the Member for the Calgary-Mountain View to have made those statements in that way.

Certainly, I can say this. We have considered this pretty carefully. We have our own set of solutions, and we believe that – you know what? – there is a strategic approach that we could look at. There is a very good strategic approach we could look at. First of all, we have to figure out what we want as an outcome. We should probably develop some comprehensive income insurance for farm employees when they are injured, disabled, or worse, something that is going to cover them very well.

Now, most farming operations already have those kinds of things in place, and most big commercial ones, of course, have in the past gone with WCB, which is fine. But we can recognize that WCB is only one of several options that might be available. There are other comprehensive and more cost-effective insurance tools that some operations are already using, Mr. Speaker, and I think that these could be used in a creative manner so that we could find unique and individual needs and solutions for those situations.

9:10

The next outcome we want to talk about is reducing the frequency of farm accidents. It seems as though one of the members across the way has that on his mind, so we have a solution for that. We want to encourage farm safety behaviours that result in low accident rates. We want to educate employers and employees through education and a certification program. Instead of having punitive measures, we could take the time and the dollars spent and invest those dollars in an education program designed specifically for agricultural operations. We could even involve courses on the Internet. We could involve testing. We could even involve what I had to go through for my boating card. It's not that hard to take all the energy that this government has and the expertise and put them to good use and create those programs, that we do apparently seem to need.

We could work with all the farm organizations we have in Alberta and try to supply some sort of a support mechanism for those education programs, Mr. Speaker. We could use previous farm accident data, and we could actually make very good use of that data to help us manage and understand accident prevention. We could develop and communicate acceptable employment standards for farm workers. We could recognize that both employers and employees accept that long and variable hours are part of the job and that they work together, so we could tailor our program to meet those specific needs.

We could also recognize and support positive farm labour relations. We know that we could create a relationship between employees and employers tailored to these specific situations, that would provide us with respect, productivity, and satisfaction. With the Internet and social media, Mr. Speaker, we can provide all that and more.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you. I hope that I can just take a moment in the House. I wanted to offer a sincere apology to a woman – her name is actually Isabelle Fournier; I hope it's okay to say her name in here – who had received an e-mail from my staffer today.

The Speaker: You're making . . .

Mrs. Aheer: I'm just doing an apology for something that happened earlier, and it's just before I dig into Bill 6. It has to do

with that. I wanted it to just be on the record. It directly relates to Bill 6, and I'll get to that. Just on behalf of my staffer, if you don't mind, I'd like to read the letter that was sent, which, of course, will have . . .

The Speaker: This is with respect to Bill 6?

Mrs. Aheer: Absolutely, it is. Thank you, sir.

Earlier today I received an e-mail from Peter. I was obviously insulted on a personal level; but mostly a little hurt. I was hurt because the e-mail made me question Wild Rose's stance on Bill 6.

I reacted, and posted the email on social media. As the Liberal leader would say "it's 2015".

I was then contacted by a friend, who spoke [out], and urged me to call him. Which I did.

At any point in one's life, we have choice words for people. I know, I have had my fair share. What I haven't done though, is apologize for some of those people who I may have insulted.

Peter reached out thru facebook and my friends, urging me to contact him. While speaking with him, I realized he is just a man. As overworked as we all are during these trying times. We are both fighting the same fight. We both have the same goals.

I also realize he is only human. He reminded me of my grand father who worked his land, day and night. Who also had words for us kids when we were making too much noise or being annoying.

I believe that Peter deserves the chance to prove himself with the Wild Rose party. Because he has . . . more qualities than any NDPer; and Honesty and Integrity. His apology was honest, and I am more than happy to have had the chance to have a conversation, with a great man; who hit "reply all", in a moment of haste.

Peter and I will be fighting this bill 6 side by side at the Legislature tomorrow. Because together our fight will only be stronger.

That's in regard to Bill 6, and it is with humility that I stand here to speak on behalf of farmers in my constituency

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

I'd like to also bring to light that yesterday in our banter the hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville had sort of pointed across at me and asked if I had actually talked to anybody in my constituency. Yeah. I mean, I've had like everybody else hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of letters and e-mails and phone calls. I mean, it's actually impossible to keep up with everything that's going on. Everybody wants to have their point spoken to, and I have so many things to share with all of you. I'm sure you're excited as I am to tell you all about that.

An Hon. Member: We are. Can't wait.

Mrs. Aheer: I know, right?

I've been in Chestermere since 1979. One of my greatest memories, actually, as a child was when I was asked to come in and help out with some calving. I actually only got the opportunity to do it once. I have long, stringy arms, so you can imagine what my job was that day. I got to go in and turn and help. It was amazing in a very odd and sort of weird, strange way. But one of the more beautiful things that I saw was when that little guy came out, and we saved him. I don't know if you've ever seen a calf. When they're first born, they're absolutely stunning: beautiful, beautiful creatures with big eyes, long eyelashes. I immediately fell in love. You know, had my father let me, I probably would have taken him home and, like one of my favourite movies, called him Norman and dragged him around from place to place. It's one of my favourite memories.

Where I lived, there were a couple of jobs that you could do. You could babysit, or you could help out with farming. Depending upon what the job was, I was quite often on some of my friends' farms. Not being a farmer myself but living in a farming community, I was able to do all manner of things. I wasn't able to lift the heavy hay bales, but there was a lot of rock picking and other things that you can do, which I was very good at.

Just to elaborate on my moment of being with my constituents. Originally, I had planned to have a meeting with my constituents, with our farmers this Friday. But when all of this started coming to fruition, I phoned one of my friends who's in my constituency – his sister actually taught me when I was in school and is actually teaching my son now – and they managed in under 24 hours to get together just under 200 farmers. That was on Saturday, November 28, with less than 24 hours' notice.

I mean, I must have held – I don't know? – seven or eight town halls during the election, and I can tell you that I probably didn't get that many people in all of them at any of those times. I really thought, you know, that people would come out and want to talk to me about what I was doing. But this was unbelievable. It was in Indus, and not only did they show up in fine form, but they had also signed that petition as well, to kill Bill 6.

As a new MLA I look to my colleagues for wisdom, and I've heard so much in here, on this side especially. We would love to hear from you on your side, especially because there are so many of you that do have farming communities. It would behoove all of us to have you stand up and have an opportunity to speak on behalf of them. As has been said in the House previous to myself, it's an imperative side of understanding what we do to have both sides of that story. You owe it to yourself and to your constituents to make sure that you are supporting them. It may not be what you think is right. But as has been said in the House previously, we are seeing massive amounts of reaction to this. Please don't ignore this.

Madam Speaker, if you don't mind, I'd like to share some other sentiments from my constituents via the hundreds of phone calls and e-mails and letters. The central point that I see and hear time and again is that they feel that this process has been a backdoor approach. I think that that speaks to the mentality of how – they're feeling like they've been betrayed. This is another term, I'm sure, you've heard over and over again. I think it's worth saying. When a person feels cornered and attacked and they feel like they haven't been consulted, this is the kind of reaction that you're going to get. I mean, there's so much frustration and anger out there that would be easily handled by some moderation, by some thoughtfulness on this part.

I have to say, again, that all of us in this House are after the same goals when it comes to safety. Every single one of us. Having been in a farming community and having had the privilege of spending time on a farm and spending time with the people who do these amazing jobs and bring food to our tables, we owe them that respect of listening. We owe them that respect of slowing down.

9:20

Again, I beg you just to consider that it's not so much about – we know that it's about safety, but you need to take a step back. Please just take some time and think about what it is that you're actually trying to accomplish here. As the hon. member from the party to the left of me here had said earlier, if you had the opportunity to go and spend time on the farms and breathe in that environment and what that actually means to people, it's just a different mentality. It would be like bringing somebody into any of your other jobs that you had previous to this one and having them spend a day on the job with you to understand how hard you worked at that and who you were at the core and how that defines you.

What you're actually saying right now is that that definition doesn't matter. You're saying that who they are, how they're parenting, who they are as people doesn't matter. You are giving them the impression that that doesn't matter. I honestly don't think that that is your intention, but that is what is transferring out to the people of this community. They feel disrespected. I would love nothing more than to be able to say that that's not the truth, but that's exactly how it's being interpreted.

Ultimately, that responsibility of how that's being interpreted lies on your shoulders, and the opportunity has been presented to you in a thousand different ways, as many times as we can, to give you the opportunity to make this right. How is it that that can be ignored on so many different levels and so many times? I mean, as a parent, you know, I sit and I do the circle talk, a typical mom thing, until my kids get the idea of what it is that I'm trying to get through to them. I don't know how many times it will have to be repeated, but we will continue to repeat it on behalf of these people that we represent until you hear it. Don't just hear it; listen to it. Take it in. We're asking for moderation. We're asking for consultation.

I have to give a small shout-out to the Member for St. Albert. In a bill that she's going to be presenting, she is asking for consultation with regard to PDD, something that is very close to my heart. That's the way it should be done, and congratulations in advance. If that member has that ability to think about how this is going to impact a very important group of people in society, why is that any different than what we're trying to accomplish over here? You need to actually answer that question.

Some of us aren't even sleeping at night because we feel nauseated by what our farmers are going through. We understand at a cellular level, I guess, for lack of a better word. I'm not sure which minister had mentioned earlier – I think it was actually the hon. member to our left here that . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Excuse me, hon. member. I just have to interrupt here at this point. According to *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, debate at second reading needs to focus on the principles of the bill, not on your personal feelings and emotions about situations that are going on in here.

Thank you.

Mrs. Aheer: Sure. I'm sorry. Thank you, Madam Speaker. I will continue on the principles, then.

The bill has been pushed forward, thrown in the faces of family farms, and it looks as though it will be rammed through without appropriate consultation. The government needs to slow down, revamp the process, and go and talk to the people most drastically impacted. Make no mistake: the 40,000-plus farms will be impacted. Just in case that number has not resonated with you, it's 40,000-plus family farms. When seeking votes, the government had promised to stand up for farmers, to review federal transport, and to keep it fairly priced. Now, we are hit with this platform bait and switch.

When we speak about safety, as many have said, we all agree that safety is of the utmost importance, but rushing in and imposing legislation on family farms is not the way to do it. Education is key, awareness, training, materials. These farms are unique and diverse, like a thumbprint, all the things that create the fabric of this province, things that I think the entire House can agree on. This is transformational rural legislation, the most transformational in a generation, and it's proposed to be done in 45 days, start to finish. Think about that just for a second, 45 days to talk to 40,000-plus farms. That's just under a thousand farms a day, that I'm sure will not be consulted. We would suggest that you tap the brakes. How can you expect to get it right when so many voices are neglected?

Farming is a lifestyle. Perhaps, the government should be spending some time with these families and consulting with them. Farming is also uniquely seasonal and very much at the mercy of nature. I've heard from many that the amount of hours on a farm during seeding or bringing in crops can hit 90 hours a week. Running a farm does not adhere to regular times, and they can't stop for statutory holidays. The work gets done – it's needed – or livelihoods are put on the line. It is the civic duty of government to reach out to constituents and make sure that we are doing right by the people and families affected before we rush into legislation.

The list of concerns goes on and on and on, and the government would understand if they had bothered to ask. How are neighbours supposed to help neighbours? This is more than just a culture. This is a lifestyle. It's been said before, and I'll say it again. It is a lifestyle, and it is one that has always involved the help of community and neighbours. It is the fabric of this province.

I've spoken with my friends, the farmers in my constituency. You know, it's funny. They're usually standing beside a friend of theirs going: well, this is my neighbour Bob who helps me with calving. That's how they introduce each other. I heard it over and over and over again outside on the steps the other day. This is a community of fellowship, and like safety, these are all important aspects that we can agree upon. These are in all parts of our constituencies. Farming or not, it's about community.

Inappropriately crafted OH and S or labour relations stop this culture from enduring, the culture of passing the skills learned by the father and the mother on to the son and the daughter.

The Deputy Speaker: Just before we go on to 29(2)(a), hon. member, at the beginning of your speech you read a letter. Would you be prepared to table that tomorrow in the House?

Mrs. Aheer: Absolutely. Thank you so much. I'd be happy to.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane on 29(2)(a).

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to ask my constituency neighbour a question here. You know, she challenged us during her statement to hear some of the stories, to take in the stories and see how people are affected by this kind of legislation. So my question to her would be – I'd like to read her some stories here of some people who have been affected, and after hearing those stories, I wonder if she might consider changing her mind on the bill.

The first story I would like to read – and I'm prepared to table these documents tomorrow in the House, Madam Speaker – is about Philippa Thomas, whom the Member for Calgary-Mountain View mentioned earlier. Philippa is actually – I believe she's one of my constituents, but she's very close to yours. We border each other's constituencies. So I'd like to read some of the story to you.

Six times a week Philippa Thomas heads out from her Cochrane home with her dog Gaffer to go for 12-kilometre walks through woods, meadows and cow pastures.

Thomas's four-hour treks are her moments to meditate; to put out of mind the agonizing pain she has endured since she injured her thumb almost seven years ago while working as a farm worker at a local equestrian facility.

At first the injury was just a small cut but it morphed into complex regional pain syndrome (CRPS), a chronic progressive disease characterized by severe pain, swelling, and changes in the skin. It progressed to her wrist, elbow, shoulder, and then to her neck. Ultimately, the condition rendered her right arm useless.

"I never knew a body could handle this amount of pain. My back teeth are all broken as I grind. I vomit every day, copious amounts," . . .

To combat her CRPS, a spinal cord stimulator has been implanted in her back. She must wear morphine patches and take four daily doses of methadone for the pain.

"This is a forever thing. I will never get better."

9:30

Madam Speaker, I'd also like to read to the member a bit of a story from the public fatality inquiry, that the Member for Calgary-Mountain View mentioned earlier, on Kevan Chandler. Here are some of the circumstances surrounding his death. I'd be prepared to table this document as well tomorrow.

The deceased, Kevan Chandler, was an employee of a feedlot. Just before noon he went inside a silo to clean out grain that was encrusted on the inside wall. He was attempting to knock down the grain when it collapsed, burying him and causing his death by smothering.

It goes on, Madam Speaker. I'll skip to some of the more germane points here.

A Fatality Inquiry was ordered after the Fatality Review Board recommended that one be held to determine if the death of Kevan Chandler was preventable, and address the advisability of having the Occupational Health and Safety Act investigators involved in farming accidents that occur on large farming and livestock operations.

Go figure.

It was noted that Mr. Chandler had expressed concern on the morning of June 18 as to the danger of clearing out silo 7. However, Mr. Chandler was known to be eager to please, and confident in his abilities.

Much like the Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

The opinion of the co-workers was that Mr. Chandler made an error in judgment, caused by his enthusiasm and lack of experience.

I'll skip to the end here, Madam Speaker, where the hearing tribunal makes an explicit recommendation. This is in regard to the applicability of the Occupational Health and Safety Act to farms. It is recommended that paid employees on farms . . .

Mr. Hanson: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: You raised a point of order, hon. member? Go ahead.

Point of Order Question-and-comment Period

Mr. Hanson: Under 29(2)(a) it allows members to ask questions and comment briefly on matters relevant to the speech.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Go ahead, Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Bilous: Madam Speaker, this is not a point of order under 29(2)(a). Any member in this House has the opportunity to comment or to ask a question, and there is much precedent in this House of members that are setting up some background, some context before they get to a question. Simply, the member standing up on a point of order is pre-empting the member here from getting to his point, to his question. This is not a point of order. This is standard practice in this House.

The Deputy Speaker: I will point out that earlier the Speaker did allow a great deal of leeway on the use of 29(2)(a), which, if you

strictly interpret what you just read from there, hon. member, doesn't really allow for the original speaker to finish off their dialogue. But it has been used in that way, and there has been traditionally a lot of leeway given in this House. I believe that the hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane is reaching a point. He did say that he was looking for the hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View's opinion, so I feel that there isn't a point of order on this particular matter.

Debate Continued

Mr. Westhead: Thank you. I'll finish up quickly here. It was recommended that paid employees on farms should be covered by the Occupational Health and Safety Act, with the same exemption for family members and other nonpaid workers that apply to nonfarm employers.

An Hon. Member: What was the date?

Mr. Westhead: This was from 2008, I believe.

Again, to the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View: after hearing these stories and the explicit recommendations of a judge here, have you changed your mind?

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you so much for taking the time to tell us those stories. I think, again, it comes back to some of the same things that we've been talking about. [A timer sounded]

The Deputy Speaker: I believe I have next on the list Strathmore-Brooks. Is that correct?

Mr. Fildebrandt: Madam Speaker, this week has been extraordinary. This week I have been swamped by e-mails, phone calls, letters, and visits by farmers who are extremely upset about Bill 6. Right now the phone on my desk is buzzing with angry e-mails and Facebook messages from farmers who are angry that they have not been consulted about a bill that affects their way of life.

The majority of these concerns are about the way the government has gone about imposing Bill 6 rather than the nitty-gritty of the contents of it. Hundreds of my constituents are astounded that a new government, elected on a platform of transparency, would impose changes that affect their lives and livelihoods without speaking to them first. Sure, the NDP government belatedly decided to hold a few token meetings in a small, select number of towns across the province. The majority of these meetings have been scheduled for after the NDP had planned on passing this bill. I have a feeling that they're not going to meet that deadline anymore. These are not town halls; these are town tells. These are not consultative sessions. These are sessions where they tell farmers and ranchers how to comply with the bill and not find out what farmers and ranchers want in the bill.

Let me quote the dictionary on the definition of consultation for the members on the government side. Quote: a meeting with an expert or professional such as a medical doctor in order to seek advice. Earth-shattering stuff, Madam Speaker. How could one put advice to use if the bill has already been rammed through the House and passed into law before we solicit the advice?

Our job as MLAs is to be the representatives of our constituents to the government, not representatives of the government to constituents. Now, I wonder what the constituents of the 11 ridings represented by NDP MLAs who are rural or partially rural think right now. Do their constituents really believe that their MLAs are representing their views to the NDP government, or do they think that those MLAs are representing the NDP's views to their

constituencies? We are not voting machines. We are representatives of the people.

There were over 200 people protesting Bill 6 on the steps of this Legislature last Friday. There were between 1,500 and 1,800 people protesting on the steps of the Legislature on Monday. How many are going to have to be here later this week before the government will listen? How many people will it take before the government realizes that they are not doing what is right for farmers and ranchers?

My office has been swamped by farmers and ranchers in my constituency who want to discuss Bill 6 because I'm their representative. Unfortunately, the government held no consultations whatsoever in Strathmore-Brooks. Nothing. In one of the most agriculture-intensive constituencies in Canada not a single government consultation with my farmers and ranchers. So you know what I did, Madam Speaker? I did what every member of the NDP caucus representing rural constituencies should have done. I called my own town hall meeting. I booked the Bassano Elks lodge for 2 o'clock this coming Sunday. I found out very quickly that we are not going to have enough space in the Elks lodge.

I've had constituents who have gone out with their own money and bought local radio advertisements in Brooks informing people about the town hall, out of their own pockets. A constituent of mine went out to put up some posters around the county telling people about the town hall. You know what that constituent found? That constituent, in going out to put up her printed posters, found that random constituents, unprompted by me or my office, had gone and put up their own posters telling them to come on out to our town hall because that was their only chance to tell the government what they thought of Bill 6. Rural Albertans are waking up to this, and they're not happy with what they've found.

9:40

The Bassano Elks lodge is likely to be too small for what we had, so we've had to scramble to find a larger venue. We've now had to move it to the Bassano school gymnasium. There this Saturday I've invited farmers and ranchers in my constituency and adjacent communities who have not been consulted to tell me what they think we should be doing about Bill 6. Has a single member of the government side of the Legislature done so as well? Has a single member of the government side of this House representing rural or semirural constituencies held an open forum in their constituencies for farmers and ranchers to come and tell them what should be done about Bill 6? The silence is deafening.

This is what we do in a democracy. We listen to those we represent in our constituency, and we represent their interests to the government, not the other way around. Is it not the purpose of this House to listen to the people and be their representatives, or did that notion, once held by the NDP in opposition, change once they won power? How many signatures on petitions asking this government to stop Bill 6 will it take for them to listen? Will it take half the farmers in Alberta to sign a petition? Will it take every single farmer to sign a petition before they'll listen? How many thousands need to stand outside these doors before we'll do what they need us to do?

Judging from what I've heard from my constituents so far – and I've heard a lot – the reaction has been almost unanimous. Let's look at two historical examples in Alberta of what happens when the government ignores or disrespects farmers and ranchers. In 2008 the Premier of the day pushed through a series of laws that violated the fundamental property rights of landowners in this province. That set in motion a long chain of events that led to the ousting of that Premier and the creation of the Wildrose. But in looking further back, Alberta's first Liberal government – and, I

might add, last Liberal government – thought that they knew better than farmers and ranchers and governed like they didn't matter. In short order farmers organized into the United Farmers of Alberta and swept that old government from office. Governments worthy of this province must respect both urban and rural Alberta. No government worthy of its office should treat one or the other as second-class citizens.

This government did get one thing right. Every single farmer wants to have a safe farm that their children can live and prosper on. Every single mother and father wants to ensure that their child is as safe as they can possibly be on the family farm. After years of no mandatory WCB or OH and S officials on the farm, Alberta still has the lowest fatality rate per capita in Canada. Now, one fatality is one too high, but this is not a record that should be overlooked. This is because Alberta farmers do care about safety, and they take it more seriously than any government bureaucrat possibly can. The workers on farms are the sons, daughters, aunts, uncles, grammas, grampas, moms, and dads of rural Alberta. These people care more about each other than any OH and S bureaucrat ever will. These people will do anything possible to ensure that every single member of their family comes back from work safe and secure every single night. They've been doing it for generations.

In fact, the government should know this. There have been numerous studies done on this topic by the government. And you know what they said? They said that OH and S does not necessarily need to be legislated. They said that more education would be beneficial for the agricultural industry but that imposed legislative changes to their way of life are not recommended. This government does not even listen to their own research, nor are they listening to the Albertans who stood outside those doors protesting just the other day. What will it take for this government to listen?

We could all agree here, every member of this House, that safety is a priority. The way this bill is being rammed through this House, however, is not ensuring safety. We must consult with the experts – the farmers, the ranchers, the people who live and breathe agriculture – to ensure that we're getting this legislation right the first time. This cannot be done by legislating first and consulting later. By forcing this bill through the House without proper consultation, this government is doing a disservice to all Albertans, urban and rural.

If my point has not yet been made, I'll make it now. Bill 6 should not be rammed through this House at midnight without any due consideration for the people it affects. This bill, like several others that we have seen in this session, should be sent to a committee for review and consultation. By sending it to committee, we can ensure that everyone who wants and needs to be consulted is consulted. Unfortunately, the only farmers who will participate in this debate in the Legislature are the farmers on this side of the House because there are none over there. By sending this to committee, we can ensure that this bill is what Albertans want, not what the union organizers and the NDP want.

The NDP has insisted on sending opposition bills, private members' bills, to committees for study, bills that, while important, do not fundamentally alter the character of half the province. If those bills proposed by us, that have already had significant consultation done before they were introduced, should be going for further consultation at committees, then surely an omnibus piece of legislation that will have significant consequences for everyone in rural Alberta should also go to committee to ask rural Albertans what they think.

On December 5 I will be in Bassano to listen to rural Albertans, to listen to my constituents. The NDP might be waking up to it now. They have lit a prairie fire in Alberta that they cannot undo.

I urge all members of this House, especially those members on the government side representing rural constituencies, to do what they know is right, to listen to their constituents, and to kill Bill 6.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Schneider: Yeah. Madam Speaker, as I was listening to the Member for Strathmore-Brooks talk about his constituents – well, I was sitting, and now I'm standing, so I'm going to ask the question. I wondered how many cards and letters or e-mails you've got. I know you've probably consulted with your constituents, your farm constituents. You're going to consult with them on the 5th, I understand. I intend to be there myself.

You know, I don't know that it sinks in. I don't think that it's sinking in around here, what these people are telling us. We keep telling the people across the way there what people are saying here, and it just doesn't seem like they're listening. I'm hearing: "Time. We need time. We need consultation. We need someone to care. We need our government, that represents us, to slow things down, and to be compassionate and try to understand where we're coming from." I just wondered if you're hearing those things in your constituency, hon. member.

9:50

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you to the Member for Little Bow for the question. Little Bow is probably the closest, adjacent riding to mine, and Bassano is quite close to many of his constituents. He can correct me if I'm wrong, but I'm also of the understanding that the government did not hold any consultations in his constituency, in many of the constituencies, especially on this side. I invited the Member for Little Bow to attend my town hall meeting in Bassano because it's close to many of his constituents who are farmers, who are not being listened to.

[The Speaker in the chair]

You know, members on the other side have tried to fearmonger and say that the Wildrose has just whipped the farmers and ranchers into a frenzy. [interjections] They say that we whipped farmers and ranchers into a frenzy. You know what? The hundreds of calls and e-mails and Facebook messages that I've had come into my office whipped us into a frenzy to fight for their interests.

You know, this was an uphill battle. We did not think that this was going to be an easy fight. Pretty much every major province-wide media outlet endorsed the bill before they read it. They thought it was a slam dunk politically. We all knew that this was a bad bill and it wasn't doing the right thing, but we listened to our constituents, and they told us what they wanted us to do. They told us what they wanted us to do.

I don't have an exact number, Member for Little Bow, but it was hundreds of calls. My two constituency assistants, one from Strathmore and one from Brooks, are in town for training today, and I talked to them. We had a sit-down. I said: what's it been like? And they said: we don't have enough lines in the office to even take the messages that people are leaving. They don't even have enough lines to take the messages. Rural Alberta is standing up. They're mostly modest folks, who don't get too angry about a whole lot, but when you do something like this, you're going to hear from them, and we heard from them on Monday.

What are they saying? They say a few brief things: don't treat the family farm like a big corporate factory. They're saying: consult with us. They're saying one thing unanimously right now: kill Bill 6.

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. I'm just curious to know if my hon. colleague might elaborate. One of the things that I'm hearing a lot from the constituents in Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills is that their primary concern is actually around the lack of consultation on the regulations when it comes specifically to OH and S and the labour code. Many of my constituents have been quite sympathetic and willing to have this conversation around WCB and ensuring that appropriate insurances are in place. But the real concern isn't on that half of the bill; really, it's on the regulations. From all accounts it seems that the government is intent on saying: "Don't worry. Trust us. Over the next year we promise not to have any misinformation get out around the regulations, and the regulations are going to be okay for you."

The Speaker: Hon. member, your question was so brief that you used all the time.

The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to be able to stand in this House and speak to this proposed bill, which I consider a threat to the viability of small farms, family farms. I live down in the south part. You and I have had discussions before. You know where I live. I live in a little area called Feedlot Alley. I've been getting calls from all across my constituency on this Bill 6 issue.

Firstly, regarding feedlots, most if not all feedlot operations in the area already carry private health and safety, death, dismemberment, disability, and critical illness insurance for their workers, and my constituents report that these are very good insurance products, better than the coverage and support provided by the Workers' Compensation Board. Feedlot operators are watching these debates on this bill, getting ready to potentially have to drop their far superior insurance products due to being mandated by government to adopt Workers' Compensation Board insurance.

It costs hard-earned money to try to carry both a superior insurance product and a mandated insurance product, a mandated subpar product, I might add, that the Premier herself said was not a great creation. I think she said that the Workers' Compensation Board is the most miserly workers' compensation board in the country. That's from a few years ago, but she was standing in front of the building and making a speech and stated that this was some of the worst insurance possible. Why the Premier would believe that this is something that she should force on someone else, I'm not sure. If one is mandated, obviously that's the one that the employer would have to use and workers will have to live with.

I should say here that farmers and ranchers and feedlot operators alike would like to have a choice as to what kind of insurance they carry. I had an owner of several feedlots in my office here in Edmonton on the day of the rally, and he was explaining that the insurance he's carrying for his employees has much better coverage and is available at a better rate than Workers' Compensation Board insurance. The part that he liked is that if there were an unfortunate incident, the insurance simply kicked in for, he told me, 16 weeks or so. It was no muss, no fuss, no arguing with the insurance company, as there is, it's well documented, with WCB claims. It just worked as you would hope insurance would work.

So how about that, Mr. Speaker? The government is mandating workers to be worse off, insured less, and takes more of the business profits. I wonder what ever happened to the old adage: do no harm.

Mr. Speaker, speaking of insurance, it seems there must be a problem over there at WCB. Since being elected, I've lost count of how many individuals I've seen protesting in front of that building, at the corner of 107th Street and 99th Avenue. Then my constituency assistants get calls at the office from individuals who,

unfortunately, have had an injury, are not healed from that injury, are still not able to go back to work, and Workers' Compensation Board calls and tells them that their benefits have been dropped. They're told: you're all done; get back to work. Yet these folks aren't able to work because of that injury. I think it's clear, the issues with WCB that claimants have had over the years. It's known very well as a one-sided insurance.

At that point it gets interesting again. Those workers that can't go back to work do their best to try to get on a different government program like AISH, for instance, and they get denied that because the Workers' Compensation Board says that they can go back to work. It's like a never-ending circle of problems; it never seems to end. It's just unbelievable. Look on the Internet. You'll have no trouble finding people who have had bad experiences with WCB.

I received a letter from a constituent about Bill 6 that was actually pretty short, but I want to share a couple of lines from that e-mail. It says: I understand that farm safety is a top priority on Alberta farms, but I strongly disagree with Bill 6. Farmers understand that safety is paramount on farms. I mean – good grief – all farmers and ranchers do. This legislation is ramming something down the throats of the very folks that it affects. That they have no input into this legislation is the ultimate problem here. Just to get back to that email, the last line says: I refuse to support Bill 6, that has no definitions, and I refuse to support the undemocratic process by which this bill is being implemented. That's a common thread with the hundreds of e-mails that I've received.

Another e-mail that I received puts it differently. These particular folks have a small family farm in southern Alberta, that has been in their family since the '40s. It's a quarter-section farm, and they're looking to do their best to hang onto it and see that it gets passed to another generation. I want you to hear the words of these folks. I quote: we are writing out of desperation and frustration as this government, which is supposed to be working for us, seems to be not listening to the very stakeholders that this Bill 6 is supposed to be for. End quote. You know, Mr. Speaker, I can clearly hear the frustration in that person's voice through the letter that I got from him.

10:00

Another letter, that I received about five days ago, speaks to several generations of a family living on a farm and working together. I'll just share a couple of sentences from it.

To understand my reasons in opposing Bill 6 I must fill you in on my personal . . . background. I grew up on a family farm in southern Alberta. We were a mixed cattle and grain operation that included my Grandfather, my two uncles, and my Dad. My cousins and siblings were all involved in the daily operations. Currently my brother is a 4th generation farmer as our cousins . . . have taken over their [family's] farms [as well] . . .

I do understand why the NDP government believes that this bill is important, ask any farmer and they will agree that farm safety is important. However the way the government has gone about in getting this bill passed . . .

Those are the words that are written there.

. . . and everything it includes it is flawed. By creating a bill that combines, WCB, OHS, Labour Code and Employment Standards you are mixing safety, insurance labour and employment issues. Some of these should be together [but] others should not.

The safety of everyone on the farm and ranch setting is important no matter what group you are talking about, be it farmers, family, workers or neighbours. As in all industries those who are on the ground working are the experts, you need to take this into consideration. Listen to the farmers and ranchers, their families, and workers.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 6 is, well, to put it politely, bull manure and heifer dust.

An Hon. Member: What did he say?

Mr. Schneider: Sorry. Bull manure and heifer dust, for those that didn't hear me. You should hear what my constituents are calling it. Because I'm a gentleman, Mr. Speaker, and because you would run my backside clearly out of here, I can't repeat the anger that my constituents are relaying to me through their e-mails and letters.

There's another rally on the steps of the Legislature tomorrow, right outside that door. Mr. Speaker, I know that it will be a peaceful event. Farmers are angry and confused and demanding answers, but they won't be unruly here tomorrow. But before this is all done, it would not surprise me in the least if a few truckloads of bull manure were spread on the lawn of the Legislature. Not that I'm promoting that.

In other provinces there are varying exemptions recognizing that farms are unique workplaces given that they are often a family's home. As of yet there are no distinctions made in Bill 6 as to what a family farm is.

I have another e-mail here. I'd just like to read one paragraph.

A family farm is an excellent place to live and to learn and to love. It is often two or three generations living and working together. Children have the experiences of watching and learning how to get along and work with others. They are taught many different skills; it is like an apprenticeship where you learn about working well with others, learning business skills, mechanics, animal husbandry, driving and operating equipment (at a proper age) and yes even about Safety. Accidents do happen and this is heartbreaking, but accidents happen in urban areas as well.

With the haste that this bill is being pushed through this Legislature, it is crystal clear that this government has no intention of consulting with farmers in Alberta, that all have an opinion on this bill. That's right, Mr. Speaker. The very folks that this bill is intended to serve have absolutely no input as to its outcome. Oh, sure, the government will stand up and say that they're having consultations with farmers in nine different centres or whatever the number is throughout the province. That all sounds great in a newspaper article or on a television news program, but the part that is never mentioned is that those consultations basically take place after the bill has been passed. Considering what's going on now, the consultation meetings that are being held across the province while we stand in this House and debate this bill are really ending up being anything but consultation meetings. That's not a consultation meeting; it's an information meeting and barely that. On behalf of farmers all across this province I say: thanks a lot.

One more. I have another e-mail here I'd like just to read a paragraph from.

Bill 6 has serious impacts on how farmers operate their business and how they work with their families on the farm. All I am requesting is that the current Alberta Government asks the agricultural industry for input before the Bill is passed to ensure proper and complete legislation and regulations are created. This will ensure producers have access to and understand the details of the legislation which will enable them to properly implement and support Bill 6. At this point the Alberta Government has handed us a box and said "here, this is Bill 6. You must follow it." When we open up the box and look inside it is empty. Without all of the details of Bill 6 an environment that breeds fear-mongering, distrust and animosity is created.

I feel that I need to explain one thing, Mr. Speaker, because I, honest to God, don't think that the folks on the other side have any kind of understanding of the life of a farmer. The operations include seeding, spraying, haying, harvesting, feeding cows, calving cows. These things all have seasonal work requirements . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, it's been drawn to my attention – and I think it applied to others – that if you have some documents like

e-mails, letters, et cetera, you would table those documents during daily Routine. Are there other comments that you'd like to make?

Mr. Schneider: Regarding that?

The Speaker: Other than the letters that you're reading.

Mr. Schneider: I'm not reading from letters now. I read from a letter before, Mr. Speaker. I'll be tabling 400 letters tomorrow, and these will be included if that's all right.

All of those seasonal working operations are not seen in other workplaces. Now, Mr. Speaker, you've heard the saying: making hay while the sun shines. Well, it's true. Farmers work long hours. All of those jobs that I just mentioned require a lot of hours at the correct time of year in the life cycle of grain production or animal husbandry or the like, and the hours that a farmer absolutely has to work in order to get those jobs done cannot be legislated. A farmer works until the job is done. Sixteen-hour days are normal fare in those busy times, and farmers do it because they love it, and those that work for farmers are generally there because they love it and the lifestyle that it provides.

I'm sure the government can go around and say that farm groups were surveyed and consulted for years, and studies have been done and reports have been written, but the push to get this legislation in place is reminiscent of the behaviour of a previous government. They would ram legislation through, find a mistake, and amend the legislation at the next session ad nauseam.

In an ideal world I would suggest that important legislation like this would be sent to a legislative policy committee for study. Even though age-old consultation may have been done, going to committee is the final discussion, the final meeting, the final conference to make sure we get things right. On an important piece of legislation like this, that affects so many family farms, so many family ranches, so many Albertans, family farms and ranches that are the backbone of this province, consultation with those people and expert opinion are paramount.

Even the Premier, in the debate last session on Bill 2, the Alberta Accountability Act, stated:

So what we need to do instead is refer this matter to an all-party committee so that we can look more expansively at those parts of legislation that would at least get us to the base camp of the mountain that needs to be climbed by this government in its effort to ascend to minimal levels of trust, integrity, and accountability to Albertans.

Well said. I commend her on saying it. It just doesn't seem like she remembers, several months later, saying it here.

I firmly believe this bill needs to be sent to the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship, where expert witnesses can be called, comparisons to neighbouring jurisdictions done, and real, living, breathing farmers can come before the committee to report on the impact that this legislation will ultimately have on their lives. But it's not enough to have committee meetings and to have people come in. No, Mr. Speaker. We need to go out to rural Alberta and have committee meetings there and be accessible to the people that this legislation will impact.

I can see members in the back row of the majority benches shuddering over there – shuddering – at the thought of interacting with real people and getting a dose of reality from those people. The hallowed walls of the academy and the institution they dabble in . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Opposition House Leader, do you have a brief question?

Mr. Cooper: A very brief question, Mr. Speaker. One brief question: would you like to continue with some of your thoughts?

10:10

Mr. Schneider: Oh, my goodness, would I ever.

Mr. Speaker, what if I have children on my farm? You know, my farm is their home, too. The ridiculousness of this proposed legislation is that when OH and S applies, I would have to submit paperwork to some bureaucrat in Edmonton outlining that I'm going to have my 12-year-old child go milk the cows or feed a couple of pigs, collect some eggs, maybe run out on the quad and fix some fence so that the cows don't get out. Now, that bureaucrat is probably going to look at a list of chores, and because it's not on his list . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, the answer to the question that was asked of you: would it be yes or no? If that was the question to be asked, it would be a one-word answer, yes or no.

Mr. Schneider: He asked if I would like to continue with my thoughts, Mr. Speaker. That's what I'm doing.

The Speaker: So the answer to the question would be yes or no?

Mr. Schneider: I said that, absolutely, I'd love to.

The Speaker: Okay. Now, do you have another question, hon. Opposition House Leader?

Mr. Orr: I have a question.

The Speaker: I have one right here. Hon. member, please proceed.

Mr. Orr: I'd like the member to just clarify for me. I think I heard in your earlier statements what I interpret as a conflict of interest for the government. If the government is to mandate monopolistic, WCB, poor-quality insurance and the government is under obligation to try and save some money, I think that puts them in a considerable conflict of interest if they're also supposed to be supporting and caring for workers. It means, then, that they, in fact, have to reduce their costs and cut benefits for injured workers. Whose side are they on here? Are they on the side of saving money, or are they on the side of caring for the workers? You know, in law the same lawyer cannot represent opposing parties normally. Why is this so in this situation, and does this, in your opinion, contribute to the dysfunctional aspects of WCB? Would private insurance actually be a better choice?

The Speaker: The Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: You're welcome.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you very much, sir. As I mentioned, an owner of three or four feedlots was in my office the other day, and I have to believe that what he was saying was true. He said: "We don't use WCB. We use private insurance because WCB is so onerous and troublesome." All the data would state that certainly there are lots of success stories with WCB, but it does not take four minutes on the Internet to dig up 30 where people are having trouble. The bulletproof glass on the building would let me assume that there may have been issues at one time and that there may be issues in the future, so I would have to say to the hon. member that private insurance has got to be a lot more beneficial, probably cheaper, with a wider range of protection and coverage for employees.

Can I continue with a different thought? There's one organization in this country called 4-H. The 4-H program has a mission statement

that states, “Learn to Do by Doing.” Learning through experience is a key objective of 4-H. At all levels of 4-H members are encouraged to learn through active participation. 4-H is young people and adults learning project and life skills, co-operating and having fun together, sharing leadership, and learning to do by doing. 4-H has been around in Alberta communities since 1917. This is an honourable organization that teaches children life skills by allowing them to do.

We don’t want the government telling parents how to raise their children on family farms, farms that have operated safely and without government interference for generations. It’s education in the home and schools and in the media that is the best way to encourage worker safety. Education, not legislation. No amount of bureaucracy and red tape can make a workplace one hundred per cent safe. There’s always going to be something getting by all the due diligence implemented.

You know, Mr. Speaker, if anything or everything that I’ve just talked about will not appear in the legislation and the legislation will not be more in line with what farmers and ranchers in Alberta would expect from a compassionate government, then there’s only one entity, only one source, if you will, that needs to take the blame for that, and that is the government, that is pressing this bill down the throats of farmers and ranchers in this province. This government has had a great opportunity to engage the people that this bill affects. It has had a great opportunity to prove to the farmers and ranchers . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think I prefer today, actually, to speak mostly to my constituents because I have the very real sense that the members across the floor aren’t really listening anyway. They say that they’re consulting, but they aren’t actually listening to anything that’s said, and I do know who elected me. So to my friends in the riding: that’s who I’m speaking to, Mr. Speaker.

As they already know, agriculture is our second-largest export industry in this province.

The Speaker: Hon. member, you direct your comments through the Speaker.

Mr. Orr: Yes, sir. I did think I said “Mr. Speaker” several times, but I’ll try and focus that.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Orr: According to the 2014-15 Agricultural and Rural Development annual report there are actually 62,000 farm operators in Alberta, and then they go on and point out that of these many operators 90 per cent of them sell a gross net of less than \$500,000 a year, which means that if they manage to keep even 10 per cent of that, they’re making a very modest income in many ways. So 90 per cent of them truly are family farms and farm families. The numbers actually tell a story that I think probably most of the farm people in our communities actually know already, and that is that the vast majority of these ranches and farms are small, owner-operated businesses.

Now, there’s something that needs to be said there. What that means is, Mr. Speaker, that these are free-enterprise endeavours. They are free enterprise to the core, to the heart, and to the soul. If I may, I would like to take a minute and explain to my riding people why it is that the members across the floor, although they say that they hear, aren’t actually listening. I’d like to explain to my members what is at the heart and soul of an NDP mindset. I know that our owner-operated farm businesses are free enterprise at heart,

but if one is reminded and goes back and takes a few moments for a little bit of a history lesson, the beginning and the birthplace of the NDP government is in a document called the Regina Manifesto.

If I may, I would like to quote a couple of lines from that manifesto because it is the guiding document and the heart and soul of the NDP Party. The manifesto states, “We aim to replace the present capitalist system.” Now, the word “capitalist” in modern language, up-to-date language, is free enterprise, so their intent is to replace the free-enterprise farm system. Part of the reason they cannot and they will not listen to you, no matter how many protests you make, is because their intent is to replace the very system by which you exist. I’d like to quote a little bit farther from the same document. Their intent is one “in which economic planning will supersede . . . private enterprise.” Now, if farmers are not private-enterprise individuals, I don’t know anybody that is, but their intent is to supersede you entirely. You could translate that to say: destroy you.

The Speaker: Hon. member, the “you”: is that the Speaker? Direct it through the Speaker. When you use the phrase . . .

Mr. Orr: I’ll speak to you. You don’t want me to speak to my residents, to my riding?

The Speaker: I want you to speak through the Speaker if you will, sir.

Mr. Orr: I’ll speak to you. They can hear me.

Mr. Bilous: Point of order.

The Speaker: Excuse me.

You have a point of order? Proceed.

Point of Order Language Creating Disorder

Mr. Bilous: I am citing from 23(j). The member is clearly trying to use language of a nature to create disorder. I’d also like to clarify, Mr. Speaker, that the hon. member is referring to a document that is not adopted or created by the Alberta NDP, so inferring that what he is reading is the policies of this party is incorrect and needs to be corrected for the record.

10:20

Mr. Fildebrandt: Mr. Speaker, I’m rising to speak in defence of my colleague from Lacombe-Ponoka. He is reading from a document, one of the founding documents of the NDP. The NDP is a federated party that has no distinction from the federal or provincial levels. It is a single party registered at different levels of government, but it is structurally a federated party. The CCF is a founding, constituent part of the New Democratic Party of Canada and the New Democratic Party of Alberta.

He is quoting from its founding documents and founding principles. It is highly pertinent to this debate. It is a factual document. If the NDP members wish to disassociate themselves from Tommy Douglas and the CCF and their own history, which they proudly proclaim regularly, that is a different issue, but this is highly pertinent. This is not intended to create disorder. If the members across have any issues with members on this side quoting their founding documents, then I recommend they disassociate themselves from their own founding documents.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I do not believe that this is a point of order. However, I would ask, firstly, that the members direct their comments – you must use the first-person you; it’s the Speaker that

you're speaking to. And I would ask, as this hour draws on, that you cease and desist from using the kind of language that's going upset the House.

Please, hon. member, let's get back to Bill 6, please.

Debate Continued

Mr. Orr: Mr. Speaker, I truly do not believe that this is irrelevant to Bill 6. The reason that Bill 6 matters to farmers is because they are free enterprise in their heart and soul, and the reason that the members opposite cannot and will not listen to them is because they are socialist in heart and soul. We're talking about a political, social difference here. It's history. It's the reality. I'm not trying to be inflammatory. It's just a simple reality of history. Their name, NDP currently, was previously CCF, and that's their history. I'm just drawing a point to it. I'll move on from that. Obviously, I've hit the heart and soul of the issue because it's gotten a tremendous response.

Alberta farms are not just workplaces. They are free-enterprise places, and they are also homes and communities. For the families that work the land, it isn't just a job; it's a way of life, as we've already heard. I don't feel like I should need to repeat these kinds of things over and over and over, Mr. Speaker.

Farmers do rely on their community, their neighbours, their friends, their extended family to get the job done. Not that this government has expressed any interest in it to date, but I highly suggest that they go and ask some of these people, sit down at their farms and ranches, and learn this from them or go ask how it is that, by community, they harvest each other's fields. Running a farm often means helping your family or your neighbour run their farm, too. Everybody pitches in, and they get the work done in a single season with long hours. Now, that seems to require that we have labour laws to prevent them from working too many hours in the day or hiring people to do that.

I'd like to pull an example though, of the vitality and the excitement of long hours from a completely different field. My oldest son works in hi-tech venture cap. down in Silicon Valley, and he tells me that one of the most energizing, exciting, moving parts of being involved in that is the fact that they are a team, together working and creating something new. They are creating things that nobody's ever worked on before. They work, literally, sometimes 24 hours a day. They work day and night. They don't even pay attention to hours. The whole point of it is that it's so exciting, there's so much camaraderie, day and night. It's a triumph. It's a celebration. It's an incredible social thing that they do together, and he says: I wouldn't trade it for anything or any amount of money.

Farmers experience the same thing. This legislation wants to take that away from them. It's their culture. It's their life, and they will not allow it to be taken away from them. Yes, there's a big amount of work that is needed to run a successful farm. It can be unfathomable to those who are used to working a 9-to-12 and having all kinds of rules and regulations that they shouldn't have to do anything more. But, Mr. Speaker, the long hours, which are often harsh working environments, that do pose serious health and safety risks to farmers, are something that they understand and that they embrace. [interjections] Safety is always top of mind for them, and I would like to point out that although they understand – yeah. See? They're not listening, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I'll be sad with you. Please keep going.

Mr. Orr: Okay. Fair enough.

The reality is that they know this risk, and they embrace it completely.

Now, I'd like to draw another illustration from our current society. We have today a social phenomena, that's often spoken of in regard to family, called helicopter parents, who seek to bubble wrap their kids and protect them and keep them from anything that might be any risk at all. I'd like to suggest that this legislation wants to bubble wrap our farmers and wants to be a helicopter government to our citizens. We have a generation of young people who have grown up in a bubble-wrapped world and who actually crave some adventure. My second son is actually one of these young men who hates the sterile, safe, controlled environment of modern society. He's a rock climber, and today we have all kinds of young people who take all kinds of risks, with whitewater kayaking and snowboarding off the zone where they should be and taking endless kinds of . . . [An electronic device sounded]

The Speaker: Hon. members, please. Does somebody have a phone on in here?

An Hon. Member: The member from Lacombe has his phone on his desk.

The Speaker: Okay. So there is not or there is?

An Hon. Member: It's vibrating, possibly.

The Speaker: Carry on.

Mr. Orr: The reality is that in a bubble-wrapped society we have young people in droves who crave some risk and some danger, and why? My youngest son articulates it with so much more passion than I do: because I finally feel alive.

Psychologists have actually pointed it out in a large number of articles, actually. One from 2011, *Evolutionary Psychology*, published an article on risky play. We're talking about farm safety and risk here. It's entirely relevant, risky play. It's quite widely spread. They actually argue that without some risk in life children have an increase in eroticism and psychopathology – the doctors should appreciate this – in a society if children are hindered from partaking in risky play. Over the past 60 years we have had a decline in risky play, a continuous, gradual, ultimate, dramatic increase also in all sorts of childhood mental and emotional disorder. Risky play helps develop the ability to regulate fear and anger and creates healthy beings.

A University of British Columbia study recently published by the child . . . [interjections] This is about farm . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I'm having some difficulty in trying to make the assertion. Please be seated. Please be seated. Please be seated. Hon. member, please be seated. I'm speaking. Please be seated. Thank you.

Please, can you make more clear how your story ties to Bill 6? It's been a very scenic route. Could we get to the substance, please?

Mr. Orr: This bill is about farm safety, the fact that farm children are at risk. If we put them in bubble-wrapped society, we are in fact putting them at risk because they grow up with less ability to cope.

The University of British Columbia study says that where children take risks, they have increased social interactions, increased creativity, increased resilience, and are more healthy adults. Farm families know this. They embrace the risk, and quite frankly they do not want their children put in a bubble-wrapped society. Unfortunately, I understand that accidents will happen. The

psychologists and the authors from around the world who talk about this acknowledge that, yes, there is some risk, but we can't live in a nonrisk world. It just isn't out there. It's a fantasy. Too often it does cause some harm.

But let's talk about the harm to farm workers. Research has showed that in Alberta the number of farm accidents that happen to hired workers versus family owners is 9 per cent hired, 91 per cent family owners. That's the reason why farmers are opposed to this, because 91 per cent of them are actually family owners.

10:30

Yes, farm safety is extremely important. It has to continue to be at the top of the priority list. Immigrants should be protected, no question about that. But farmers do not want their lives or their culture destroyed, and adding red tape doesn't improve safety, but increasing awareness and sharing best practices does. The agricultural community has a lot of knowledge that is immeasurably important in this, and beginning from an early age, farm kids are taught about how to deal properly with livestock and other farming methods and all kinds of things that actually make them the best children in this province.

Speaking about children growing up, which is what this bill is all about, their safety, with regard to 4-H, will this government be including these clubs under this policy? Will children at farm clubs be subject to OHS and WCB?

Some Hon. Members: No.

Mr. Orr: Yeah. They say no, but I would like to read to you from the WCB website. If you are operating a for-profit farming operation, which almost all of them are, it is defined on the website as one which sells goods commercially to individuals or other organizations: you must cover any unpaid workers including family members and children performing work on your farm. WCB website. Don't tell me it isn't there.

When a child is learning about how to look after his 4-H cow, is that labour? What I just read off the WCB website seems to say that. I come up again. How is the bureaucrat that goes on the farm to administer these rules going to deal with the 12-year-old who has used his 4-H profits? He bought six cows just this fall. He actually only bought five because he didn't have that much money, so his grandmother bought the other one with him, so now he learns how to be in a business partnership. How is WCB going to administer that when they come on the family farm, which is a for-profit farm, and the cows are mixed up with his father's? Are six cows not WCB liable, and the rest are? Are they going to have to have a separate barn? Are some of the cows subject to OHS and labour legislation? What about . . . [interjections] Don't tell me it isn't there. It's written on your WCB website.

What about the three little girls, seven, nine, and 10 years old, in my riding who have 70 chickens and sell the eggs and make a pretty good profit from them?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Under 29(2)(a), are there any questions to the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka? The Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you. I might just add a few comments, if I might, as 29(2)(a) gives some latitude around comments or questions, and the hon. member might have an opportunity to respond should time allow. I hope that I'll be able to be concise enough so that he would be able to respond.

I heard the hon. member talking about the importance of the family farm, and we had the opportunity to receive a little bit of a history lesson around the family farm. Certainly, we've seen an

attack on that very way of life, and we've seen some real vagueness on behalf of the government when it comes to regulations and exactly what those regulations will look like. The government has made a commitment to consult on these regulations, and there's a significant concern amongst family farmers. Many of those family farms employ multiple people, but they still remain a family farm, with friends and neighbours helping.

The challenge that I've been hearing – and my question to my hon. colleague will be around the consultation on these regulations. We have the regulations that will come into effect in a year and consultation around the OH and S regulations as well as the labour standards. I've been hearing a lot that this is real concern for farmers, that they're not being consulted prior to . . .

The Speaker: The question, hon. member.

Mr. Cooper: Yes. I'm moving in that direction.

The Speaker: Yes. Faster, please.

Mr. Cooper: I still think that these comments have been brief; 29(2)(a) gives about five minutes of brevity.

The Speaker: Hon. member, ask the question, please.

Mr. Cooper: The question, I guess, is around this consultation. If they haven't been consulted prior to the coming-into-force date or until the law passes, which is creating the fear and the concern . . .

The Speaker: You've said that already. Ask the question.

Mr. Cooper: Is the hon. member hearing similar concerns from Lacombe-Ponoka around this consultation issue?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Could we have the answer to the question?

Mr. Orr: Absolutely. The answer, Mr. Speaker, is that the people do not trust that they are being heard. They absolutely do not trust a government, if I may refer to the history again, that comes out of the roots of a socialist background, and . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, there was a question about the people of Lacombe that the hon. member asked. Could you answer the question?

Mr. Orr: The people do not trust the consultation. They do not trust the government. In this particular case, NDP governments in other provinces have continually proven that – those that are for free enterprise are not prepared to trust this government to write willy-nilly rules after the fact. They are not prepared to give a blank cheque and then trust that when they send out legions of bureaucratic police to enforce it all, it's all going work out in the wash in the end. They don't trust this government and its history and what it stands for in its heart and soul. That is the answer.

There are all kinds of complicated issues for which there are no answers, and they're not prepared to trust a blank cheque. They want to be consulted. They want to know what the answers are going to be before. For instance, right out here on the Legislature grounds the other day I was approached by a farmer who said to me, "Okay. I own a U-pick berry farm." He says: "How are they going to value that? Pickers are paid in berries. They're going to charge me WCB on that? Can I pay my WCB in berries?" That's what he asked me. There are so many issues about this whole thing that are absolutely not clear. It's impossible.

Another farmer right out here the other day asked me about rodeos. In Ponoka we have the second-largest rodeo in the province. Is this going to kill rodeos? At the moment WCB . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Taylor: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to rise and talk about this bill. You know what? I'd like to begin by discussing duty. You know, the first thing we have to do is talk about duty. We have a duty to consult, a duty to go out to our riding, to our constituents and consult. "Duty" truly is a term that conveys a sense of moral commitment. I have to repeat that – moral commitment – because I'm not hearing enough of that out of enough people. Let's put it that way.

You know, it's also an obligation to someone or something. This moral commitment should result in an action. It is not a matter of a passive feeling or of mere recognition. All too often I've heard this government saying that they've heard, but are they hearing? They're listening, but they're not hearing. I'm not getting that. This moral commitment: you've got to embrace this, and you've got to internalize what you're hearing. When someone recognizes a duty that the person theoretically commits to himself for fulfillment without considering their own self-interest, that's part of this duty.

10:40

An Hon. Member: How does this relate to the bill?

Mr. Taylor: Okay. Let's go to consultation. How about consultation? This is part of the duty, you know. Consultation, on the other hand, is a conference at which advice is given or views are exchanged. You consult first, and then you can look to see if it's a good bill or not. If you're making proper consultation, you'll have gone out to the people in your riding. That's what I would like to be able to do, to go out to our riding and ask the people in my constituency, and I would hope that you would want to do more of that consulting. And if we kill Bill 6, you'll have an ability to go out there and consult with your constituents. You can take this time off and use that time . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, through the Speaker, please.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm sorry. I should be making sure that I'm addressing you. My apologies. I'll do that. Sorry.

Mr. Speaker, anyone conducting an undertaking has a duty to consult so far as it's reasonably practical with workers who carry out work for the business or undertaking who are likely to be directly affected. If you look out there, with the farmers, the ranchers, these people are actually directly affected, very much so. Farmers and ranchers are by this definition very directly affected. They're the ones that work on the land, work with each other, are tightly knit together with their families and communities.

But for some reason they're being left out. They're being left out of the most important process and are in no way having real consultation. That's what I'm hearing. I'm getting phone calls. My office in my constituency is getting phone calls. I'm getting phone call calls. I'm getting e-mails, letters. On the last day that I talked to my assistant back in Battle River-Wainwright, he told me that he had 200 letters that came in with regard to this.

Where does this duty lie, Mr. Speaker, with the farmers and ranchers? Why does this government not want to have this first go to committee – I think it's a reasonable question – and have this pass with consultation, meetings with our farmers beforehand? You know, it would sure make our lives a whole lot easier, I think, in

this whole process if we went to committee first. It would make your lives a whole lot easier.

The nature of consultation means that information, Mr. Speaker, and matters must be shared with farmers, and they must be given a reasonable opportunity to express their views and to raise health or safety issues and to be able to contribute to the decision-making process related to this matter. They need to be able to contribute to the decision-making process. That's an absolutely important part of this consultation. This must be done in an open forum, I believe, before a decision has been reached. Otherwise, you are basically forcing an act upon them. Farmers and industry stakeholders have been in this profession for many years and have a lot to offer when it comes to considering the whole range of operations in the province in ways that, I believe, this government has not thought through.

A small family farm, Mr. Speaker, does not operate the same as a large-scale operation. I believe that the government is leaving out the most important part. They are removing the part for the right of the people to have a say. Without taking time to get this right the first time, I think that this government will learn that you have to come back and redo this and redo it if you don't take the time to properly consult and send this to committee. It needs to go to committee, or it needs to be killed. One of the two things needs to happen. Kill Bill 6. I heard "kill Bill 6," chant after chant after chant, and I'm sure that anybody in the NDP that went outside heard "kill Bill 6" as well, shouted from the steps of the Legislature.

Mr. Speaker, forcing compliance before discussion will only serve to create a situation where farmers feel hostility towards the government. I don't think the government wants to have those ill feelings, you know, thrown at them, but this is what's going to happen. Well, this is what has happened. I shouldn't say, "going to happen." It has happened. What does the government have to hide that they're trying so hard to pass legislation without proper consultation?

Mr. Speaker, history has proven that a safe workplace is achieved when everyone involved in the work communicates with each other beforehand. So let's consult and get it right. Farmers are the first to understand safety on their farms. They don't want to have anybody injured. They don't want themselves injured, they don't want their children injured, and they don't want their workhands injured. They don't want anyone injured, and I believe that's what both parties agree on, that we want safety. We want safety in this workplace. Safety is critical to farmers and their families and their friends, to their lives. It's absolutely important to them. You know, nobody cares more about family farm safety than the moms and dads that work on the farms. They want to improve the lives of their families.

You know, by drawing on the knowledge and experience of the workers that are out there, more informed decisions can be made about how work should be carried out. If you're going out and you're relying on the information and the knowledge that they've garnered over decades, you're going to learn something from farmers, and this legislation could be that much better if we took the time to consult and just asked the farmers about what they think and what should be done. You know, Mr. Speaker, it's about education, not legislation.

Mr. Cyr: Educate, not legislate.

Mr. Taylor: Yeah. That's right. That's what I meant to say.

Education is absolutely the most important thing that we can do. It doesn't matter what happens with legislation if they don't understand what the process is, Mr. Speaker. If the process is to be safe, they have to understand that. Farmers understand that farming and ranching is diverse and dynamic and can be a high-risk

environment. They absolutely understand that, but they would like this government to also take into consideration their thoughts on safety instead of just ramming through this agenda.

This Bill 6, as was pointed out earlier, has only five pages. It seems like not very much information is being sent out to the farmers, and it seems like there must be a hidden agenda behind this. Farmers have said that at these town halls. They go to town halls, and I'll be having a town hall meeting in Kinsella this Sunday at 2 o'clock at the Kinsella centre to discuss with farmers. This is part of the consultation. At the town halls they've been saying to slow down, and that's what I've heard when I've talked to farmers over the phone and heard about the other town hall meetings that were discussed already.

These farmers love to do what they're doing. Why don't you want to listen to them? Mr. Speaker, I heard this government say that they're working in partnership and listening for feedback, but it seems that they're not. All these people are asking you to kill the bill. That's what I've heard. Kill Bill 6 and reconsider consulting with them first and come up with better safety practices. Government should be trying to foster positive relationships because understanding the views of others leads to greater cooperation and trust. Farmers are trying to communicate. They're trying to communicate with this government, but it seems that this government is just not listening.

10:50

Mr. Yao: Say what?

Mr. Taylor: This government is just not listening.

Why does this government repeatedly say that they are consulting with farmers when we know that this is not an absolute truth or a fact? The government is telling the farmers that they're consulting on something to change their lives, but you're not in consultation with them and taking into consideration their issues. At best this NDP government has put on information sessions, which, up to just a couple of days ago, the members have not attended. They have let the folks from WCB and OH and S run these information sessions. How is this fair, how is this consulting, and how is this transparent for these farmers?

I have not heard, Mr. Speaker, that there have been any consultations coming from these meetings. These farmers and ranchers are just being told what information the government wants them to hear. The farmers have been told: this is what's going to happen on January 1, 2016. That's what they're being told. That's what it says at the end of the bill, that in 2016 this is going to be passed. That's what they're concerned with, that they don't have a chance to have that consultation. They don't want you to go ahead and implement this bill on January 1 the way it's worded. That's what I'm hearing time and time again.

Mr. Speaker, they would like this government to stop this process, start consultations, and come to a reasonable agreement, which includes cultivating a safe, fair, healthy workplace for Alberta farmers and ranchers. This government is confusing consulting with informing. Finalizing and submitting plans: that is not consultation. This government is choosing to ignore farmers.

Mr. Speaker, they need to apologize for their mistakes and commit to working with these farmers. These farmers have spoken. Frankly, they're angry that you're not consulting with them. I should say "the government." I shouldn't say "you," Mr. Speaker. Sorry about that. For these farmers, opposing Bill 6 is not opposing farm safety. They are disagreeing with the ramming through of this legislation without truly understanding the family farm.

If this government had consulted with special-interest groups, which they have, who have an interest in one thing, to make a profit

off these farmers – it seems like that's what's happening. I'm sure these consultations are one-sided. This government needs to hear all sides.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills on 29(2)(a).

Mr. Hanson: Yes, sir, 29(2)(a). Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A question for the member. As elected officials it's our duty and responsibility to represent the concerns of our constituents and to listen to their concerns and opinions and bring them forth to this Legislature. Our job is to provide a voice in government for the people we represent.

Now, my constituency office for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills has been fielding calls from outside of my area. Specifically, residents from Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville and Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater have been calling my office because they don't feel that they're being represented fairly, that their voice is being heard. Their members in the Legislature are not standing up and speaking for them. They don't feel that they can get through to the office. They're not getting the answers that they want.

I was just wondering if you're experiencing the same thing from surrounding areas in your constituency office. How many calls are you getting? How many letters are you getting? [interjection] Sorry, Mr. Speaker. How many letters are you getting? How many calls are you getting, if you are, from outside your constituency? Could you just expand on that a little bit?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. With regard to the letters and the communications that I've been getting – the phone calls, the letters, and the e-mails – frankly, it's been literally hundreds of e-mails that we're getting, and the phone goes nonstop. We've had to put an extra person on staff while this Bill 6 has been going through just to be able to field all the calls and to be able to help communicate with the different ranchers and farmers out there.

There's a great concern for the people that are out there. They're looking and they're questioning; they're wondering what's going on. They don't trust what's happening, Mr. Speaker, what's going on. They don't trust the process. The process has not been communicated to them well. The process is broken. It's broken down and it's confusing and it's causing them to be angry. It's causing them to want to come over here. It's great to see the people that are coming out to the Legislature grounds because it's showing that they're very concerned. It's good to see that they have a unified voice saying: stop this bill; kill this bill.

At the very least, take it to committee. Let's stop and communicate this more fully. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Mr. Piquette: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I've got a question for the hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright. In his address he talked about us having a hidden agenda behind, you know, our proposed changes to Bill 6. I'd just like to know the member's opinion on whether he thinks that's a constructive and helpful way to characterize what we're doing and to present that message to the constituents in his riding and, indeed, our ridings as well. I mean, the hon. opposition has been saying over and over again that we need to have respectful, careful, reasoned consultation. I just wonder what his opinion is on inflaming passions and, I guess with his colleagues as well, making assertions which they know are not true because of the press releases that our minister of jobs and our

Premier have put out. I'm just wondering: why is he implying that we have a hidden agenda, and how does he think that's helpful to us getting through this debate?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. You know, really, this is about consultation. When you ask that, it's about the consultation. Where's the consultation been on this? Being able to go out to the different ridings – I don't know if any of these members have gone out and consulted. The Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose has, I believe, 1,955 farmers in his riding, and I would ask: has he gone out and consulted with those farmers? Has he held a town hall meeting? That's where this becomes very questionable. The document itself, like it was mentioned before, has only these five pages. Without proper consultation and without . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with great sadness that I rise today to speak on behalf of the constituents of Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre against Bill 6, the so-called Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act. Now, I say "with sadness" because I'm so very disappointed, I don't have to tell you, with this current NDP government, which has chosen to force through this legislation without proper consultation. Now, I never in my wildest dreams thought that a day would come in Alberta when a government would so blindly ignore our critical farm and ranch communities and force through wide-sweeping legislation without even taking the time to talk with the farmers and ranchers that it affects. This current government in particular, in my view, should be ashamed because it was elected in part due to public anger over the previous government's frequent use of similar practices.

11:00

Now, Mr. Speaker, these duck-and-cover tactics in support of blind ideological belief tend to breed turmoil, and I think we're seeing it now across the province. I must say that I'm heartbroken to report that in the case of both my communities back home in my riding as well as communities across the province, this is the case. Travelling back home this past weekend to my constituency, I was shocked to hear from my own children that kids in elementary classrooms are worried about what this government's policies mean for them, mean for their families, mean for their parents' livelihoods, and mean for their homes. My kids are getting phone calls and e-mails from their friends begging them to ask their dad to make the government listen. While it's great to see youth engaged with the political process, I wish it was under much better circumstances.

Mr. Speaker, this is just one indication of the level of frustration and fear among our farm and ranch families. In every community I stopped in while back home this weekend, I heard the same thing. People are mad. They're shocked and extremely concerned about this government's move to force this legislation through this House in less than two weeks and into law within a month. It's not just farmers and ranchers who are worried. It's entire communities, from coffee row to church parking lots. The people of our communities know just how important farmers and ranchers are. We're proud of them, and we stand with them.

Our farmers and ranchers are rightfully outraged that no one has talked to them about this bill. They are furious at these so-called town hall meetings where the government claims consultation is

supposed to be taking place, but it has not happened in any meaningful way. Instead, these meetings have featured bureaucrats telling farmers and ranchers how it's going to be. Now, Mr. Speaker, does that sound like consultation? Displays were set up to provide information on the new law and rules yet with no opportunity for stakeholders to speak or ask questions. Again, does that sound like consultation? Farmers and ranchers are demanding better. True consultation demands better than handing out brochures, patting people on the head, and pledging to help them set up WCB accounts.

My constituents back home and the hundreds of Albertans who are contacting my offices from across the province are infuriated that this government has asked this Assembly to put through a piece of legislation that is essentially a blank cheque. Mr. Speaker, that is exactly what this bill accomplishes when it opposes OH and S and the entire agricultural sector without providing any OH and S agricultural standards. What will these codes entail? Nobody knows. Essentially, this government is saying: hey, just trust us; we'll fix the things you're worried about after we pass the law. This is a ridiculous miscarriage of the legislative process and an affront to the oaths we have taken as servants elected to represent the public interest. There simply can be no major advancement in farm safety or on any other major policy initiative the government demands when they're asking for blind trust and no consultation for the people it affects.

The hard truth is that at the time of the last general election the vast majority of people in my riding did not trust this government. That's the truth, Mr. Speaker. This certainly has not changed in the past six months, which have seen this government systematically attack every employer, large and small, and every major economic sector. Yet blind trust with this bill is what this government is demanding.

Since this bill was announced, the government has systematically denied that any and all concerns raised by the public are valid. Rather than engage, discuss, or consult, the government chose to immediately leap into fear-and-smear mode. We have witnessed the Premier of Alberta stand up in this Assembly in front of all of us and accuse farmers and ranchers of forcing people to do unsafe work. She said that she was trying to rectify this great wrong that has been taking place in Alberta. Does she really think, Mr. Speaker, that farmers and ranchers have been systematically forcing our friends and neighbours to do unsafe work, tasks that these folks are pleading not to do? Does she really think so low of farmers and ranchers?

Whether she truly believes this or not or is just cranking up her ridiculous rhetoric, she really needs to get out of her office and meet the farmers and ranchers of this great province because, Mr. Speaker, they are some of the finest people this province and country have to offer. Let's be clear. The Premier's rhetoric has become unnecessarily provocative. To gain support for her government's actions, she has cast farmers and ranchers in a poor light, turning Albertans against Albertans. I'm willing to concede that that is perhaps not her intention, but this government needs to understand the consequences of implying that farmers and ranchers are improperly or selfishly motivated. Farmers and ranchers are proud of their operations and remain committed to the safety and well-being of all who work and live on their land. These farms are also their homes, and no one desires any less than the best for his or her family.

This Premier and this government certainly should apologize to farmers and ranchers for the unfortunate rhetoric being produced as well as trying to force this bill through the Legislature without proper consultation. Now, Mr. Speaker, through you I challenge the Premier to stand up right now and admit that she got it wrong, admit

that this process is hopelessly flawed, and at the very least send this bill to committee for proper consultation. She should stand up and make it clear that she is going to ensure that family farms are protected like they are in other provinces. She should stand up and make it clear that she'll make sure that kids' agricultural involvement will be protected. Perhaps most importantly, she should make clear that all the OH and S and employment standards will be fully transparent and completed in full before this bill proceeds so farmers, ranchers, 4-H clubs, rural communities, and all Albertans know exactly what this legislation will require.

I can tell you this, Mr. Speaker. Demanding blind trust without consultation is a recipe for disaster. In fact, as soon as I saw this bill from this government, I knew trouble was brewing. I knew folks at home would be upset, that hundreds of thousands of Albertans would be livid. The sad part is that this government is so out of touch with some parts of this province that they simply did not know. They really didn't see it coming. They only saw things from their own point of view, and they had no idea how entire communities could be so upset, so hurt, and so angry. I believe the word for that is arrogance. They didn't realize that this would anger even more people than the former government's horrific property rights bills a few years back. In less than a week I received more than a thousand phone calls on this issue and more letters and e-mails than I can count, and they're still coming in even as we sit here.

This bill, Mr. Speaker, is simply unacceptable. This government would be wise to step back from this course of action and commit to working with the communities affected to get this right. The bottom line is that the government's campaign of misinformation against ranchers and farmers is not making anyone safer. The folks who can actually take concrete action to improve safety are farmers and ranchers, and they're willing to help, but they cannot get anywhere with those who refuse to take into account what real life is like on a farm or ranch. In short, they want this government to work with them. Why won't the government work with them? It is an affront to them when they see this government take steps to ram this legislation through the process.

They aren't stupid, Mr. Speaker. They know that the provincial and federal governments regularly send bills to committee to allow expert testimony and consultation. They have seen this government send matters to committee to ensure that legislation is well thought out and that any and all ramifications have been addressed. They know that this NDP government put together a special committee on ethics and accountability and has sent relatively simple private member's bills to committee for review. Farmers and ranchers know all of this, and they're asking why Bill 6 is different, and I have nothing to tell them.

The fact is that Bill 6 is the most wide-ranging and important piece of legislation ever written with respect to agriculture in this province. Depending on how the OH and S and employment standards are written, this bill could end the concept of family farming as we know it, yet this government can't see fit to send this bill to committee and ensure that farmers have an opportunity to consult. For shame. Mr. Speaker, through you, shame on this Premier, who promised a better approach to the legislative process, and shame on these rural MLAs in this NDP caucus, who are not stopping this behaviour by this government for their constituents.

Now, I know that they're getting the same calls and the same e-mails that I am about this bill. I know that the bulk of their constituents are saying: hey, wait a minute. I'm sure of this because the same folks are calling me for help. Their constituents are calling me for help. They're calling my colleagues for help. Now, think about that, Mr. Speaker.

I challenge them through you, Mr. Speaker, all NDP rural MLAs, to stand up in this Assembly and explain why they think Bill 6 needs to be forced through with no consultation.

I ask them through you, Mr. Speaker, to explain to their constituents how the so-called town halls are in any way adequate.

I challenge them through you, Mr. Speaker, to explain why they think farmers and ranchers should blindly trust bureaucrats to protect family farming.

I ask them through you, Mr. Speaker, to stand up and explain, and if they cannot, then do their darn jobs and stand up to the government.

11:10

Mr. Speaker, through you I remind them that they are supposed to represent constituents' views on these bills and make sure that constituents' views and interests are on their minds first and foremost, not their Premier's. They need to explain right now why this bill has to pass this House at lightning speed, because I guarantee you that they will face questions during the election, not to mention every single day between now and then. This will not just go away. Duck and cover is not a legitimate long-term option on this one. Now, I understand that some of them are conflicted with the orders from the Premier's office, and I truly hope that they reach for the courage necessary to stand up against this. However, in the past we have seen government backbenchers choose to toe the line, abandon integrity, and cling to talking points.

Now, I certainly hope that is not the case here because the government's talking points on Bill 6 are truly ridiculous. How ridiculous is it to ask Albertans to trust this government after it attempts to force major legislation through the process without talking to farmers or ranchers? How ridiculous is it to refer to these town hall meetings as consultation when there is no dialogue other than to seek advice on when it would be most advantageous for unions to strike on farms? That's consultation?

How ridiculous is it to say that consultation isn't necessary because the previous government consulted four or five years ago? The fact is, Mr. Speaker, that thousands of farmers are coming forward right now, and they're telling us that they want their say, and no one from this government has bothered to ask their opinion. This flawed argument also ignores the fact that the last government chose education over legislation precisely because it did consult.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we're going to talk a lot about this in the coming days, particularly in Committee of the Whole, but with the limited time I have left to speak in second reading, I want to talk about why this matters. This bill in its current format hurts family farms. It hurts farming, it hurts ranches, and it hurts rural communities. You see, in Alberta farming is primarily a family enterprise. Only a small percentage of all farms and ranches sell more than half a million dollars a year. These farms and ranches are not just places for work; they are homes. The people who live in these homes are not just farming as a job but as a way of life. It is who they are. It is their family's identity. It is who their neighbours are, and it is crucial to their community.

Representatives of this government like to stand and accuse farmers and ranchers of forcing people to do unsafe work and say that all other provinces have the same legislation. Now, what they do not tell you, Mr. Speaker, is that other provinces also protect the family farm, and this bill does no such thing. Now, we've heard some vague promises over the weekend, as farmers and ranchers began to register their anger, about this government considering steps to protect family farms after the bill passes. I have not found one person in my riding willing to entrust the future of their home and their livelihood to the empty promises of this government. They need this bill to provide a hundred per cent ironclad protection for

family farms immediately upon implementation of this bill, and anything else is unacceptable.

The success of family farms relies on the help of not only the family but of the entire community. As a farmer from my community wrote to me:

When family farms have a major project, everyone pitches in. The neighbours and friends, and families pitch in. We do not pay each other, we help each other out. Let me please say that again. We do NOT pay each other, we HELP each other out! This is one of the greatest aspects, of farm life. The tremendous community support system we get to enjoy. This may not make sense to people from the city. But, it is because of this great support system that small farms and ranches are able to exist, and keep costs to a minimum. Many hands make light work.

Mr. Speaker, what will this legislation mean for the way that family farms are operated and how they interact with their neighbours? Under Bill 6 OH and S applies to volunteers, and it will have an impact. There's nothing in this bill that says otherwise. Pass this bill as currently worded without fully written employment standards, OH and S, and you risk attacking the very foundation of the family farm. Full stop.

I've heard from my constituents. This is a big deal.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Any brief questions or comments under 29(2)(a)? The Member for Calgary-South East.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd just like to ask the hon. member – you know, in my time as a paramedic I've seen certain things, and there are always certain trends around times and eras. When you think about the farm and how it's evolved, there's a lot of use of recreational vehicles versus horses, and there's also that part of the tradition of riding a horse to do some of the work. Now there are kids on ATVs and that sort of thing. One of the pieces in this legislation that I'm not clear on – and maybe the member can speak to it a little bit – is that as we go through this, statistically I don't know that any of that was vetted out in this process in terms of consultation. Now, one of the things I can commend the government on is the mental health review board that they put in because they understand that mental health is complex. What we're seeing here and what we're seeing play out in this Legislature and in this province is that this issue that the government has brought up with Bill 6 is a complex issue between the family farm and the corporate farm.

I mean, having had an uncle and a family farm that I used to go to – that work is complex because it's part of your day-to-day life. It is part of your enjoyment. It is this labour of love. It is everything that you put into it, your whole family. That's how you're raised. You know, there are traditions. There's tea, which I used to love. Grandma used to make the best chocolate cake. I remember being a kid. When I walked out the door, I walked out the door in a pair of running shoes, shorts, and a T-shirt. The first place I went to was the corrals and to the hay bales, and I ran around when I was old enough. The thing is that when I think about the complexity of this, statistically wouldn't it be wise – to the member on this question. We've talked a little bit about some of the changes in the evolution of the family farm and how complex it is, but there's a lot of grey area, a grey area that I think the family farms would want to know about.

Then, secondly, you know, how are we going to vet this? [interjection] Thank you, Member. Ultimately, at the end of the day, this is a good thing. If there are occupational hazards, let's identify those. Let's educate farmers, like the former government did. Thank you for that shout-out because education is always better.

Here's the other thing, to the member. There are a lot of questions on this, hon. member. I ask the hon. member: if this bill goes through, can you not see a lot of family farms just stop reporting incidents and driving a lot of this underground? This is the last thing we want. I'd ask the hon. member that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Nixon: Well, I only have a little bit of time left, so I'll just probably touch on the one main area. Given the hour I assume my children are in bed sleeping before school tomorrow, but at any other time of the day, if you ask me where my kids are, they're either attempting to get on a horse or thinking about getting on a horse at home. We live in the middle of cattle country, just outside of Sundre, and there are major ranches all around us. Their highlight is when they get to go participate in branding or to be able to participate in cattle drives, and that's how kids are all over my community.

In addition to that, you often see my neighbour – there's water that we share between our livestock and their livestock – as she's working her cattle and checking the fences, travelling with her youngest child on the front and another child on the back of her ATV as she checks the fences and does her chores. That's because, obviously, she's being a mother. She's taking care of her kids, but she's also being a farmer. That is how life is on a farm. You work at your home, and your kids are at your home, and you need to take them with you. She can't leave the kids at the house. It's intermingled. It's every part and every aspect of being on a farm or a ranch when you're on a family farm or a ranch because that's what your life is. You can't predict when a calf is going to come. You can't predict when one is going to need to be pulled. You can't predict when your spouse is away and you're going to need help from a neighbour to come over and do your chores.

You know, there are a lot of issues with this bill that need to be answered for farmers and ranchers. One that I think is unique – and I think the member was hinting at this area – is respite milking. That happens in all of our communities. When a dairy farmer gets sick, other neighbours and people in the area will work their farm. They'll milk their cows. They'll make sure that their operations can keep going. They'll do it when they go on vacation. Dairy farmers don't get to go away a lot, and if it wasn't for respite milking, they wouldn't be able to go away. How is this bill going to affect it?

The problem with this bill is that there's no explanation. You could drive a truck through the holes in this bill. It's wrong, Mr. Speaker. What the government should do is send this to committee, talk to farmers and ranchers. Kill Bill 6: that is probably what they're going to tell you. But at least get farmers and ranchers around the table and find out what they need. Find out how this bill can accomplish the goal that we're trying to accomplish.

We're all for safety. Every farmer and rancher I talk to in my riding: no problem; they want to make things safer. Nobody cares more about their kids than their moms and dads, Mr. Speaker. I think we can all agree on that. How do we do that? I don't know how you can determine regulations and rules around an industry without talking to the people in the industry.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to second reading of Bill 6, Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act. It's a bill which will force family farms to be covered under traditional OH and S and WCB legislation, the Employment Standards Code, and the Labour Relations Code.

Mr. Speaker, with family farms, a way of life is under attack. I do not claim to be an expert in farming, but as a parliamentarian I

believe that it is my duty to approach every issue with an open mind, consult with many people, absorb as much information as I can before I make a decision on any issue. This government is quickly falling out of grace with Albertans and branding itself as an ideological force that does not care to consult with those affected.

11:20

Yesterday as hundreds of farmers gathered on the steps of the Legislature to voice their concerns, I was listening, and so was the entire Wildrose caucus. I heard from grain farmers, cow-calf operators, dairy producers, honey producers, and others across this industry. The thing they all wanted most was just real consultation.

Mr. Speaker, this government, in an attempt to mitigate the damage caused by their agenda, set forth to host various town halls across the province seeking input on this legislation. However, they were not allowed to voice their concerns with the bill. They were only allowed to speak to suggestions on implementation. The message was clear: the NDP government will not listen; they will only impose. Many of my colleagues in this House have noticed this trend as well, with the speed and limited debate with which we are moving through these motions. This bill has obvious concerns and many for which the government does not have answers other than: trust us; it will be addressed in regulations. My constituents of Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo did not elect me to vote for legislation which gives more power to ministers and bureaucrats to decide on a whim without consultation.

These are decisions which affect the livelihoods of thousands of Albertans, and it is important that when this legislation is introduced, all consequences are realized. At Monday's protest insight was shared with me as to how the employment standards regulation will apply to family farms and, in particular, to the children on the farm. While the NDP are prone to extremes, exploiting accidents and other personal tragic situations, it is not necessarily representative of the truth. In part 5 of the employment standards regulation it places restrictions on employees under 18 years of age. An adolescent is defined as an individual that's 12, 13, 14 years old. Adolescents may work in the following approved jobs: delivery person for flyers, newspapers, and handbills; delivery person for small goods and merchandise for a retail store; clerk or messenger in an office; clerk in a retail store; certain jobs in a restaurant and the food service industry, with restrictions.

My list is the approved list as defined by the code. To one farmer this means that he will now be in contravention of the act. You see, Mr. Speaker, this parent and rancher owns a small dairy farm, and a large portion of his day is looking after livestock. Filling up the trough with water from the hose is now a prohibited action and in contravention of the code. There's even, quite certainly, no harm posed by this, but he could be charged under the act.

Just so that everyone in this House is aware, these are not charges to be taken lightly. Section 132 of this code lays it out quite clearly.

- 132(1) An employer, employee, director, officer or other person who is guilty of an offence under this Act is liable,
- (a) in the case of a corporation, to a fine of not more than \$100,000, and
 - (b) in the case of an individual, to a fine of not more than \$50,000.

As if this was not bad enough, when I think of myself when I was 15, 16, 17 years old, I remember being quite responsible, and I'm sure that is the case with many young adults these days as well, as the member opposite can attest to.

In this code the 15- to 17-year-old age range is defined as young persons. Here the code stipulates what they cannot do rather than what they can. Some are common sense – no selling of liquor, as was pointed out – but many are not in the context of a family farm

such as working without the continuous presence of an adult from the hours of 12 a.m. to 6 a.m. When you're working on a farm, you're dealing with living, breathing things that do not follow the government-imposed schedule.

For this I was given a story of cow-calving. I was told the story of a gentleman's 17-year-old son who was left alone in the early hours of the morning while his father was out. When the dad returned, the son had successfully helped deliver his first calf. This is a typical story of pride, ownership, and responsibility for many ranchers, but to this ideologically driven government it is an unlawful act of child labour. Farm life cannot adhere to stringent codes, and if they are policed in this manner, the legislation must reflect the real-life situations they face.

I'd like to quote a letter addressed to the agriculture minister from one farmer who opposes Bill 6.

Please consider the effects Bill 6 could have on what farms and ranches in Alberta look like. Right now we are the family farms, who cannot afford to be legislated off the land. Does the government really want the people growing our food to be employees of land-owning corporations who may not care about the land like a family member, who has the knowledge and wisdom of generations who cared for it before him? I beg of you: do not rush this legislation through. Take the time to ensure that our shared core values are at the heart of how it will affect those in the field. We all want to share the utmost safety of every person involved in raising our food and fibre. Let's do it in a way that will not force family farms out. Please engage in meaningful consultation with farmers and ranchers about what they need and what they want from a farm safety bill.

I echo these concerns and sentiments and those also raised by my learned colleagues. I strongly urge the members of this Assembly to refer this back to committee so that you can consult or to just vote outright against it. The point is that you have to do your due diligence. You have to ask the people. This is bad legislation. In fact, all your stuff is bad legislation because you are not consulting a lot.

Mr. Speaker, you know, the NDP was in opposition for such a long time. Why are they trying to rush everything through right now when they understand that they have to do their due diligence when they're writing these bills, that are going to affect so many people?

Mr. Speaker, if I might give an analogy that perhaps they can relate to a little bit more, when you don't ask the right questions or when you don't ask any questions, when you don't consult properly, it can impact anything regardless of the subject matter, regardless of the profession. It doesn't matter whether you're a school board trustee, a social worker, a geologist, or a paramedic; you have to ask the right questions to do your job.

When we talk about due diligence, if I might speak from my own experience from my previous life, it's the simplest of phone calls to 911, and we're responding. It's for someone who's not feeling well. I get to this call. If I might relate it, it's more of the atmosphere around here, just so they can relate to it a bit more. I went to respond to a fellow by the name of Jack, and he was kind of not feeling very well. You know, we do our due diligence; we start asking him some questions. We ask him his name, what happened. "Do you know where you are right now?" He's, like: "Oh, my name is Jack." "What happened?" "I don't know. I was listening to the budget by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, and some hard feelings started to come down." "Do you know where you are right now?" I ask him these kinds of questions. "Yeah. I'm in the House; I'm here in the Legislature." "Do you know what time it is?" "I know it's very late. I thought this government was going to promise us none of these night sittings, but here we are." I ask him questions about: did this happen before? He'll respond to all these questions. He'll tell me his name is Jack. He tells me what happened, that he was listening

to the budget. He tells me he knows where he is, right here in the House. He knows what time it is, and he knows what he was doing before this all happened.

Some people might just call it a day right there and say: "You know what? I've asked you enough questions. Let's get you on that stretcher, and let's slide you on out." But if you're doing your due diligence, you're going to ask a lot more questions. You're going to try to get to the root of the problem, figure out what the causes are, try to address all the issues. You know, I might be asking him: "Why did you feel so uncomfortable? What's going on?" "Well, I'm having some discomfort." "Some discomfort, you say? My goodness. Can you describe this discomfort?" "Well, it's a pain, something in my chest." "A pain in your chest? My goodness."

11:30

It's a good thing I'm asking these questions because right now we're going to find out what provoked this pain, what's the quality of this pain, what's the rate. We're looking at little tricks like his rate of respiration, the rate of his pulse, some little things to give us some indications of what's going on with this fellow. I'm asking for severity: "On a scale of 1 to 10 how would you rate this discomfort in your chest?" I'm going to ask him, "How long ago did this start?" and he'll tell me, "An hour ago, when that budget started." You know, we're going to go on and on with all these questions. I'm going to keep on asking more questions.

I'm going to do an assessment on this patient. I'm going to feel for the pulse. I'm going to continue to ask him all sorts of stuff. Is he allergic to anything? Because all these little questions that we have to ask might give us an indication of what is going on. "I'm not allergic to anything." "Are you on any medications?" "Well, I'm on nitroglycerine." "Pardon me? You're on nitroglycerine, you say?" Well, that's telling me now that he might be having some heart issues, and I'm going to ask about his past medical history, sir.

Mr. Speaker, these are important questions to ask, and they're questions that you have to ask. You can't just ask a couple of questions and walk on by. You have to make sure that you're doing a thorough job. I'm going to ask him about his medical history. He's going to tell me that he might have been having some heart problems in the past. Maybe's he's at McDonald's lots. Maybe he smokes a ton of cigarettes. Who can say for certain? But these are the questions that we have to ask because we have to find the root cause of what's going on here.

You know, I'm going to ask him things that might seem irrelevant, like a last meal. Why would you care, if you're having chest pain, that I'm going to ask you when you ate last? Because it could be something as simple as indigestion. Again, it's about asking the right questions, Mr. Speaker. We're going to ask for the events leading up to it. We ask all sorts of things. We're going to put things on this person, and we're going to assess him, in the same way that when they're looking at legislation, they should be looking at all the angles. They have to look at the measures and take a look at certain things.

But in the case of where I was, you know, we're putting on things like an electrocardiogram. We're checking his heart, looking at the patterns there with the electrical impulses. I'm getting his blood pressure. I'm taking his pulse. Because all of those things contribute to what could be going on with this fellow. I'm going to be counting his heart rate, and it's not just: do I feel a pulse or not? It's: is it a strong pulse, or is it a weak pulse; is it fast; is it regular, irregular? We have to ask all sorts of these kinds of questions, and I know there are people in this room that can account for all these things here. The questions. It is so important to do that consultation, ask

those questions, come up with all those answers so that you can come up with that perfect solution.

When we're talking legislation, when we're talking something that can impact so many people, we have to make sure that we do it right and we do it once. I'd be proud to be in the opposition and work with this government on a bill if they would do that proper consultation, if they would do that proper management of what this legislation is, what these documents are, because they do impact so many people. You know what happens when you're a paramedic and you don't ask all those right questions? Your patient dies. It's a pretty frustrating situation to be in. Fortunately, I didn't really encounter that too much because I was doing my due diligence.

Sir, I have to tell you that it is such an important thing that they do this due diligence because this does impact so many people. No one believes more in safety here. Commercial operations, those big ones: yes, we recognize that there need to be some things there. But these small farms run under a totally different operational mode.

I can personally talk to being and working on a farm. I worked on the only farm in Fort McMurray, owned by Mr. Jack Peden. I grew up with these folks. They would take me quadding and triking. Actually, they had trikes back then, highly illegal today. But we were safe. His father taught us all the most responsible things on how to operate this machinery.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I know that under 29(2)(a) we're going to hear how Jack made out.

The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Sure, Mr. Speaker. I was just wondering if the member would like to elaborate a little more on where he was going with those comments.

Mr. Yao: You know what? Growing up in Fort McMurray – you all might not think of it as a city, but it is a city – we were very close to being exposed to that country flavour, for sure, if you want to differentiate between them all. I was very fortunate to grow up with the Peden family because – you know what? – they had cows, they had horses, they had chickens. We helped with everything. His parents were so good to me. They guided me along. They taught me so many rules.

My parents – my father is a physician; my mother is a nurse – met this family, had been out at that same farm. They respected the fact and they enjoyed the fact that I would go out there because they knew that I was being taught some really good lessons about safety and respecting animals and livestock, respecting nature. There is no one that believes in a healthy environment more than this team over here. I can tell you that.

The simple things, like fishing, I might say. He even taught me how to tie a line properly, a lure, and how to take a hook out of a fish without jamming my finger on that hook, how to hold that pickerel properly without getting chewed up by its fins.

An Hon. Member: They're nasty critters.

Mr. Yao: They are nasty.

It was great fun. You know what? I learned how to use a knife. He taught me how to use a knife properly, so I could whittle a stick and have a hot dog, and we could start our own fire without cutting ourselves. It's a lifestyle that when you're in it, no one emphasizes safety more because no one wants anyone to get hurt. I mean, we're all people. We're all humans. We all believe in the same base things. When you put legislation on certain things, you can sometimes have an adverse cause and effect to what your intent was.

So do we understand your intent? Yes, we all recognize safety. We are all on the same team in that regard. But when it comes to legislating the backyard, your kids playing in the backyard and maybe helping mow the lawn or shovelling the walk – as bizarre as that sounds, that’s certainly what the impact seems to be on the small family farms – if you would provide that clarification in your legislation, you would make this all go away. That’s all we are asking you to do, to provide that clarity in your legislation. Again, your legislation, like everything else, is really vague.

The Speaker: Hon. member, again, your comments through the chair, please.

Mr. Yao: Apologies, Mr. Speaker.

I guess my point is that, you know, this legislation is very sparse, and they have to admit that. It’s like the budget they gave us. They want us to provide a shadow budget. I can’t provide a shadow budget. I know something about business, and there’s not enough detail in there for me to be able to provide a budget of any sort. It would be a lot of guessing, to be quite honest.

Mr. Hanson: Looks like that’s what they did.

Mr. Yao: Yes. Yes.

Mr. Speaker, I’m very disappointed by all the folks on the other side that represent these areas that we consider to be more rural areas. You know, maybe they should just step up and step out of that closet and recognize that they’re not country mice; they’re city mice. They certainly are not representing their country mice cousins. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. member, any other comments?

Mr. Yao: I just want to say that it’s really disappointing that they aren’t taking this seriously. Really, this is legislation that they can refine. They can avoid a lot of this conflict if they would just recognize and listen to the people and perhaps consider adding some amendments, tweaking it. Sending it back to committee would be the best thing so that it can be properly assessed. Consultations are so important.

That is the challenge. Mr. Speaker, I challenge you to ask these fellows and ladies to speak up.

11:40

The Speaker: Are there any other comments?

The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think you need to say that with a little more enthusiasm for the evening and for the event that we’re going through tonight and for the topic that we’re discussing. However, I can understand. The last time we were together this late at night, I seem to remember some of the young pups on the other side saying: are you sure that you can stay up; are you going to be able to get up in the morning? So this old dog over here is going to try to do his best to talk to you and through you to the people of Alberta on this pretty important topic.

I have to admit that being born in the city, perhaps somebody could accuse me of not really knowing what country life is like, Mr. Speaker. But I have to assure the House that I come from good rural stock, that my family homesteaded in this part of the world around 1908, 1909, 1910, and that I, too, know what it feels like to be in the southern parts of this country where the wind blows and you can see your dog run away for the next five days.

I want to start, maybe, by talking a little bit about an experience I had tonight. I had to leave a little bit earlier and then come back to the House tonight. One of the things that I was doing was talking

with a young man, a young fellow in about grade 4. He wanted to know a little bit more about what Bill 6 was all about. He wanted to know what was happening in the House with regard to Bill 6 and how it was working, and I had to try to sit down and help him to understand that, you know, when we come into the House, there’s first reading and second reading and Committee of the Whole and how this all works and how it relates to Bill 6. He was just in grade 4 or grade 5, yet this has touched him.

I’ve had, as many of the members in this House have said already, lots of people calling, lots of people phoning, some pretty frustrated. Sometimes you have to explain to people that, no, you can’t have a petition to call a general election. That’s not the way our system works. But that’s how angry they are sometimes. They’re looking for a way to try to have an impact on this bill and on this issue. They’re frustrated, whether they’re that young man that’s in grade 4 or grade 5 or whether they’re a senior who’s ranched all of his life and just wants to get rid of a government that he doesn’t think is listening to him, and I have to try to explain to him that, no, that’s not the way it works in our system.

In my short term as an MLA this bill has by far been the one that I think I’ve received the most feedback on, well, I know I’ve received the most feedback on, from my constituents. They’re extremely worried about this bill. Mr. Speaker, I want to start with this. Lots of people have said this, but I want to reiterate it because I think it does tie to the commonality that we have in this House. No one – and I mean absolutely no one – that earns a living through agriculture, no one in this House, no Albertan wants to see workers hurt or maimed on the job.

I can speak to personal experience from my own family history on this. Everyone on my dad’s side of the family are farmers and ranchers, every single one of them. You know, I can speak to an incident, about 25 years ago now, where my uncle was working out on the field and his bailer gets clogged up with hay. He jumps on top, and he thinks, “Oh, if I just grab it, if I just get it out of there,” and he got sucked in by the wrist. The belts are burning his wrist off. They were cutting through his wrist, and the only thing he can do to try to save himself from being sucked into that bailer is to try to grab the knife that’s in his pocket and cut his wrist off. That was the choice: get sucked into the bailer, or cut his wrist off.

An Hon. Member: Did he get compensated when he was injured?

Mr. Smith: Excuse me. It’s my turn to speak right now.

So when he’s trying to save his life, he dropped the knife, and he got sucked up to his arm, here. And he had to stay there for half an hour while the belts on that bailer burned through his arm, burned through the bone. Eventually, he was pushing himself so hard that when they finally gave way, he flew 20 feet off the bailer. I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to create a problem there, but I bring that to your attention because nobody here wants to see that happen.

When I look back on that experience my uncle faced, I’m not sure – I mean, my uncle farmed all his life. He knew the dangers of being around a round baler. He knew he should have shut off that PTO. I’m not sure that legislation would have solved that problem. Education, maybe. Maybe. But in the real world that we live in, we know that we can all be educated and we can all have really good laws and sometimes we’re still going to make the wrong choices in life. That’s just the nature of life, isn’t it, Mr. Speaker? We’ve all been there, haven’t we? We’ve all been in those situations where we’ve known what to do, we’ve known we should or shouldn’t do something, yet sometimes we make the wrong choice. My uncle made the wrong choice.

You know, on a little more humorous side, I never had a chance to go out and do any of the branding. For some of you maybe over

on the other side you've gone out to brandings and you've been a part of that side of the farm culture and farm life, but I never had that opportunity until I moved out to Drayton Valley. I was a teacher, and we had some families in our church that were farm families, and I got invited out to a branding, and I got to learn what it was like to be on the back end of a cow and to have to sit down there and see the hooves smacking around the top of my head and wondering how I was going to get out of this. They took a great deal of pleasure, Mr. Speaker, in watching this civified teacher running down the end of a rope and grabbing the cow and putting him down on the ground and having to try to figure out how to keep this cow from killing me. Well, you know, I went home with an awful lot of bruises that day. Went home with an awful lot of satisfaction that day, having learned what it was like to be out on the farm and what farming life is really all about.

I learned about 15 years later, after becoming a vet, at every branding and castrating in our little area and in our church to keep my mouth closed because we went from slamming the cow down on the ground to having the cow run into a chute or a cattle squeeze and flipping that cattle squeeze up. One of my best friends in Drayton Valley, a mechanic: we were working, and the farmer was castrating a calf, and somehow that calf had scours, and I'm sure that if he'd had to do it over again, he would have kept his mouth shut because he actually got very sick and almost died. I don't know how you legislate that. I don't know how you legislate keeping your mouth closed so you don't get it full of something, okay? So the reality is that sometimes in this life you're best not to legislate; you're best to just let experience teach you what to do and what not to do.

I'll give you an example here again. Just last October my uncle had his 80th birthday, so we went down to experience this 80th birthday. It was really quite tragic because my other uncle, who was in his 90s, passed away on the same day as the birthday, so it was really quite awful. But as we were down there, you know, as families do, you get together and you try to have some fun as a family even in those hard times, Mr. Speaker.

I've got one cousin that has got a ranch that's 64 sections of land. Now, for those of you that don't know what that means, that's like one square mile. A section of land is one square mile. I mean, that's large. You understand that, Mr. Speaker, because down in your area you need about like 3 sections of land to feed a cow, right? You know, that's the way it is down there. To get to his farm, you actually have to drive like 15 kilometres.

So we get out there, and what are they going to do? Well, I've got all my cousins with all of their kids, so there are about 25 kids out there. What are they going to do? They're going to have a great big paintball fight. They've got this whole yard with old machinery in it that they can hide behind, and we've got kids from four years old to 15 years old going to paintball. He's got 20 paintball guns. You know what impressed me? It wasn't the paintball. I was too scared to go out there. I don't need to get hit by paintballs. What impressed me was that from the four-year-old on up, every one of those kids knew how to operate a quad, a bike, and a paintball gun safely.

11:50

When they came up, they put their vests on and their coveralls, and they had their neck protectors on and they had their helmets on and they had their visors on, from the four-year-old on up. When that four-year-old was given that paintball gun, that four-year-old already knew to keep his finger off the trigger and keep that gun pointed down, at four years old. Why? Because in the farming culture they start to teach their kids young how to behave safely on the farm. That's the truth.

I'm not sure that sometimes we need to legislate as much as we need to just educate. Nobody here, whether they support this bill or whether they have concerns with this bill, wants to see people abused. Nobody here wants to see people treated unfairly from unsafe or hazardous work sites on a farm. So any discussion on the merits of this bill or the problems surrounding this potential piece of legislation, Mr. Speaker, must start from the recognition that all Albertans are concerned with safety and all Albertans are concerned with safety within an agricultural community and on a farm. I think we have to start there.

Let's understand something. I don't think that you believe this, and I know that I don't believe this. I know that it's not a lack of compassion, it's not a desire to maximize profits on the backs of farm workers that has held this legislation back. We've talked about 98 years to legislate. Well, I don't believe that it's been a lack of political will that has held back legislation in this area. Rather, legislation has been slow because of the complexity of farming, which makes it difficult to enact legislation that will adequately recognize the needs of the various sizes and types of farming units.

You know, I've talked a lot about my family. I'm very proud of my family. I've got one cousin that has a predominantly mixed farming operation: a grain farm, some cattle, that kind of thing. I've got an uncle that was a dairy farmer for most of his life. I've talked about the one cousin that's a cattle rancher. You see, they don't fit the same style of farming.

My one cousin, Mr. Speaker, who was a dairy farmer for many, many years, decided that because of his diabetes he had to get into another line of farming, so he's joined his farm together – and it's a corporate farm. He's got three or four other farmers that have all joined their farms together, and they farm as a corporation, very different from my other cousin who's got the old family homestead and who's got nine sections of land and farms very, very differently. You can't always put them together the same way. They have different needs, different desires, different ways of operating. I don't know if the legislation that we're trying to pass here with Bill 6 is recognizing the differences and the complexity of farming. I think that's a weakness in this bill.

The current government, I think, to a certain degree is – and I don't know if this is too strong a word or not; I'm going to use the word "baffled" although that may be a really awful word to use. I don't know. I'm not sure that you really understand some of these things that come as a result of a farming lifestyle. I think that perhaps some of the lack of progress that we're seeing in initiating this bill and understanding what we're doing comes from a cultural difference there of not understanding sometimes.

What this government has not acknowledged sometimes is that the farmers themselves who live and breathe and work in agriculture have challenged this legislation. They've challenged legislative proposals, not only this one but through the long history that we've seen of trying to find appropriate legislation for farm families in this province. It's not the city people that are protesting this so much as it is the farmers themselves. I think we need to realize that either the past legislation or today's legislation is probably not adequately addressing the realities that the farm families of today face. You know, I grew up in a city, but we always went back to the family farm.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Really quick, a little question I'd like to discuss. One of the big things we're hearing around this is around kids and agriculture, and it's created a lot of controversy. It's causing a lot of people to be upset. I can tell you, living in an

agriculture community, that kids participating in agriculture is important. It's important to farmers and ranchers. It's important to their communities.

I know that tonight we heard the Member for Calgary-Mountain View talk about slave labour and stuff in regard to the kids, and I don't think he's meaning it, you know, about all farmers. I get it. But it's really not a nice way to talk about farm kids. My friend, Mr. Speaker, the Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock has raised five kids: four girls and one boy. I've had the privilege of meeting some of them. They're great kids. Farm kids all across the province are excellent. What we need to do is talk about why people are concerned about kids.

This is the question I'm getting to, Mr. Speaker, with the member. This minister of labour yesterday said: the government has always planned to exempt children and other unpaid workers on family farms from mandatory WCB coverage. Now, this bill deals with a couple of the areas, OH and S and the labour side, but I just want to talk about WCB for a minute. That's what she said yesterday in Okotoks. But in the middle of November this was what was on the website about Bill 6. It states this about the implications of Bill 6: if you are operating a for-profit farming operation, i.e., one who sells goods commercially to individuals or other organizations, you must cover any unpaid workers, including family members and children performing work on your farm. That was posted there.

You, the minister's staff, and the people putting this out were wrong, or they've changed it after the fact. I don't know. But it's caused a lot of confusion, a lot of frustration. And this was on the WCB side. The OH and S side gets even worse, very, very confusing. But I'd like to ask the hon. member – you know, he has a riding that borders mine, and we share many of the same farms and those types of areas – to elaborate a little bit on how ridiculous it is that after this type of stuff, talking about farmers' children, something so important to our communities, this government would ask for blind trust to pass a bill that is a blank cheque. Maybe just explain why farmers aren't going to go for it. A blank cheque is not acceptable to them at all.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Smith: Thank you to the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre for asking me the question here. You know, I've taught rural kids all of my life, Mr. Speaker. I had the chance to start my career in Drayton Valley, and probably about a third of the kids in our high school were kids that grew up in a rural environment. You could absolutely tell the difference between a student that grew up in a rural environment from one that didn't, and I was always very, very impressed with the kids that came from a rural environment, from a farm. They seemed to be so strong and independent. They learned at a young age how to work, how to be responsible. I saw that, for instance, when I was dealing with them in the classroom. Somebody doesn't bring his homework. "Excuse me. Where's your homework?" "Mr. Smith, I was doing chores last night. I'm sorry. I'll get it done." And they always made sure they got it done and showed it to me.

The farm breeds a different group of kids, a different culture of kids. I think that perhaps one of the problems that we're facing here is that when you try to impose legislation on people that are strong-willed, independent people that are used to solving their own problems, that are used to being able to make their own choices and their own decisions, when you don't engage them in the right way, I know in my family their backs get up, and the conversation ends. You have to go a long way to regaining that trust, and you have to go a long way before they're going to start to listen to you about whether or not they're going to give you the

permission. Government has to ask that permission. We really do. We have to earn the right to be able to pass legislation that will govern people.

12:00

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It truly is an honour to stand here in front of you today. I'm here to talk about Bill 6, in case anybody isn't sure what we're talking about.

An Hon. Member: What's the title of that bill?

Mr. Cyr: The title of the bill? It's the no-consultation bill, a bill given far less thoughtful and informed consideration from this House than it deserves.

I would like to read just a paragraph from *Beauchesne*. It's not because I'm looking for a point of order or a point of privilege. I think that it's important to understand, when you're looking at the Legislature, to be actually looking through these texts that we use all the time. I myself have heard this book being referenced so many times that I decided that I wanted to start reading my way through it. Paragraph 1 on page 3 is the one I want. It's just going to be a short paragraph.

The principles of Canadian parliamentary law are . . .

The Speaker: A quick comment. You ought to get a life if that's what you're . . .

Mr. Cyr: Pardon me?

The Speaker: I'm sorry. It's after midnight.

Mr. Cyr: I do agree that, apparently, I've got too much time on my hands if I'm going into this book.

But to get back into the book on paragraph 1:

. . . To protect a minority and restrain the improvidence or tyranny of a majority; to secure the transaction of public business in an orderly manner; to enable every Member to express opinions within limits necessary to preserve decorum and prevent an unnecessary waste of time; to give abundant opportunity for the consideration of every measure, and to prevent any legislative action being taken upon sudden impulse.

This was written by Sir John Bourinot.

I think that what we need to focus on here is that we truly are blessed to be here. When we're looking at these texts that we go to, we usually only pull parts of these texts to go into defences against things that may have happened in the House. So I think that everybody here should consider reading this book. It has so far been a very informative read.

But to get back to Bill 6 and to relay this back to what I'm trying to get to, I feel strongly as the chosen representative for Bonnyville-Cold Lake that I need to bring forward and represent all the silenced voices that need to be heard in this Legislature, and that's what I'm trying to get to in paragraph 1. We need to get the voices of our constituents out into our Legislature. I'm not seeing these voices in Bill 6 being heard. I have farmers in my riding that are saying right now and sending me letters right now that are stating that they are not being heard.

Now, I did table several letters yesterday. I'd like to refer periodically to one of those letters. Now, to start off, this says that "I have contacted both my MLA," the minister of agriculture, "and Premier Notley with no response from either. Now I am looking to all MLAs for clarification. Thank you for your time." You know what? I sent a letter back to her saying: I'm listening. That's what we want to be going to our farmers and saying, that we are listening.

She goes on to say:

I am a 20 year old female that until recently worked as a safety consultant in the oilfield, upholding various OH&S standards to help people have a safe workplace. I realize the importance of safety in people's day to day lives and applaud you for trying to make people's lives better. There is always room for improvement and I understand that.

I am also ranch born and raised. Since learning to walk I've been outside, bottle feeding calves at all hours, branding cattle, chasing livestock. I've been riding horses and chasing cows since before I could walk. . . . I've been called redneck, short-sighted and uneducated. Sometimes it's a really tough hill to climb. There are challenges I face every day, accidents waiting to happen. You do the best you can to make it a safe environment but when the first year heifer is calving at 2 a.m. on Easter Sunday, you plow on, because lots of farm situations are choosing another animal's life over your comfort.

Now, it's important to clarify here – and many of my colleagues have mentioned this, actually all of this side of the House – that farming isn't just a job. Farming is a lifestyle, a lifestyle that has gone on generation after generation. I have that in my riding, a constituency that is proud farmers and ranchers.

To go back to the letter:

It taught me that your life has value beyond what your bank account states. Allowed me to gain bonds with my animals that gave me confidence to be my own person no matter who stood in your way. That hard work and dedication are always appreciated, because it doesn't matter if you're not the best, so long as you try your hardest. It showed me that you can have a competition, but that at the end you had to be able to shake hands and walk away friends. These are invaluable lessons that I learned on the farm, from my family and from friends whose bonds are thicker than blood.

Now, this is important because what we're looking at here is a person that is describing what living on a farm is like. Again, I'm going to get back to the point. This isn't a job; this is a lifestyle.

Now, I say that because, unless this bill is put aside for consideration and further consultation, the farmers will have no voice in matters that will affect them, their families, and their communities. I have been going out and talking with my local farmers. I have been wanting to hear what my local farmers are concerned about with this bill. The fact that they're being consulted after the fact that it was tabled in this House is insulting. It needs to go to committee or . . .

An Hon. Member: Kill Bill 6.

12:10

Mr. Cyr: Thank you. We need to kill Bill 6.

Now, to go back to the letter again, to say that this constituent of the agriculture minister has stated:

I feel like your bill is completely disregarding my voice, and yet I am the newest generation. We are the ones you want to instill confidence in, want to push to succeed, keep encouraging to keep on keeping on because when you leave you're handing it over to people like me [the next generation]. It's my life this bill is affecting. But you're not allowing my voice heard. You're trying to push it through without allowing us anytime to weigh in or make any changes that effect my lifestyle. I want to see a more open discussion about Bill 6. I want my voice to be heard.

Why can we not bring these conversations to communities that will be affected, make it easier for us to help you. This is important. She's actually saying that they want to contribute. They're not given the opportunity. We're hearing that there are meetings being put on right now and that there are not any notes being taken at all at these meetings. That's not consultation; that's information.

We're feeding them information on what we as a government are going to force on them, and that's not okay. She goes on to say:

We are really a humble group and all we want is to have our voices heard and make sure that we can still pass our traditions and way of life on . . .

to the next generation. I don't think that's unreasonable.

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Now, the government wants to pass this bill a few days after being made public. We're looking at last Thursday. It's a week, and we're already at second reading. This is crazy. This bill is one of many reasons why they previously passed motions for the House to sit. Now, they are passing the legislation too fast. We're not getting through the consultation that we need to, and consultation, as we heard from members over here, is of the utmost importance.

The fact is that I would consider every one of us to be a person that really wants to do what's best for our constituents. Right now what's best for our constituents is to actually listen to the constituent. Our constituents right now are saying: consult. They're also saying that education is better than legislation. We need to be making sure that is out there. A bill of this magnitude, that affects hundreds of thousands of people, needs to be dealt with in a proper way and should only be completed with extensive consultation with those who are affected.

Now we've heard from across the aisle here that there's been 10 years. Well, my question. Ten years: how come you got it wrong? How could we have gotten this wrong? Did you just ignore everything that the past government did in consultation and just throw this together? This is just another way that this government is reminding rural residents that their voices do not matter.

If they won't go to farmers, I want to see the farmers bring their voices here. Their voices need to be heard, and if that means on the front steps of the Legislature that we will finally start to listen, then they need to come here and help the Wildrose push forward the fact that they have not been consulted.

Again, it's important to realize why this is so important. It's because of the fact that this is a lifestyle. These farmers tell me that farming is not just an occupation or a job.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake for his presentation. He has a big riding like mine. He has one less name in it, which I know makes it easier for people when they are addressing him. Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, besides having three towns in its name, is an area that encompasses 25,000 square kilometres. It's about an hour south of Edmonton and about an hour and a half northwest of Calgary. At the bottom it goes to the B.C. border and east to the shores of Sylvan Lake and Gull Lake.

Now, I tell you that, Madam Speaker, because I just want to give you an idea of the area that I have to cover when I want to consult with my constituents. I have farmers all across those 25,000 square kilometres who are trying to talk to me right now. This government has brought forward a bill that will impact them drastically, I would argue the largest agriculture bill, definitely, that we've seen in my lifetime, possibly in Alberta history. I have to say that as the elected representative of over 40,000 people in the riding of Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre I am offended by this government's behaviour. I'm offended by them bringing forward a blank-cheque bill and then not providing MLAs in this very Assembly enough time to properly consult with the people back in their ridings, to properly take the time to hold town halls.

Again, I've described the area that I have to deal with. I know that you, Madam Speaker, have a large area to cover as well, and it's very unreasonable to do that to MLAs but not because of work.

I want to work. I want to go back to the riding, and I want to talk to a lot of farmers, make sure that I know what's going on. We're going to be asked in the coming days to vote on a bunch of amendments now, as the government has indicated, and we're not going to be given a chance to consult with our constituents yet again. Farmers in my riding are being punished. They're not being given adequate opportunities to give their feedback to this Assembly.

Through you, Madam Speaker, I ask the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake how he feels about that and, you know, if he's as offended as I am about this process and the challenges that he has in the tight timeline that the government is providing to push this through at, I would say, lightning speed – they're trying to put this through now, not giving anybody opportunities to talk to their constituents – and if he feels that that's an appropriate thing.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud, did you want to contribute under 29(2)(a)? [interjections] Oh, I apologize. Sorry. I didn't realize there was a question. I thought it was just a comment.

Go ahead.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would thank the hon. member for the question. The question that I heard, that he brought forward on these amendments that we are having thrown in front of us – we have, like, an hour to consider them. Some of them come in with four or five pages of literature there. The fact is: how can you be working as an effective opposition when you've got an amendment that hits your desk and you're voting within an hour or two later? This means that we can't go out to our farmers and say: what is it you think? No. Well, obviously, the fact is that we can't even fully get through the amendment without even being able to come out and say: "What is it you're trying to do? Obviously, you made a mistake with the original bill. Now you're coming forward with an amendment that we barely even get to see in a short window."

12:20

It is offensive. My colleague is right. This is offensive, and we're going to be doing that when Committee of the Whole starts. They're going to drop – who knows? – 10 amendments. The fact is that when you're looking at these amendments, we need time, and that means we need to send it to a committee like a standing committee. The fact is that when we're looking at what we're doing with these bills, they're going too fast. The fact is that this bill, in the way it is currently worded, may well be beneficial in some capacity to corporate farms but will severely affect the small family farm, who is safe. Let's be very clear: they're safe.

Now, when we're looking at what actually needs to happen, it comes down to consultation again. If there are concerns with safety, then why didn't we ask what exactly is . . .

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'd like to welcome everybody to a brand new day at 20 after 12. I am very, very pleased to stand up and represent the constituents of Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills with regard to Bill 6. This bill is about lack of consultation. We can call it the lack-of-consultation bill.

Albertans want this bill sent to committee or shelved completely. That's what we're hearing, "Kill Bill 6; kill Bill 6," everywhere we go, every time that people show up on the steps or go to – what do they call it? – a consultation meeting.

Mr. Cooper: A come-and-be-told meeting.

Mr. Hanson: A come-and-be-told meeting. That's what it is.

Anyway, as elected officials it's our duty and responsibility to represent the concerns of our constituents, to listen to their concerns, their opinions, and bring them forth to this Legislature. That's exactly what I'm doing. I'm here talking because I'm representing the people in my riding that have phoned me and sent me e-mails and sent me letters. I have some of those letters here. As a matter of fact, I'm getting calls from other areas outside of my constituency.

An Hon. Member: Really?

Mr. Hanson: Yeah, from 1,430 family farms in the Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville area that don't feel that they're being represented in this House, from 1,159 farms and ranches from Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater that also feel that they are not being represented in this House because they're not hearing from their MLA. I've actually gotten a phone call from as far away as Slave Lake. Our job is to provide a voice in government for the people we represent.

This government never ceases to amaze me. Just last week in debate I spoke about the government members' lack of consultation with their constituents with regard to Bill 4 and the overall budget. If you're not willing to stand up in the House and speak for or against the legislation, how are you actually effectively representing your constituents? We were all elected to be a voice in this Legislature representing our constituency. If we are not consulting with our constituents and then representing those opinions in this House, we are simply filling a chair and not acting in the best interests of our province or Albertans.

Madam Speaker, today we are addressing another example of how this government refuses – and I repeat that: they refuse – to consult with the people that elected them. If the government was serious about getting this bill right, they would have actually consulted with the stakeholders prior to proposing the legislation, not dropping wide-ranging, omnibus legislation that will have a huge impact on the 60,000 people who make their livelihood in farming.

Farming and ranching have been a way of life in Alberta since the very first settlers arrived in this area, the people that opened up this country and who have made it the wonderful province it is today. They should be exempted from the bureaucratic nightmare that this bill represents. This is totally unfair. This NDP government has already aggravated Alberta's largest industry, the energy industry, with drastic tax increases and economic uncertainty by their various policies and regulatory changes, and now we're going after another one of our most important industries and bringing in these changes that will affect the daily lives of farm families too hard and too fast.

Madam Speaker, if they intend to make this bill take effect January 1, 2016, there will be no opportunity for effective consultation or dialogue with farm and ranch families, period. They feel that this is being shoved down their throats.

Madam Speaker, this government intends to have this bill passed through the House by the end of the session in early December, and we're already there. We're getting very close. Most of the scheduled consultation sessions are taking place after December 3. What the heck is the point of asking people for their input to help craft legislation after the legislation has already passed?

Madam Speaker, is this the NDP version of democracy? Let's not forget that the D in NDP stands for democratic. Is this indeed the new democracy? Really? Really? Stand up and tell us. Is this indeed

the new democracy we can expect until the day this government is defeated, which I hope is damn soon? [interjections] I'm sorry. I'll withdraw that comment.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

An Hon. Member: He's talking about the Springbank one.

Mr. Hanson: Yeah, the Springbank dam. It fell right in here. Sorry about that. [interjections] Who writes this stuff?

Madam Speaker, this new law will make massive changes to the way farmers conduct their daily operations. Is the ultimate goal of this government to see the end of the family farm? That's the question on a lot of people's minds. When the government lumps together occupational health and safety and workers' compensation legislation, the Employment Standards Code, and the Labour Relations Code into one bill, it demonstrates quite clearly that they do not understand the complexity of what they are trying to enforce. The cost to farm families for the WCB portion alone will put financial burdens in place that will make it impossible for many smaller operations to continue. I've heard from one family in my area that they figure that, based on their gross income, it's going to cost them \$15,000 a year just for the man and his wife.

In many cases these are families that have operated for four generations in farming. Their families, grandfathers and grandmothers, came to this country and endured many hardships to build up their operations so that their children could have a better way of life and share in the abundance this land provides, not so that their lifestyle could be turned on its head without any consultation whatsoever. I don't know of any farm families that have asked for this government to step in and save them from themselves. I don't know of a single family that doesn't care as much about the safety of their own farms as we do here in this Assembly.

Madam Speaker, now farm families are stepping forward by the hundreds to stop progress on this bill until proper, democratic consultation can take place. This government had best pay attention to these voices, or it risks wading into an unfamiliar area and causing any number of unintended negative consequences. Nowhere in this bill is there a recognition of the differences between small family-run farms and large commercial operations. Other provinces have this legislation in place, and they do exempt small family farms.

Madam Speaker, while there is definitely the need to bring in some sensible, reasonable regulations for larger operators, we are disappointed there is no recognition of the special nature of the family farm and the contribution that they make to our society. Farmers and ranchers have the right to have their voices heard when it comes to legislation that will affect their ability to operate and prosper.

Running a family farm in no way resembles running an industrial fabrication shop, a packaging facility, or a major greenhouse operation as we see in, for example, Redcliff, Alberta. Family farms need to be treated in a different way. Madam Speaker, we should be encouraging the next generation of farmers to stay on the land, not make it such an insurmountable task that they give up before they start. I've been contacted by locals that expressed concerns over the high cost of the WCB premiums they will be subject to, premiums they have no control over. They are concerned about the implications of the OH and S regulations, that can be very confusing, even to industries that have dealt with them for years. Part of the problem is that a lot of the people that are working on farms in my area also work in the oil patch. They've seen the

cumbersome OH and S regulations and paperwork that has to be filled out, and it really hasn't changed safety a bit in their industries.

One family expressed the concern that according to new regulations their 15-year-old daughter in 4-H would not be able to work unsupervised with her 4-H horse. She would not legally be able to help out for more than two hours on a weeknight and then must be supervised, and that includes her 4-H program time.

12:30

Madam Speaker, busy farm mothers during harvest time will no longer be able to take their children with them in a harvester, in an air-conditioned closed cab. It's no different, really, than a person taking their children on a car trip to the grocery store or on a road trip.

Madam Speaker, many farms are run by moms and dads and maybe temporary hired hands during peak times. What right does this government have to interfere with how they teach their children on the farm operation? I truly believe that farm parents are way more concerned about the safety of their children than this government, made up mostly of people from urban areas. Parents do their utmost to protect children and families.

Pushing confusing, vague, expensive, and at times inappropriate legislation onto the backs of our hard-working farm families is not what we were elected to do. We're just asking for some time. Push it to committee, or scrap the bill completely. We hear it all the time: kill Bill 6. Implementing this bill without consultation on the true needs of farm operators will only serve to be a huge windfall for WCB, and it will not affect farm safety one bit and will undermine our democratic process. Bill 6 must be sent to committee to allow for actual democratic consultation and to give the Alberta farmers involved a real chance to have their voices and concerns heard by this government.

Madam Speaker, I've got a couple of letters here, that I will be happy to table tomorrow, and I would just like to read you a few notes from them.

This is against Bill 6 and asking why it's being pushed through the Legislature before all of the details are laid out. It says:

I am from Warburg Alberta. I have been raised on the family farm and my husband and I are presently farming.

She goes on to say:

Farming teaches responsibility and commonsense. Something many people do not learn in other workforces. Growing up on a farm you learn how to care for animals and to be aware and safe around them. You learn how machinery works, the dangers around equipment and to be aware of your surroundings. You accept that you work with what Mother Nature has in store for you that day, no matter how long the day may be, not having to watch the clock for the amount of hours that legislation has allotted you.

Further down she says:

I understand the government has a very difficult job [to do], but please use your commonsense when implementing legislation . . . Implementing the Farm Safety Program in schools in Alberta is a great idea. Education of our children, whether they are on the farm or not, with this type of program is important. Pushing legislation through that treats the family farm like a 9:00 - 5:00 job is impractical. Take the family farm out of this legislation as it has been done in British Columbia.

Another letter came from La Glace. She says:

I live on a working cattle ranch located near La Glace Alberta . . .

I am opposed to Bill 6. I feel [that it will] affect my way of life greatly. Also if any changes are to be done, they must be done with as much feedback from fellow producers as possible . . . Farming and ranching is a way of life. It is not a job, it is a lifestyle.

She goes on to say:

We don't wake up every day and head out to work. We wake up every day to live our life. It is our life, it is the way we live . . . We are pro efficient people, we work safe. We love the land and we love our stock. Only we understand that accidents do happen and at times are unavoidable, just as accidents happen in your home and in your vehicle. Bill 6 will not change this.

She concludes with:

If you guys truly care about Alberta and her farmers/ranchers this bill would be dismissed. I myself cannot differentiate work from home. My work is my home, this is what I live for. Why can you guys not see or understand this? It feels as though we are losing our rights. Our rights to raise our kids as we were raised. And to share our knowledge with our children. And our way of life. How is this a just cause?

Another one is an open letter to the hon. Premier and the hon. ministers and CCed to the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills. It's from St. Brides. He says:

You were . . . elected on the platform that the former government had a sense of entitlement, which may very well have been the case . . .

Mr. Rodney: No.

Mr. Hanson: Sorry. I'm just reading from the letter. Bear with me, sir.

. . . but if you fail to consider all involved with this bill, and any other bills, you are just proving what we all know and that is [that once] you become a government that sense of entitlement comes with the job. Please prove me wrong and stop this Bill till all have been consulted and [before] you destroy an industry that feeds you all [and] provides employment for thousands of Albertans, and just wants to have a way of life.

Another letter:

I write today in protest of Bill 6 . . . I am 29 years old, and a fifth generation farmer from the James River area. Which is about ten minutes North of Sundre AB. My family has been farming in this area since 1904 . . .

As a mixed farmer, you need to be educated. Not only on what the price that your commodities are selling for. But, also you need to know what fertilizer, pesticides, herbicides, fungicides, to use on your crops. You need to be able to diagnose illness in your herd, and also what the best form of treatment is for your animals. You have got to be able to treat and maintain your herd. You have got to be able to fix breakdowns on equipment . . .

[Mr. Hanson's speaking time expired]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud under 29(2)(a).

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is actually a great honour for me to stand and speak under 29(2)(a) to the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills. I've been waiting for this opportunity for some time. My impression is that the members opposite actually are blocking rational questioning of their statements.

Just to establish my bona fides, I am actually a fifth-generation family farmer, who continues to operate the farm. I actually have farm income listed on my ethics disclosure, unlike, I think, everybody that's sitting across the way. There is one of your members that is a full-time farmer, but he – I can't say it.

I actually consulted with my family farmers that are renting the farm that I own. These are fourth-generation family farmers. They live in Manitoba, which has an enlightened government, which, many of us know, is an NDP government. That jurisdiction, like all the other jurisdictions except Alberta, has effective – and they're

well received by the farming community – OHS, WCB, and labour regulations for paid farm labour. I consulted with my family farm tenants, and they told me that what they saw of the reaction in Alberta was completely over the top. In their experience this gives the protection to their business from lawsuits in the event that an accident does occur. They have actually never had an OH and S inspection on their farm because they actually operate a very safe farm.

My question to the Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills is: how can he justify the fact that Alberta does not have this kind of farm safety and financial safety provisions in its legislation, and why is he slowing down the transition of this bill to Committee of the Whole?

12:40

Mr. Hanson: Actually, I'm not trying to slow this bill down to Committee of the Whole, Madam Speaker. I'm trying to stop it completely for the people of Alberta, and if it takes dragging my feet on this for another four days in this House and another 10 hours, I'll do it.

Every one of these letters that I have – and I said that I will be tabling them along with probably another hundred that I have on my desk – has talked about nothing more than consultation. They're all happy to talk to you about safety, but they want to be consulted. They don't want this stuff rammed down their throats. They want consultation, true consultation, not somebody throwing a bill at them and giving us four days to consult in here and drag our feet on it. They want true consultation, where their people sit at the table and discuss issues that affect them daily and how best to deal with them. Some of these people have their own insurance policies, that are far better than the WCB policies that you guys are trying to push on them.

I'm going to end this with page 5 of the letter from this fella. He calls it "The Farmer's Creed."

I believe that a man's greatest pride is his dignity and that no calling bestows this more than farming.

I believe that hard work and honest sweat are the building blocks of a person's character.

I believe that farming, despite its hardships and disappointments, is the most honest and honourable way a man can spend his days on [this] earth.

I believe that farming . . .

[Mr. Hanson's speaking time expired] Oh, I'll finish it up tomorrow.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to Bill 6. You know, some will say that this side of the House is trying to slow down debate, but let me be clear. If there's one thing that I've heard from the people of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, it's that they would like to have strong representation that is willing to rise in the Assembly and speak to legislation, that best reflects the people of that area. That is exactly what this side of the House has done today. Many, many, many of my hon. colleagues have risen in this place to defend the interests of the constituencies that they represent, and I'm proud to stand with them. I'm proud to stand shoulder to shoulder and arm in arm with them along with the 45,000 farmers and ranchers across this province.

Let me be clear. Every single one of those farmers and ranchers wants a safe farm. In the consultation that I've done, I have heard some relatively positive comments about sections of the bill. Not all farmers are adamantly opposed to all portions of the bill, and I've heard many of them speak to me about the reasonable

possibility that some form of insurance, be it privately held or WCB, can be a positive step forward. But the way that this has taken place is unbecoming of this government and communicates a lack of trust. It is exactly what this government promised they wouldn't do when they were in opposition. I can tell you that there is a significant amount of disappointment from the people of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

I am proud to rise and speak immediately after my hon. colleague from Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills because in his remarks he provided a lot of context and comments around the need to send this bill to committee. So it's my pleasure to rise and offer that very opportunity to this government.

I plan to move an amendment, Madam Speaker. I'm happy to hand it out myself. I know that the hour is late and that our pages have gone home. So let me just say thank you to the Legislative Assembly staff and security, who have given of their time to ensure that the important debate on Bill 6 can continue. That is exactly what we're doing here this evening, important debate on an important issue that drastically impacts hundreds of thousands of Albertans.

I rise to move an amendment, that the motion for second reading of Bill 6, Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act, be amended by deleting all the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 6, Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

This should be no surprise to this House. In fact, I have risen on numerous occasions to talk about the need for the use of committees, to talk about the need for proper consultation, the opportunity for expert testimony and witnesses, and that is exactly what this amendment does. Madam Speaker, I have chosen the Resource Stewardship Committee because this committee currently has no tasks before it, so there is a wide open slate of opportunity. In fact, the committee could begin meeting tomorrow, should it be called. But the point is that this committee would have the opportunity to do meaningful consultation right across this province, tap the brakes, as a prominent blogger in this province said – and some would call him a left-leaning blogger – on this bill to ensure that trust can be restored. I can tell you right now that the trust of many rural Albertans and, certainly, farmers and ranchers has been broken by this government. I can tell you that that's not good for them. It's not good for this province because we need everyone in this province pulling in the same direction right now. Right now they have a government who's working against them.

If I might just take a moment to talk about the importance of consultation, the important work that committee does and provide some context for the House. There have been many great people that have spoken in this House prior to all of us here. Many of them believed in proper consultation, the use of committee, and many of them believed that in a very, very similar situation as we're in today.

So I'd just like to take a couple of moments. In fact, I won't go through them all, but I have about 85 points of reminders, over 10 pages of comments made by the NDP on this exact matter. I hope that the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview will have the opportunity to listen because it brings me a certain amount of joy to be able to reflect upon some of the words that he's used in *Hansard*. There's no real need to table these words because they are well documented in *Hansard* on December 9, almost a year ago to the day.

I think it's important that Albertans are reminded that there are many examples of bills that have been brought forward hastily, poorly written, and without adequate and proper consultation,

which then have to get yanked or paused or repealed, Madam Chair. I mean, a great example of this was Bill 10 last week, that has been put on hold because it falls into that category of hastily written, inadequate, and improper consultations. And here we are repealing Bill 1 from the spring.

Mr. Jean: Who said that?

12:50

Mr. Cooper: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview just last year on the importance of proper consultation.

I think that it's important to note that he's not the only one that believes in proper consultation and sending pieces of legislation to committee.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will be supporting the amendment. I do think that it would be very useful at this stage to have some open public consultation.

The Minister of Infrastructure, *Hansard*, December 8, 2014, on the Condominium Property Amendment Act, 2014.

That same day from the hon. minister:

Because of the clear problems we're hearing about this bill and the utter lack of notice and complete consultation with all concerned stakeholders, we would like to see the legislation delayed. It's been pushed forward too fast, and not everyone has had their voice heard.

The Minister of Infrastructure and of Transportation, *Hansard*, December 8, 2014.

I think that I might have heard those same sorts of words being spoken by members of this side of the House earlier today. The same things. We would like to see the legislation delayed. It's been pushed forward too fast. Not everyone has had their voice heard. There are thousands and thousands of farmers and ranchers that feel exactly like that.

I'll go on to quote from November 26, 2014.

So we will be seeing those this afternoon sometime, I'm sure, in due course.

Certainly, we oppose this lack of consultation, first and foremost, that came up with this WCB portion of this omnibus bill.

The Minister of Culture and Tourism.

While we're on a good thing and speaking of the former NDP caucus, I'm quoting here from *Hansard*, May 7, 2014.

A week ago this PC government apologized to party members for its failure to listen to the grassroots. Yesterday they backtracked again, this time on pension rollbacks, because they failed to listen to Albertans. It's clear that they still don't get it because now they plan to ram through an omnibus bill without written briefings to Assembly members and without listening to Albertans.

The Premier of Alberta when she was in the fourth party, just in 2014. The similarities are startling. I don't quite understand how we've gone from believing in consultation, believing in taking time, believing in listening to stakeholders to today: this bill needs to be passed before the Christmas break so that we can turn our backs on consultations and listening to farmers. What farmers and ranchers are concerned about is, Madam Speaker, the fact that this legislation gives a blank cheque on regulation. The good news is that I have some quotes on regulation and passing legislation and dealing with the regulations later. Hopefully, I'll have the opportunity to get to those. Farmers and ranchers are concerned that their trust has been broken. How can they trust to get the consultation on the regulations right when they can't even get the consultation on the bill right in the first place?

I'd like to quote one or two more because I think it's just so, so relevant to the amendment that's been proposed, an opportunity for the government to do the right thing and to tap the brakes on this. I know for a fact that there have been thousands of e-mails, phone

calls, and letters received by members on all sides of this House from workers quite frustrated with this government and rightly so. I mean, for a government that loves to talk about the word “consultation” and how they speak with folks, their actions don’t seem to live up to their words. Although I could stand here and give numerous examples of where consultation never took place even though it was asserted, I won’t do that.

I just wanted to say, Madam Speaker, that once again we’re in a position where this bill should be . . .

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Three Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Two Hills.

The Deputy Speaker: Two Hills. I’m seeing double at this point.

Mr. Hanson: It’s getting late.

Anyway, thank you very much, Madam Speaker. To the member. You had mentioned that you had some references to regulations. I was wondering if you could expound on those a little bit for us.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, hon. member. I will be happy to get to that, but given that I was just in the middle of a sentence – maybe I’ll just start this sentence over for the sake of ensuring that we have the full context of the quote.

Madam Speaker, once again we’re in a position: should this bill be referred to committee? I do see that as a positive step, but I do need to voice my frustration with the fact that once again it’s another example of the government putting forward poor legislation then being stopped in its tracks by the public and by opposition parties and forced to go back to the table. If it was done with adequate consultation in the first place, then we wouldn’t have to be here constantly going in circles. We’ve seen examples of this from the amendments to the municipality act, where, again, amendments that the NDP put forward were voted down originally last year, and then amendments to the bill came forward and – surprise, surprise – half of the changes were the exact amendments that we put forward.

The hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade and all of the other things that he is responsible for in *Hansard*, November 26, 2014 – I think that it’s just so unbelievable that we can go from

the exact spot we’re in today when the hon. minister stood on this side of the House, railing against the government of the day about lack of consultation, about lack of committee to a point where today the government front bench is essentially silent other than to say: some of the bureaucrats have provided misinformation. To not stand up and take responsibility for the bureaucrats is one thing, but to continue this narrative that they are on the side of angels in this is absolutely flabbergasting, to know that just last year they stood and said the exact same things that members of the opposition have been saying for going on 14 hours today.

1:00

This is an incredible chance to do the right thing. This government, to their credit, on at least three occasions have been going in the wrong direction and said: “I’m sorry. We weren’t doing what was right. We promised that when we were doing the wrong thing, we would stop, turn around, apologize, and do what’s right.” That’s exactly what farmers and ranchers want. They’re not saying that they don’t want safe operations. They’re not saying that they don’t want a safe home and workplace. What they’re saying is that they want to be consulted and assured and know that they can trust the government, that the regulations that come into force at the end of next year aren’t going to be a surprise, aren’t going to do all of the things that the opposition is concerned that they might do.

The only way forward, the only way that that can happen is if this government taps the brakes, sends it to committee, or even better, kills the bill altogether then comes back once they’ve consulted. They can provide a clear view of what the regulations look like, and then they can start this process over. One thing that I am very confident in is that if they choose not to do that, the rest of the quote from the hon. minister will also come true.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I think we made quite a bit of progress tonight – very interesting debate – but seeing as the hour is late, I will move that we adjourn.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 1:03 a.m. on Thursday to 9 a.m.]

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The 29th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday morning, December 3, 2015

Day 28

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

First Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

9 a.m.

Thursday, December 3, 2015

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Deputy Speaker: Good morning.

Let us reflect. As we come to the end of a busy week, let us remember that our role as public servants is to put aside our own self-interest and work to make life better for the people we serve. Today we mark the start of the holiday season, so may peace and goodwill towards others be our guide.

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 4

An Act to Implement Various Tax Measures and to Enact the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act

[Debate adjourned December 2: Mrs. Aheer speaking]

The Chair: We are on amendment A6. Do we have any speakers to this amendment? The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Chair. If I'm not mistaken, we are debating a subamendment right now regarding ministerial stipends.

The Chair: We're just on the amendment. It would have been your amendment, yes.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair. We'll continue debate on this.

I think it is an important and common-sense amendment to this bill. Bill 4 is not the budget itself, but Bill 4 is legislation that will enable the budget to be implemented. Interestingly enough, I'm not sure that this budget is able to be implemented until this bill is passed, which is interesting because the government seems to be moving forward with some of the measures in the budget before it is even enabled by this bill.

This amendment is a constructive point being put forward by the Official Opposition to ensure that if the government does not follow its own laws, there are some consequences. The government has put forward a significantly higher debt ceiling than has previously been in place. You know, after the tough budget measures of 1993 we came to a point where once the budget was balanced, the government outlawed deficits on both an operational and a consolidated basis.

As time has gone on, governments have subsequently loosened those rules, allowing for minor borrowing and then major borrowing. A debt ceiling had been put in place. When the Fiscal Responsibility Act and Government Accountability Act were repealed in the winter of 2013, we protested. We said that the debt ceiling being put forward was a soft ceiling. It's a ceiling that any government, any future government, can easily change as soon as they run into that debt limit. But we were assured at the time that it

would never go further, that that was an appropriate amount of debt to take on, and that we could just trust the politicians that it wouldn't go any further.

Well, I was skeptical then, and I'm skeptical now of the government's claim that they will never exceed the 15 per cent debt limit. In fact, I'm almost positive that they will. DBRS said just the other day that without a significant course correction the government of Alberta is likely to blow right through that 15 per cent debt limit.

Now, I know the hon. Minister of Finance has publicly stated that that will not be the case, that we will stay below our 15 per cent debt limit, but I don't think the numbers for that add up. We've seen the fiscal projections in the budget itself, which have oil projected to be significantly higher than virtually all other major credible indicators that aggregate oil prices. Compared to the Parliamentary Budget Officer's estimates, that will leave an \$8 billion hole in our budget over the next three years alone. That will have a significant impact on our debt-to-GDP growth as our revenues fall short. Also, the GDP projections in the PBO and other credible private-sector forecasters have GDP growth lower than the government is projecting here. So the lower GDP and the higher debt make it much easier for us to run into our new proposed cap of a 15 per cent debt-to-GDP ratio even before the next election.

Compounding this is that in years 4 and 5 of the budget there are no details. In fact, years 4 and 5 of the budget are little more than a brochure where the government promises to get back to balance but doesn't provide a shred of data about how they'll do that. They don't provide a line-by-line breakdown of revenues. In years 1, 2, and 3 of the budget you can see how much the government projects to bring in from personal income tax, corporate income tax, gasoline tax, insurance tax, tobacco tax, alcohol taxes, royalties from oil, royalties from gas. There is a long list that is at least somewhat defensible for years 1, 2, and 3 of the budget. But in years 4 and 5 they provide nothing. They say only how much money they expect to have in total revenues, and then they say how much they expect to spend in total expenditures.

They don't break down, as they do in years 1, 2, and 3, how much they'll spend on the Department of Finance or the Department of Health or the Department of Education, Human Services. That breakdown is provided for earlier years but is not provided for years 4 and 5 of the budget. All they show is that they'll have a reasonable level of an ability to curb the growth of expenditures but that revenues will somehow increase by a whopping 16 per cent, a 16 per cent increase in revenues without any justification whatsoever as to how they expect to get there. So an unreasonably high projected GDP growth, unreasonably high projected oil prices for years 1, 2, and 3, and for years 4 and 5 no explanation whatsoever of how they'll get a 15, 16 per cent increase in revenues. This all leaves me to believe that the 15 per cent debt-to-GDP ratio that they are proposing will be easily shattered.

Now, the Minister of Finance has assured us that that 15 per cent debt-to-GDP ratio will not need to be increased. Well, I suppose we have little choice but to take the Minister of Finance and Executive Council at their word. So we are proposing to amend Bill 4 with a subsection requiring that if the government exceeds its debt-to-GDP ratio of 15 per cent, a 15 per cent debt ceiling, ministerial stipends will be clawed back. That is requiring that the government put its money where its mouth is. That is requiring that if this government actually believes its own laws that it's proposing, they should have no problem passing this.

9:10

When ordinary Albertans break the law, there are consequences. If one of us drove home, to our Edmonton residence – you know,

just the other week I got a parking ticket. I parked where I shouldn't have.

Some Hon. Members: Shame.

Mr. Fildebrandt: It was shameful indeed. Shameful indeed.

I was quite upset to see that I had a parking ticket for \$40, but – you know what? – I deserved the parking ticket because I didn't obey the rules. The same thing should apply to the government. When the government does something against its own laws, they deserve a ticket. They shouldn't go to jail for it, but they should probably pay a fine. The same goes for any Albertan. If you get a speeding ticket, well, you don't get to just answer for it with a police officer in question period. If you get a parking ticket, you don't get to debate with the bylaw officer in question period and wiggle off the hook and not answer any questions about it. You've got to pay the ticket. The only person you can argue with is the judge. The government would certainly be free to argue its case in front of a judge if they'd broken their own laws. If you don't pay your credit card on time, you pay a penalty.

In life there are penalties for not following the rules, but for some reason there is no penalty when politicians break the rules. When the Minister of Finance broke the law and failed to table a second-quarter fiscal update in this House on or before November 30 of this year, he was in violation of the Fiscal Management Act. He has said that the government had put forward Bill 4, which gives him, essentially, a mulligan on that one. But we're debating Bill 4 right now. Bill 4 is not law; Bill 4 is merely a proposal. Assuming that this House will change the law doesn't mean you're allowed to break it before that law changes. In fact, if we do not have any kind of penalty for breaking the law and the government can bring forward legislation willy-nilly to allow it to break the law retroactively, we are setting a very dangerous precedent. We're allowing the government to break the law one day and then insist that it will change the law a week later to retroactively let it break the law.

Now, I haven't paid my parking ticket yet, and I'm considering doing the same thing with the city of Edmonton. Perhaps we should propose a bylaw to the city of Edmonton giving me a one-time exemption on my parking ticket. [interjection] I'm pleased to see members support this. We'll have to put it forward to Edmonton city council. We'll put forward a motion to the Edmonton city council saying, "Well, I really should have been parking there anyway. Why not? I'm a politician. Why not? We should be parking where we want. So let's retroactively pass a law to let me get away with that one. It's a gimme; it's a mulligan. It's a mulligan. Give us a mulligan, but going forward we'll obey the law." But if we run into that law again, well . . .

An Hon. Member: We'll do it again.

Mr. Fildebrandt: We can do it again. We can do it again.

That sounds familiar. Who does that sound like? Another elected body that constantly changes its own laws, a debt ceiling if you will. A debt ceiling. Who would that be? Who would it be? Bizarre to see the NDP follow the example of the United States Republicans. Bizarre that we would have to make a comparison of the Alberta NDP to the U.S. Republicans, constantly changing their debt limit.

Dr. Turner: A pretty successful government.

Mr. Fildebrandt: I think the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud just called the United States Republicans a very successful government. I'm shocked and interested.

An Hon. Member: They did stop the pipeline.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Yeah.

It is a dangerous precedent that we would be setting, Madam Chair. We have an obligation to the people of Alberta to follow our own laws. People are cynical enough about politicians. You know what? They have good reason. I think everybody in this House is here for the right reasons, fighting for what they believe in, but people still have reason to be cynical about politicians. We sit here all day passing laws, making laws, amending laws, but for some reason the laws that we make for ourselves don't have any consequences when we break them. That gives people reason to be cynical.

When the Minister of Finance is required to table a fourth-quarter fiscal update and he doesn't but he's required to by law, people say: well, what can we do? I know we posted the video of question period on that matter on our Facebook page, and I had constituents saying, "Well, shouldn't the police do something? They broke the law," because laws made for the regular people have consequences. We don't make laws for the people outside of this place that they're allowed to break without consequence. Can we think of any laws that we pass for everybody outside here who pays taxes that they're allowed to break and we don't do anything about? Are there any laws that we pass that we don't enforce, that we just pass because they sound nice? Laws shouldn't just be suggestions. Laws should be hard, they should be enforceable, and they should have consequences for breaking them. They shouldn't be mere suggestions for the people who make them.

So what this is doing is putting some teeth in the act. Cabinet needs to be accountable for its spending. If cabinet is not responsible with spending and goes over its limits, then there needs to be consequences for that. Right now there's no accountability. Laws are here to hold us accountable. They're not here to be mere guidelines.

I am not too concerned that the ministers across, if they were deprived of cabinet stipends if they break the law, would necessarily be starving and begging for change. They would still be entitled to their entire MLA pay, a pretty handsome salary, that we all receive. They'll still be entitled to their vehicle allowance. They'll still be entitled to their living allowance. They'll still be entitled to per diems. They'll be entitled to all of their expenses. They'll still be entitled to their offices and their staff and all of the perks that come with being a cabinet minister. All that would happen is that the extra bump in pay that you get for being a cabinet minister would be rolled back temporarily until they're back in compliance with the law. That's actually pretty soft.

Mr. Hanson: No one is going to jail.

Mr. Fildebrandt: No one is going to jail. In fact, you're not even paying a fine. You start earning the money back once you start complying with it. It's more like a parking ticket. Instead of having a \$50 fine, it's a dollar an hour. Then you stop paying it once you move your car. It's real soft, real easy. You get to keep your car there. This doesn't stop the government from going over the 15 per cent debt limit. It still allows the government to go over the limit, but there's a soft penalty, but they won't starve in the meantime. They'll still be making far more than the average Albertan. They'll just be making as much as most members of the Legislature, hardly starving.

This amendment still permits the 15 per cent debt ceiling, 15 per cent of the GDP, to be legally exceeded but just attaches penalties to Executive Council for it. This amendment to Bill 4 would have minor, minor consequences compared to the effect that it will have

on everyday Albertans. While some cabinet ministers will not earn a huge salary, they'll now just earn a really good salary.

9:20

Albertans, by contrast, will have to pay higher taxes because debt is just deferred taxes. Debt today is tomorrow's taxes. By year 3 of the budget the government is already proposing that we'll be spending \$1.3 billion a year on debt interest payments. That is the combined equivalent of six entire ministries. Think about that for a moment. The debt interest payments that the government is proposing just by year 3, not even year 5, could afford six entire ministries of the government. If the government exceeds the 15 per cent debt limit, our debt-servicing costs will easily surpass \$2 billion to \$3 billion a year. That will mean one of two things, either less services or higher taxes. Instead of paying for six ministries of the government at \$1.3 billion, perhaps it will be eight, nine, or 10 ministries in the government that could be paid for by debt interest costs.

Or, by contrast, the government can do what its instincts tell it to do and just raise taxes. At every turn when this government has run into any bump on the road, their knee-jerk reaction has just been to raise taxes, even taxes that they have no mandate from the people to implement, a \$3 billion carbon tax, a backdoor PST.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. The Member for Strathmore-Brooks is absolutely, one hundred per cent correct again. Section 3 of this act – and an act is law. I've dealt with issues under the Water Act. Some people think that they can flout the act because it's just a guideline, but it is not. These are actually laws.

For a fiscal year Crown debt shall not exceed 15 per cent of GDP for Alberta. That's pretty simple, straightforward. It's fairly easy to ride within that law. It's no different than the argument that's used for photoradar or for speeding. If you don't want to get a fine, don't speed. It's as simple as that. So it's pretty easy for the government, and I see no reason why they wouldn't accept this amendment on those grounds. All it does is put some reason and some penalty that if you do break the law, you pay the consequences. I don't think it's unreasonable for anybody in this House to consider that a manageable amendment. The cabinet has to be accountable for government spending, and those responsible for spending beyond their means should face consequences for their actions. It's fairly simple, straightforward.

Another one of the amendments that was asking to reduce this limit was defeated. Now we're at 15 per cent, which is in the act. I think it's not unreasonable to put some consequences to that penalty. Therefore, I mean, I'm going to be voting in favour of this amendment, and I think that all members should consider that there should be some penalty. You know, it's easy. If there's absolutely no penalty for speeding, people aren't going to slow down. It's absolutely ludicrous to think so.

I would ask if somebody else would like to talk about their feelings on breaking the law. Is it a good idea? Should it be allowed? At what point, if we allow this to go through and the government breaks its own law with no penalty, is somebody going to use that as a defence in court when it comes to a charge under the Alberta criminal code? You know, there are laws in Alberta that they could say: "Hey, well, you know, the government broke the law, and they had no penalty, so I broke the law. Why should I have a penalty?"

Those are my thoughts on it. I'm going to be voting in support of this, and I look forward to any other comments.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to speak to this amendment. You know, when I think about 15 per cent and a debt ceiling that is going to cost this province as we accumulate more and more debt, we're just saying that we're going to only accumulate debt to a 15 per cent debt ceiling. That scares me a little bit. I know that I've talked with many members of this House, and some of the members of this House have come from jobs and backgrounds that have provided them with a very significant remuneration. I'm not trying to claim poverty or anything like that. I think that as a teacher I got a good salary, but as a single-income teacher with three kids, and three kids now in university, there are some realities in life, and one of them is that usually at the end of the month there was less paycheque than there were bills. That meant that sometimes we had to be very creative.

I wish I'd had the opportunity to have a debt ceiling in my life sometimes, to be able to know when to borrow and when not to borrow, to know how much I could borrow, and if I needed more than what I thought I needed originally, to be able to borrow more.

I know that I taught with many wonderful people over my career, and everybody approaches this differently. That's fair enough. Everybody's got to make their own choices in life, and everybody's got to make their own decisions about how best to take care of their families and how to spend the money that they make. I know that I can think of one colleague who always surprised me a little bit in that they always could find another reason to borrow money and to spend. You know, they needed the latest gadget, the latest iPhone, or they needed this car, or they needed that. And because we were a single-income family, we just never had those options.

So when I look at debt and when I look at a budget and when I look at a debt ceiling, I guess it's one of the reasons why I am a fiscal conservative. It's because of where I've come from and it's because of the life I've had to live. I look at debt very, very hesitantly. I know that in my life I could have a mortgage, or I could have a car payment, but I couldn't have both. When I started looking at debt and debt ceilings and whether I would increase the debt load that I would put on myself and my family, I had to be very, very careful. That's why, I guess, I would encourage this government to consider this amendment.

In this amendment it does try to put some consequences to a government that faces a lot of pressures, and I fully agree. I mean, I understand that sometimes it's not easy being a minister. You're smiling at me. That's good. I'm glad you're enjoying this. One of the realities and the differences between where you sit and I sit is that you actually have to make the decisions. You have the power to make those choices, and you have the responsibility when you make those choices. We all understand the nature of the game that we play here, of the roles that we play here in government, that in the Executive Council you have the responsibility for setting the direction of spending for the province of Alberta. We've heard many times in this House from various members of Executive Council that everybody's asking for money. There's always a good reason to ask for money. I actually understand that. There's some truth there. I mean, I'm going to be asking for money for Drayton Valley at times, and everybody's going to be asking for money for their constituencies. I understand. It's a tough place to be sometimes, and everybody in Alberta can give good reasons for why they need the money from the government that they need.

9:30

I'm not even going to argue that they aren't good reasons and that they aren't valid reasons. That's one of the tough things about being in government, isn't it? You've got to try to make those decisions about when to spend and when not to spend and whom to spend the money on and how to spend it. One of the problems that arises in a

democratic system is that we all recognize we need votes. If we don't get voted back into power, we can't have power, and we can't make those decisions. It's very hard on a government sometimes to stop spending because there's a lot of pressure from Albertans and from constituents and from other MLAs to do exactly that, spend.

What happens is that we then go: "Okay. Well, it's a good reason. Let's spend it. All right. This is a good cause. We'll spend here." Pretty soon that debt ceiling gets exceeded, and we've got a problem because you've set that. You've said to yourselves that this is a 15 per cent debt ceiling, that we're not going to increase our debt past that debt ceiling, yet there are all sorts of demands for that money and for that spending.

I think Albertans understand that. I think Albertans understand the pressures that the government is placed under and that the executive has to make these tough choices. I think Albertans would support this amendment because sometimes it actually makes it easier for you to govern. If there's a rule, if there's a law, if there's a ceiling and there are penalties, you can actually go back to the people and say: "You know what? I'm sorry. We have to stop spending. It's against the law for us to go above this 15 per cent debt ceiling."

Now, as a teacher we would try to help our kids understand that there is a thing called the rule of law and that it's one of the cornerstones of democracy, that no one is above the law. Everyone is expected to obey the law. If you break that law, it doesn't matter whether you're the hon. member who just spoke here, who got a parking ticket. It doesn't matter if you're the Premier. It doesn't matter if you're one of the MLAs. It doesn't matter who you are. The law applies equally to all of us. It's a part of our democratic system, and it's a very important part. I don't think there's anybody in here that's going to argue that.

One of the realities of our democratic system is that it's made up of a system of checks and balances that hold the Executive Council accountable for their choices and for their actions. This 15 per cent debt ceiling, if it has some teeth to it, will be another one of those checks and balances which ends up producing good government at the end of the day. My high school students understood that, and I know that every member in this House understands that idea. It's an okay thing to have teeth in the law sometimes because it does hold us accountable. When we're dealing with something like debt, it can amass so very quickly. I don't know if in your lives it's the truth – it has been in mine – that it's a lot easier to go into debt than it is to get out of debt. Trying to find that money to balance that monthly balance is hard. Finding that money to pay off that car loan or pay off that mortgage: that's hard.

When I look at this debt ceiling and I look at this amendment and I see that it actually tries to hold the people that we give an incredible amount of power to accountable for the decisions that they're making, I actually believe it not only makes your job easier, but it's better for the province, and it's better for the people of Alberta.

You see, one of the realities that the government faces is that they are accountable. As a teacher there were times when I had to hold my students accountable for their behaviour, for the work they were handing in. There were times when I would have to sometimes confront them. "Sorry. This just isn't good enough. Do you understand why this work isn't good enough? Can I sit down with you? Can I help you to understand why that decision that you've made or this argument that you've put into this essay or this decision for how you behaved in my class is not acceptable?" Normally you try to find an accommodation. I'm sure that every one of you in this room, in this Legislative Assembly, has probably had that conversation with a teacher or a parent of some sort where they're holding you accountable. It's a part of making us well-

rounded people. I always believed as a teacher that if I did not hold my students accountable for their decisions, they would not grow, they would not engage in their learning, and they would not get better. So I believe that this is actually helping our government get better.

When you hold yourselves accountable for the decisions that you make on how we spend money and you put some teeth into it – and this isn't really onerous. Saying that we're not going to give you those stipends because you've exceeded the 15 per cent debt limit, it's not – I mean, nobody loses their job. Nobody is losing their life. But it's that little reminder that says: "You know what? That 15 per cent debt ceiling actually has meaning." It's just another little layer of accountability. It's a part of what we call responsible government, the idea that you have power but not the power to do whatever you want, whenever you want, however you want, to whomever you want, that you actually do answer to other people. In my case I answer to my constituents. When you're on Executive Council, you answer not only to the people of Alberta, but, through their representatives in this House, you answer to the opposition.

This opportunity that we have to talk about debt ceilings and to come together as a Legislature and to listen to each other and to consider is a rare privilege. We must support this idea, not only of the rule of law but of responsible government, that the buck does stop with the minister. Who was it – President Truman? – that said, "The buck stops here"? You know, there is a man who understood the idea of democratic government, who understood that when you're the President of the United States and you have executive power, that power does stop with you. You are responsible for that power, and you are accountable to a Legislative Assembly and to a Supreme Court and to the people.

Dr. Turner: The president responsible for the Marshall Plan as well.

Mr. Smith: Yeah. Absolutely.

Dr. Turner: The U.S. government went into debt for that.

Mr. Smith: You haven't heard me talk about the fact that we should never have any debt, but we have to be very wise. We can have that conversation. But the point is this. Having a debt ceiling and this amendment is actually a very wise idea.

You know, I taught social 30-1 and 30-2 and all the levels of social that you could teach, and I realized that there were times, if you can believe it, when there were kids that would come into my class that weren't always enamoured with the concept of social studies. When they would come into my class, sometimes they were pretty cynical when we started talking about government. Part of my job was to try to break through that veneer, to try to help them to not be cynical when the topic became government. How could I help these students of mine to see that this was an incredibly important job done by people basically of goodwill who are trying to be able to pass laws and uphold the laws that actually help us to have community?

9:40

Cynicism is probably one of the worst things that we can have in a democracy. It actually kills democracy. I believe that one of the things that builds cynicism sometimes, not always but sometimes, in ourselves and within our citizens is when we say one thing and we do another, when we pass a law but then don't obey that law or live up to that law and we don't hold ourselves accountable to that law.

Now, we can all fall, we can all screw up, we can all say the wrong thing at the right time, we can all park in the wrong place at

the wrong time, and even cabinet ministers and governments can sometimes do the wrong thing. But when you have the ability to point to a law and to say clearly, “You’ve gone past this point, and there’s a penalty for it,” it helps to reduce the cynicism that the people see. If we obey that law, if we follow the rule of law, we actually do what we’ve said that we’re going to do. I don’t think any of us are unaware that sometimes people might think that politicians are sometimes just a little bit hypocritical. We play the game.

Well, I guess I would speak to this amendment and ask that we not play a game, that we actually look at the debt ceiling, see the value of having that debt ceiling – and I’m glad you’ve put it into this bill – but then that we actually make it enforceable, that we actually have penalty to it, not just so that we can control our spending, not just so that we can make it easier for the government to actually say no sometimes but so that we can actually help to improve our citizens’ understanding of how this system works and the accountability that is built within this system.

These are important concepts. They’re important when you’re raising a family, they’re important when you’re trying to make a budget for yourselves, and they’re important when you’re running a government. These ideas are important. It’s why you start with – basically, you should start, I believe, with a principle and then try to find out how that principle should be enacted in the real world. I think this actually speaks to my heart as a conservative who believes you need to control spending at times, that you need to be careful when you’re around debt, that you need to be wise stewards of the finances that we take from the people of this province, that we ensure that if we do go into debt, there’s a limit and that if we have that limit, we stay within that limit and that we try to make it easy for the government to see that they have to stay within that limit.

I think we all understand that the other side has a majority government. I would appeal to you that perhaps we start listening, as we did a little bit yesterday on Bill 5. We actually listened to some of these things. Maybe we’re not going to agree. That’s fine. Maybe you’ve got another agenda, and you need to go one way. That’s fine. We understand that. I don’t know how many of you heard this morning the CBC as I was coming in. They were talking about Bill 5 and the rare occurrence that, I guess, occurred yesterday and the amendments that were passed and how those amendments actually made the bill better and how this House was working together.

I would speak to this amendment because I think it’s a common-sense amendment. I think that it actually will make this government a better government, and it will make ourselves as legislators perhaps move in a direction that will allow the people of this province to re-establish a positive view of the people that are in here, the people that are working hard to try and serve the people of this great province.

You know, I once had an opportunity to talk to the grandson of Frederick Haultain. One of the things that Haultain always talked about was the fact that if he’d had his way with the . . . [Mr. Smith’s speaking time expired]

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to speak to this amendment and to encourage all members of the House to consider it and to support it. The current legislation, as it now exists and has existed for several years, is sometimes referred to as Alberta’s financial firewall to protect us from mistakes of government and the temptations of government to extend its reach.

In the IT world no one would consider operating an IT system without a very serious firewall. The point of a firewall, actually, is to protect the integrity of the system. That’s what the point of our financial firewall is: to protect our government, to protect our province.

The other point of it is to maintain the integrity of the system so that it is not broken down, so that it is not destroyed. I think we need to maintain the integrity of our financial firewall. If you have a firewall and you begin to poke holes in it or lower it down to the point where anybody can just pass over it, which would be the case if we move in the direction we’re moving, then the firewall really doesn’t have any merit or value to it anymore. It will be breached. That, I think, is the point of some of the arguments that have been made here.

The reality is that I don’t think the people of Alberta trust the track record of previous NDP governments, at least to not overspend. Reputation, I guess, often precedes us, and reputation in this case causes people to be questioning the reality of even keeping 15 per cent if that’s what it’s set at.

The contingency fund and its limitations are actually meant to deliberately constrain and to create self-restraint on the part of government. When a person owns the cookie jar and can take of it as they choose, there needs to be self-restraint of some sort. There needs to be some way to contain them. One of the great philosophical problems of politics has been the question that’s been asked already: what to do when politicians break their own laws or the will of the people. The answer, the only answer that’s ever there, is to create laws that restrain them or at least help to restrain them.

Blatantly stating, “I will not be constrained” or “I won’t be constrained” has, in fact, the effect of raising the debt limit, raising the debt ceiling, and granting the government authority to just continue to proceed along that way. So I am concerned. Exceeding the debt limit, which is a very likely possibility, would in fact be breaking the law, and I believe there should be consequences to it. The whole point of this is that governments should be accountable. In reality, maybe the focus here should be on cabinet because it is cabinet that has the authority to make these decisions. It is cabinet that can make the spending decisions, is responsible for spending, so they should face the consequences in some form or another. I don’t mean that as a punishment. I simply mean that as an aid or as an assistance to remain accountable. Often if consequences are too many years out, then it’s too easy to break them, so consequences should be immediate and be felt.

Now, the reality is that this amendment doesn’t suggest anything that is overly harsh. Cabinet ministers would still have their full salary, their expenses. In fact, this amendment still permits, if the government insists, the 15 per cent limit to be exceeded legally. But there is a consequence, a minor consequence. It needs to be a minor consequence of some type, and the consequence to cabinet ministers would be minor compared to what Albertans would experience. The reality is that government is not an autonomous body. It has the legal role of a trustee, and trustees are accountable all across our society, so then why should the government not also be accountable? Government that is democratic is accountable to the people.

9:50

I have to support this amendment. I have to suggest that it is the only – there has to be some sort of accountability in this. In a way, what we’re trying to do is to protect the government’s reputation on credit rating. I know that the Minister of Finance has quite rightly bragged a number of times that our credit rating is triple A, that we’re in good shape. The reality is, though, that for this government

that is an inherited rating. You actually didn't create it, and I am concerned that you are in fact undermining it.

I guess I would wonder if we're not – while I think we should support this amendment because if some sort of consequence isn't in place, then the reality is, as the Dominion Bond Rating Service has already warned, that our credit rating will go down. I wonder what the minister's response to us and comments would be if after his regime and his leadership the credit rating does in fact go down. We need to make sure that it doesn't. I think that it would be to the benefit of all Albertans and the credibility of the government to be willing to make themselves accountable in some sort of tangible means and to demonstrate to Albertans that they actually do want to be accountable and they're not just prepared to keep raising a debt ceiling without any personal consequences.

I think I will leave it at that. Those are my main points. Thank you.

The Chair: Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to speak in favour of this amendment. I just want to take a moment to speak about something that maybe hasn't been mentioned yet about the value of an amendment like this but specifically to this particular amendment. Trust in a relationship is a fragile commodity. It takes years of consistent care to build what psychologists call a high-trust culture. It was not that long ago when the world was shocked as major corporation after major corporation was caught cheating in the financial reporting on the health of those corporations. We were all shocked at the scope of that, WorldCom, Enron. My goodness. We no sooner had had a week full of Enron before there was another one and another one and another one. It just seemed like it wasn't going to stop. No sooner had that happened than it was followed by the entire global financial system beginning to collapse as revelations regarding the skullduggery and the backroom deals in the financial services industry started to come out in the press and through investigations by the SEC, in the States, and other such regulatory agencies around the world. Again, we were shocked. Trust had been broken.

Those revelations were also followed by some more revelations. You know, I've been in business and seen some of the just nasty stuff that goes on in board meetings and the decisions that boards take sometimes that are at least questionable. The part of that whole scandal that bothered me personally the most was that in the financial services industry there were analysts, traders, and CEOs that were still receiving bonuses of millions of dollars while these companies were going down. To me, that was the most evil part of it all. A junior analyst, a senior analyst: it didn't seem to matter. How can that person be receiving – I remember one that was a \$1.2 million bonus, and the company was going down. It just blew me away.

There was no accountability, and trust was broken on so many levels. So many levels. Even trust in the Securities and Exchange Commission was destroyed. They had a huge trust deficit following that. They recognized that, by the way, and did something about it.

In spite of the inept handling of billions of dollars of other people's money, these people were receiving bonuses anyway. These market analysts, these CEOs, these senior management people are essentially in the very same position that the ministers in this government are in. The ministers in this government control billions of dollars of other people's money. It's just like these people.

Now, there were charges laid. Some of those people are in jail. There were fines levied. You know, the litigations go on and on. They're still going on and on today. Trust had been destroyed in the

relationship between the shareholders and corporate executives and even between the consuming public and producers of consumer goods. Trust had been broken.

The issue that I see before this House right now is that – you know, I'm sure that everybody in this room during the election heard a similar story from the electorate: we don't trust politicians; we don't trust government anymore; we don't trust the democratic process anymore. I had people that – and I'm thinking of one particular couple right now, because I come from a floor-crosser riding – were in tears as they expressed to me the grief they had about the trust that had been broken with the former MLA when that individual crossed the floor. They were crying, an elderly couple crying, and it broke my heart to think that that trust had been broken there between them and an elected official that they put their trust in. Every single one of us have people back home in our ridings who have entrusted us to be here.

The people of Alberta have this democratic process, this Legislature, this Executive Council, and so on, these democratic institutions in which they are told repeatedly: "Trust. Trust us. Trust us." Over and over and over again. Well, as I said, trust is a very fragile relationship, and the trust between the people of Alberta and our democratic institutions right now isn't that good. These kinds of amendments that we have before us right now in fact this specific amendment that we have right now, if adopted, could go a long way in starting to rebuild a trust that has been broken. I think that's worth considering by every one of us in this room. We need to do those things that engender trust, and this one will do it.

You know, we have a Minister of Finance that has put forward a budget. That budget is based on estimates given to him by the various ministries and their staff. Of course, you are now asking the people of Alberta, who have lost trust in government – in fact, they've lost trust so much that they threw that previous government out. That was the reason. I remember speaking to one politician from Ontario. He said that Canadians never elect governments; they throw governments out. It's always over trust issues. If you really boil it on down, it's always over trust issues.

10:00

So we have now a budget that's before the people of Alberta. The Minister of Finance is saying: trust me. Every minister in the council is saying: "Trust me. Trust our estimates. Trust our revenue projections, and trust our expense projections. Just trust us, Alberta. It's going to be okay." But then this government changes a long-standing law that was a trust law. That law that prohibited a government from borrowing for operation: that was a trust law. The moment that this government removed that law, it was like an axe to the root of the trust tree. You just chopped it again. You removed an element of trust. Well, faith is like a tree, hon. minister. Do you get it? If you go to church, you'll understand what I'm talking about. The faith tree. Faith and trust: same thing.

Now, the minister has told the people of Alberta: trust my budget. All the ministers have said, I suppose, to the hon. Minister of Finance: trust my numbers, hon. minister, and add them up. Then the minister has to trust those ministers' projections and add them all up and come to the House and come to the people of Alberta and say: "Trust us. It's going to be okay. Oh, but, yeah, we want to remove this one law. Oh, trust us, but we also want to change the cap on borrowing. But trust us; 15 per cent will be okay. We'll never go above 15 per cent. Just trust us."

Then along comes an amendment that says: "All right. Put your money where your mouth is. Put your money, Mr. Minister, where your mouth is. If you really trust your projections and you really trust your revenue and expenses, go ahead and put your money where your mouth is. Go ahead and do it." This amendment makes

you put your money where your mouth is. That's all that this amendment is asking. It is an amendment that could start instilling trust again, so don't pass this one up. Refusing, in fact, to support this kind of an amendment that fosters accountability . . . [interjections] I'll repeat that again since the hon. members over there are – it looks like video games or something. Refusing to support an amendment that fosters accountability . . . [interjections]

The Chair: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake has the floor.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Madam Chair. I was a teacher. I understand unruly classroom chatter. I get that. Those are the same ones that usually didn't get a passing grade when the tests came around.

An Hon. Member: They failed.

Mr. MacIntyre: They failed.

Refusing to support an amendment that fosters accountability really completely destroys any trust that this government was sincere in its claims during the election of providing a more trustworthy, more transparent, more accountable government than the previous government. Those were the claims that were made during the election, yet we have seen instance after instance after instance where this government is refusing to take advantage of measures that could in fact prove trustworthiness, accountability, and transparency.

Now, the good people of Alberta recently threw a government out over these very same issues. This amendment is offering this government an opportunity to take a concrete step toward building trust. But one thing that I have noticed in just the few months that we've been in this House is that this government never misses an opportunity to miss an opportunity. Here we are again. We have an amendment before this House that is an opportunity for you, given to you to build some trust in the hearts and minds of Albertans. Put your money, ministers, on the line because every law that you make puts the people of Alberta's money on the line. They're hurting right now. They're suffering right now. We've seen more taxes, more taxes, and more taxes. Everything this government has done is putting Albertans' money on the line with no cost to those who are doing it to them. There needs to be some trust built, and this is that opportunity for you to do it.

I support this amendment. It is a great amendment. Don't miss this opportunity. Don't miss this opportunity to start building trust with the people.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Just before I call on the next hon. member to comment, with the indulgence of the House I just want to acknowledge that we have a lovely group of young people, a school group, up there. I'm not sure which school they're from, but I would like to welcome them here. It's great to have them.

Do we have the next hon. member willing to speak to this amendment? The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm happy to rise and speak in favour of this amendment. I guess that's no surprise. What I'd like to start off with, though, is that the gross domestic product is one of the country's primary indicators used to gauge the health of the country's economy, the province's economy in this case. I'd like to know: what provisions do you have in place to punish a government if they exceed the 15 per cent debt-to-GDP ratio? This amendment addresses that. This amendment puts that disincentive,

I guess, if you want to look at it that way, in place to say: no, you shouldn't be going past the 15 per cent debt-to-GDP ratio.

In my Battle River-Wainwright riding, my constituency riding, I was given a budget. I was given a budget, and I was told that if I exceed that budget, that money is coming out of my pocket. I'm having to put my money where my mouth is. If I go and exceed this, there are going to be punishments in place which hit my pocketbook. What we've talked about with this one is that if you exceed this, there should be punishments in place for the ministers that exceed this.

Mr. MacIntyre: Consequences.

Mr. Taylor: Yeah. Consequences. That's a better word. I agree with that.

We certainly need consequences when they exceed it. We've got to ask: what protections have you decided to put in place for this so that our future generations are not going to be saddled with more debt?

This amendment stems from the bill. This bill is about enabling the government to implement higher taxes, more debt. More debt, Madam Chair. It refuses to reduce the bloated spending. You know, no government has ever borrowed its way to a balanced budget, and certainly no government will be able to borrow its way to a surplus budget. We need to somehow curtail the money that the NDP government is throwing around this province. We have to have a plan. Let's get straight with the deficit budgets that lead to higher debts, which eventually lead to an unstable economy, something that we've already seen because of this government's and the previous government's spending practices.

Madam Chair, does no one understand that the cost associated with paying off debt takes away money that could be used to build hospitals, schools, roads? The list goes on. If we continue down this road too long, it's going to impact how many people we will be able to feasibly employ in the future. It will start cutting into jobs and into employees that government is able to employ. So these unionized workers that the NDP are trying to protect right now are probably going to be the same people that they won't be able to afford to keep because there won't be enough money.

10:10

You can't keep running higher and higher debts. If we don't have penalties or consequences to stop people from exceeding the debt limits, then we will look at the problem of perhaps having to lay off people or not hire as many people. The same people, again, like I said, that are the union workers, the same front-line workers that now you're trying to protect: you're going to have to look at them and say: can't afford them. Do you want to be known as the party that kills jobs, kills front-line workers? If you continue down this path, I believe that's going to be the inevitable consequence.

Let's break down this bill and be clear about what it's showing will eventually happen. This bill is about enabling governments to inflict higher taxes on Albertans, to run operational deficits, which for decades have been, frankly, illegal. I don't believe we want to be going there. Other places have tried this. You know, the United States: another example. They've been widening this up. They keep raising their debt ceiling and raising their debt ceiling. Eventually they're going to have to pay the piper. How is it going to affect them in their job situation? It's absolutely going to affect them. Do we want to keep going there?

If we exceed the debt ceiling, you can be assured that it's going to hit Alberta taxpayers. It's going to hit them in the pocketbook through higher taxes. The credit rating for this province will get worse. Eventually, if we keep exceeding this, we'll be dropping our

credit rating. We have a triple-A credit rating. Absolutely fantastic. I don't want to see us go to a place where our credit rating will be hurt in the future. Would the Finance minister resign if we drop our credit rating? That's a question.

From worse credit rating to higher borrowing costs, higher taxes, not to mention that we have to pay it all back – eventually it's got to be paid back, so we can't just keep running this way. We need to put teeth into this act. I'm borrowing a quote from the Member for Strathmore-Brooks. He said it earlier, and I thought that it was an apropos thing to say: put teeth into the act to say that you cannot exceed this 15 per cent; otherwise, there are penalties. Then that's probably the best way to go because we now can have a means or a mechanism, consequences, if that gets exceeded.

When I ran my business – and I've run several businesses, and they've all been successful – I had to budget. I had to make sure to budget for myself. I had to make sure I budgeted for a profit. The government doesn't have to look for a profit. They have to look for a balanced budget; that's the goal. For myself, I had to budget for a profit. Whenever I was building a project or working with my different – well, let's go to my real estate company. I hired staff. I hired agents, and I had to make sure that they were looked after, that they were paid, but I had to make sure that, at the end of the day, there was enough money there to keep operating. We want the government to be able to operate that same way. We want the government, at the end of the day, to have balanced books. Otherwise, if we have \$2 billion or more in debt, then \$50 billion in debt, it's going to take \$2 billion just to pay it off, just for the deficit.

Mr. MacIntyre: That's the debt servicing?

Mr. Taylor: The debt servicing. Thank you.

So it's going to be \$2 billion in debt servicing. That \$2 billion: well, it affects the people in my riding. It affects them because we know that it's going to cost \$241 million to build a hospital. That's what we were told from the last estimate, \$241 million. We're looking at eight comparable hospitals that will now not be built every year that we're having to service that debt. We don't want to be going down that road. We don't want to be losing schools, hospitals, roads, and bridges that could be built just because we're servicing debt.

We need to run this more like you would a well-run household. You have a certain amount of money coming in, and that's what you can spend. In a household if you spend more than what you have, then eventually the bank is going to come knocking on your door and say: "I want your money. I want your keys. I want all of this. We're shutting you down. You're bankrupt." I don't want to see us in a situation where our credit rating gets lower and lower and we're paying higher and higher debts. Those are the inevitable consequences.

For these reasons I'm voting in favour of this amendment. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you. A couple of things I would like to add, and I'd like, if I can, to begin with just a bit of a personal story. I grew up in a situation where we didn't always have money. I suppose one of my most powerful memories is the day – my father was away trying to get work; my mother was home – that a finance company came and repossessed the only car we had out of the driveway. I remember my mother trying to argue with him, beg him, but he took the keys, and he took the vehicle, and she was left in tears. Shortly after that, we lost our house, lived in somebody else's house through their generosity and goodness for about a year, until my

father was finally able to find work again. I think it's extremely important that we do manage our finances carefully. Some of my position is born out of that experience and reality of life, that if you get yourself in trouble with debt, there is a day of reckoning.

Canada, in fact, survived the recent financial and banking crisis, that spread around the world – it was actually initiated by the American policies – for one reason. Because Canada's banking rules and regulations themselves were more restrictive and better built than most other countries in the world, Canada as a result has had an extremely positive reputation in regard to our banking practices.

I'm reminded of Henry Ford, who said, "You can't build a reputation on what you are going to do." It's based on what we have done, and other people form their valuation of what our reputation is. You see, the whole point of branding in the financial industry is trust. How many financial institutions can you think of that use the name "trust" in them? A lot of them. Even the major banks, some of them, use it. Financial practices are about trust, and the reason that the marketing, the advertising, the branding of financial institutions is about trust is because trust is so often betrayed.

I fear that the people of this province are going to feel betrayed if our financial firewalls are broken down, holes poked through them, essentially destroyed, because government, if it is anything, is a financial institution. The financial systems that we create are some of the most important systems that we create. In fact, financial systems that this government creates will define it and define its reputation amongst the people of this province. GAAP, or generally accepted accounting practices, are all about procedure, about best practices. Every time you read an audit and sit down with an auditor, that's what comes up, best practices. An ever-changing debt ceiling, removing best practice financial systems, demolishing our financial firewall are in fact going to betray the trust of the people in our province.

10:20

I actually think that this bill is probably one of the biggest game changers that Alberta has seen in a very, very long time. I actually think that this bill, in the long run, will be more important than Bill 6 although Bill 6 gets more traction at the moment. This is an extremely important bill, and for us to allow it to change and not speak about it, not try to create motions – we're giving you endless opportunities to establish trust, to establish your credibility, to create best practices financially.

I have to vote for this motion. I encourage you all to vote for it and think about the fact that the people's view of their trust of your financial institution will be determined by whether or not you follow best practices or look for ways to adjust things to make it easier for yourself. That's what happens in far too many corporations and institutions. That's why we have to actually have audits of institutions, because people don't trust that the ones who write the numbers actually write them truly. So it's extremely important that we support this amendment and that we don't betray the trust of the people in this province.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other member wishing to speak to this amendment?

If not, the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Chair. I want to continue on with some of the points from my colleague from Lacombe-Ponoka. My colleague from Lacombe-Ponoka, I think, has made some very good points about trust, the need to re-establish trust in this institution and trust in the members of this institution, trust in the

laws that we have, and trust in the laws we pass because as it stands now, there are no consequences when the people passing the laws break those laws. That's what we are trying to achieve through this amendment.

You know, many of us were elected in constituencies where the trust of voters had been very, very badly broken: Strathmore-Brooks, Lacombe-Ponoka, Little Bow, Airdrie, many members in the House right now. We had been elected in constituencies where people's trust had been broken, and it is our job, parties on all sides, to restore that trust.

Now, we're facing a bill here, Bill 4, which seeks to give the government a blank cheque to run up \$50 billion plus in debt. They're calculating it as 15 per cent debt to GDP. The purpose of this amendment is to put teeth into those laws so that Albertans can trust that when we pass laws, we will abide by them. Right now Albertans have no reason to trust this government. They have no reason to trust that when this House passes laws, we're actually going to abide by them. That's the point made very well by the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, that we have to put our money where our mouth is.

The Member for Battle River-Wainwright talked about the consequences of breaking these laws for regular Albertans. There are no consequences for the politicians who break them, but there are great consequences for the Albertans who will have to pay the bills. Now, the Minister of Health says that it's not true that there are no consequences for the politicians. Perhaps the only consequence would be at election time, when people throw them out for breaking them. But in the meantime it allows the politicians to waste the people's money, to break their trust. You know, this is not asking for a limit on the government's doing what they were elected to do; this is asking for consequences for the government's breaking a law that they had no mandate for to begin with.

Is there a single member on the government side who knocked on a door and said, "I will take on \$50 billion of debt"? Could one of you raise your hand? No. Not one. Is there a single member in the NDP caucus who knocked on a door or gave a speech and told people, "I will take our debt-to-GDP ratio to 15 per cent, and even then we're not sure if we'll go further"? Is there a single member over there who campaigned on taking on 15 per cent debt to GDP? One? Can you raise your hand? Not one of you campaigned on that, but you're doing it right now.

Is there a single member on that side who said that they would run operational deficits, that they would borrow for operational spending? You said that you'd borrow for spending for three years on a consolidated basis and then balance the budget. You're going to go for a lot longer than that on a consolidated level. But is there a single member over there who ran in the election for a mandate to borrow for the basic operations of the government? Is there one of you? It's pretty quiet. Is there anyone? I don't think there's one who ran on that. I don't think that there is a single member elected to this House who has a mandate to borrow for the basic operations of the government.

I don't believe there's a single member of this House in any party who has a mandate to take on \$50 billion of debt. I don't think that there's a single member of this House in any party that has a mandate to take our debt-to-GDP ratio to 15 per cent. Not one of you can say that you have a mandate to do any one of those things. Not one of you can say that you were elected to come here and do that. What we are saying is that if you're going to give yourself that mandate, if you're going to say, "We're going to do it anyway, and to hell with what we promised voters," then we should at least put some limits on that.

You've said that it's going to be 15 per cent, but judging by the fact that not one of you can get up and defend this bill, not one of

you will stand up and make a case for having a 15 per cent debt-to-GDP level without any consequence for breaking that in the future – is there a single member on the government side who has the guts to stand up and defend this bill? Is there a single member on the government side who's got the guts to stand up and say why they shouldn't pass this amendment? Is there going to be a single member from the NDP who is going to articulate, or are you just going to follow the orders of your whip? Is there a single member?

An Hon. Member: Let's vote on it and see what happens.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Before we vote on the bill, I'd like to see a single member of that caucus stand up on this amendment and tell us why we shouldn't be passing it. Were you sent here to debate and represent your constituents, or were you just sent here to vote as you're told, like Bill 6?

What are the rural MLAs here on that side of the House doing to consult their constituents right now? What are you doing with your constituents? Are you talking to them, asking them about how you should vote, or are you only asking your whip how you should vote? Are you consulting? Are you consulting with your constituents, or are you just going to do what you're told? I challenge members on the other side, who really don't seem like they want to be here right now, to stand up, to stand up and debate, debate this motion about why you think you deserve to give yourself a mandate, that you were not elected to, to take our debt-to-GDP ratio to 15 per cent, to take on \$50 billion of debt, to borrow for the basic operations of the government for the first time since 1992, and to speak to the amendment that would put a small consequence – a small consequence – on the government's cabinet ministers for breaking even that soft promise that you're making afterwards.

10:30

Is there a single member of the government caucus who could stand up and speak for your constituents? Have you gone back to your constituents and said: "You know what? I know you didn't elect me to take on \$50 billion of debt and raise our debt-to-GDP ratio to 15 per cent"? Has one of you gone back and talked to your constituents and said that that's the cost of this? Of course everybody wants to spend more money – it's nice; it's easy – but there are costs associated with that. Has one of you gone back and held a town hall about how you should be going forward with your budget?

Some Hon. Members: Yes.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Then one of you or a few of you should. Has a single member of the government asked their constituents at an open forum how much debt they should be taking on? Have you asked your constituents at what level it's enough? At what point is debt too much? You can't take it on forever.

I challenge the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud to have another one of our enlightening exchanges and defend the borrowing that he is proposing. I challenge the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud to speak to the amendment, about why he thinks that his government should be allowed to already break its promises and far exceed – far exceed – the debt that it said it would take on in the general election and have no consequences for the new level that it's proposing. I think he's being told right now that he's not allowed to talk.

Ms McLean: Tell him not to feed the trolls.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Nice to see the government caucus member call its own members trolls. [interjections] I'm debating, the government members are perhaps trolling, but it's all fair.

I challenge the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud to articulate his thoughts in the debate on this amendment. He's not in Executive Council, so it won't dock his pay. He may as well stand up and tell everybody in this House and tell Albertans why he should be allowed to take on \$50 billion of debt without any consequence whatsoever.

Well, it looks like he was just told – I'm not sure if that's a deputy whip or not – that he shouldn't be talking. I think that a lot of government members in the last few days have been told not to talk. That's why we were here till about – how late were we here last night? – 1:30 in the morning. I know the members want to hear me all night long, and we were here till 1:30 last night debating Bill 6. We were here till 1:30 in the morning last night debating Bill 6. You know how many members of the NDP stood up last night to defend Bill 6 for their constituents?

The Chair: Hon. member, could you confine your comments to the amendment, please.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Madam Chair, I am speaking to the point of having members of the government side represent their constituents in this debate. Unfortunately, it seems to be that only one side of this House is debating. Only one side of this House is getting up and speaking for their constituents right now. I know members over there want to. I know that some people over there want to stand up, speak for their constituents, but they're being told by their whips not to talk. They're being told to ram bills through this House without debate. That's why last night we were here until 1:30 in the morning and not one government NDP member had the guts to stand up and defend their own government's bills.

Last night we didn't have anyone outside of Standing Order 29(2)(a) for questions and comments. No one stood up and gave their own speech, not a single person. Now, on this amendment, that the government seems intent on not voting for, we can't get a single member of the government to even stand up and talk about it. We can't get a single member of the government to stand up and represent their constituents, their constituents who surely must not want any penalty for breaking the law. How many people have we heard stand up and talk to the amendment today?

Mr. Hanson: None.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Have we heard one stand up and give a speech?

Mr. Hanson: Just some beaking from the backbench.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Just some beaking from the backbench.

We've heard nothing from the government side on this amendment. How is it that they know how to vote? Is it just that their whip has told them to vote against anything that ever comes from the opposition today? Or is it that their whip has said: "Don't bother saying anything. We're trying to ram this through"? Madam Chair, if we can't get a single member of the government to stand up and represent their constituents, then I will move that we call the question and get them on the record.

The Chair: Any other speakers to amendment A6? The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to speak to amendment A6. Deficit spending is poor economic policy that will erode services in the long run, contrary to what you believe at this point in time. There are real numbers, real people, and real dollars. The government does not have to look inward and cut the significant amounts of inefficiency and waste. The NDP is more

comfortable abusing taxpayer dollars than improving their operational efficiency in the manner that every private-sector company is doing right now.

Meeting or exceeding the debt limit has very real consequences. The reality here is that Albertans are forced to contribute billions of dollars to servicing debt. I know you don't like to pay credit card fees on your bills every month. The government and the people of Alberta certainly don't deserve to be paying those sorts of fees as well. These are Albertans' hard-earned dollars. This is money that will not be invested in Alberta industry, families, and local economies although it happens to be their money. This is extremely important to remember in every single decision that you make here in this House: nothing new will be produced from these funds allocated to debt servicing. They do not go to building anything more: infrastructure, roads, something everybody uses to get to work, to move product, to be industrious, thereby influencing the economy positively as the investment creates a means to work, to be paid.

Debt servicing disrupts important economic drivers. This disrespectful management of our funds, all taxpayer dollars, undermines the proper use of taxpayer dollars. Not only that, but we are talking about potentially exceeding the 15 per cent debt cap. What are the consequences to the government for that? What happens is that by increasing our debt servicing, we will lose our credit rating. This could happen even before reaching that limit if the world sees us as an unreliable borrower and an unrestrained spender. Let me tell you that I think we're very close, and I know I'm not alone. We are a resource-dependent economy. As you know, the ebbs and flows of this economy are unique to Alberta, and it requires finesse to handle the fluctuations and the cyclical nature of this province and to deal with the volatility of the product prices that we depend on for our revenue.

A 15 per cent debt-to-GDP ratio has typically been used as a benchmark figure which jurisdictions must stay below in order to qualify for a triple-A credit rating. Alberta, however, being a resource-dependent economy, has a higher risk classification, and therefore it is necessary for us to stay well below this absolute ceiling of 15 per cent. That 15 per cent debt-to-GDP figure applies to economies deemed less uncertain than our own resource economy here, which relies on a volatile commodity.

10:40

When we exceed the 15 per cent – and as I said, there's a very real chance that a downgrade could come at a threshold lower than that – we will see an increase in our debt-servicing costs. This will impact future generations – your children, my children, grandchildren – burdening them with this cost, something no generation will benefit from. Interest payments are not an investment that they can use towards empowering their ability to earn a living and have a good quality of life. Is that what this government wants? Is this what you want for your kids, to saddle our children and our grandchildren with unnecessary debt and debt-servicing costs? What a proud moment. What a legacy. Congratulations.

The government needs to create legislation to secure our financial future, not burden it with debt. Give your heads a shake. You are comparing our economy to other economic jurisdictions that have much more stable economies. There is a legitimate reason to cap it at 15 per cent, which is already too high. There are sufficient reasons to impose consequences on the government for exceeding this as that is detrimental to our province. If our children and grandchildren must face the consequences, then the government should be held accountable for their mistakes. I'm sure the children up there agree with me.

For years we have been fortunate to salvage a triple-A credit rating, even through years of rapidly escalating spending and perpetual deficits. Understand that the higher that credit rating is, the less you pay in debt servicing. It is absurd that a government would even consider ruining this rating. It should be a priority. We are so fortunate to have this rating, and it is something to be very proud of. To put it at risk is a danger. It means that our debt-to-GDP ratio is reasonable, that we are able to pay it back, and that the risk of default is minimal. Other rating agencies have already warned that we are at a higher risk to default. Please listen. The lack of confidence in our ability to repay is seeping in already, and this could bring disastrous effects on our budget and economy. Please support this amendment for the sake of the generations to come.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other hon. members wishing to speak? The hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Madam Chair. You know, I want to bring a little bit of, I guess, the voice of reason into this. Clearly, Albertans elected this government, like it or not. In my job as a paramedic I need to know when I go out there and with the decisions that I make that, no matter what, I can execute a decision. Sometimes it goes well, and sometimes it goes bad. I worked really hard when I was a paramedic – I'm still a registered paramedic – to be informed, to make sure that I understood the protocols, understood the physiology and everything that goes along with that job and how to treat it. But, like I said, sometimes it goes well, and sometimes it goes bad.

Now, let me speak to the government caucus and the cabinet. They should be very, very careful about the decisions and the things that they say here because it is a record. It is a foundation of what our future generations will stand on. It is completely – completely – irresponsible, in my opinion, that the hon. Finance minister didn't give a third-quarter update. That's his job, and he's made a mistake. He should recognize that regardless of how you want to dance around it. As a paramedic, if I make a mistake, it's time for me to move on, correct whatever that mistake is. To quote my hon. good friend the former Member for Calgary-Greenway: do more; be better. That's what this conversation is about.

Now, we have the privilege in this House to be able to speak because we are protected here to speak on behalf of our constituents without being held liable, to get down to the business at hand for Albertans. Again, to the members that I hear chirping across the way: my kids will inherit every decision that comes to conclusion in this House. It is not a game, and it is important. You're absolutely right that I'm not happy about the debt. In fact, I'm frustrated about the debt. It is something that we need to get control of because if we don't, it will spin out of control, and you will not be able to afford the payments. Who knows what is around the corner?

Now, granted that perhaps we are one of the governments that you can look to today. Former governments said: that will never happen. That is a phrase that nobody should ever use – never – because it happened to us. It happened to us on things like Bill 10, by not getting spending under control.

Like it or not, this is the cabinet that is in charge of this province. They need to be able to execute decisions responsibly. I will not be voting in favour of this because they need to know at the end of the day that they're not being penalized. I'd rather them make the tough decisions and execute those, but I also expect when you're in that position for you to be responsible, and when you make a mistake to own up to it.

I think we're seeing this. Albertans, clearly, after 44 years – yes, in many respects we were number one, but clearly we just couldn't rest on that laurel. We could have done more. We could have done better. This government has an opportunity to be able to do more and do better and follow what has historically been: do your job.

While I'm not voting for this motion because I do believe that you shouldn't be penalized or have something looming over your back, make the right decisions. I encourage the Finance minister to not make this mistake again. Do more. Be better.

The Chair: Any other hon. members wishing to speak?

If not, I will call the question on amendment A6.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A6 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:47 a.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:

Ellis	McIver	Smith
Fildebrandt	Nixon	Stier
Hanson	Orr	Taylor
MacIntyre	Schneider	

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Gray	Miranda
Bilous	Hinkley	Nielsen
Ceci	Hoffman	Payne
Connolly	Horne	Piquette
Coolahan	Jansen	Rosendahl
Cortes-Vargas	Kazim	Sabir
Dach	Kleinsteuber	Schmidt
Dang	Larivee	Schreiner
Drever	Loyola	Shepherd
Drysdale	Luff	Sucha
Eggen	Malkinson	Sweet
Feehan	McLean	Turner
Fraser	McPherson	Westhead
Goehring	Miller	Woollard

Totals:	For – 11	Against – 42
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[Motion on amendment A6 lost]

The Chair: We are back on Bill 4. Are there any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Chair. Well, you can't win them all.

I'm pleased to continue debate on Bill 4. It's a bill of great importance to us. It's a bill of great importance to Albertans. It's a bill of great importance to taxpayers. Try as the government might to not listen to anybody in the province, we're listening, and we're going to do our best to make this bill, as I've said, less horrible. As such, I have an amendment to propose, and I'll wait for it to be distributed.

The Chair: It will be known as amendment A7.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Chair. The amendment is that Bill 4, An Act to Implement Various Tax Measures and to

Enact the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act, be amended in schedule 1 in section 4 by adding the following after subsection (3):

(3.1) The consolidated fiscal plan must clearly state a projected consolidated cash balance for each fiscal year included in the plan.

Now, every time I get up to speak about the bill and read its name, it makes me scratch my head a bit. An Act to Implement Various Tax Measures – that is a terrifying phrase right there; I'm from the government and I'm here to help – and to Enact the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act. Well, there isn't terribly much fiscal planning taking place in the bill. It is more or less drawing the bowstring, closing your eyes, spinning in a circle, and hoping you shoot towards a balanced budget in 2019.

The transparency part of the act. Well, that is one of the biggest problems with this act. It guts the requirement for any details in the budget for years 4 and 5, as I've discussed previously. It takes away some of the requirements for quarterly fiscal and economic reporting. But what we can do is improve some of the transparency around the act. The act says that it's for fiscal transparency, so this amendment seeks to add a little fiscal transparency to the act.

Albertans once upon a time used to be blessed with having the most accountable, straightforward, and open budget framework in Canada. I've spoken before about the Fiscal Responsibility Act and the Government Accountability Act of Jim Dinning. Jim Dinning said that any government that attacked those acts by repealing them or watering them down would have to look in the whites of Albertans' eyes and explain to them why they deserved subpar government.

Well, over the last decade our accounting system has undergone some significant changes, and I'm not going to belabour the point about why that was. But the fact is that today Albertans cannot open up a government budget and make any sense of it.

11:10

At the end of the day Albertans deserve a clear statement of the state of our finances. They deserve to have a single figure provided that says what the income statement is, effectively, of the government. How much money comes in, and how much money is going out? Well, that is a simple figure that Albertans should have. The government would be very well advised to accept this amendment to provide more transparency for Albertans when they open up a budget.

Now, mind you, not many of us get as much joy out of going to a government lock-up, sitting with bad coffee for a few hours, and reading through an embargoed budget, but I would chance to say that it is a very, very, very small fraction of Albertans who ever bother to open up a budget to begin with. One reason is because they can't understand it anymore. It's convoluted. There are three sets of books that often do not match each other, that are not reconciled, and there is no single cash-adjusted balance provided in the budget or in the annual report of the government nor quarterly reports.

There is no reason to hide facts from Albertans. We're not asking the government to change its accounting system. We're not asking the government in this amendment to change anything that it is doing. We're not asking the government to even change its own reporting structure. All we are asking for, simply, is that they provide one more piece of data in the budget: a simple calculation, effectively an income statement, a cash-adjusted balance.

The cash-adjusted balance reflects all spending decisions made by government; that is, operational and capital. That means spending on the nurses running the hospital but also the cost of the hospital. It includes the cost of the teachers serving in a school but also includes the cost of the school. This is, in my view, a superior

and important measure to the so-called consolidated balance sheet that the government currently provides, which leaves out between \$3 billion to \$6 billion a year in capital spending.

Now, as I said, this amendment does not require the government to change its accounting practices. This does not compel the government to move away from accrual accounting. This does not compel the government to do anything with regard to policy or its reporting except provide a single table in its budget and its annual reports and quarterly reports to give a little more data to Albertans.

Capital spending is one of the most important parts of our budget, but it still comes from our taxes and our debt. It reflects the real-life spending decisions of the government. It is problematic to take away any of the accountability that comes with a capital spending decision and leave only the ribbon cutting ceremony for the public to see. A cash balance statement would reflect the true borrowing or savings that we do every year. It would tell us what is the true cash on hand and how much cash needs to be borrowed. Importantly, if we ever got back to a position where we ran surpluses again, it would provide an important measure of what funds are available to move to the contingency account, what funds are available to move to the heritage fund, and what funds are available to move to debt repayment. Right now, even if the government's budget was under control and running a surplus, it would be difficult to follow the money in a clear and accountable and concise way.

Cash adjustments. This calculation is already done by Finance, so it would not be difficult to present the number in the budget itself. This is work already done by Department of Finance officials. Many capable individuals who have been with the department for a long time already do it. Department officials already know what the income statement is. They already know what the cash balance is. So this comes with no additional monetary or administrative cost to the government, minus a half-page of printing every time we release a budget. Although now that that's three times a year, that might be of some cost.

All of the math for this is on page 101 of the budget, where they do the cash adjustments to figure out how much they'd have to take or put into the contingency account every year. In the past they would actually put it in a line item called cash available for debt repayment or savings. We used to report this explicitly. It is now implicitly reported in the numbers, but it is not clear for Albertans who would pick up the budget to understand.

When the NDP took power, they were surprised by the status of our finances, but I was of the understanding that they wanted all Albertans to have a better understanding of what is truly happening and that they wanted to prevent future surprises. Let me reiterate that nothing in this amendment would prevent the government in any way, shape, or form from continuing to use its current accrual-based accounting. Nothing in this amendment would change the way the government does business. Nothing in this amendment would require the government to move to a cash accounting system. This asks very simply that Albertans be given one more piece of data, one more table in the budget from which to glean more information. This is a simple and virtually costless accountability measure that would go a long way in providing some clarity to Albertans, the 99.5 per cent of Albertans who don't pick up a budget every year.

It's a common-sense amendment that could be supported by small "c" conservatives and small "p" progressives on all sides of this House. It doesn't compel the government to spend more money; it doesn't compel the government to spend less money. All it does is it would compel the government to provide a statement of how much money is coming in and how much is going out in a simple, easily understandable way.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to amendment A7?

Mr. MacIntyre: I support this amendment. At the risk of sounding a little repetitious, it comes back to the trust issue again. When we have a reporting method – I'm not talking about changing the accounting method. Those two things are very different. As the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks pointed out, this amendment is not an attempt to change the accounting method of how the government staff accounts and develops the books for the province. All that it does is add to the already in place reporting mechanism another little tidbit of information that is very useful.

11:20

Using a cash-adjusted balance in budgets and in the annual reports comes back to this trust issue again. This provides more transparency to the health of the organization. That's why these things are used in business. It allows the owners of a business, basically or essentially the shareholders, to take a look at the financial health of an organization, a corporation, from a little different vantage point than the other financial reporting instruments that are issued by corporations. It helps for shareholders – and in our case that's the people of Alberta – to understand a little bit better the health of the provincial books, just like it helps shareholders to understand the relative health of a corporation's financial position.

The cash balance reflects all the spending decisions because it includes capital. It is a superior measure to the so-called consolidated balance system employed, as it is currently employed by this government. As the hon. member pointed out, it hides from view anywhere from \$3 billion to \$6 billion. That should not be hidden from view. Albertans have a right to know where their financial position is at. I mean, no member in this House would like to go online to his or her bank account, hit the button that shows you your account balance and transactions, and discover that there are a few thousand dollars that are somehow hidden from your view. I suspect we'd be phoning the Royal Bank call centre, or whatever institution you deal with, and we'd probably come unglued on them. How dare you report that way. I want to know my financial position fully because I have decisions to make. Well, the people of Alberta ought to be entitled to that same freedom and right, I would say.

So a cash balance as a reporting item – and again I want to reiterate that we're not talking about changing the accounting method, the accrual method currently used in government. It's simply reporting information that the government already has but simply collated in a little bit different way for clarification. That's really all this amendment is about, clarification.

Again, I come back to this issue of building trust between the government, the stewards of our people's money, and the people. That trust relationship has been sorely hurt. Here again this government has an opportunity to help restore some trust, start working towards building trust. Don't miss this opportunity.

The cash adjustments, by the way – I'm not sure if the members opposite realize this – are already done by Finance, so it's not going to be difficult to collate and present that number. All that this amendment does is make that reported.

When the NDP took government, they were surprised. You expressed surprise by the status of Alberta's finances. Of course, there isn't anyone in this room that likes those kinds of surprises, that, oh my goodness, we're in worse financial shape than we thought we were. Why were we surprised? Because not all the facts had been made known. This kind of a reporting mechanism helps the good people of Alberta to understand their financial position

better. It's clearer. Again, coming back to the trust issue, it would go a long way – a long way, hon. members – in helping to restore some trust in this province.

I support this amendment. I encourage all of you to support this amendment because, after all, every single one of us in this room is here to act in the best interests of the good people of Alberta, and this amendment is in the best interest of the people of Alberta. I would question why any member of this Legislature would not support a measure that helps the people of Alberta have clarity. Are we not here to take care of the best interests of Albertans? I would be a concerned voter if I found that my MLA did not support a measure that made the financial health of our provincial books clearer. That would be problematic for me as a voter. I'm sure it will be for other Albertans, too.

So I support this amendment, and I would hope that every MLA would take this opportunity to be responsible and to help the good people of Alberta understand the health of their provincial finances in a much simpler, clearer way with a very simple – a very simple – line item to have this, our cash position, indicated. As I said earlier, it's not a change in the accounting method; it's an addition to the current reporting method, not new numbers, simply a reconfiguration of existing data that is held by the ministry.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Any other hon. member wishing to speak? The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm going to rise briefly on this because I think it's worth talking about. We don't always agree with the Official Opposition, but I think this is actually a reasonable request. I would say to you and to them and to government members that I think this will actually help the discussion. For the ones on the government side: folks, our job here is to chew on you when you put a budget out and point out to the public where we think you could have done better and we would do better. I'll tell you that what's not productive – I know this from my past experience – is when you can't even agree on what the numbers are. Once you can agree on what the numbers are and have the bureaucrats that have all the data at their fingertips, then you can have an informed debate.

I'll tell you what's not productive and not good for government. Frankly, it's not good for opposition either. It's arguing over what the numbers are. We've done that in the past in this House, and frankly Albertans – I mean, there are people with a great deal of accounting expertise, and they get it, but not all Albertans are accountants. I know I'm not. When the argument is over what the numbers are, again, it's not in Albertans' best interests; it's not in the government's best interest.

Here's the thing about a consolidated cash balance sheet. It will be discussed whether you provide it or not. I just think it's going to be a more productive conversation if there's an agreement on what those numbers are. Then the government can trot out all the reasons why they think they did the right thing for the right reasons, and that's your job. If we agree, we probably won't say much, and if we disagree, we will trot out all the reasons why the government is wrong and you should have done something different. But at least that's a legitimate public debate that serves Albertans' purpose. Arguing what the numbers are doesn't make anybody look good. For that reason I think this is reasonable. I think it's actually in the government's interest, I think it's in the opposition's interest, and more importantly, because we all need to remember that we work for Albertans out there, I genuinely think this is in Albertans' interests.

For that reason, Madam Chair, I intend to support this. I don't think there's any risk to either the government or the opposition providing this. The one thing the last speaker said that I agree with is that the government's accountants have this information anyway. It's only a matter of consolidating numbers that they already have and printing a spreadsheet.

I would appeal to my hon. colleague the Finance minister to consider asking your government colleagues to support this. I think you're going to end up producing the numbers anyway. It's actually better for you if you can say, "I provided these numbers because we're running a transparent government" than having to provide them later, which you will, and having us say, "We dragged the guy to the altar. He had to provide these numbers." I think it actually makes you look better if you offer them up in the first place. I could see how you could say, "Well, I don't have to offer them up at all," but I think that if you actually look at the past history, if you don't offer them up in the first place, you'll probably end up offering them up anyway. So why not look good and be able to say, "We're transparent, and we offered up what the public wants?" For that reason I think it's reasonable to support this, and consequently that's just what I'll do.

11:30

The Chair: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to amendment A7? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Chair. You know, I guess that when I get up to speak, I always think back on my family and my responsibilities as a husband and as a father. I know that when I looked at this amendment, it made sense to me. I would agree with the hon. member in the PC caucus that I'm not an expert when it comes to understanding how budgets necessarily flow and doing line items. I know that one of the things that this job has done is expand my horizons in that area.

But I know that when I've looked at my income and my cash balances and my family budget over the last 30 years, an income statement was always a pretty important thing. It was something that helped my family to get a truer understanding of what we had as a family. What was our cash balance on hand? How much were we spending? How much were we taking in? Those were pretty important to us. I think that those principles that have allowed me to balance my family's budget are important for this government as well. It's important for any government. It doesn't really matter your political stripe.

I would speak in favour of this amendment, that we've got to perhaps change the way we do some of our reporting. Maybe we have to add a budget line in there, but it doesn't sound like it should be too burdensome. It sounds like there's lots of opportunity for us to make this better. You know, governments do need to show the people of Alberta where we stand fiscally and provide a cash statement, I believe. They need to be able to show us how much money is being spent, how much money is being brought in: does the government have a positive or does it have a negative cash balance?

I know, again, that in my family, when we needed to take a look at our finances, if we started to have a negative cash balance, we needed to start slowing down our spending. We needed to figure out where we were going to find the money that would accompany that. I think that while governments are dealing – and we would all agree – in the billions of dollars rather than just maybe, as in my budget, in the hundreds of dollars, you know, that's still an important concept and still an important idea.

I think this amendment speaks to this issue, that having a cash-adjusted balance reflects all of the spending decisions that this

government makes. By doing that, you start to understand the patterns, and you start to understand where you are and whether you can afford to spend that money or you need to start cutting back on your spending. If you don't, it's pretty hard to decide. If you don't have that cash-adjusted balance, it's really hard to decide where the money should go and whether you have the ability to spend that money.

This amendment, I believe, provides some transparency. We've heard that said already, and I can understand that. I think it provides the people of Alberta and the Minister of Finance with some accountability. I believe that Albertans are very practical people, and I think that if we take a look at the history of our province and the kinds of governments that they've chosen and that they've supported, they support governments that are practical in how they view the services that they provide for their people. I believe they have always supported governments that were open and honest and transparent with the monies that we entrust them with. We have always as Albertans supported fiscally responsible governments.

Conversely, we've also seen that the people of Alberta have withdrawn their support of governments that over a period of time have shown that they're not transparent with the spending of their money, that they're not fiscally responsible with the tax dollars that we give them, whether you were the United Farmers of Alberta, whether you were the Social Credit, whether you were the Progressive Conservatives. I guess we'll see with the new government, the NDP government, if you can continue to be fiscally responsible, if you can show the people where they stand financially, whether you'll maintain Albertans' support. That's for the future.

I think most Albertans believe that there's no reason to hide behind numbers. They want clarity. As a matter of fact, they demand clarity. The current system, the so-called consolidated balance, can sometimes leave out money in capital spending, and that can sometimes grow to be very large amounts of money: \$3 billion, \$6 billion. Sometimes it's very difficult to know just what the real balance is.

We've talked about creating a contingency fund. Well, if we don't know what the cash-adjusted balance is, how do we know what to put into the contingency fund? We've got various monetary instruments that we can put money into: a contingency fund, the heritage savings trust fund. We can put money towards debt reduction. All those are very important things that, as we take a look at this province, we need to consider. Yes, we've done a very poor job, I think, of setting money aside in a contingency fund and saving for our future with the heritage trust fund. I think many Albertans, as we look back over the last 20 or 30 years, would say that we could have done a better job for our children. If we don't have a true understanding of the cash-adjusted balance, it becomes much more difficult to be able to figure out where we put that money.

We're going to have somewhere around a \$50 billion debt. How much of the income that we bring in, how much of the revenue that we bring in as a government should be going to paying off that debt? We need to know what our real bottom line is. This government needs to know it just as much as I need to know that when I deal with my family income. How many times have we heard from various political parties of all political stripes across this country and across this world that after they've gained power and after they've opened up the books, there are some pretty big surprises as to the real status of what the budget is and where the country or the province or the municipality stands.

11:40

I think we heard that from this government when you first gained power. I think we heard it from the Liberals after they'd taken over

from the Conservatives nationally. I know that this is not something that is partisan. It's not something that is particularly political. It's dealing with numbers and realities of economics, that sometimes when you take over the books, if we haven't had a cash-adjusted balance, if we haven't had clarity, there can be some pretty big surprises, and of course those surprises are not without consequence. They can mean the difference between being able to have a health care system that can meet the needs of its people or not. So we need clarity, and would a cash-adjusted balance not have helped the government and the people of Alberta to make wise economic choices? Well, I think it would.

I believe that there are times when being transparent is perhaps one of the most important things that a government can do, and I know that in Alberta understanding the debt and the savings balance is something that our people, our Albertans, expect out of us. You know, the more I stand here, the more I realize that sometimes you can put a suit on the person, but you can't always change the person that's inside the suit. [interjections] I'm seeing something happen here that I am completely amazed at. I'm wondering if maybe we need to have a story on this today. Well, I'm not going to go there because I know that there are times when what happens in Vegas has got to stay in Vegas.

You know, I guess that when I look at this, I believe at the core of it that the people of Alberta want this. While I said that you can put a suit on the person but you can't always change the person, I know I've spent my days in my classroom at times wondering if I was droning on to myself and wondering if anything that I was saying to the kids was actually connecting dots for them and wondering if I was really having an impact or making an effect on the lives of my students.

You know, I guess I'll start to close my remarks with this. I really do believe that the people of Alberta are well served when any government and any Finance minister are transparent, when they can show us what our bottom line is, when they can show us what revenues we have coming in, when they can show us what outlays of expenditures we have, and more for the people of Alberta than for any political party. I believe that when we do that, it not only provides for a good government, but it provides for good results for the people of Alberta.

I would speak to this amendment. I would encourage this House to support it. I would encourage the members on the government benches to consider this amendment, to give it serious consideration, to consider supporting it because I think that it actually makes the bill better and will help the people of Alberta and, I guess, at the end of the day, the people of Canada.

So I would ask for your consideration for this amendment. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you. I'm suspicious. I know the opposition presents this as an innocuous addition, a small consideration for our budget. We have presented the budget. We presented the budget on October 27. The budget is presented on the basis of nationally accepted standards for accounting that our Auditor General has supported.

[Mr. Feehan in the chair]

In the past – and I wasn't here – former Finance minister Horner presented a budget in three parts. He presented the operational part of the budget, the capital part of the budget, and the SUCH sector, the schools and hospitals and colleges, and that ran afoul with the Auditor General. The Auditor General did not like that and argued vociferously that it should be a consolidated approach.

Former Finance minister Robin Campbell last March presented a consolidated budget. This government has continued what former Finance minister Campbell did, and we presented our budget on the same basis as his budget. I'm suspicious because the last speaker talked about how we were leaving capital spending out. Nothing could be further from the truth, which makes me think that this seemingly innocuous, small amendment really is just hiding behind something else that the Wildrose wants to push, that no other government in Canada does, which is cash-based accounting. We will not do that here. We're going to follow what all governments, both subsovereign and the federal government, do with regard to accounting. We're going to use nationally accepted standards for accounting and not something that is presented as – you know, it will make things clear. It is clear already.

Last week I was in Toronto talking to economists, and they were complementing the government of Alberta and the people in the room, and it wasn't my work. They were complementing the people in administration of the government of Alberta, and they were saying: "This budget is clear. We know what you're doing. We understand your approach, and you should be very proud." The only person not happy with our approach, it would seem, is across the aisle, and that person has been pushing for a cash-based accounting system since we started here in May. We will not do that. We will follow what's nationally accepted, what our Auditor General requests of us, and what Robin Campbell before me provided. That's what we'll do. We've done it. It's clear. It's going forward like that.

I will not support the amendment.

The Deputy Chair: Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I thank the Minister of Finance, if I'm not mistaken, the first member of the government's side to participate in debate this morning. Members on this side of the House have been here to work. I will not call the member out by name, but I did see someone snoozing over there pretty recently, but I'm very happy to be here to debate Bill 4 and the amendment.

Point of Order Decorum

Mr. Mason: Point of order, Mr. Chairman. It is completely unacceptable for the hon. member to make statements like that unattributed. I mean, you just don't do that in this place.

The Deputy Chair: Government House Leader, do you have a citation for your point of order?

Mr. Mason: Standing Order 23(h), (i), and (j).

The Deputy Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Mr. Chair, if the Government House Leader would like me to cite the member who was snoozing or very visibly appearing to be snoozing laying back in their chair, I can do so, but I feel better not to call that one out. The Government House Leader himself in the media has misleadingly said that members on this side didn't want to come to work, effectively the same accusation – the same accusation – and he felt that that was reasonable to do to the media. They have said so in the House, misleading people.

11:50

We were here until 1:30 in the morning representing our own constituents, working hard, while none of those members were standing up, working hard. We were here at 9. We've been debating since 9. Finally, a member of the government has stood up to

debate. I think it was a fair comment, and the Government House Leader is not prepared to take as good as he gives. He has been accusing members on this side of the House of the exact same thing, except we actually found someone snoozing in the House. I don't think that the Government House Leader has any argument. This is not a point of order. We are saying a much toned-down version of the same that he has been saying.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you. I'd just like to take a moment to use this opportunity to remind everyone in the House, on both sides, that decorum in the House is quite important to the proceedings and that everyone should stick to the topics of the debate and refrain from making comments about individual members' behaviour or looks or presence in the House.

I'd like to leave the point of order at that point and proceed on with the debate.

Debate Continued

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I was thanking the Minister of Finance for the first part of the government's contribution to the debate since we began, at 9 a.m. I think that it is good to have members of the government finally participating in the debate that has been taking place for the last three hours. We are nearing the end of our morning session here. I had been led to believe that morning sessions would lead to the end of night sessions, but we all have some bags under our eyes because we were here till 1:30 a.m., debating. But that is another point.

The Minister of Finance's comments are not addressing the issue. The Minister of Finance is arguing that this amendment is somehow going to change the entire accounting structure of the government. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Minister of Finance went on at some length about accrual accounting and the Auditor General and that they wanted to stay with their current accounting practices, practices adopted by the former government. The minister is most likely greatly confused when he talks about this amendment changing the accounting of the government.

Now, let me read the amendment for the members opposite, for their clarity. We would amend schedule 1 in section 4 by adding the following after subsection (3): "The consolidated fiscal plan must clearly state a projected consolidated cash balance for each fiscal year included in the plan." The wording is clear. The consolidated balance must clearly state a projected cash balance. This amendment does not say, imply, or in any way construe that the government must change the accounting practices of the government. This amendment requires the minister to ask his department's officials twice a year, once in the budget and once in the government's annual report, to provide a table that . . .

The Deputy Chair: Hon. member, I am sorry. I must interrupt. It is now 11:55. It is time for us to have a report from the Committee of the Whole. We will ask the Member for Banff-Cochrane to report on that.

[Mr. Feehan in the chair]

The Acting Speaker: The Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Mr. Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 4. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Acting Speaker: The Member for Banff-Cochrane has read the report. It's not debatable. I ask for a vote. Does the Assembly concur with the report? If so, say aye.

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Acting Speaker: Those opposed? So ordered.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I would move that we adjourn until 1:30.

[The Assembly adjourned at 11:56 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday afternoon, December 3, 2015

Day 28

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

First Session

Wanner, Hon. Robert E., Medicine Hat (ND), Speaker
Jabbour, Deborah C., Peace River (ND), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Feehan, Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (ND), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Ceci, Hon. Joe, Calgary-Fort (ND)	Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (ND)
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Kleinstuber, Jamie, Calgary-Northern Hills (ND)	Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND)
Larivee, Hon. Danielle, Lesser Slave Lake (ND)	Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Littlewood, Jessica, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (ND)	Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)
Loewen, Todd, Grande Prairie-Smoky (W)	
Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (ND)	
Luff, Robyn, Calgary-East (ND)	
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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Thursday, December 3, 2015

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Leader of the third party, I understand that you have some visitors.

Mr. McIver: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House a former colleague and his wife, who are visiting here today. Dave Quest was a member in this House for Strathcona-Sherwood Park from 2008-2015. He also served as Associate Minister of Seniors during his time at the Legislature. His wife, Fiona Beland-Quest, is also dedicated to serving the public. She is a Strathcona county councillor who has a long record of community involvement in Sherwood Park. My guests are seated in your gallery, and I ask them to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The opposition leader.

Mr. Jean: Thank you. I'd just like to introduce Ken and Betty Epp. Ken Epp, as many people know, served with distinction with the Conservative Party of Canada in the federal government for some years. I believe they are sitting in the Speaker's gallery. With your permission, Mr. Speaker, I would ask that they rise and receive the warm, friendly reception that they're due from this House.

Thank you.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Are there any school groups to be introduced today? Seeing none, the hon. Member for Peace River.

Ms Jabbour: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hon. members, today I want to recognize a group of remarkable individuals in the galleries who are truly key to our democratic process in Alberta, our constituency assistants. They are the first point of contact with us for our constituents, they help maintain a nonpartisan presence, and they put up with a heck of a lot on our behalf, especially this past week. We want to say thank you to all of them. This evening they're here for a winter seminar, and tonight we're having a recognition dinner. I especially want to also recognize my own constituency assistant, Susan Thompson, who is among them, from Peace River. They're from every part of the province. If they could all rise, and can we give them the traditional warm welcome of the House. [applause]

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members. I'm very proud of you, that you did that for all of these good people.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Mr. Connolly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my absolute honour to rise today and introduce to you and through you distinguished members of our community who have contributed as advocates of human rights on indigenous, LGBTQ, and immigrant issues: Gurcharan S. Bhatia, former citizenship judge, recipient of the Order of Canada and founder of Daughters Day; Sonia Bitar, former citizenship judge and executive director of Changing Together: A

Centre for Immigrant Women; Robert Philp, QC, chief commissioner of the Alberta Human Rights Commission; Muriel Stanley Venne, president and founder of the Institute for the Advancement of Aboriginal Women and recipient of the Order of Canada; and Dr. Kristopher Wells, director of the Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services at the University of Alberta. I'll ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my great honour and pleasure to introduce to you and to the House several distinguished men and women who've used art and journalism to advance human rights for marginalized people in society. I'll ask them each to stand as I mention their names: Kristina de Guzman, an artist who uses music and art as common ground to connect people from diverse backgrounds; Arnim Joop, publisher of community newspapers which cover stories of diverse ethnic communities in Edmonton and across Alberta; Trina Joshi, a journalist who co-organized the first public screening of *India's Daughter*, a controversial documentary on gender rights in Canada; and finally, Judy Piercey, former managing director of CBC Edmonton and northern Alberta. Her work on sexual violence against children created significant impacts. I request all now to receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

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

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of introductions here this afternoon. I'll start by rising to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a group of people who have worked hard to promote justice for all, using law and labour relations. They're here to commemorate international Human Rights Day, which is coming up next week. I'll ask that they please stand as I read their names: Carrie-Lynn Rusznak, vice-president of the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees and chair of AUPE Human Rights Committee; Susan Slade, vice-president of the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees and chair of the AUPE Women's Committee, which supports women to realize their leadership potential; Matthew A. Woodley, a legal expert in constitutional law and a teacher at MacEwan University; and Doug Stollery, a human rights lawyer with more than 30 years of experience, best known for progressing the rights of people marginalized due to their sexual orientation. I ask them all to please rise and receive the traditional and very well-deserved warm welcome of the Legislative Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you – and it's a little bit redundant because they all stood already; I didn't realize that was going to happen – my two assistants from the St. Paul constituency office, Monica de Bruyn Kops and Nancy Pratch-Wiebe. If they'd both rise and receive the warm welcome of the House, please.

The Speaker: Yes. Hon. members, if there are some other members, in recognition of the time – on the notes that I've prepared, I will be contacting each of you. But if that's the situation, I think it would be appropriate that we accept the introduction by the Member for Peace River. Agreed?

The hon. Member for Calgary-North West.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly some powerful voices from Edmonton's multicultural communities. With us are Vivian Abboud, a public servant and a strong voice for immigrant women, especially for the Lebanese community; also, Lindsay Daniller, the director of community initiatives and development at Reach Edmonton; Yazmin Juarez and Sergio Olivares from Memoria Viva Society, which works closely with Latin American communities to raise awareness on human rights issues; Clarizze Truscott, a foreign workers and migrants advocate for 15 years and the president of Kabisig Society of Fort Saskatchewan; Renée Vaugeois, the executive director of the John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights, dedicated to bringing social equality; and Leslie Weigl, a public educator and director of the U of A's International House and recipient of the 2015 daughter of the year award. I ask them to rise and accept the warm wishes and welcome of this Assembly.

1:40

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Minister of Education and Minister of Culture and Tourism.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my great pleasure to rise today and introduce to you and through you to the members six Albertans, our 2015 Stars of Alberta volunteer award recipients. I'd like them to rise as I introduce them. Number one is Ravina Anand of Edmonton. She's been a committed volunteer since the age of 12, including at Big Brothers Big Sisters of Hope Mission. Mohit Kumar was instrumental in setting up a program called water wings and in EXCEL, assisting elementary students with their school work. Deanna Lennox from Fort Saskatchewan, from the RCMP, now has an amazing program using horses to help people with posttraumatic stress disorder. I have Roberta Rehill from Hanna, who has contributed many thousands of volunteer hours to organizations like the Hanna Front Row Centre Arts Council, performing arts association, and so forth. Dawning Boston from Edmonton is a driver extraordinaire working through the helping hands seniors association and just does an unbelievable amount. Dwayne Hlady from Vegreville is an important senior citizens volunteer as well, driving and helping. I would like everyone to please recognize these individuals today. They work tirelessly to make all of our communities a better place.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you two proud Albertans who have supported and believed in me through five trying years of Alberta politics. They reside in my heart and have been instrumental in almost every major life decision that I have made, including the best decision of all, coming to Canada. Santhi is my strong and loving wife. She was a star in academics and sports, and she earned a bachelor's degree in architecture. She's also a survivor of the Bhopal industrial gas leak tragedy. When Santhi and I first came to Canada, she wanted a return ticket. That's right. She survived the largest industrial disaster in the history of the world, but she didn't know if she could get through the Alberta winter. Now we know that we can get through anything.

Himanish, my son, was a young socialist in high school, who, like the opposite members, expected a lot of freebies from the world. But when he worked in the oil sands and received his first paycheck and saw all the tax deductions, his approach to life changed, and he quickly joined me on the right side of the table.

Himanish was recently accepted to med school in Australia. He leaves home next month, and we'll miss him terribly, but I'm proud to say that he has made a promise to Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor and will return to Alberta after his studies conclude. At least, he'd better.

Santhi and Himanish are here today to show their support for Alberta's farmers and ranchers in their fight against Bill 6. In 2008, Mr. Speaker, the Calgary Zoo had two pandas. Well, today in the House we have done one better. I ask that my family stand to receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to the members of this Assembly one of the most important people in my life, my best friend, my husband, Kent Pitt. When we first discussed that I was going to be running to become the next MLA, I believe his first response was actually considered unparliamentary in this House. Despite his initial lack of enthusiasm, he's been such an amazing support and such an amazing dad. During all this excitement Kent managed to complete his final tests and training to become a journeyman electrician. He is proof that it's never too late to follow your career goals. I'm so grateful for Kent and our two wonderful children, and as I'm sure many other members would agree, I would not be here without their support. He is seated in your gallery. I will ask him to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you seven special guests today. These individuals are members of a volunteer-run charity, the Dil Walk Foundation, which is committed to increasing the awareness of heart diseases. Their work focuses on the south Asian population, which studies show is at a much greater risk for heart attacks and cardiovascular diseases. I also have had the honour of attending their very successful fundraiser two weeks ago. I commend their efforts and work and would like to introduce these guests now. Dr. Anmol Kapoor, Mrs. Raman Kapoor, Mr. Mandeep Duggal, Kuldeep Nahal, Jocelyne Lamoureux. Also in attendance are two other guests, Roop Rai and Saby Paul, but the Member for Peace River already introduced them. They are my constituency staff, so I will not introduce them. Now I ask all my guests to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to introduce to you and to all members of the Assembly a distinguished friend of mine, Mr. Nima Dorjee, currently the vice-president of the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of Alberta. Born in India in a Tibetan refugee camp, Mr. Dorjee came to Canada and has had a distinguished life, including previously serving as the president of the University of Calgary Students' Union. He is also the president of the Project Tibet Society, which is an entirely volunteer-run organization that will help up to 400 refugees from Tibet come to Alberta to resettle. I ask that Nima please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have two sets of introductions. I am pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly the construction crew of a favourite part of the Legislative Assembly for visitors, staff, and members alike: the people who did the Lego Legislature. Representing the building crew in the gallery here today are project managers Chris Gray and John Koob and members of the building crew Nadine Leenders and Michel Magnan.

I also would like to recognize the following guests. They, like me, have a passion for cycling, and we'd love to see Members of the Legislative Assembly join them on their rides Wednesday evenings in the river valley or in training rides for the MS Leduc and Beaumont rides. I would like to recognize Al Carlson, Dennis Miller, Dan Boonstra, and Greg Pommen. I'll ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-South East.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I'd like to introduce to you and through you the elected body of the Alberta College of Paramedics. They consist of Ian McEwan, president; Kieran Moore, vice-president; Dusty Schlitter, treasurer; Ted Langford, public member; Enzo Della Rocca, councillor; Jon Jaekel, councillor; and Tyler Douglas, councillor. These people not only serve on the front line and in other areas, but they dedicate so much of their private time to make EMS better. I have nothing but great respect for them and ask them to please rise and receive the warm welcome of the House.

1:50

Oral Question Period

Farm and Ranch Worker Legislation

Mr. Jean: I want to welcome the Premier back. She has been away in Paris not making news, but she is coming back to a mess of her own making. Now, the Premier says that all these good people are mad about Bill 6 because of misinformation put out by government officials. However, the same misinformation was given to us as the Wildrose and reporters in private briefings, and of course the same misinformation appeared in government information sheets and government websites. Is it just possible that the information given was correct but that the Premier just got this bill all wrong?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very, very proud that when passed this fall this bill will ensure that paid farm workers in Alberta will finally enjoy the protections enjoyed by every other farm worker in the country. What this bill will do, and the only thing that this bill will do as of January 1, is that it will ensure that if somebody is seriously injured while working as a paid farm worker, they will not lose their house and their families will not go hungry because they will be entitled to compensation, as is the case in almost every other jurisdiction in the country.

Mr. Jean: I'm going to repeat a point because I think the Premier needs to hear it. Family farms are sophisticated operations. They monitor commodity prices and markets and scientific developments. They hire accountants to structure their farms to minimize their tax bills. They put family members on the payroll and actually give them T4s because that's the smart thing to do. That's just one of the many reasons why the government's amendments will not help at all. The Premier needs to stop this bill. When will the Premier admit that this government doesn't know anything about farming and ranching and kill Bill 6?

Ms Notley: Interestingly, Mr. Speaker, I grew up in a farming community, and I do understand farming and ranching. You know one of the things I also understand? I also understand what it means when a person is injured when working on a farm or ranch and they have no compensation and they are permanently injured for the rest of their life and they have no ability to make a living. Then we say: "I'm sorry. This is just a thing about Alberta. You're going to have to be on welfare for the rest of your life because the government doesn't care about protecting vulnerable paid farm workers." Farms exist very well in other provinces that have this kind of protection, and they will here, too.

Mr. Jean: It's actually about consultation and not doing any. The government's town halls on this bill have been an absolute joke. The crowds get bigger; the answers get far less clear. Farmers and ranchers tell the government to stop. The government is deaf. Today we had the largest of three rallies on the steps. Each has been larger than the one before. If the government doesn't relent, they will get bigger. I know the Premier's top advisers are telling her to stay strong, to be tough. It's a mistake. It's bad for Alberta. It's bad for your caucus. Will the Premier do the right thing, the smart thing, and relent and kill Bill 6?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As has been the plan all along with Bill 6, once the bill is passed and farm workers, vulnerable paid farm workers, have their health and safety protected and their right to compensation protected, we will engage in fulsome consultations both before regulations are drafted and after regulations are drafted on the application of the Employment Standards Code and the Labour Relations Code and the specifics of the occupational health and safety legislation. That's the way you move legislation forward. I look forward to working with those farmers to talk about how this will impact them. Even if they're angry, that's fine. We will consult until we reach a consensus on how those work.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.
Her Majesty's Official Opposition leader.

Mr. Jean: So it's clear that NDP consultation is ramming legislation people don't want down their throats without talking to them about it first. Leaders accept responsibility. They step up when they're wrong, and they admit their mistakes. Businesses say that minimum wage is hurting their bottom lines. The Premier ignores them. The energy sector says that it's being crushed by the uncertainty of the royalty review. The Premier doesn't care. Now farmers and ranchers say that they're very worried, and the Premier tells everyone that it's not her fault. This is a failure of leadership. When is the Premier going to stop blaming others and accept the blame for her government's out-of-touch policies for Alberta?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, I will say that I take full responsibility for the confusion that exists around that. As the Premier it does ultimately rest with me, but I also as the Premier have to think about the 177 farm workers who are paid who will be hospitalized between January 1 and April 1 who will not receive any compensation if we do not move forward on this legislation. Ultimately, that's what I think about when I go to bed at night. Those are the people that this government will act to protect, and we will do so while protecting the integrity of family farms.

Mr. Jean: Alberta has one of the best farm safety records in the country. The Premier's problem is that she has lost the trust of

Albertans. That's the truth of it. The Premier asks farmers and ranchers to trust her. Well, she has done absolutely nothing to earn that trust of hard-working Albertans. She has not consulted on this bill. Her government's consultation meetings are a joke. Now we learn that the four crop commissions proactively offered to help this government, but this Premier ignored them. The Premier thinks that she knows better than farmers and ranchers. Her arrogance is shameful. Why won't the Premier listen to Albertans and kill Bill 6?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I said, you know, there were on average 17 paid farm workers who die in Alberta every year. Their families receive no compensation because we do not provide workers' compensation. That will change January 1. Interestingly, in B.C. when these rules were introduced, the farm fatality rate was reduced by 68 per cent, the farm injury rate was reduced by 52 per cent, the serious injury rate was reduced by 41 per cent. That's what happened when these rules were introduced in B.C., and – you know what? – they still have farms in B.C. That is the way we are going to go here in Alberta.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After all of those changes in B.C. Alberta still has a better record of safety for farmers.

The Premier seems totally unwilling to listen to Albertans. That's what it's about. She even seems unwilling to listen to her cabinet and her caucus. We see her rural caucus members walking around with hand-dog faces all over this place. We know the ag minister has told farmers that he is recommending that the Premier pull this bill. We can see the pained looks of ministers when we read farmers' letters, thousands of them. It's not too late for the Premier. She could do the right thing. It's not too late for her to show real leadership.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Ms Notley: Well, you know, it's interesting, Mr. Speaker, that the member opposite is able to talk about the comparative injury rates between B.C. and Alberta because – you know what? – the stats aren't collected in Alberta because these people are not protected in Alberta. So once again the member opposite has just made it up, much like he made up everything else in his preamble.

The fact of the matter is that this caucus is committed to moving forward, protecting vulnerable paid farm workers, and working together with farmers on the application of the other parts of this bill over time.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Now the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Public Education Collective Bargaining Legislation

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We just saw at the rally against Bill 6 how well legislation without consultation goes. Now the NDP government is trying to pull the wool over the eyes of another group of Albertans. The Alberta School Boards Association has said clearly that they want the minister to stop the bill from being "rushed through the Legislature." It's time to take off the government's training wheels. These bad bills and lack of consultation are hurting people on the front lines. When will this government realize that they need to listen to those impacted by

legislation, and when will the Minister of Education slow down . . .

2:00

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. It's very important at this juncture that we put together a coherent framework to negotiate collective bargaining with the teachers in the province of Alberta. From the time that I started as the Minister of Education, we knew that this was very important. Over a period of many months we did consultations with everybody. I think the member is confusing consultation with people sometimes having concerns. We're consulting. We're working with those concerns now. We have been in the past, we will be in the future, and we will build a framework that we can use to do good bargaining.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Edmonton public school board, the Calgary board of education, the Golden Hills school division, the Fort McMurray Catholic school board, and many more boards across the province have expressed concerns about the time provided for consultation on this bill. Wildrose is doing something that will likely seem revolutionary to the NDP; we are reaching out to the school boards and consulting with them. To the minister: can you please provide me with a single board who has given you sign-off on your rushed bill?

Mr. Eggen: Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, I tabled yesterday the process that we used for consultation, and I think the member saw that clearly. It's very important not to misrepresent the consultation that we did do. People have concerns, and that is a normal process that we are working through, but to suggest that we didn't consult is a misrepresentation of reality. I think this member could use maybe a better dose of reality to think this through properly.

The Speaker: Your first supplemental? Second supplemental. It was a late night.

Mr. Smith: Yes. I agree.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The timeline for passing Bill 8 is too fast for meaningful consultation. We've also seen what happens when school board negotiations go awry. It impacts students and learning. The minister knows that he could direct school boards and the ATA to wait on starting negotiations until this bill has had more time for real consultation. Why won't this minister – and here's a novel thought – slow down on ramming through Bill 8 and send this bill to committee for real review and consultation?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. It's very important for everyone to understand that by December 31, if we do not have a framework in place, then individual school boards can start to negotiate, and you end up with the same circumstances that you had for the last 15 years, with people negotiating here, there, and everywhere. This opposition is very concerned about – and I am, too – making sure that we control costs. The best way we can do it is to have the funder at the table to negotiate wages at a provincial level.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Farm and Ranch Worker Legislation

(continued)

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since I know that the Premier brought me back a new T-shirt, I'm going to appeal to her higher aspirations. We know this government cares about farm and ranch safety. We only want the government to realize that farmers and ranchers also care about farm safety for themselves, their children, and their employees. To the Premier: could we just do what's right for the people that feed us? Will you demonstrate the patience and leadership that Albertans expect and at least put Bill 6 on pause until farmers and ranchers feel heard?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. By moving forward with the bill on January 1, the fundamental duty of care and the right to receive WCB if you are a paid farm worker will apply. The details around the application of the Employment Standards Code, the details around OH and S, the details around the Labour Relations Code will all be worked out through regulation, through consultation, extensive consultation with the very farmers and ranchers that you're talking about. Nothing will go forward until that has been done. So, effectively, we're not moving ahead on all the things . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, I often disagree with the Premier, but I hope, at the end of the day, our goal is the same, safe farmers and ranchers and their families and employees. Respectfully, I listened to her answer, and the farmers and ranchers don't agree. We work for them. They're Albertans. I'm just saying: can we not let the voice of reason rule and let them have their say before you forge ahead? It seems just reasonable.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, as I said, there will be a multitude of opportunities for farmers and ranchers to have their say on the vast majority of this, but while that goes on, say between January 1 and April 1, over 170 paid farm workers will end up in the hospital. They will have no entitlement to workers' compensation, they will have no ability to refuse unsafe work, and roughly seven or eight people will die, and their families will get no compensation. So we do not need to delay that part of the bill, and I will not delay that part of the bill. But we will work very closely with farmers and with ranchers to negotiate the remainder of the regulations, which will not . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, I will continue to try to give the Premier all the credit that I can, but here's the thing. Your government has admitted the communication was botched. You've said that we need amendments. When you do put the legislation in place, certain things become permanent that can't be changed without coming back with more legislation. All the more reason to talk to farmers and ranchers before you put the regulations in place. I'll ask a third time. Will you please listen to the people that we work for, that feed us, and talk to them before you make it permanent?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I've said before and will continue to say, there are a number of different regulations that need to be fully thought out and discussed and negotiated with farmers so that we develop a common-sense

approach to the application of the Employment Standards Code, the application of specific OH and S standards, and the application of the Labour Relations Code. That is what we've always intended to do, to engage in a common-sense discussion about those things, and we will do that. But because it's involved and because it's complicated and because it involves a great deal of consultation, it is going to take a while, and we're not going to let those injured and killed workers suffer while that happens.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Now, I care about farm safety, and I know the government does, too, but how legislation is passed matters as much as what is passed. *Webster's* dictionary defines consultation as seeking information or advice from someone with expertise in a particular area. Now, given that there was yet another big rally on the steps of the Legislature today, it's pretty clear that the experts from Alberta family farms don't feel particularly well consulted, and the government has the opportunity to make it right. To the Premier: will you withdraw Bill 6 and start again with real, honest consultation?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is a fabulous opportunity to make my case over and over, so this is great. What we will do is that on January 1 we will make sure that paid farm workers have the legal right to refuse unsafe work, and we will make sure that paid farm workers who are injured will receive compensation, and we will make sure that for paid farm workers who die, their family will receive compensation. In the meantime, while that is happening, we will engage in fulsome consultations, both before the regulations are drafted and after the regulations are drafted, with everybody so that everybody's issues are acknowledged, the farm . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

First supplemental.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Consultation after the fact isn't consulting; it's telling. I'm an MLA from a big city, and I've heard from dozens of my constituents in Calgary-Elbow. They tell me that they are all for farm safety, but they don't like Bill 6. I am here to tell rural Alberta that urban Alberta has got your back. Now, if I'm hearing from people in inner-city Calgary, I can't even begin to imagine what the backbench rural MLAs are hearing from their constituents. To the Premier: why have none of your . . .

2:10

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Ms Notley: Well, I'm not entirely sure what the question is. Nonetheless, what we know is that workers' compensation . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Madam Premier, please proceed.

Ms Notley: What we know is that workers' compensation has been in play for almost a hundred years, and it has provided compensation and benefits to the families of injured workers and to injured workers when they are injured at their workplace. For almost a hundred years that has not applied to vulnerable paid farm workers in Alberta, mostly only in Alberta. For about 40 years vulnerable paid farm workers in Alberta have been the only farm workers and the only workers in all of Canada who . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker, there was a huge convoy in Lethbridge today and the same in Okotoks and Red Deer yesterday, and I don't need to tell you that family farmers in Alberta are obviously not happy. Now, the NDP doesn't have many veteran MLAs over there, but there are a few, and when they were in opposition, they knew when it was time for the government to step back, seek input, and start again. They knew that any bill that requires extensive amendments is not a good bill. To the Premier: given how badly this has been handled, do you feel your government has earned the right to pass Bill 6?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, when I think about the roughly 170 people who will be hospitalized in the next three months who won't enjoy workers' compensation benefits if we don't act, I absolutely believe we have the right, and we have the obligation.

Environmental Policies

Mr. Westhead: Mr. Speaker, the government's climate change policies put a price on pollution, but my constituents in Banff-Cochrane want to know that this will be effective. Communities like Banff and Canmore also know that co-operation in investment supported by GreenTRIP funding on regional transit is one of the best ways to reduce our impact on the environment. To the Minister of Infrastructure and of Transportation: what kind of infrastructure supports are we providing to control greenhouse gas emissions on public transit?

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, hon. member, for the question. One of the key priorities of our government, Mr. Speaker, is public transit. I'm pleased to say that we've set aside a significant amount of money in the capital plan for an extension to the GreenTRIP program. There is going to be a third call for applications from municipalities as well as support for municipal water, waste water, and so on. I think there are going to be some exciting new programs as well as we implement our climate change initiative to enable Albertans to reduce their carbon imprint.

Mr. Westhead: Well, thank you, Minister. I'm looking forward to those programs.

Mr. Speaker, given that we are addressing climate change to protect our shrinking glaciers, to the same minister: what are we doing to support better water management in our communities?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our government understands the importance of clean water . . .

Mr. Fildebrandt: Go easy on him, Brian.

Mr. Mason: . . . public health, and healthy waste-water programs for the province, and that's why I was pleased to announce our government's \$170 million increase to the water for life program and the Alberta municipal water/waste-water program. They are cost sharing with municipalities in order to ensure that all Albertans have access to clean, safe drinking water and safe waste-water systems.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, could you desist from using first names in the House. I'd appreciate that. Thank you.

Please proceed.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the important role that Albertans play in all communities in supporting the sustainability of our province, to the same minister: how will these programs affect and improve the lives of rural Albertans?

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Rural Alberta is a critical part of our province, and the government is pleased to support rural Alberta with municipal infrastructure that allows sustainable growth. That's why we've made investments in the priorities that matter to rural Albertans. We're going to continue our grant program so that communities are able to access them. For example, our water and waste-water grant programs operate on a 75 per cent government cost-shared basis for municipalities with populations under 1,000 people. It ensures that rural communities are able to take advantage of these important programs.

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

Farm and Ranch Worker Legislation (continued)

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, it is my hope today to be able to represent the concerned faces of our farming brothers and sisters. It's important to note that Bill 6 is not only going after the farmer's pocketbook; it's going after what farmers love to do. It's going after their heart, their passion, and their way of life. That's what this government doesn't seem to understand. This is why they will never, never, never give up. It's not easy to give up on your passion because it takes a piece of your heart with it. On behalf of my farming brothers and sisters I humbly ask: please, stop Bill 6.

The Speaker: The Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. On Friday, Monday, Tuesday, and today I have been there listening to the pain and anxiety and stress from the misunderstandings of what Bill 6 is about. When I tell them that it's very small, that it's about protecting and compensating those paid workers, that we will protect the farming way of life, then they're good with it. I'm so thankful to bring that information back.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the members opposite have rallied in the past for issues that they have felt passionate about – and I respect them for that. It's their right to do it. It's a democratic society. I ask my colleagues to think about how the farmers and ranchers outside feel, hoping that you will listen, as you hoped when you rallied, that someone would take your concerns seriously. Will you crush their hopes now, or will you stop Bill 6?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. As the hon. Minister of Education said, consultation is about listening and about hearing those concerns. You know what? We've been listening, and we hear those concerns, and we're working with those concerns. We're committed to continuing to work with farmers to ensure that we protect their way of life so they can have their kids on the farm, can live that way of life, can work with their neighbours, and can do all the things they still want to do.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I think you have a second supplemental question.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The number of Albertans standing against this bill grows by the day. In fact, it could turn out to be the largest movement against the government in Alberta's history. Given that we've seen rallies in every corner of the province, from Grande Prairie to Medicine Hat, and given that we've seen protests numbering in the thousands, including the one right in front of the steps of this building, to the minister: will you take the only option left to you and stop Bill 6? For the sake of farmers please do the right thing.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. I've been talking with many farmers, and all of my colleagues, who represent over 11,000 farms in this province, have been listening to our members and bringing forward those concerns to this team. We will recognize that farming is a way of life. We will protect that. When I go to my partner's family farm, I'll be out there to help build the fence. I'll be there with their nieces and nephews riding the horses, and I'll be at 4-H with my daughter in the future.

Emergency Medical Services

Mr. Fraser: Alberta has the distinction of having one of the best emergency medical services in the country. Over the years other jurisdictions have looked to cities like Calgary and Edmonton and their best practices to develop and enhance their own emergency medical services. It's not the size of the ambulance or how good the ambulance looks or how the uniforms look or how good the siren sounds that determines how good an EMS is. It's what's inside the ambulance. It's the paramedics, the EMTs, and the EMRs that determine how good the service is. In Alberta we have the best-educated and -trained professionals, and that's why the service has been so good.

2:20

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. Your time is gone.
Is there a response? The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: I want to thank the hon. member for his many years of service as a front-line first responder. I also want to thank him for the continuous leadership that he shows. I enjoyed a meeting this morning with the hon. member and with the College of Paramedics to discuss ways that we can expedite their ability to serve in the most acute ways. In the spring I will be bringing forward Health Professions Act amendments to make sure that we can include paramedics as well.

Mr. Fraser: Thanks, Minister, and thanks again for your generosity today.

Minister, we've heard a lot about PTSD, and we see more reporting since the bill passed in 2012. Given the fact that paramedics deal with heartbreaking circumstances, physical and mental, and they're particularly susceptible to PTSD themselves, Minister, would you consider putting a paramedic on the mental health review to get a better perspective of front-line and prehospital care for all Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. I think that it's a very good proposal. The mental health review is actually just wrapping up their process. We wanted to make sure that it was completed by the end of this year. I think it would be most appropriate, though, when the recommendations are complete, to get feedback from the various

colleges and organizations. Certainly, we'll be happy to have a dialogue around their feedback around that piece moving forward.

Mr. Fraser: To the same minister: given the fact that EMS plays a vital role in our community, having one foot in health care and one foot in public safety, and given the fact that the province has experienced unprecedented growth and that with the poor economy history tells us that EMS call volumes will rise, Minister, will you commit to following through with our former Progressive Conservative government's commitment to increase funding for desperately needed EMS infrastructure and operational needs?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. We are certainly bringing forward a variety of ways to make sure that we spend the \$4.4 billion allocated toward capital needs in a thoughtful way that's evidence based and driven by where the most acute pressures are in the province as well as through the various systems that we serve. We will look forward to bringing further updates in a timely fashion.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Physician Service Contracts

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The culture of doctor bullying and intimidation is alive and well at Alberta Health Services. It's sickening. The Premier once called for doctor intimidation to be part of the health inquiry. Quote: patients who suffered as a result of their doctor feeling they could not advocate for their health and safety will continue to suffer. End quote. The NDP used to rail against doctors being muzzled. Now they call it nothing but an "HR situation." Hypocritical. Why is the Health minister now letting ongoing bullying of doctors by Alberta Health Services go unchecked?

Ms Hoffman: I have to say how disappointed I am that this hon. member continues to bring up in this House a very personal situation involving an employee and an employer. I think that it is most inappropriate, Mr. Speaker. If she wants to discuss this, there are certainly ways to do that in a professional and appropriate manner. In this House is not one of them.

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, our doctor, Dr. Kyne, was fired for sticking up for the people of Airdrie. The NDP used to stick up for front-line workers. Now they stick up for bureaucrats at Alberta Health Services. Given that we all know Dr. Kyne was doing his job as a relentless advocate fighting for a 24-hour urgent health care centre and given that we know that Alberta Health Services and this NDP government are steadfast against the project, why can't the minister clearly see that this was nothing but revenge against a doctor fighting for his patients?

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I had nothing to do with this situation. My department had nothing to do with this situation. If the hon. member wants to have an appropriate conversation about what is actually legally allowed to be talked about – of course, everyone deserves rights to privacy and protection of information. I'm going to respect the law. I'm going to respect employees and employers, and I wish the hon. member would do the same.

Mrs. Pitt: Mr. Speaker, this isn't the change that Albertans wanted. It's just more of the same from a broken, out-of-touch government. Given that we know that the Health Quality Council clearly laid out in its report that doctors feel constrained in their ability to stick up for

their patients and seeing that this Premier once called for a public inquiry around the culture of intimidation in our health care system, does the minister think that the Premier was wrong then, or is she just happier to stick up for bureaucrats at Alberta Health Services?

Ms Hoffman: I will stick up for the protection of privacy of employment contracts and privacy of information. When it comes to making sure that we address the workplace culture, we certainly have made a number of efforts in that way. I'd say number one was making sure that we had stable health care funding as opposed to proposing cuts of billions of dollars for front-line services, nurses, teachers, doctors. Give me a break, Mr. Speaker. I've had enough.

Coal-fired Electric Power Plant Retirement

Mr. Orr: The energy sector is vital to Alberta's economy. Coal has been a crucial part of that sector, but now with an accelerated shutdown of coal-fired operations 7,000 more Albertans will be out of a job. They know that our province is moving away from coal-fired power, but to say that these 7,000 Albertans will easily find a new job is laughable. To the minister of jobs, skills, and training: why is this government waging war against these 7,000 employees in a year when 65,000 jobs have already been lost?

The Speaker: The minister of economic development.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The premise of the hon. member's question is patently false. First of all, our government is showing leadership on the climate by the introduction of our climate leadership strategy, which is going to work with the coal sector and work with those folks working at plants in communities affected. Our plan, Mr. Speaker, is to phase out coal emissions by 2030, a phase-out that we are accelerating, but we're going to do this in a way that's fair to employees, fair to companies, and fair to communities.

Thank you.

Mr. Orr: Given that the coal industry currently provides millions in revenue to this government, in fact to the tune of \$90 million in royalties over the past five years, and given that an Industrial Alliance Securities report has said that the accelerated phase-out of coal plants will result in \$12 billion in forgone revenue to plant owners, will this government acknowledge that on top of risky economic policies like the carbon tax, they are hurting our economy even more with this phase-out when we can afford it the least?

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, we're committed to a thoughtful transition away from coal that ensures that our electricity system is stable and that the lights stay on in people's homes. We're also committed to working with all of the workers in the coal industry. This is a task that the Premier has given to me, to work with the affected communities and their families to look at ways that we can work with workers either with transition as well as look for opportunities for them to work in other sectors. Quite frankly, our plan includes an adjustment envelope, and we are going to ensure that there is funding and that workers, families, and companies will be treated fairly.

Mr. Orr: Again to the minister: given that Alberta actually has a proud record of clean energy and given the fact that it's about time that the NDP government started being proud of and not embarrassed by our energy sector, will the minister of environment acknowledge that Alberta does energy better than anyone else in the world?

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, our climate leadership plan will invest in new technology, diversify the economy, and help us gain access to new markets. Unlike the Official Opposition, that would like us to pretend that climate change doesn't exist and do nothing about it, we are showing leadership, and by doing that, we are going to create new jobs in this economy, new access for our products, and ensure that Alberta is the best place to live, raise a family, and invest in.

Thank you.

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

2:30 Lower Athabasca Regional Land-use Plan

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. An independent review panel was established back in June 2014 to investigate the effects of the lower Athabasca regional plan. Six First Nations communities applied to the review to determine if the plan directly or adversely affects them. According to the Land Stewardship Act here in Alberta the panel had one year to submit a report with accompanying recommendations to the minister, and that deadline was back on June 22 of this year. To the environment minister: have you received this report, and if so, when?

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Well, of course, it's challenging for me to speak on behalf of the minister of environment, but I have been working quite closely with the minister of environment with respect to the lower Athabasca regional plan. Certainly, you know, our caucus has had concerns about the planning going back to the past, and I've certainly heard concerns from indigenous communities. We have been working quite closely on a strategy to move forward with this. In terms of the specific report I'm afraid I'll have to get back to the member.

Thank you.

Mr. Rodney: Again to the minister. Given that section 45(c) of the act requires that the government of Alberta post this review panel's report on the Land Use Secretariat website and given that as of today at 1 p.m. the report is still not available on the website and given that lawful transparency is not occurring, please tell us and Albertans across the province: when are you planning on releasing this report so that First Nations communities and all other interested Albertans can review its findings and its recommendations?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Well, of course, we have been working very closely with a number of First Nations communities on multiple concerns that they have with policies that were brought forward under the last government, including environmental policies and land and resource consultation policies. Again, as I've said, I can't comment on the specific report. We'll have to get back to the hon. member on that.

Mr. Rodney: Mr. Speaker, I'm seeing a time lag and a disturbing trend.

Given that the six First Nations that applied for the review deserve to learn if the panel has recommended recourse for addressing any negative effects to health, property, income, and more and given that we have heard feedback from aboriginal groups indicating they are at a loss to understand why your government has not shared this information with them – keep in mind six months –

and given the vow to forge a new relationship with Alberta's aboriginal peoples, Albertans are wondering: what are you hiding from them, and is this the kind of consultation that aboriginal peoples can expect from this kind of government?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Well, of course, we've been working very closely with indigenous communities on a number of issues. Certainly, some of those issues surround the management of cumulative effects because they feel that nothing was done under the previous government with respect to that policy. In terms of the specific report I've told the member that I'll get back to him, so I'm not sure what else he wants me to say. But we will be working very closely with First Nations going forward to address the concerns.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Aboriginal Peoples' Economic Development

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In my constituency many are struggling in these tough economic times. In particular, indigenous communities are feeling the effects of the slowdown surrounding their communities. To the Minister of Aboriginal Relations: what are you doing to help indigenous people, who often live in rural, remote areas of Alberta, take part in the resource sector and participate in our economy?

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Well, in my conversations with First Nations we have heard some real concerns from them and some genuine pleas from their leadership on behalf of their people that they be included and involved, going forward, in Alberta's economy and that they, too, share in the wealth that this province has to give. So we are moving forward with our consultation on the UN declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples. We intend to use a whole government approach to this issue, so we have a number of funding mechanisms available for jobs on that front.

Thank you.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that in Edmonton and Calgary there are great opportunities for entrepreneurs to access capital and to start up or expand a business and given that it's not the case in many First Nations communities, to the Minister of Aboriginal Relations again: what are you doing to support the many entrepreneurs in indigenous communities of Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and, again, to the member for the absolutely critical question. One of the policies that my department has is the aboriginal business investment fund. This fund is designed to increase the number of indigenous-owned businesses, increase the number of employment opportunities, and create local revenue streams. We also just recently announced a partnership with the Siksika Nation and the Indian Business Corporation to provide access to capital, which is sometimes difficult to access on reserves.

Thank you.

Ms Babcock: Mr. Speaker, these programs sound like a good idea, but my constituents need help now. Can the Minister of Aboriginal Relations please tell us when this money will start flowing?

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the incredibly timely question. The application submission period for the aboriginal business investment fund goes on until January 1 for this current funding year. The evaluation process will be completed in mid-January, and decisions will be announced for applicants during the week of January 15. We are absolutely committed to working with indigenous groups in this way, and we hope that they will bring forward applications in this process.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Job Creation and Protection in Calgary

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Like farmers, Calgarians are very concerned with the direction this NDP government is taking with the economy. Last month Statistics Canada found that Alberta lost 11,600 jobs, many of these in Calgary, and now this government is making it worse for Calgarians with a new carbon tax, a tax on everything and everyone. To the minister: why is your government doing nothing to help Calgarians who have lost their jobs but, instead, doing your best to make . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The minister of economic development.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I'll thank the member for his question. Quite frankly, our government is doing a number of things, and we are doing our job. In fact, we're working with the private sector to create jobs. There are a number of initiatives that we've already taken under way, from giving start-ups and budding entrepreneurs access to venture capital through \$50 million in the Alberta Enterprise Corporation, increasing the debt ceiling of ATB or their lending capacity by \$1.5 billion, and we've also introduced the job creation incentive program.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Panda: Employment insurance claims are up almost 100 per cent in Calgary – this is shocking – and this is more than just a number. These people who have lost their jobs include many friends of mine. They are good people who want Alberta to succeed. They're Albertans that are being hurt by this government's bad ideas. Given all this, why is the new economic development minister not speaking out against his government's bad ideas, which are punishing all Calgarians?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I want to say, first of all, that when any layoff is announced, we're not talking about a number; we're talking about people, and we're talking about Alberta families. Our government takes this very seriously, which is exactly why about six weeks ago the Premier created this Ministry of Economic Development and Trade to do just that, to focus on economic diversification, looking at ways to develop our economy further, looking at ways to build more value-added within our growing sectors, and also looking for new markets to access as far as exports and bringing investment dollars back to Alberta.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Mr. Panda: Not helping Calgarians.

Let me try again. Given that this NDP government is not helping Calgarians in a time of economic need and given that it is time they stop hurting Calgarians with their risky economic policies, Minister, it's clear that this government is hurting the economy and not developing it. I ask the minister: when will your government increase economic development rather than work to kill our job-creating industries like the energy sector?

2:40

Mr. Bilous: Mr. Speaker, we are working with the energy sector. In fact, we're working with all sectors and all job creators, which is, again, the reason that we introduced the job creation incentive program, to create up to 27,000 jobs. But I'll tell you this much. We also introduced the climate change strategy, which is going to build our economy and create jobs. The opposition here, their approach is to ignore the problem. Their approach created barriers that we need for our energy. Their approach is not leadership.

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly distinguished guests who have worked untiringly to improve equal rights for all: Ratna Basappa and Jagjeet Bhardwaj from the Indo-Canadian Women's Association, who work tirelessly to prevent harmful cultural and domestic violence against women; Vasant Chotai worked with organizations, including the Edmonton Social Planning Council, to promote social equity and affordable housing; Indranil Chaudhury, active community volunteer who raised funds for UNICEF Canada to help Syrian refugees; Charan Khehra, co-founder of Daughters Day, an initiative to support Alberta women; and Dr. Mohyuddin Mirza, a passionate advocate and public educator for human rights in the Ahmadiyya Muslim community. I request that they rise and receive the traditional welcome of the House.

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

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Brandon Gibb, a fourth-generation farmer-rancher. He grew up on a small family farm in southwest Alberta, where he learned many valuable lessons in life about working safely. He doesn't employ anyone full-time, but he does rely very heavily on the help of family and neighbours. His wife is a full-time nurse and works to help support their small family of two young boys and a third one due in March.

Brenden Scott is a grade 10 student at Cardston high school, who helps his grandpa and uncle on the farm they own.

Blake Gibb is a grade 8 student at Paterson middle school in Lethbridge. His parents own a trucking company and almost his entire family is involved in the agriculture trade. During the last four summers he has worked with both his grandpa and uncle on their farm.

Kenyon Jackson is a fourth-generation farmer on the land that his late grandfather posted in the late 1800s. He has four children who wish to remain on the farm. They have had various farming operations, from raising pure-bred cattle to farming hay. His wife is a part-time school assistant. They both wish to keep their rights and privileges to use their land as they see fit.

They have risen, and I'd like to give them the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to be able to rise today to introduce to you and through you my beautiful daughter Ashley. Ashley Taylor is up there. She came in a little bit late, so I didn't get to see her right away. It's an honour to be able to see her up there. She's the youngest of my three children, and she worked tirelessly throughout my campaign. Now she's actually finishing off her fifth year of university. She's taking an education degree, and she's going to be teaching elementary. Ashley, could you rise and accept the warm welcome and the greetings of this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Carol Robertson Baker, our Mental Health Patient Advocate, as well as Deborah Prowse, our Health Advocate and interim Seniors' Advocate as well. Joining them are patient rights advocates and health advocate representatives and staff. I ask that they also rise. They are Beverly, Ryan, Lorraine, Mark, Lisa, Wendy, Ashley, Than, and Janina. I want to thank them for the amazing work they do for Albertans, a lot of which is outlined in their annual reports, which I look forward to tabling today.

I also want to extend a special thank you and congratulations to our Mental Health Patient Advocate, who is celebrating a 30-year anniversary as a public servant with the government of Alberta. I'd ask that we extend the warm welcome and congratulations to the hon. guests.

The Speaker: Are there any other individuals who have guests that I might have overlooked? The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House Bev Anuszewski. She farms with her husband, Barry, in the Whitemud area. They're here to rally on the steps for Bill 6. Of course, it's great to see them here today. They've travelled a long way to be here today. Bev, if you could stand. I introduced your husband the other day. If we could give her the traditional warm welcome of the House.

Members' Statements

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

Human Rights

Loyola: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. International Human Rights Day, celebrated on December 10 of every year, commemorates the day, in 1948, when the United Nations General Assembly adopted the universal declaration of human rights. The universal declaration is, of course, universal, but a Canadian law professor, John Humphrey, wrote it, and that document has two daughters inside the Canadian federation, our Charter of Rights and Freedoms and our Bill of Rights. In a world of war and tyranny that sets millions fleeing their homes in search of justice, these documents are lighthouses in the storm, guiding freedom seekers to a land where they can stand without fear, with dignity and hope and peace.

It gives me great pleasure to announce that Canadians for a Civil Society has developed a poster containing the universal declaration, our Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and our Bill of Rights. They produced this poster because they are convening a national conversation in 2017 on how Canadian values can contribute to

making Canada the best country it can be and a beacon during the storms that shake the world.

I encourage all members to use this poster to inspire everyone to learn the planet-shaping significance of what no political prisoner, no refugee, and no oppressed person anywhere at any time has ever taken for granted, human rights. We need to understand our profound and inalienable rights. Without understanding them, given the right scare tactics we could be tricked into losing them, surrendering freedom for the illusion of security.

The universal declaration enshrines three main categories: freedoms, equality and political rights, and social rights. It's neither simple nor easy to guarantee that we protect all three categories of human rights. But, Mr. Speaker, it wasn't easy for a small population like Canada's to fight fascism in Europe and in Asia. It wasn't easy to face our sins within truth and reconciliation, but we did it. So, too, can we respect and protect these three sacred covenants.

As legislators we share an enormous responsibility. Ultimately, we must accept our true duty as members of this Legislature to clear away systemic barriers that keep Albertans from living up to their full potential, providing the opportunity to increase their standard of living and be treated with dignity.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Human Rights

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm going to continue on with the same idea. The next week will obviously mark the 67th anniversary of when the United Nations adopted the universal declaration of human rights, drafted after the horrors and unspeakable evil of the world wars. It is a document that reminds us of our humanity's own past atrocities and the obligation to protect all peoples from the forces that seek to repeat and make new these horrific crimes. Despite the document's binding moral clarity and the need to protect the rights of every person and their rights to life, liberty, and security of the person, evil still persists.

There is perhaps no better reminder, as we look beyond our borders, than men and women still being forced into hiding, tortured, or ultimately killed because of whom they don't pray to. Basic religious freedoms are constantly ignored and abused from Afghanistan to Syria to Iraq. In states and countries across the world religious minorities are suffering from persecution. Others have to go into hiding or face unspeakable discrimination and violence just because of the colour of their skin, who they love, their family name, their nationality, disabilities, or other statuses.

Behind these actions remain the states and political leaders that continue to oppress their people, suppress free thought, rip up property rights, and make unconscionable and brutal violations of these basic human rights. Let's never forget our moral obligation to continue to speak out against these abuses and do what we can do to prevent them.

2:50

Here in Alberta we have much to be thankful for. As a province we have been world leaders in advocating for rights for all peoples. We are truly fortunate to have the Magna Carta within walking distance of this House today. This 800-year-old document is the very foundation of our laws and Canada's democracy. It has established clear boundaries on the power and the rights of the state against the individuals. It led to the establishment of property rights and other basic liberties and freedoms.

As legislators may we always remember to stay vigilant, to speak against evil, and to promote liberty and equality for all. Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Human Rights

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, next Thursday is Human Rights Day, which commemorates the anniversary of the adoption of the UN universal declaration of human rights. Sixty-seven years ago the UN presented to the world a commitment to equal rights for all people. The chief drafter, of course, was the Canadian John Humphrey, so it's fitting that we would take some time to celebrate both him and the John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights here at the University of Alberta, of which I'm a member.

Mr. Speaker, it seems particularly appropriate that we would mark this anniversary at a time when the Magna Carta is visiting the Legislature. Eight hundred years ago the barons forced King John to sign the document. We saw one of the first official charters outlining the rights of human beings. Of course, that document was extremely limited, applying only to a select number of white, landowning men. Over time we've expanded that notion of human rights beyond those select few. The UN declaration marks that expansion, declaring, "Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth . . . without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status."

We continue to struggle with this commitment. Our society continues to grow as we gain greater understanding of those who have been left in the shadows, denied those rights and human dignity. Just this week, Mr. Speaker, this House was able to take an important step towards protecting the trans and gender-variant community, and in this House we've been debating human and constitutional rights of paid farm workers. We know all too well that the rights of First Nations continue to be neglected in this society, and I'm pleased to see that the government has embraced the UN declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples.

The UN declaration on human rights remains a work-in-progress. We continue to strive to meet the high bar that it has set for humanity, so even 67 years later the work goes on.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Calgary-North West.

Human Rights

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In recognition of Human Rights Day, on December 10, 2015, I'd like to reflect on our privilege and power as legislators in order to advance and protect human rights in Alberta. Although it's crucial to enshrine human rights in formal legislation such as the International Bill of Human Rights and the Alberta Human Rights Act, it is equally important to engender respect for human rights in individuals both at home and abroad.

The last few months of discussions about gender rights; refugee, immigration, and indigenous rights; and vulnerable Afghan minorities have all allowed progressive defenders of human rights to demonstrate a depth of caring, compassion, and motivation to make this world a better place for those whose enjoyment of human rights is hampered at best, yet our human rights champions constantly face individuals and groups who believe that we don't have the capacity to welcome refugees into our hearts and our homes.

Although we've stumbled at times in our efforts to protect basic human rights in Canada and in Alberta, oppressed people worldwide have looked to us to defend the core values that everyone on this planet has a right to. Those rights include a life free of fear and oppression regardless of their nation, language, religion, or ethnic origin. We see an excellent example of Alberta's passion for human rights in our warm welcome for Syrian refugees, our resolve to show them how we value human rights in Alberta.

As Alberta's voices of reason we must each exercise social responsibility as legislators to become educated about the human rights issues faced by some of our new and established constituents and to educate and help each other and our constituents understand and sympathize and connect personally with those in need.

Female refugees face particular vulnerability when fleeing human rights violations around the world. Often, as heads of war-torn households they are simultaneously responsible for feeding, clothing, housing, and educating their families. They're targets for human trafficking, pressured into forced prostitution.

All of these things we must remember, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The deputy House leader.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to ask for unanimous consent of the House to waive Standing Order 7(7) to continue the Routine past 3 o'clock.

[Unanimous consent granted]

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

Human Rights

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As we celebrate international Human Rights Day, although a bit early, I think it's telling that all the different parties in the House have been given an opportunity to mark this very important occasion. It is important that we rise and speak as it is celebrated around the world.

In 1948 the United Nations General Assembly adopted the universal declaration on human rights, a declaration that has allowed for the basic human rights of all to be fought for by those who seek to live in a better world. This year's Human Rights Day is devoted to the launch of a year-long campaign for the 50th anniversary of the two international covenants on human rights, the international covenant on economic, social, and cultural rights and the international covenant on civil and political rights. These, alongside the universal declaration of human rights, create the International Bill of Human Rights, setting out civil, political, cultural, economic, and social rights that are the birthright of all human beings.

Today we rise to honour the better future centred around the four freedoms: freedom of speech, of religion, from want, and from fear. It is this last one that we have been dealing with in the House this week, Mr. Speaker. When we pass Bill 7, the Alberta Human Rights Amendment Act, 2015, we are seeking to allow gender-variant and gender-diverse individuals to live a life free of fear, where they can live and be accepted in a world that is inclusive and understanding. It is as an ally for those individuals that I am honoured to rise today and speak to the importance of international Human Rights Day.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Family Farms and Bill 6

Mr. Rosendahl: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to discuss Bill 6. I grew up on the family farm. I know all too well the work that goes

into making the farm successful. The family had to work together as a unit to ensure that chores got done. This included feeding chickens, turkeys, ducks, geese, and many other livestock. No one or anything went without food or water, 24/7, 365, and we respect that. Calving season, spring seeding, later summer haying, making forage, taking the crop off in the fall, and also tending the very large gardens went on for many years without any issues. I think we were extremely lucky considering some of the work that we did on the family farm, but sometimes we weren't so lucky. My brother was hurt when his arm was broken in three places when it was wrapped in the knotted of a square baler. No coverage; no insurance.

Bill 6 does not kill the family farm or rob children of experiencing the life of growing up on a family farm or participating in 4-H projects that make our communities proud. Bill 6 does nothing more than bring Alberta safety standards on farms and ranching operations in line with every other province in Canada. Bill 6 provides two simple things. A paid farm worker who is directed to do something dangerous can simply say no, just like any other worker in Alberta and Canada. Second, if the worker is hurt or even killed at work, they or their family can be compensated like any other worker in Alberta and Canada as well. Neighbours and relatives . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

3:00

Presenting Reports by Standing and Special Committees

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As chair of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts I am pleased to table five copies of the committee's report on its 2014 activities.

Thank you.

Presenting Petitions

Mr. Orr: Mr. Speaker, I'd like to table in the approved format the following petition:

We the undersigned residents of Alberta, petition the Legislative Assembly to urge the Government to immediately withdraw its proposed Bill 6, Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act, from the legislative agenda, request its withdrawal from the order paper and we petition the Assembly to cease all further readings and debate of its content.

Thank you, sir.

Tabling Returns and Reports

Cortes-Vargas: Mr. Speaker, as the chair of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices and in accordance with section 4(2) of the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act I would like to table five copies of the 2014 Annual Report of the Chief Electoral Officer: the Election Finances and Contributions Disclosure Act for the 2014 Calendar Year.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Minister of Seniors.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have the requisite number of copies of the two reports I mentioned earlier, Helping Bridge the Gaps: Annual Report of the Alberta Health Advocate 2014-2015 as well as Alberta Mental Health Patient Advocate: Celebrating 25 Years of Advocacy and Protecting Patient Rights. Just so everyone is aware of the mission of this organization, they assist Albertans in dealing with concerns about

services impacting their health and becoming empowered and effective advocates.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice and Solicitor General and Minister of Aboriginal Relations.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the requisite number of copies of a document entitled Public Sector Compensation Transparency Act, summary of public access to compensation disclosure. This document discusses the estimate with respect to the cost of creating a searchable database as discussed yesterday in committee.

I also wish to table the requisite number of copies of follow-up answers to questions in my Justice estimates.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's with respect and humility that I rise today to table two reports, that I referred to last night, of individuals that were tragically affected by farm accidents.

The first document is a report to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of a public fatality inquiry for Mr. Kevan Chandler, who tragically lost his life.

The second document is a newspaper article about a farm worker who is disabled for life, Mr. Speaker.

I urge all the members to read these documents.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table a letter that I read last night.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Schneider: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table the appropriate number of copies of letters from constituents, that I referred to last night in the second reading debate on Bill 6.

The Speaker: The Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the appropriate number of copies from constituents and people around Alberta that I spoke about last night in second reading of Bill 6. I have several copies of letters from Albertans who don't trust this government on Bill 6.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'm pleased to table the requisite number of copies of the Legislative Assembly Office 2014 annual report, Stewards of the Parliamentary Process.

The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite number of copies of eight letters from constituents who have wished to be able to express their concerns over Bill 6.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake. Or Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Taylor: Now we're going to fight each other here on this.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table letters from farmers and some people that are from my riding, that have been sent to me. They are the constituents of Battle River-Wainwright, and they're trying to get their message across to the government about Bill 6. I have the required five copies.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to table the requisite number of copies of a letter from Chinook's Edge school division, which contradicts statements made by the hon. Minister of Education that he had some sort of universal support for Bill 8. This letter clearly indicates the opposite.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I'll call the committee to order.

Bill 4

An Act to Implement Various Tax Measures and to Enact the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act

The Chair: We are on amendment A7 as proposed by the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks. Are there any comments with respect to this amendment? The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Chair. It is an honour to continue debate on Bill 4, the fifth amendment coming from the Wildrose Official Opposition. We are having a strange debate in this case. The Official Opposition and the third party are having a debate about one topic, and the government is having a debate about another. This amendment clearly states, "The consolidated fiscal plan must clearly state a projected consolidated cash balance for each fiscal year . . . in the plan." This is requiring the government to provide a piece of information. It is requiring the government to merely provide a data point, that they could easily put together in Excel, taking about five minutes, with information that they already have.

3:10

The Minister of Finance appears to believe that this is a huge, earth-shattering motion to change the entire accounting structure of the government.

The Minister of Finance stood up and argued a different topic altogether. He was arguing about his desire to see the government continue with accrual accounting methods, his desire to see our expenditures reported in such a way that they include operational spending but only a small fraction of capital spending for each given year, to keep it in that way, without providing a simple income and expense statement.

What we are calling for is a consolidated cash balance. We are not arguing about switching to another accounting system for the government. We are not arguing about accounting for the government's finances in a different way. What we're calling for is simply for them to ask their officials to go into and print off an Excel sheet, that they already have, to take up about half a page in the budget and print another table in it. We could do an interesting study on the printing cost of this, a little bit more ink, slightly more ink for the budget, and half a page.

Mr. MacIntyre: I'll pay for it. I'll donate.

Mr. Fildebrandt: The Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake has volunteered to donate the extra costs of the ink for an extra table. I thank him for his charity.

Mr. MacIntyre: I want a receipt.

Mr. Fildebrandt: But he wants a charitable tax receipt. I see.

This is asking the government to provide information in the budget that they already have. Their departmental officials have already told everybody that they have an income statement – they have a cash-adjusted balance that they have as an internal document – but since Budget 2013 the government has declined to provide one. That is unfortunate. What we're asking for is simple. We're asking that they just put it in the budget.

There are important reasons for this. This is an important accountability measure that will help Albertans understand their budget. It's an important accountability measure that will help the 99.9 per cent of Albertans who don't open up the fiscal plan documents every year with glee and sit in a budget lock-up eagerly awaiting their chance to get into the operational plan and the capital plan and the savings plan and sit there with a calculator and try to do their best to sort it all out. This is for Albertans who want to have a clear idea of how much their government is spending: money in, money out. There are good reasons for this.

There is a place for different metrics of the deficit. What was used in 2013 was three separate buckets: a totally separate budget for operational, a totally separate budget for capital, a totally separate budget for savings. That was rather confusing to pretty much anybody who read the documents. I think most people here would agree.

Mr. Rodney: Agreed.

Mr. Fildebrandt: I'm always glad to have the eager agreement of the Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Rodney: Agreed.

Mr. Fildebrandt: He agrees with that.

The government made attempts to improve upon that system subsequently with what they called a consolidated primary balance, which blended them somewhat, but they were not fully reconciled. It was and remains still a valuable measure, based on accrual accounting, of the operational costs of the government and the amortized cost of capital for a particular year. It is a valuable measure, that I find useful when analyzing budgets, but it does not tell the entire picture. By that measure, governments could make, as we're doing this year, between \$8 billion and \$9 billion in capital commitments, important projects for the most part. They could make commitments of between \$8 billion and \$9 billion on capital, but only a small fraction of that actually shows up in the spending ledger for a year. That's dangerous. [Disturbance in the gallery] I believe someone is calling for mommy in the gallery. Madam Chair, I think we've got the government crying for mommy after the last few days.

The government's current form of a consolidated budget figure is a useful measure as it includes the operational costs of the government and it includes a portion of the capital costs amortized for a particular year. But that is a dangerous measure if it's left on its own, without more context behind it, other important data metrics to help explain the budget. That number on its own would allow a government to make approximately \$8 billion a year, as we're doing, in capital commitments but only have a few billion of that show up in the expenditure ledger for the year.

This downplays the true size and scope of the deficit significantly. It allows the government to run massive consolidated deficits, borrowing money and seeing its net financial assets decline year after year, but claim that it is running a balanced budget because the operational side of the ledger may or may not be

balanced. But overall the government is still spending significantly more money than it is bringing in. Now, this is not an argument that the government should do that. That is a separate argument: if the government should be borrowing or not or what it should be borrowing for or not borrowing for or how much it should be borrowing or not borrowing. This is an argument about the transparency of that borrowing. This is an argument about the ability of Albertans to understand the size and scope of the borrowing.

The next important metric that we could look at when we're measuring, essentially, the primary balance of the government is our net change in financial assets. It's an extremely valuable metric for us to use when measuring the financial health of the government. This is what we use when we measure, effectively, the change in the wealth of the province. The way we do that is that we look at the net change in financial assets; that is, in English, are we richer or poorer this year than we were the year before? Do we have more money to our name this fiscal year than we did last? It's a simple calculation. We take our assets, and we net them against our liabilities on a financial basis.

Assets. We lump together the heritage fund; external investments; self-supporting lending organizations; the sustainability fund, which has been renamed the contingency account; endowment funds; the capital account; what we used to have as the debt retirement account – that is a line item I would like to see returned to the budget some day – and anonymous other financial assets. Together those constitute the financial assets of the government. We net that against our accumulated debt and liabilities, against our pension obligations, against liabilities for self-supporting lending organizations like ATB, liabilities for government-owned capital, other liabilities, and direct borrowing for capital purposes. These two broad categories of liabilities and financial assets we used to net against each other and compare that year over year as our net change in financial assets.

3:20

This particular year our net change in financial assets – effectively, the überdeficit, the overarching deficit number, net change in financial assets for the overall government – will be a negative decline of \$8.7 billion. That constitutes the single largest decline in the net financial assets of the government of Alberta in our history. The next largest change in net financial assets was, if I'm not mistaken, in 1992. Off the top of my head, I believe that that change in financial assets was a negative \$4.2 billion to \$4.7 billion. So we have now effectively doubled what was previously the largest deficit, as defined by net financial assets, in the history of the province. It's a staggering figure. But defining our deficit as net change in financial assets, as valuable as it is, is still one snapshot. We're blindfolded, touching the elephant in different areas, and all finding different things.

The fourth metric to define the overall financial health of the government is our income statement. That is the cash-adjusted balance. That's what we're asking for. We already have the three other metrics, those three other metrics that help us define the financial health or ills of the government, but we're missing the fourth, being our cash-adjusted balance. It is important as another metric so that Albertans can understand the balance of money coming into government and the money leaving government. The cash balance truly reflects what borrowing or savings are possible for the government. Right now, under the current system money is moved around, but it's very difficult to follow.

If we had a hypothetical balanced budget in this province – and I long for the day when we finally do . . .

Mr. MacIntyre: Three and a half years.

Mr. Fildebrandt: It will take longer than three and a half years because it will take us a little time to do it, I think, when we get there. But in three and a half years the healing can start, however much I wish that we could start today.

If we had a hypothetically balanced budget, we wouldn't have a difficult time understanding in a transparent way how much money we can allocate to the contingency account to rebuild what we used to call the sustainability fund, which once reached \$17 billion. That was more than a rainy-day fund. That was a retirement that we blew on a really great vacation. We wouldn't know how much money we have to clearly allocate to the contingency account, but having an adjusted cash balance would allow us to know that. It would allow us to know how much we can clearly allocate to the heritage savings trust fund account. It would allow us to know how much we could put towards an account which I believe we no longer have, effectively, the debt retirement account.

The government has put forward no plan whatsoever to pay down the debt. They have a plan to rack it up, and that's easy. It's always easy to go into your online banking and do an Interac transfer from your line of credit to your chequing account or from your line of credit to your credit card. That's always easy, but finding a time and finding a way to save money is always more difficult.

The easiest way to understand how we effectively do that in a transparent way is to provide a cash-adjusted balance. It's not difficult to do. The data already exists. It's sitting on a spreadsheet of some bureaucrat a few hundred metres away, probably not more than a kilometre, saved in an Excel file on their desktop. It's just sitting there waiting for the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake to donate some money for the ink to print it. He is reaching for change right now. He probably has enough money in his pocket to do it right now. Probably a few dollars of ink. This is easy to do.

Perhaps the only reason that the Minister of Finance is opposed to this is because it's an embarrassing metric. Frankly, all of the metrics in this budget are embarrassing. A record decline in our net financial assets of \$8.7 billion. Again, every time I say that, I feel I need to put my pinky to my lip and say: \$8.7 billion. It is a sad, sad number to have to read. The minister should be less worried about being embarrassed by the figure and more concerned with providing transparent numbers on the financial health of the province to Albertans.

I thank the members for their time and hand the floor to the next member who wishes to speak.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Madam Chair. Earlier today, when the Minister of Finance was here, he made a statement regarding this very amendment which I found – well, it would have been amusing if it wasn't so sad. In reading this simple little amendment, the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board came back in his response saying that this amendment means that the Wildrose wants to change our accrual accounting method to a cash accounting method. It had already been stated on a number of occasions by the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks that this simple little amendment did not change the method of accounting used by the government. It did not do away with the accrual accounting method.

The minister's statement took me aback a little bit because it meant to me that he actually didn't understand the amendment or doesn't understand the difference between accrual accounting and cash accounting or doesn't understand what a cash-adjusted balance means. The lack of whichever one it is concerns me, that the man

in charge of the purse strings of our province doesn't understand basic financial reporting 101. Yet he is effectively riding herd on tens of billions of dollars of other people's money – our people's money, taxpayers' money – and could not understand, from a very simple amendment, that we are simply asking for a listing of the cash-adjusted balance in budgets and annual reports. It is the cash position of the government. To make the statement that he did, reading this simple little amendment that we put forward, just boggles my mind. This is the individual in charge of our money? It's concerning to me.

3:30

This simple amendment would provide extra transparency and understanding and clarity of the province's true cash position – true cash position. That's why it's called cash-adjusted balance. It's more than just the balance; it's cash adjusted. It reflects all the spending decisions made by the government, and it includes capital. It is – no kidding – a superior measure to the current so-called consolidated balance, which currently leaves out about \$3 billion to \$6 billion worth of money. Now, I don't know about you, but I would rather know that than not know that.

Actually, the adjusted cash balance gives a true reflection of the cash position and what borrowing or saving we can then move forward with. Those are important numbers to know, and the strange thing is that the government has these numbers already. It has to. It already has these calculations done. It has to. Otherwise, the government would never know how much room it had to borrow or how much money was still there to save. So the math has even been done already. The numbers are known. All this amendment is asking for is that all the rest of Alberta be told, too. It's just that simple. It's not a change to the accounting method; it's simply a change to the reporting method, to include in the current reporting method one more thing.

For this to be met with the kind of opposition that we heard from the minister is very disconcerting. Why is the Minister of Finance, the person in charge of and handling and responsible for and the steward of the taxpayers' money, so concerned about a simple little table in a document? Why is that number that critical, that important, that he would buck against something so simple? It concerns me. It makes me question: what are we trying to hide here? Is there something we're trying to hide or not? That's a valid question. You know, I don't want to go back in history too much, but there was a government recently that was rejected by the people of Alberta because they didn't like the way their money was being handled, and here we go again. Something similar is going on.

The people of Alberta want to have faith in their government handling their money, and this sort of an amendment is another one of those trust-building measures that I've spoken to before here. It's such a simple thing. We're not asking for a change in the accounting method; we're simply asking that these numbers, which the government already has, be reported to the people of Alberta. It is, after all, their money. It's their bank account. It's not our bank account. It is not the Minister of Finance's bank account. It is all Albertans' bank account, and they have a right to see what's in their bank account. It's a right, really. To deny Albertans this information, in my opinion, is to deny them their right to accurate information about what they have in their bank account. It's just that simple. I do not understand the government side's rejection of this amendment. It makes no sense to me, and I'm sure that it makes no sense to a lot of Albertans either. I believe that it further erodes the trust that Albertans have in this government's forthrightness, which is not a good thing.

So, Madam Chair, I support this amendment for all of the reasons that I think I made very clear. I am surprised that this government

is not also supporting this very simple thing, and I would hope that all members in this House would genuinely have a sense of responsibility to our people. This their money. We ought never to be shy or attempt to hide from our people information about their money and what this government is doing with their money. So I would hope that every member in here would feel the responsibility, would feel the accountability to be forthright in the reporting of the true cash position of the government when it makes reports to the people.

I thank you for this time, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to the amendment?

If not, we'll call the question.

Mr. Hanson: Excuse me. I'd request a call for one-minute bells.

The Chair: Hon. member, according to our standing orders we are unable to do that when we sit again as a committee. The first bell has to be the full 15 minutes even with unanimous consent. It's a technicality. It's explained that it is a fair way because it allows for the members to come in and know that we're starting this process. You know, it just is what it is, so unfortunately we can't entertain that motion.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A7 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:37 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Hanson	Orr
Barnes	MacIntyre	Rodney
Cooper	McIver	Schneider
Fildebrandt	Nixon	Starke
Gotfried		

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Goehring	Miller
Babcock	Gray	Nielsen
Bilous	Hinkley	Piquette
Carson	Hoffman	Renaud
Connolly	Horne	Rosendahl
Cortes-Vargas	Kazim	Sabir
Dach	Kleinsteuber	Schmidt
Dang	Littlewood	Schreiner
Drever	Loyola	Shepherd
Eggen	Luff	Sucha
Feehan	Mason	Sweet
Ganley	McKitrick	Woollard

Totals: For – 13 Against – 36

[Motion on amendment A7 lost]

The Chair: We are back on Bill 4. Are there any further comments, questions, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Madam Chair. If I could move that the committee rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill: Bill 4. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

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

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed, say no. So ordered.

Hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, I need to confirm that you're reporting progress. I believe we missed that piece.

Mr. Nielsen: Yes, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 5 Public Sector Compensation Transparency Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to move third reading of Bill 5, the Public Sector Compensation Transparency Act.

The bill will follow through on our commitment to make the government more transparent. It will extend what is commonly referred to as the sunshine list to include our province's agencies, boards, and commissions. Albertans expect and deserve further insight into how their tax dollars are spent. Agencies, boards, and commissions, including Alberta Health Services, will be required to disclose names and salaries of employees that earn more than \$125,000 a year. All compensation paid to board members will be required to be disclosed. In addition, Madam Speaker, the bill enables municipalities and school boards to disclose the names and the compensation paid to employees if they wish to.

In order to ensure that we further the goals and underlying principles of this bill, we accepted some amendments proposed by the hon. members for Drayton Valley-Devon and Calgary-Elbow, which were passed yesterday in Committee of the Whole. These amendments set up minimum thresholds for employees of school boards and municipalities to ensure that it is consistent with the threshold for other public-sector bodies. We believe that these amendments strike the right balance, Madam Speaker.

Another amendment was passed yesterday to address concerns raised by offices of the Legislature. We respect the independence of these offices, so we have made the changes.

The hon. Member for Calgary-North West also brought forward an amendment that was passed yesterday. This amendment stipulates that the legislation will be reviewed every four years and the review shall last no longer than six months. We support this amendment, and I think we can agree that ensuring that legislation is reviewed to ensure that it is having the intended effect is the prudent and responsible thing to do.

Madam Speaker, in conclusion, this government is committed to helping to ensure that Albertans know how their public money is being spent, and I urge all members to support this bill. Thank you.

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

Loyola: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm honoured to rise once again and speak to Bill 5, the Public Sector Compensation Transparency Act. First, please allow me to express how appreciative I am for the collaboration and the co-operation and, overall, the spirit of working together that have gotten us to this point. Thank you.

Very briefly, I'd like to take the opportunity to address some of the concerns expressed by several of my MLA colleagues during the presentation of this bill, the main concern being why all agencies, boards, and commissions would not be required to publicly disclose the salaries or per diem rates of their members under this bill. It's my understanding that many of the agencies, boards, and commissions not covered under Bill 5 have little government role or funding. One example of this is the Law Society of Alberta, where the government appoints a couple of members and is not providing substantial or any funding. That being said, I'll remind the members of this House that the Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board has announced a much-delayed review of the province's agencies, boards, and commissions, and therefore additional agencies, boards, and commissions may be added through regulation at a later date. So I think we're on the right track here.

Again I want to express my thanks to all the members here in the House for their collaboration and co-operation. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

4:00

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'll just close by speaking strongly in support of this legislation. There are small areas that can be improved. It's an interesting day when the member across and I will be voting on the same piece of legislation in the same way. It's a very good day, in the holiday spirit, before we all go and enjoy the holiday season together.

I will call the question and move that we vote.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any further speakers who wish to comment on this bill?

If not, the Minister of Justice to close debate.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Madam Speaker. In closing, I will just say that teamwork makes dream work.

[Motion carried; Bill 5 read a third time]

Mr. Mason: Madam Speaker, I will move that the House stand adjourned until Monday at 1:30.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 4:02 p.m. to Monday at 1:30 p.m. pursuant to Government Motion 14]

Bill Status Report for the 29th Legislature - 1st Session (2015)

Activity to December 03, 2015

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 1 to 200 are Government Bills. Bills numbered 201 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills numbered with a "Pr" prefix are Private Bills.

*An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If a Bill comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel, Alberta Justice, for details at (780) 427-2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned chapter numbers until the conclusion of the Fall Sitings.

1* An Act to Renew Democracy in Alberta (Ganley)

First Reading -- 9-10 (Jun. 15, 2015 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 30-38 (Jun. 16, 2015 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 85-94 (Jun. 17, 2015 eve.), 152-157 (Jun. 22, 2015 eve., passed with amendments)

Third Reading -- 157-159 (Jun. 22, 2015 eve., passed on division)

Royal Assent -- (Jun. 29, 2015 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 15, 2015; SA 2015 c15]

2 An Act to Restore Fairness to Public Revenue (Ceci)

First Reading -- 104 (Jun. 18, 2015 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 161-162 (Jun. 22, 2015 eve.), 183-193 (Jun. 23, 2015 aft.), 201-213 (Jun. 23, 2015 eve.), 213-227 (Jun. 23, 2015 eve., passed on division)

Committee of the Whole -- 242-257 (Jun. 24, 2015 aft.), 259 (Jun. 24, 2015 eve., passed)

Third Reading -- 259-271 (Jun. 24, 2015 eve., passed on division)

Royal Assent -- (Jun. 29, 2015 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force January 1, 2015, with exceptions; SA 2015 c16]

3 Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2015 (No. 2) (\$) (Ceci)

First Reading -- 77 (Jun. 17, 2015 eve., passed)

Second Reading -- 107-114 (Jun. 18, 2015 aft., passed on division)

Committee of the Whole -- 145-152 (Jun. 22, 2015 eve.), 159-161 (Jun. 22, 2015 eve., passed on division)

Third Reading -- 182-183 (Jun. 23, 2015 aft.), 213 (Jun. 23, 2015 eve., passed on division)

Royal Assent -- (Jun. 29, 2015 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 29, 2015; SA 2015 c14]

4* An Act to Implement Various Tax Measures and to Enact the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act (\$) (Ceci)

First Reading -- 331-32 (Oct. 27, 2015 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 379-81 (Oct. 29, 2015 aft.), 501-522 (Nov. 17, 2015 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 753-68 (Dec. 2, 2015 morn.), 795-99 (Dec. 2, 2015 aft.), 839-54 (Dec. 3, 2015 morn.), 867-70 (Dec. 3, 2015 aft., adjourned)

5* Public Sector Compensation Transparency Act (Ganley)

First Reading -- 448 (Nov. 5, 2015 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 619 (Nov. 25, 2015 aft.), 650-60 (Nov. 26, 2015 aft., passed on division)

Committee of the Whole -- 782-95 (Dec. 2, 2015 aft., passed with amendments)

Third Reading -- 870-71 (Dec. 3, 2015 aft., passed)

6 Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act (Sigurdson)

First Reading -- 501 (Nov. 17, 2015 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 619-20 (Nov. 25, 2015 aft.), 735-51 (Dec. 1, 2015 eve.), (Dec. 2, 2015 eve., adjourned)

7 Alberta Human Rights Amendment Act, 2015 (Ganley)

First Reading -- 548 (Nov. 19, 2015 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 618-19 (Nov. 25, 2015 aft.), 693-704 (Dec. 1, 2015 morn., passed on division)

8 Public Education Collective Bargaining Act (Eggen)

First Reading -- 649 (Nov. 26, 2015 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 717-734 (Dec. 1, 2015 aft., passed)

- 9 Appropriation Act, 2015 (\$) (Ceci)**
First Reading -- 612 (Nov. 25, 2015 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 613-18 (Nov. 25, 2015 aft., passed on division)
Committee of the Whole -- 621-31 (Nov. 26, 2015 morn., passed)
Third Reading -- 631-38 (Nov. 26, 2015 morn., passed on division)
Royal Assent -- (Nov. 27, 2015 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force Nov. 27, 2015; SA 2015 c17]
- 201 Assuring Alberta's Fiscal Future Act (Fraser)**
First Reading -- 104-105 (Jun. 18, 2015 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 128-139 (Jun. 22, 2015 aft.), 302 (Oct. 26, 2015 aft., defeated on division)
- 202* Alberta Local Food Act (Cortes-Vargas)**
First Reading -- 105 (Jun. 18, 2015 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 303-313 (Oct. 26, 2015 aft.), 401-404 (Nov. 2, 2015 aft., passed on division)
Committee of the Whole -- 573-83 (Nov. 23, 2015 aft., passed with amendments)
- 203 Election (Restrictions on Government Advertising) Amendment Act, 2015 (Strankman)**
First Reading -- 349 (Oct. 28, 2015 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 404-10 (Nov. 2, 2015 aft., adjourned), 474-77 (Nov. 16, 2015 aft., passed), 477 (Nov. 16, 2015 aft., referred to Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee)
- 204* Residential Tenancies (Safer Spaces for Victims of Domestic Violence) Amendment Act, 2015 (Drever)**
First Reading -- 448 (Nov. 5, 2015 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 477-84 (Nov. 16, 2015 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 680-86 (Nov. 30, 2015 aft., amendments agreed to and introduced)
- 205 Persons with Developmental Disabilities Services (Public Consultation) Amendment Act, 2015 (Renaud)**
First Reading -- (Nov. 18, 2015 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 583-84 (Nov. 23, 2015 aft., adjourned)
- 206 Recall Act (Aheer)**
First Reading -- 649 (Nov. 26, 2015 aft., passed)
- Pr1 The King's University College Amendment Act, 2015 (Schmidt)**
First Reading -- 377 (Oct. 29, 2015 aft., passed)
- Pr2 Bethesda Bible College Amendment Act, 2015 (Nielsen)**
First Reading -- 377 (Oct. 29, 2015 aft., passed)
- Pr3 Rosary Hall, Edmonton Repeal Act (Shepherd)**
First Reading -- 377 (Oct. 29, 2015 aft., passed)
- Pr4 Canadian University College Amendment Act, 2015 (Orr)**
First Reading -- 377 (Oct. 29, 2015 aft., passed)
- Pr5 Concordia University College of Alberta Amendment Act, 2015 (McLean)**
First Reading -- 377 (Oct. 29, 2015 aft., passed)
- Pr6 Covenant Bible College Amendment Act, 2015 (Fildebrandt)**
First Reading -- 377 (Oct. 29, 2015 aft., passed)
- Pr7 Living Faith Bible College Amendment Act, 2015 (Nixon)**
First Reading -- 377 (Oct. 29, 2015 aft., passed)

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Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday afternoon, December 7, 2015

Day 29

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

First Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Monday, December 7, 2015

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Hon. members, let us take a moment and reflect. Let us acknowledge the 26th anniversary of the horrendous Polytechnique massacre that took place on December 6, 1989, in Montreal, killing 14 innocent women. Let us be reminded by these brave women how important it is to highlight the ongoing issues of gender inequality and violence. Let us in this Chamber use our voices and the power of unity to take steps to address these issues in the future. Take a moment.

Hon. members, we will now be led in the singing of our national anthem by Mr. Robert Clark. I would invite all to participate in the language of their choice.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
Car ton bras sait porter l'épée,
Il sait porter la croix!
Ton histoire est une épopée
Des plus brillants exploits.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, it appears we have no school groups with us today. Is that correct?

I would acknowledge the hon. Member for Red Deer-South.

Ms Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my absolute pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two of my constituents from Red Deer-South. Garnet and Sharon Ward have both lived in Red Deer for over 30 years and have always been active citizens throughout the city. Garnet has been a member of the Rotary Club of Red Deer East for 17 years, and Sharon has been a part of many great organizations but is most proud of her time as chair of the central Alberta women's committee, a member of the Festival of Trees steering committee, and part of Big Brothers Big Sisters. I'd like to ask them both to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two guests, John McDonald and Ben McConnell. They unfortunately could not be here last week when I introduced them, but I'm so happy they could be here today. John is the executive director and regional vice-president of CNIB, who recently announced the My Wish Is advocacy campaign, asking Albertans to tweet their support for the visually impaired using #mywishis. Ben is a strong advocate for his community and for the CNIB. Ben is currently finishing his articling, after recently completing his law degree at the University of Victoria, and is also a motivational

speaker. John and Ben are also both constituents from my wonderful constituency of Stony Plain, and I'd ask them both to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It is a tremendous privilege to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly the three people who make me look good in the Assembly, and trust me, that is even harder than you might think it is. These are the folks who are the brains behind the Alberta Party shadow budget, behind our climate change plan, behind all the bill briefings, and behind anything halfway intelligent I get to say in the House. You know, in all honesty, we all know what it takes to come prepared into this House, and that is all the more challenging as a solo MLA. So I'd ask that Barbara Currie, Natasha Soles, and Jonathan Bilodeau now please rise and receive the traditional and well-deserved welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly my good friend Mr. Thom Bennett. Thom is a well-known drummer, producer, and engineer who's been involved with numerous artists in multiple genres, including his own project, the A/B trio, since his graduation from Grant MacEwan college's esteemed jazz performance program in 2001. Thom is also the main driver behind the Edmonton live music, or ELM, initiative, which is looking to not only preserve Edmonton's live music scene but to guarantee its sustainability and growth for years to come. I've been working with Thom and city councillor Scott McKeen to support this important initiative, and today he's here to witness debate around Motion 507, which we'll discuss here in the House later this afternoon. I'd like to thank Thom for attending today and ask that we present him with the warm traditional welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly two guests today. Jim Visser is a retired farmer that has lived in Edmonton-Manning since 1949. He took over the family farm from his father in 1960 until he retired in 2000. Currently his son and extended family work the land. Jim arranged for several Edmonton MLAs to tour the agricultural lands in Edmonton-Manning and continues to spend his time as an advocate for the preservation of agricultural land, especially in the Riverbend area. As a farmer he is a strong supporter of Bill 6.

Also joining us today is Robin Tharle-Oluk, who grew up in a farming family in southern Alberta that included her great-grandfather, grandfather, her two uncles, her dad, and now her brother. She recognizes the importance of safety for everyone on the farm and ranch, whether it be farmers, families, workers, or neighbours. Today she lives in Edmonton-Manning, where she works as a certified athletic therapist, advocating safety for athletes.

I'd like them both to please stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

CNIB

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to begin by asking my colleagues in this House to imagine what life would be like without sight. If all of the lights in this Chamber were to suddenly go out, would we be able to navigate ourselves to the nearest exit? Would we be able to travel safely and tend to our work or return to our homes and families and come back to the Chamber the next day? Though lights can be turned back on, for nearly 53,000 Albertans blindness and partial sight is a reality that will remain for the rest of their lives.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise and speak about this issue, which has been brought forward to me by the CNIB and one of its employees, Ben McConnell, whose mother, Dianne, works in my riding as the associate superintendent of Parkland schools. Ben is the manager of advocacy for CNIB, the organization that has worked hard to bring to our attention some of the many issues facing Albertans living with blindness or partial sight.

1:40

For people living with vision loss and their family members, CNIB is a pathway to a life of hope, mobility, and independence. From humble beginnings in 1918 the organization has grown to become the main support organization for Albertans and Canadians living with vision loss. In Alberta CNIB is the sole provider of essential rehabilitation for visually impaired Albertans. Its dedicated staff of specialists offer individualized rehabilitation support to clients, focusing on enhancing their independence and mobility in their homes and communities. This support is made possible thanks to support from the government of Alberta, through the ministries of Human Services and Health, as well as community support through donations and funding agencies like the United Way.

Mr. Speaker, I am delighted that Ben could join us in the House today alongside John McDonald, the organization's executive director. I wish them well, and once again I commend the CNIB for the incredible, invaluable work they do on behalf of Albertans who are blind or partially sighted.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Farm and Ranch Worker Legislation

Mr. van Dijken: Mr. Speaker, at first reading the Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour introduced Bill 6, an omnibus bill. Then on November 27 the minister released a statement in an attempt to do some damage control, saying that the legislation "provides two simple things." A paid farm worker can say no to something dangerous, and if they are hurt or killed, they can be compensated. Now everyone is wondering if she's confused. Is this an omnibus, or is this two simple things?

If the Premier's true intent is simply to provide farm and ranch employee protection, she could have accomplished that with a much simpler bill, but instead, Mr. Speaker, she has chosen to introduce omnibus Bill 6. The Premier has chosen to introduce a bill so wide open to interpretation that no Albertan knows what her true intentions are and what will come next. This bill is so poorly drafted, it has this government backpedalling so fast that I think time may go back to before they introduced the bill. Every day the communication changes. It was a mistake, so she says, that her intentions were not included in the text of the bill. It is now up to

her to clearly put her intentions in writing before expecting anyone to trust her.

The minister said on November 27, "Our legislation allows us the flexibility to develop common-sense regulations." In other words, this legislation allows the Premier the flexibility to do whatever she wants to after Bill 6 is passed. Nobody in their right mind would agree to that, Mr. Speaker. The Premier is expecting Alberta family farms to trust her as this government develops common-sense regulations. Alberta does not believe that this government possesses any common sense about life on the family farm or in those farming communities. They certainly are not prepared to give free rein to a government that has broken their trust on this issue and others.

Bill 6 legislation does not exist on family farms in every other jurisdiction in Canada, as the Premier would have us believe. Alberta farmers and ranchers have spoken loud and clear. Do the right thing, Premier. Respect the . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North West.

Parliamentary Language

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Twenty-six years ago a man walked into l'école Polytechnique in Montreal and killed 14 women. His decision to use violence to make his political statement is sadly not a rare occurrence. We see examples of violence against women every day in our society. As female politicians we are subject to a dizzying array of verbal attacks. Hate a piece of legislation? Then depict the Premier with a pitchfork in her back. That a cartoon as offensive as that is casually passed off as biting satire is bad enough; to do it on the heels of the anniversary of one of this country's worst examples of violence against women is in startlingly poor taste. We have so far to go as people to understand that the power of the pen and the word to damage is so profound.

We face that responsibility as legislators every day. When we walk into this Chamber, we all have the tools to set an example for the province, but too often we use our time to toss insults across the aisle, to inflame our supporters with gross overstatements of each other's nefarious intentions, to wound politically. If we face our jobs every day with the intention to be legislators first and partisan politicians later, we might engender more respect from the public. It is easy yelling "commie" or "climate change denier" across the aisle, but taking the higher moral ground requires us all to work a little bit harder.

I don't believe that there is a single MLA in this room who wants to make Alberta worse. So perhaps it's time to start using the language of facilitators, communicators, and advocates. There is nothing acceptable about a cartoon of any politician with a pitchfork in their back. It is unfunny, ill-timed, and feels more than a little threatening, but our incendiary words are weapons, too, and when we stop plunging them into each other's backs and start using them to find solutions to our problems, we create the most powerful weapon of all, the example of leaders who have earned the right to . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Alberta Hospital Edmonton

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise and speak to an important service that is being provided within my constituency of Edmonton-Manning. Alberta Hospital Edmonton is one of the key mental health centre providers caring for Albertans and Northwest Territory residents through ongoing mental health supports.

It first opened on July 1, 1923, to support returning veterans who were struggling with shell shock, now considered PTSD. Since that time Alberta Hospital has become essential for those requiring in-patient mental health supports. In fact, the hospital supports over 40 per cent of provincial mental health in-patient services.

Alberta Hospital offers services ranging from acute care to forensic care, providing support to youth, seniors, and everyone in between. The expertise that is available at Alberta Hospital is second to none. Doctors, psychiatrists, social workers, nursing staff, and support staff all provide a safe and nurturing environment for those who are in need of critical mental health supports. Through the hospital's expert care many individuals in need of mental health supports are able to stabilize and transition back into the community and lead successful lives.

Mr. Speaker, I know many of my constituents are proud to have Alberta Hospital within our constituency. They know of the good work that is being done there and look forward to the report of the mental health review that was called by our Premier earlier this year. These constituents know that our government takes the mental health of all Albertans as a serious issue and want to ensure that all Albertans feel safe and included in all of our communities.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta Hospital is a leader in the services provided to Albertans with mental health challenges, and I am thankful for all the work that they continue to do within the constituency of Edmonton-Manning for all Albertans.

Thank you.

CBC Radio Edmonton Turkey Drive

Mr. Schmidt: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to tell you and this Assembly about CBC Radio Edmonton's turkey drive, CBC's annual fundraiser in support of Edmonton's Food Bank. This is the turkey drive's 20th year, and since 1995 CBC has raised more than \$3 million for Edmonton area food banks. This year CBC hopes to raise \$500,000, and the need is great. According to the Hunger Count published in November, food bank usage across Alberta has spiked 23 per cent since 2014. Forty per cent of those served will be children, most of them children in single-parent families. By donating generously to this fundraiser, you'll be giving help and hope to those who need it most in their hour of need.

I'm pleased to say that the turkey drive spirit is alive and well in my constituency of Edmonton-Gold Bar. The Holyrood school in my constituency has participated in this fundraiser for many years. Under the direction of music teacher Mrs. Helene Magus the students of Holyrood school eagerly participate in the turkey drive. Students forgo birthday presents to collect donations instead, and the whole school community pitches in to contribute. Holyrood has won the junior turkey spirit trophy award seven times since 2008. This is awarded to the school that raises the most money for the turkey drive. Last year they raised the impressive total of \$33,275. I'm keeping my fingers crossed that Holyrood school wins again.

I know that many families in my constituency will also be the beneficiaries of food baskets from Edmonton's Food Bank this Christmas. I can't say that I'm happy about this situation, but I am happy that neighbours are helping neighbours in their time of need. The turkey drive this year kicks off on December 11 and runs through December 18. You can support the drive by taking donations to CBC Edmonton's donation desk, by taking donations directly to the Edmonton Food Bank itself, or by going to the CBC Edmonton's website and clicking on the link that will allow you to make an online donation. I encourage all of my colleagues at the Legislature to make a donation and help those in need have a merrier Christmas and to start 2016 on the right foot.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Public Consultation

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to take this opportunity to talk about consultation. Consultation is defined as the action or process of formally consulting or discussing, a conference in which advice is given or views are exchanged. When you don't consult with those who are most affected by legislation, it is no longer a fair and open process. To paraphrase a constituent, any bill designed to protect us should be written with us so that it doesn't harm us.

1:50

Due to a lack of consultation from the government on Bill 6 several members of the opposition have been asked to hold town hall meetings. I myself held two this weekend, one of which was in the Deputy Speaker's own constituency of Peace River. More and more cities and towns are asking Wildrose for consultation, including the town of Mayerthorpe in the minister of agriculture's riding. Wildrose MLAs have attended meetings in Bassano, with over 600 in attendance; Killam, with over 300 in attendance; and in James River, with over 175 in attendance. This is how consultation should be done. Industry has also spoken out against Bill 6, with a large number of agricultural organizations taking a stand against this government's risky approach.

But it's not just farmers and ranchers decrying the lack of consultation from the NDP. Recently the Alberta School Boards Association expressed concerns regarding a lack of consultation on Bill 8. A news article on the weekend showed that a vast majority of Albertans have concerns about this NDP government's carbon tax on everything as well. It all makes you wonder who the NDP is listening to, because it's certainly not Albertans.

Camrose county has come out with a letter to the Premier, where they quote the Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose as saying: it is difficult as a politician answering questions, much like standing in quicksand as the target and intentions of the bill are constantly changing. Well, Mr. Speaker, at least he's honest. Now he knows how Alberta farmers are feeling. This government promised to do things differently and be more inclusive, but that hasn't been the case.

The opposition is listening to Alberta families who are worried about this NDP government's ideological agenda. Listening is core to who we are, and that will never . . . [Mr. Loewen's speaking time expired]

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of Her Majesty's Official Opposition.

Job Creation and Retention

Mr. Jean: Our economy is in crisis. Over 80,000 Albertans have lost their jobs, bankruptcies are on the rise, and the number of those suffering from depression is climbing. We know that the NDP isn't helping. Their risky experiments are scaring away investment, and the \$3 billion carbon tax will hit families the hardest. What's the Energy minister's advice to those hurting? Well, leave the province until things get better. First we are embarrassing cousins, and now this. Will the Premier stand today and apologize to Albertans for members of her cabinet insulting Albertans when they're already down?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I believe that the minister has already issued an apology for misspeaking about

what her intention was with respect to jobs in B.C. That being said, Mr. Speaker, this is a wonderful opportunity for me to reinforce the strategy that our government has put in place around economic development and job creation. We have invested unprecedented amounts into infrastructure, for instance. Just recently the Conference Board of Canada has indicated that that will help remediate the effects of the drop in the price of oil, something over which this province doesn't have control, but we can control our response to ensuring . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Jean: Growing numbers of these jobless Albertans think it's time for the NDP to start looking for jobs in other provinces, and the only thing they have to blame for this is themselves. Companies like Encana are moving money away from Alberta, higher taxes are strangling our chance to recover, and investment is fleeing Alberta. Next door, in British Columbia, where they actually reduced taxes and are holding the line on spending, their province is expected to lead growth across Canada. To the Premier: why do Albertans now have to look out of province for work instead of here at home?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, to be clear, Alberta is an energy exporting economy, and B.C. is not, so there's a difference there. That being said, we are aware that this is hurting Alberta families. We know that the drop in oil prices means that families are struggling and jobs are being lost. That is why we took action to stabilize front-line services, to invest in infrastructure, to free up capital for small business and medium enterprises, and to engage in a job-creation program. These are the kinds of things you do when you want to help families who are suffering from job loss.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Jean: For the very first time since the early '90s Alberta has higher unemployment than Ontario. Unless we change track, Alberta will see higher unemployment than Quebec for the first time since 1983. While the NDP are working on building their new fantasy economy, they're telling Albertans to move somewhere else. It's disgraceful. Albertans deserve leaders who fight for them, not against them. When will the Premier back down from her bad policies so Albertans can get back to work?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, as I've said before, it appears as though the folks on the other side really think that cutting back and laying off teachers and nurses is the way to raise the price of oil, but we know that's not true. We know that it does create major challenges for Albertans, and we are working together with industry, with job creators, with stakeholders to ensure that we do everything we can to ameliorate the effect of the drop in the price of oil and to stabilize jobs in Alberta and to do everything we can to soften the blow of something over which we, unfortunately . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.
Second question.

Carbon Tax

Mr. Jean: Everything the NDP is doing is hurting our economy, and Albertans are worried. They're upset that the NDP are ramming through a new carbon tax that will mean \$3 billion out of their pockets and into a government slush fund. A new poll shows overwhelming opposition to this backdoor PST and for good reason. It will cost families an extra \$1,000 a year, hurt our economy, and

raise the price of everything for Albertans. Will the Premier admit that she does not have the support of Albertans to bring in the largest tax grab in Alberta's history?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, in fact, just recently the Conference Board of Canada released projections which indicated that the economy should begin to recover next year. One of the reasons that will happen, they say, is because of our government's policies with respect to infrastructure investment. That's leadership. We will continue to work with stakeholders and with industry to do what we can to invest in technology, to invest in job creation, to invest in diversification, and to stabilize front-line services as we work through, together, these challenging times.

Mr. Jean: The NDP talk about a new carbon tax as some kind of a gift to get enemies of our energy sector on board for new pipelines. Environmental Defense and ForestEthics stood side by side with this Premier when she announced her new carbon tax. Here's what they've been up to since. One has a petition wanting to shut down the Energy East pipeline, and the other is campaigning against any pipeline expansion to the west. Will the Premier admit that this new carbon tax will do nothing to get new pipelines built and will just hurt Alberta's families?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, the Official Opposition believes that the thing to do about climate change is simply ignore it, and that is not the responsible way forward. It's not the responsible way forward for our industry, it's not the responsible way forward for our hopes to get pipelines built, and it is not the responsible way forward for our children and people who rely on our air and our land and our water. We are going to take action, we're going to be responsible, we're going to do our part in Alberta, and that's going to help our environment and our industry.

Mr. Jean: Maybe the Premier can listen to her new deputy chief of staff that once said that a carbon tax – and I quote – threatens to penalize families who are already doing their part for the environment. End quote. Albertans remember an NDP that used to fight for fairness, and now they're pushing a new tax that will raise the price of everything for Albertans, all to satisfy enemies who want to shut down our oil patch. It is shameful. Premier, what do you have to say to every family in Alberta that will be poorer and is out of work because of your new carbon tax, that will not reduce emissions?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think it's important to point out that the carbon pricing plan that we introduced includes provisions for rebating low- and middle-income families. The member opposite knows that. He's just decided not to talk about it. He also knows that this government has committed to taking every cent of that carbon price and reinvesting it in diversification, in technological development, in working with industry to help them bring down their emissions so that we can grow our market, not lose it. That's what our plan will do. They know that's what it will do, but they just don't want to talk about the real outcome.

The Speaker: Third main question.

Mr. Jean: The NDP plan is to bring in a carbon tax that will not reduce GHG emissions by one iota.

2:00 Farm and Ranch Worker Legislation

Mr. Jean: Bill 6 continues to anger Albertans right across the province. Each government town hall is a bigger fiasco than the last

one. This weekend Wildrose MLAs hosted seven Bill 6 town halls. At every town hall the message is clear: kill Bill 6. This afternoon the government will talk to press about amendments to this bill. This is the third time this government has tried to get Bill 6 right, but the fact is that amendments won't cut it. Farmers want the Premier to kill Bill 6 and consult with them. Why . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'm not exactly sure who's doing the Official Opposition leader's math, but this is the first amendment, and it's the one amendment that we've been talking about all along. [interjections] That being said, what we've done is that we have listened to Albertans, and we have heard that they were . . .

The Speaker: I will stop the clock. I am having difficulty hearing the Premier.

Hon. Premier, finish your answer, please.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What we have done is that we have listened to Albertans, and we've heard that as a result of our miscommunication, for which I take responsibility, they misunderstood the application of Bill 6. So we are bringing in an amendment that will make it perfectly clear that family members and . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Jean: This NDP government did not consult with farmers. The Premier fails to understand that many farmers already carry insurance that is far superior to WCB. She'd know that if she'd actually talked to farmers. She should also know that farmers are not the only industry exempted from mandatory WCB coverage. Unions are also exempted. They're allowed the freedom to choose the kind of insurance that works best for their members. If the Premier was to change that, you can bet she'd get Gil McGowan on the phone first thing. Why did she not provide that same courtesy to Alberta farmers before introducing Bill 6?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Every year in Alberta 17 people, at least, die in work-related injuries on farms. Between now and April 1 almost 140 people will be seriously injured and lose income. This is why we are moving forward on this. We are still moving forward in a way that ensures that family members, volunteers, and even paid family members are not covered by this legislation. But we do think that vulnerable paid employees who are not related to the owners of the farms need protection, and that is what we will give them.

Mr. Jean: The Premier has blamed the rejection of Bill 6 on misinformation from government officials. We have checked. Everything the officials said about Bill 6 was correct. The government's own websites and information sheets confirm that. Bill 6 was designed to cover kids doing farm chores and to apply to neighbours volunteering and helping out. Bill 6 applies to 4-H because selling that cow is a commercial activity. The only misinformation around Bill 6 is coming from the Premier. Did the Premier not read her own bill, or is she blaming others for her own mistakes and arrogance?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is where, of course, misinformation does become a problem because this does not apply

to 4-H – and it never would have applied to 4-H – it doesn't apply to family members, and it doesn't apply to neighbours. To be perfectly clear, the amendment to be introduced today – although we would have still had this outcome without the amendment, the amendment will make it absolutely clear that that's the way we are going to go forward with this. We have listened to farmers. We understand that they were concerned. We are now moving forward to ensure safety while ensuring that family members are excluded.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

The hon. leader of the third party.

Public Consultation

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The NDP has spent the past days complaining about misinformation about Bill 6. The hyperbole and rhetoric from some people could have been avoided if the government had not begun by publishing what they themselves call misinformation and been up front and honest with Albertans from day one. To the Premier: since even you have admitted that communications have been ineffective and confusing, which has farmers and ranchers in an uproar, don't you think you should stop on Bill 6 until they actually feel heard by you and your government?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for that question. As I've said before, in the next four months if we were to delay it, we would have almost 140 people injured that wouldn't have coverage, we would have four or five people who might die, and there would be no right to refuse unsafe work. These are the levels of fatalities and injuries that are happening on farms, so we're going to take action now. In the meantime all that other regulation, all the other specificity, will be consulted on rigorously for months with all parties.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, an amendment introduced today at 3:30 guarantees there's been no consultation because the farmers couldn't have seen the amendment.

Just last week the School Boards Association sent a letter to the Education minister stating that they had not been provided the opportunity for meaningful consultation. Given that we repeatedly hear the same sentiments from farmers asked about Bill 6, to the Premier: why do you think dictating policy to Albertans instead of listening to them is the best course of action?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, as we have said before, it is very common to put in place the architecture of legislation, and that is what we are doing with Bill 6 to keep paid farm workers safe and to ensure they are eligible for WCB. But we are also committed to moving forward with rigorous consultation at a number of different technical tables to talk about how the regulations will apply and will be refined in exactly the same way that they have been in every other province while still maintaining the viability of family farms. That's what we're going to do here in Alberta, too.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, consultation after the fact is like telling prisoners when mealtime is after they're convicted.

Last week this government blamed hard-working department staff for the fiasco that is Bill 6. Albertans are now against government on bills 6, 8, and 5 as well as on climate change, carbon tax, royalty review, the budget, and a pile of other issues. Isn't it time to admit you need to start listening to Albertans before launching in on legislation, that they seem to almost always dislike?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, as I've said before – and it's interesting to see this coming from the member opposite – it's standard, you know, that you pass legislation, and then you move to regulations, and you consult on the regulations. That's the way it works. [interjections] That's the way it's worked for a very, very long time. The fact of the matter is – I mean, writing regulations behind closed doors and never talking to anyone about them is not cool, but that's not what we're going to do here. We've been very clear that we are going to invite stakeholders, industry people, farmers to the table to talk about how the Employment Standards Code, the Occupational Health and Safety Code, and the Labour Relations Code apply to farmers in a . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, would you please not raise your voice so high next time.

The Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dental Care Costs

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Dental care is more than the key to pearly whites; it's a major contributor to individuals' overall health and lifespan. However, costs of dental care are the highest in the country and remain a serious barrier for Albertans to get dental care. Without a fee guide, most patients don't know what they're going to be charged until they get into the chair. The Minister of Health has admitted that high cost is a barrier and launched a review of dental costs and the Dental Association and College last summer, but we haven't heard a word since. To the minister: when will we see dentists post their fees, and how is the dental association involved with . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Of course, it's important for us to make sure that Albertans get good value for the investment they're making in their own health, including dental care. Certainly, when the fact that Alberta was among the highest in the country was brought to my attention in the summer, I worked immediately to make sure that my officials were moving forward on a way to make sure that we address, in consultation with a variety of different stakeholders, some of the root causes that are contributing to that. I'll be happy to update the House in 2016. I'm not going to give a month quite yet because I want to make sure we get the review right.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, ironically, the Dental Association and College is actually standing in the way of real competition among dentists by putting extreme limitations on dentists' public information and advertising and disallowing special offers for low income and seniors. To the minister: will the minister take steps to require the ADAC to free its members so they can let the public know where and when they can save money on expensive dental operations?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the idea. Certainly, there will be a variety of different outcomes contemplated throughout the report. That's one of the reasons why we're taking our time. We're working in collaboration with the Alberta Dental Association and College to ensure that we understand their opinions as well as the opinions of others throughout Alberta.

2:10

I have to say that the number of responses when we made the announcement that we were going to be moving forward with the review on dental fees was very positive from Albertans. Clearly, they want to make sure that we move on making sure that they get good value for their investment as well. Certainly, this is one of the things that we'll be considering. I look forward to updating the House in a timely fashion.

Dr. Swann: Mr. Speaker, I'm quite sure that the Alberta dental association did not give a positive response to investigation of their activities.

Now, scores of dentists have raised concerns about how the Dental Association and College governs itself. Most urgent is the need to separate the association and the college since the college is trying to protect the public and the association is trying to protect and promote dentistry. To the minister: when will you require, as other provinces do, the separation of the association and the college into two separate organizations and eliminate this conflict of interest?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our government is conducting a review of the dental fees. We've also engaged the Alberta Dental Association and College in that review. In terms of specific outcomes resulting from the review, the review hasn't been completed yet, so it would be premature for me to say what direction we might be taking on the idea that the hon. member is presenting or other ideas that have been brought forward from insurance providers as well as within government and within the dental association itself. Certainly, it's all food for thought at this point.

Don't forget to floss.

The Speaker: The Member for Calgary-East.

PDD Housing Safety Standards

Ms Luff: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I've heard plenty of concerns from PDD-funded individuals and their families as well as service providers in my constituency. Particularly, the SCOPE Society and Disability Action Hall, I recall, were some of the first meetings that I took after I was elected. They say that these regulations are particularly strict and that compliance would require costly renovations and would unfairly marginalize PDD clients. Some even fear that landlords will evict PDD clients or refuse to rent to PDD clients because of these regulations. To the Minister of Human Services: what is your government doing to address these troubling concerns?

The Speaker: The Minister of Human Services.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. Every Albertan deserves to live in the community of their choice and to be supported to live safely and independently. We have heard those concerns as well. The previous government failed to take into account those concerns. That's why last Friday we announced consultation that will guide us on a go-forward basis as to what path we should take and how we can balance safety with those concerns.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

First supplemental.

Ms Luff: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister for the answer. Given that some PDD clients require assistance to leave their homes in case of an emergency and given that some have complex needs, careful consideration is needed when it comes to ensuring their safety. To the same minister: what will be the goal of consultation on this issue?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me begin by saying that the safety of PDD individuals is of paramount importance. It's also vital that whatever measures we put in place are practical and that they are affordable. The goal of this consultation is to look into those concerns raised by PDD individuals and service providers and to guide the department and the government on the safety standards and what's appropriate in the circumstances.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
Second supplemental.

Ms Luff: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's important that consultation focuses on those most impacted by this government policy and that the engagement is meaningful, effective, and inclusive. Again to the minister: how did you choose who makes up the consultation committee, and what expertise do they bring to the table?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Sabir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. I'm very proud to say that the consultation team brings a wealth of knowledge and experience in the relevant field. It consists of members of academia, it consists of service providers, it consists of self-advocates, and it also includes an MLA on this team. This consultation team is a very balanced team that will help us guide the future direction.
Thank you.

Medicine Hat Town Hall Meeting

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, as you know, over 1,200 people attended the town hall in our city of Medicine Hat. I hope you heard everyone speak passionately against Bill 6. Thousands upon thousands of people in our ridings simply do not trust this government. To the Premier. They don't trust that you have their best interests at heart. They don't trust your agenda. They don't trust you to get this right. Will you kill this bill, consult with farmers and ranchers, and try to earn this trust back?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, the majority of Albertans believe that paid workers on farms need to be kept safe, and they also believe that they need to receive an income should they be injured, and that is what we are going to do. We are also going to go forward with technical consultation tables with respect to the application of the detailed codes in the form of regulations.

Mr. Fildebrandt: After the bill has passed.

Ms Notley: Exactly. You don't consult on regulations before the bill passes.

So that's what we're going to do. It's absolutely the reasonable way to go forward, and we will earn their trust.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, at the meeting in Medicine Hat it was noted that the Health minister has repeatedly rejected funding for the local air ambulance service, HALO. I must ask the minister: given that safety is apparently so high on your list for the people of

southeastern Alberta and given the known problems with emergency services in rural Alberta, why do you steadfastly refuse to help our emergency air ambulance while paying lip service to safety?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Certainly, we do appreciate that a number of members in the community have contributed to make sure that there is an air ambulance. We have a responsibility to make sure that we use the public resources in a way that's derived based on where the greatest needs are, and I know that everyone wants to have access to an air ambulance in their own community. In terms of specific funding for HALO I'd be happy to follow up in additional conversations with the hon. member, but at this point the demand in the area hasn't warranted public investment.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, whereas this government has made an absolute mess of Bill 6 and given that the government story seems to change every single day and given that even the agriculture minister could not give his full support to his own bill at a town hall hosted by my Wildrose colleague, will this government admit that it made a mistake, listen to the overwhelming majority who oppose this, and kill the bill?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, actually, I found it quite interesting because apparently at that town hall that the minister of agriculture attended, one organized by the Official Opposition, pretty much a first I think, by the way – nonetheless, I believe that one of the members opposite suggested that there are parts of the bill that he was in favour of. So, you know, I'm not sure who's in favour or who's not in favour. I know that our caucus is completely behind moving forward to protect workers in Alberta.

Workers' Compensation for Farm Workers

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, speaking to the Canadian Injured Workers association in July 2012, the Premier said, and I quote, that the Alberta Workers' Compensation Board functions solely as a means of providing cheap insurance to Alberta employers at the expense of the dignity and the health and the future of Alberta's workers and, further, that workers, quote, suffer the consequences of that day in and day out. My question to the labour minister. In 24 days Bill 6 will force WCB upon Alberta farm workers even though the Premier says that WCB causes workers to suffer. If the Premier is right, why are you forcing WCB on Alberta farm workers?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, I actually want to thank the member opposite for that question. Let us be clear. WCB could be better and could be improved, and our government is committed to doing the work that the previous government never did to improve WCB. But, that being said, it is far better than the alternative, which is forcing poor, vulnerable, injured workers to hire lawyers to sue insurance companies, which is the way it would work in the absence of the WCB. That is why most workers abandoned that idea and embraced the WCB model over a hundred years ago, except farm workers.

2:20

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's getting crowded under the bus.

Given that in the same speech the Premier states that, quote, we have a long list of how we would change Workers' Compensation Board to make it fair and given that in the past seven months none of these changes have been made, to the labour minister: why haven't you fixed all the flaws on your long list before foisting this

system that the Premier says is unfair onto Alberta farmers and farm workers?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, as the member opposite probably knows, we have engaged in a review of agencies, boards, and commissions, and the Workers' Compensation Board is part of that. We are in the process of trying to do a fulsome consultative review of how we can improve the service provided by WCB, but that being said, it is fundamentally different than saying that you remove WCB or keep people from having access to it and tell them to sue a private insurer to try and get a fraction of the benefits. That's what happens in the absence of WCB, and that's what we are trying to change. Then, once farm workers are covered by it . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, we hear again and again – and we heard it again today from the Premier – that the motivation behind Bill 6 is to protect injured farm workers. Now, given that Bill 6 makes WCB mandatory without provision for other forms of coverage and given that in her own words WCB causes injured workers to suffer a loss of dignity and health, why are you forcing a system that you yourself have described in words that I cannot use, because they're unparliamentary, on the very farm workers that you purport to be protecting?

Ms Notley: Well, as I've said in the answer to the previous two questions, which I will say again, workers' compensation in Alberta after 44 years of that government does need to be improved. However, it is far better – far better – than there being no compensation available to workers and far better than forcing vulnerable, injured workers to sue insurance companies to get a fraction of the benefits that they would otherwise get. That is why we're going to move forward to protect paid farm workers in Alberta.

Public Consultation (continued)

Mr. Fildebrandt: Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by thanking the minister of agriculture for showing up to a town hall meeting on Bill 6 in Bassano this weekend. I also want to thank 600 farmers who did their best to open the minister's eyes and explain how Bill 6 will hurt their family farms and ranches. Premier, my constituents at the town hall voted unanimously against the bill. Your agriculture minister was there. Polls show that your bill is hugely unpopular in every corner of the province, rural and urban. Will you listen to the people of Strathmore-Brooks and all Alberta and kill Bill 6?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, in fact, the same poll that the member opposite quotes suggests that should farm owners and their family members and volunteers be excluded from the application of the bill, which will be very clear once our amendment is introduced, over 60 per cent of Albertans support protecting farm workers, and that's why we're going to move forward on it.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Mr. Speaker, nobody trusts this government to get it right.

Given that the agriculture minister is attacking family farms when farmers are telling them by the thousands not to, the Energy minister is telling laid-off workers to get a job in B.C., the environment minister is ramming through a massive \$3 billion ND PST carbon tax on everything, why is the Premier consulting with union bosses, hardline activists, and a few CEOs but not the everyday Albertans that her policies are hurting?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, this is a good opportunity to actually talk about the extensive consultation that went on with respect to our climate change plan. In fact, as the member opposite has indicated, a number of industry people are in favour of our climate change plan, including the Calgary Chamber of commerce and other chambers of commerce and other business groups, because they see it for what it is, which is an opportunity to move forward, acknowledge the problems that we have, and reinvest in technological upgrading and diversification in our province. That's the kind of forward thinking that this government will do. We will not ignore a problem and pretend it doesn't exist. We will take it head-on and try . . .

Mr. Fildebrandt: Albertans see it for what it is. It's an ND PST socialist cash grab that will go straight into a slush fund. They never campaigned on it. They have no mandate to do it; 70 per cent of Albertans are against their cash grab. The hardline activists running that government have an agenda totally at odds with the common-sense values of everyday Albertans. Does the Premier really believe that she has the support of Albertans to impose the single largest tax increase in Alberta's history?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Actually, I believe that we have consulted with a broad range, that we have the endorsement of well-known socialists like the president of CNRL and additional well-known socialists like the Calgary Chamber of commerce and the Conference Board of Canada. It's amazing, the socialists that are lining up behind this plan. It's amazing. They're everywhere. Wherever you turn, there are socialists.

Farm and Ranch Worker Legislation Consultation

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, over the last two weeks, while the Wildrose caucus went out and actually listened to our farm brothers and sisters, we have heard two recurring messages. First, nobody cares about the safety of the family farm more than the mums and dads who run them. Second, this government needs to back off their socialist agenda and listen to the tens of thousands of farmers and ranchers who have been chanting, "Kill Bill 6." To add insult to injury, the Premier decided to exempt Hutterites. They were offended that she would try to pit them against their farmer brothers and sisters. To the Premier: when will you start representing all of Alberta's farmers and ranchers rather than just some?

Ms Sigurdson: The farm and ranch legislation is about protecting paid workers on farms and to make sure that they have the same rights that workers do in every other workplace in Alberta and in Canada. We know, actually, that the farm fatality rate in B.C. was reduced by 68 per cent when similar legislation came in, and the injury rate went down 52 per cent and serious injuries by 41 per cent. So we know this will help, for sure.

Mr. Hunter: Given that the Premier has said that she wants this to be an open and transparent government – in fact, she made a big deal over the opening of the front doors to show her resolve – but the legislation introduced by her government so far is anything but open and transparent and now, with the first real push-back from voters, she has removed contact information for herself and all of her caucus members, Premier, will you take one small step in the right direction and once again allow the people of Alberta to know how to contact you?

The Speaker: The minister of labour.

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Well, we – myself and many other ministers – have been out at the consultations, and this is just the beginning. We’re going to rigorously have consultations to make sure we get it right, and we’ll keep working with farmers and ranchers, with industry leaders to make sure that the regulations are right. We’re putting forward an amendment later today to clarify things because people asked us to put it in writing, which is what we’re doing, and we’re making it clear. I’m proud to stand here to do that and to make sure that farmers and ranchers know that we’re working with them.

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, given that this bill has been handled in the most deplorable manner and that each consultation – I mean, told-you session – degrades each time and given that this government doesn’t seem to respect hard-working farmers and ranchers in our province, when will this government concede that Albertans don’t want anything to do with their risky socialist experiments?

Ms Sigurdson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. We’re continuing to work with farmers and ranchers, industry leaders, to make sure that we get all of the details right with this group of people. We’re committed. We’ve gone out to public consultations and we’ve heard – I’ve heard first-hand. I sat and talked to many people all across this province, and I’m proud to do it again. There’s been a tremendous amount of misinformation, and we need to make sure that we get it clear now. We’re working to do that. We’re going to continue to work on that. This is a bill that I can stand behind, and I’m proud to.

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

2:30

Fentanyl Use

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On November 23 the Mental Health Review Committee provided the Minister of Health with recommendations to address Alberta’s fentanyl crisis. The immediate action plan includes allowing all first responders to administer the life-saving fentanyl antidote. To the Minister of Health: given that last week you told the *Globe and Mail* that you would make the change “before the end of the year,” when almost one person is overdosing on fentanyl and dying every day in Alberta, why would you wait even one day to save lives?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. It certainly is an issue of concern, and we want to make sure that we’re acting quickly to try to get the life-saving antidote into the hands of people as quickly as possible. That’s why we’ve purchased and we’re distributing an additional 2,000 naloxone kits across this province, but it’s only one part of the larger solution. It would be a lot easier if the federal counterparts were of the same awareness as we are in Alberta. We certainly have work to do in collaboration, but we’re doing our part provincially, within the current legal legislation that we have, to try to move it forward as quickly as possible.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you. That doesn’t explain why the recommendations from the mental health committee haven’t been implemented yet.

Given that as minister you can immediately implement the recommendations of your own Mental Health Review Committee

and no legislation is required for the five immediate action recommendations and given that the committee has called upon you to display “clear leadership and partnership,” why have you not implemented the immediate action recommendations of your own committee? What are you waiting for, Minister?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the question and the opportunity to address it. Now doctors and specialized pharmacists can prescribe naloxone. All paramedics and pharmacists can administer naloxone in an emergency. We are fast-tracking regulatory changes so that other first responders can administer naloxone as well, including paramedics. The Alberta Health Professions Act is an option that we’re working on. We want to make sure that we get the right answer moving forward. We’re working hard to make sure that we get the antidote into the hands of people who are likely to abuse, and that’s one of the reasons why we’re working to invest in these additional 2,000 kits. But it does take time, and in the meantime we’re doing everything we can.

Mr. Ellis: “Immediate” means now.

To the same minister: given that this government is wasting no time in pushing through legislation for 331 farm-related deaths from 2007 to 2014 and given that fentanyl is on track to kill that many Albertans this year alone and given that for every day wasted 15 more Albertans, 15 so far, may have already died, why are you not reacting with the greatest urgency to this crisis?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The piece around having other first responders able to administer naloxone is the one piece I was speaking specifically to. With regard to addressing this, we have certainly increased public awareness. We’re improving addiction treatment across the province. We’ve created a fentanyl response team that is pulling the right people around the table, and they’re connecting on an almost daily basis around what’s happening in different parts of the province as well as reducing the supply and trafficking of the drug. We take this very seriously, and we’re doing everything within our own authority to be able to move forward on this. The federal government has legislative authority over prescription drugs, so we’re trying to make sure through information that we’re urging them along around . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Hospital Infrastructure

Mr. Carson: Mr. Speaker, the people of southwest Edmonton are in need of a modern hospital. My constituency of Edmonton-Meadowlark is home to the Misericordia. My constituents were glad to see \$20 million allocated in Budget 2015 for much-needed long-term planning for the Misericordia and Royal Alex, but they know that there’s still a lot of work ahead of us to fix these serious problems within both hospitals. To the Minister of Health: can you update the House on how you’re working with hospitals like the Misericordia to address our health care infrastructure needs going forward?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the important question. Our government has inherited significant deferred infrastructure maintenance, and our government is committed to investing in hospitals that Albertans need like

the Misericordia and the Royal Alex. That's why we're working with Alberta Health Services and Alberta Infrastructure to ensure that the buildings meet the current and future demands in those areas. We want to make sure that we get this right moving forward, and part of that means that we do the planning work up front, before you make an announcement, a lesson that the former government didn't know.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that places like the Misericordia are crumbling and in need of repair, to the same minister: why is it important that we take the time to consult, study, and plan before moving forward?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. After 44 years of a PC government, where there were projects after projects announced without realistic timelines or realistic budgets, we are absolutely committed to making sure that we get it right at the front end moving forward so that we can give the facilities that are so desperately needed. The result is that communities are waiting and waiting and waiting, based on what's happened in the past. The budget also contains \$4.4 billion in unallocated funding for projects exactly like this so that we have a plan that suits the needs of the community. We'll be transparent about the costs, and we'll get it done right.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the minister. Given that in many cases, after years of neglect Alberta's health infrastructure deficits stretch across the province, again to the Minister of Health: what are you doing to address the backlog?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. In terms of reducing Alberta's health infrastructure backlog, that certainly is a priority. That's why the new capital plan helps make that a reality by investing more than \$2 billion already in the infrastructure strategy. As I said, we also have the \$4.4 billion. We're going to be using evidence to ensure that we continue to make the right decision moving forward. Capital plan 2015 also includes \$652 million over five years for capital maintenance and renewal specifically in health care facilities.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Government Policies

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The NDP government should know full well how frustrated Albertans are with their performance. I'd like to take the opportunity today to ask questions submitted to me by frustrated constituents. Quote: if you push Bill 6 through without consulting all Alberta farmers or at the very least making consultation available to all Alberta farmers, that is an abuse of power. To the Premier: what do you have to say to this Albertan about your consultation process?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, as I've said a number of times today, this is an issue that has been outstanding. It has been the subject of debate in the province for many, many years. We are moving forward to ensure that the basic ability to refuse unsafe work and

that access to workers' compensation are in place as of January 1 for paid farm workers who are not related to the farmers. That's something that is long overdue. That is something that is in place in almost every other jurisdiction. The health and safety piece is in place in every other jurisdiction, the workers' compensation in most other jurisdictions. It is long overdue in Alberta.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.
First supplemental.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that just last week we found out that another 15,000 Albertans lost their jobs, I'd like to highlight one incident in my constituency where my constituent wrote: my trucking business has seen a drop in work, loss of customers, layoffs, and idle equipment; we have no debt, and we have cash, but we will not be investing. Again to the minister: what does this government have to say to the thousands of Albertans losing their jobs and the many more companies seeing business dry up?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We absolutely know that there are many families who are hurting through this drop in world oil prices and the economy. Just as the Conference Board of Canada said, though, next year is going to get better. We believe that it'll get better. We're investing in infrastructure to make it so. We're also investing in job development so that more people will be working.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the NDP government's jobs plan includes sending workers to B.C. and hurting Alberta's biggest industry and given that Albertans are overwhelmingly opposed to the carbon tax that this government is proposing, I'd like to quote one more constituent directly: this government needs to get the confidence back into the major players of this province by not increasing royalties and to forget the carbon tax as their way of funding all their election promises. To the Minister of Finance: is this government willing to listen to Albertans and follow this wise advice?

Mr. Ceci: Yes, this government is always willing to listen to everybody, and we're doing so through our budget consultations, that we did before the budget and that I did after the budget. Budget 2016 is going to be built on that same information. Going forward, we've also looked at the forecasters for WTI and are taking their views into account. Yes, this government listens.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

2:40

Forest Industry Issues

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Forestry plays an integral role in the diversification of our economy. I have and continue to advocate for the forest industry to ensure that our resource remains viable, which allows forestry to further diversify and continue to stabilize Alberta's economy during economic downturns. This being said, forestry cannot continue to survive and be sustainable unless the government takes the lead on forest-related policy development. To the minister of forestry: what steps have you made to ensure that a new softwood lumber agreement is reached?

The Speaker: The Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Forestry is a critical sector of our economy. Over 15,000 Albertans work in forestry, and the industry is a key economic driver in at least 70 Alberta communities, including many in the minister's own constituency. The minister wants to see a long-term solution which provides our industry with market access and certainty for years to come. This government will be working with the federal government, industry, and other provinces to ensure that Alberta's interests are well represented as we move forward with this process.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the mountain pine beetle is expected to continue to spread west and that the area affected continues to rise and given that the mountain pine beetle is jeopardizing Alberta's forestry business and communities, to the minister of forestry: what is your government doing to help control the spread of mountain pine beetles?

The Speaker: The Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much for that question. Mr. Speaker, the minister just today signed an agreement with Saskatchewan to confirm their commitment to fight this infestation. This government is committing \$35 million next year to fight the infestation of pine beetle, which is having a tremendously negative impact on one of our most important industries.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that discussions continue on the establishment of caribou habitat areas and given that forestry is one of the few industries that demonstrates exemplary land stewardship and land-use planning, with range plans prepared for 120 years into the future, and given that, if not carefully selected, these caribou habitats will affect access to fibre supply, to the minister of forestry: what are you doing to ensure that the forest industry is part of the consultation process?

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, clearly, the preservation of caribou habitat is very important to this government, and I think it's something that should concern all Albertans. The forestry industry has an important role to play. It's one of the most important industries in our province, as I said a bit earlier, and certainly the views of the forestry industry with respect to this issue are of great importance to our government.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm rising today to table the requisite number of copies of the written responses to questions stemming from the Aboriginal Relations estimates, from the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship.
Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Mr. Piquette: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I'm pleased to rise to table for the information of the House the required copies of an amendment, which the government plans to bring forward, confirming that family farms will be excluded from occupational health and safety and from mandatory WCB coverage under Bill 6. I look

forward to debating these amendments when the bill reaches Committee of the Whole.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to table a letter I quoted last week in debate on Bill 6 from the crop sector working group regarding their consultations earlier this year and also from ablawg.ca, the University of Calgary legal review of the constitutional violations that exist in Alberta relating to farm worker rights.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I've had a request to introduce a visitor we have today. I think I need unanimous support to acknowledge that.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(continued)

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

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you for the accommodation, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured to rise today and introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly representatives from Alberta KC Affordable Seniors Housing Society and the John Bosco Child and Family Services Foundation affordable seniors housing project. Visiting us today are Gus Rozycki, president, seniors housing society; Mr. Stephen Dufresne, secretary, seniors housing society; Ms Maria Lupul, board member, St. Peter's Columbus Club; Mr. Gerald Bernakevitch, president, Bosco foundation; Mr. Julian Hnatiw, president of Edmonton chapter, Knights of Columbus; Mr. Ron Schuster, St. John Bosco Council 10986, Knights of Columbus. Hopefully, if they're here, they may rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Orders of the Day

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 204

Residential Tenancies (Safer Spaces for Victims of Domestic Violence) Amendment Act, 2015

The Chair: We have under consideration amendment A3, as introduced by the hon. Member for Airdrie. Are there any comments with respect to amendment A3? The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Chair. I believe that I was on my feet last week when the hour was such that debate concluded, so it's my pleasure just to rise briefly.

Some will recall that there was a little bit of debate around this particular amendment. The Wildrose and many members on this side of the House have been steadfast in their support of this bill. While the time for private members' business may be coming to a conclusion quite rapidly and the time that we have left in this session may be coming to a conclusion, not knowing how many

more Mondays there are left and knowing that this is a very important piece of legislation to be able to move forward on for many Albertans, upon speaking to my colleague from Airdrie, I would like to ask for unanimous consent of the House to withdraw the amendment.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Chair: We're back on the main bill, Bill 204. Are there any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Mackay-Nose Hill.

2:50

Ms McPherson: I just would like to take a minute to speak in support of the bill, Madam Chair. Shelters in Alberta are over-subscribed. Roughly two times as many women seek shelter as there are spaces. A lot of women feel trapped by the financial circumstances that they're in, and that's part of the reason why they stay in the situations that they're in. I know I've had that experience myself, and it's very isolating and lonely to be in that spot.

Another couple of things I wanted to highlight. Violence against women is a major public health issue, and it's also a human rights issue. By passing this bill, we can accommodate the opportunity for women to be able to leave dangerous situations. We can give them an opportunity for safety.

I think that on those merits alone those are really good reasons to pass this bill, and I encourage everyone to vote in favour of it. Thank you.

The Chair: Are there any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill?

Seeing none, then we will call the vote.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 204 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

A motion for the committee to now rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 204. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

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

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms Drever: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would request unanimous consent of the Assembly that notwithstanding Standing Order 64(2) the House should proceed immediately to third reading of Bill 204.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 204

Residential Tenancies (Safer Spaces for Victims of Domestic Violence) Amendment Act, 2015

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms Drever: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am pleased to rise today to move third reading of Bill 204, Residential Tenancies (Safer Spaces for Victims of Domestic Violence) Amendment Act, 2015.

I would like to thank all the members for engaging in the debate surrounding this bill and for participating in the discourse around domestic violence, a strong step towards ending domestic violence in this province.

I would also like to specifically thank the Member for Lethbridge-East for her courage and strength when championing this bill. The member shared her story with Albertans and, in doing so, became a role model to so many survivors of domestic violence. The member's strength in this House showed other survivors and anyone currently in an abusive relationship that they are not alone and that they, too, can break the silence. For that, I thank you.

This bill protects survivors of domestic violence from the financial repercussions of terminating a lease. These are high-risk situations, Madam Speaker, where survivors are often fleeing for their own personal safety and that of their loved ones. Bill 204 seeks to address the growing problem of domestic abuse here in Alberta. The ongoing discussion on sexual and domestic abuse occurring in the media, in this Assembly, and in the conversations of everyday Albertans shows that, clearly, abuse does not discriminate amongst gender, age, or socioeconomic lines. In Calgary alone domestic violence is up 16 per cent since last year, and the Calgary Police Service receives two calls every hour that deal with domestic abuse, 1 in 5 of which deals directly with physical violence.

Domestic violence affects not only those directly involved but also those who experience it indirectly. Research from the RCMP shows that "witnessing family violence is as harmful as experiencing it directly." I, Madam Speaker, was one of those children. I have first-hand experience witnessing my mother being a victim of domestic violence. I have memories of waking up in the middle of the night and my mother trying to flee with my sisters and I from her abuser. I have woken up confused by my surroundings to remember that I was in a women's shelter or a children's shelter. It is something that I've always carried with me throughout my life.

This is an ongoing problem in this province. Alberta women have the highest rates of self-reported spousal violence across the 10 provinces. This bill is a positive first step towards addressing this and helping victims of domestic violence. However, I want to state that we as a Legislature must continue to remove barriers for those fleeing violence as well as explore preventative solutions in order to eliminate domestic violence. This bill does not mark the end but the beginning of prioritizing ending domestic violence in this province.

Since the second reading of this bill, my office has received numerous phone calls and e-mails from survivors thankful for this legislation, and many Albertans have reached out to me personally to share their stories. I have spoken with many of my colleagues, who have received similar feedback from some of their constituents. These survivors are hopeful that this legislation will offer those who currently find themselves in dangerous situations a way

out. This bill has the support of survivors of domestic violence, both past and present, and has the support of stakeholders who deal directly and indirectly with survivors of domestic violence.

I ask one last time for your support in passing this bill today. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member wishing to speak to the bill in third reading?

Ms McKittrick: Madam Speaker, I am delighted that in this Assembly we are spending time considering what happens to the persons who have to flee violence in the home. Actually, it makes me really glad to be a member of this Assembly, where other members have spoken about their own experience and why this bill is important.

Last night I attended a ceremony in Fort Saskatchewan where a man involved in the White Ribbon campaign held a service for the 14 women who were killed in Montreal 26 years ago. Every time I attend one of these events, I am always reminded of the danger that many women face. I was delighted this year that this event was led only by men, who realized how they themselves have to be aware of the role that they have in violence against women.

3:00

If we pass this bill tonight in third reading, I think it's very appropriate because yesterday was December 6, and we will forever link this bill with the events that lead to the death of so many women. I wanted to really thank the member for having raised this bill at this time in our year.

So many women, and I should also say men, when they are faced with violence in their home cannot make decisions because they face poverty. In my work as a community developer I have seen so many situations where when somebody leaves their home, it means that they're forever living in poverty, not just at the moment but forever and forever, because of the tie-in that they either have because of their apartment that they live in or because of the situation that they face because their other partner abuses the bank. I'm glad that this bill is going to make it easier for persons who face domestic violence to be able to not stay in the apartment.

I wanted to talk about an organization in my own riding, A Safe Place, because I think that we often think that these issues only happen in the big communities of Calgary and Edmonton. In my own little riding of Sherwood Park we have an organization called A Safe Place, that has a shelter. One of the things that they keep telling us is that one of the hardest things is for the women to leave the home because they have no place to go, because they don't have the security that if they do leave the home, they'll be able to have a life with their children in the future. I wanted to take the opportunity to praise A Safe Place for the work that they do and for the actions that they've taken to make sure that everyone who is fleeing their home is safe and has a safe place to go.

I would like to urge every single member of this Assembly to vote for this bill. Even though this is not going to end violence against women or men in a domestic situation, it is going to provide the opportunity for those who face the situation to be able to live and not to feel that they have to stay in their place or to feel that they are going to be forever tied to a situation that makes things even more poor.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Cross.

Miranda: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise also in support of this bill. Like many of my colleagues today – in fact, I believe all of us here today are in favour of this bill. Most of us were very moved, I

think. Personally, I was deeply touched by the story that we heard from one of my own colleagues in caucus.

I have to tell you, Madam Speaker, thinking about this issue, that I've had the opportunity to actually work for A Safe Place in Strathcona-Sherwood Park – I've met some of the wonderful people doing great work there – as well as for WIN House. In the history of at least A Safe Place I think I was the only staff that was ever allowed to come onto the actual site of the shelter for issues of security. The stories that I heard there and the impact that violence had on their lives impacted me, and I was just basically hearing the stories from them. It's impossible to walk away from this issue and not be affected by it. It affects your well-being, I think, your emotional well-being as well. When you're looking at a society as a whole and we're looking at many other issues that are impacting us, this, I believe, is one that has to be given a lot of priority.

Having said that, as much as I believe in this bill, I think it's only the first step in many, many other steps that are required of us as legislators to promote a safe environment for women, not only in Alberta but in Canada. Of course, we have to start here, and I'm glad to be among all of you, actually willing and very much taking leadership on this issue. But I also want us to think about the fact that this is not over. This is something that we're going to have to fight, and it's going to take us a long time to do.

Here we are, 26 years after the massacre in Montreal, and we're still talking about this issue. That, Madam Speaker, is absolutely unacceptable. I believe that we need to start thinking as a society about what it is that we need to learn from these stories and what it is that we need to put in place. It's not just an issue that affects women; it affects every single member of our society. We as men also have a responsibility to take action and to stand up, and I'm so glad to hear the stories. I've seen as well the men in my family and many others here today wanting to be part of the solution, wanting to speak out on this issue, and wanting to support.

I'm very, very glad to be able to stand here today and support this member and her bill. I commend her for the work that she has done. I think that it's remarkable, and I'm extremely proud to stand here and say to all of you: please vote for this.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to stand in support of this bill. I think that it's important work that we're doing here today. I think that we all agree that there's never an excuse for domestic violence. Nonetheless, it exists. It happens. Women are usually but not exclusively the victims, and it's not just physical violence, of course. It can be psychological, it could be financial, a number of things. Of course, when there's domestic violence in the house and someone is trying to leave, usually the woman, there are so many pressures. This is the time when she needs help because if there are children in the household, of course, the woman knows that if she leaves behind one of the children, then that child could be subject to who knows what form of abuse.

In other words, what I think that this bill does is help a victim get out of the house when there is an opportunity. Of course, if the weakest, smallest, slowest child can't get out with the adult victim, then the weakest, smallest, slowest child, the one least able to defend themselves, is stuck with the perpetrator. Then the victim, usually a woman but not always, has gotten out, and there's a psychological pressure to go back and not leave the weakest, smallest, slowest child there for that abuse.

What I really think that this bill does is that it attempts, and I guess time will tell how successfully. But I will applaud the attempt

to make it more viable for a victim of domestic violence when they get the opportunity to get out, removing some of the roadblocks, providing a place for them to stay. On that basis I certainly don't know how I could not vote for this. I'm hopeful that this, in the years to come, will actually lead to a safe exit strategy for victims of domestic violence for a long time. While that's a terrific outcome, it's not quite as terrific as avoiding domestic violence. However, human nature being what it is, you never know whether that bright and shiny day will ever be here. So until that happens, I'm very pleased to support this effort to make the world safer for victims of domestic violence.

The Deputy Speaker: Edmonton-Manning.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is my honour to rise in support of Bill 204. Over the course of my 10 years as a social worker I worked with many individuals and families in vulnerable situations. At times this job can be very challenging; however, the success stories always outweighed the bad. As a social worker you quickly learn to deal with the issues that you face on daily basis, and I've seen many things. However, there was one situation which was particularly vivid in my memory.

I remember sitting with a mother who was asking me to take her child because she had nowhere to go and feared for the safety of her children. Madam Speaker, no parent should ever have to ask for their child to come into care. This story is not a unique story, and many child-protection workers have been faced with the same dilemma. So it speaks to a bigger issue. It speaks to the inequality that women continue to face, it speaks to the lack of shelter beds and the ongoing support for women who are dealing with domestic violence, and it speaks to how our society continues to hide domestic violence and violence against women and violence against children in everyone's closets.

3:10

It is time for change. It is time that women feel that they have a safe place to call home and that they can protect themselves and their children against domestic violence. Together, in this House, we can make that happen.

Madam Speaker, I am so thankful to the Member for Lethbridge-East for sharing her story with us in this House and for the work that the Member for Calgary-Bow has done in ensuring that women can stay home and stay with their children, for their work will support change for women and it will keep families together.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Glenmore.

Ms Kazim: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is my honour to rise today to support this bill, and I would urge all the members in the Assembly today to support this bill. Domestic violence is, sadly, one of the ugliest diseases of our society, and the victims are highly traumatized in the experience they go through when it comes to the physical, emotional, mental damage they experience, especially the children that are with the victim. They are the most affected ones, and they're our future. By approving this bill, we are not only protecting the victims but also our future and the children and our province.

It often happens that, from what I understand by interacting on a personal level with people going through domestic violence, especially when I was acquiring my certification in conflict resolution – there was a time when I was a warden for families, in other words society, when I was focusing on family and domestic violence. When the individuals would come and discuss their

issues, it was mostly the fact that, first of all, they were not able to recognize what domestic violence was because they were inclined to believe that this is the kind of life they're born for and that this is something usual for them, so breaking that cycle and coming out of that cycle seemed impossible to them. Giving them that hope that there is a way to get out of the cycle and to stand up for yourself, to protect themselves and have a life with respect and dignity, that each individual deserves – this bill would be a great opportunity to mitigate domestic violence and help the victims to get themselves out of the cycle.

I would encourage all the people sitting in the Assembly to approve this bill. I highly support this bill. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I, too, want to offer my sincerest thanks to the Member for Calgary-Bow for bringing forward this bill, and I want to thank the Member for Lethbridge-East and others who've shared their personal stories of what they have gone through and the journey they've travelled. It is important for all of us in this Assembly to hear that but also through us for all Albertans to hear that. I am struck by how common that lived experience is for people, not just here in this Chamber but all around this province.

I had done work volunteering with HomeFront in Calgary, going back over 15 years. We thought at the time that we were getting a great handle on domestic violence and domestic conflict. In many ways we've come a long way since that time, but not nearly far enough. Clearly, not nearly far enough. So this bill is a very important step to help, in particular, women fleeing domestic violence and violence of all kinds, mental cruelty, sexual assault. It is one step; it's an important one, but it is still just one step.

I was looking at some statistics yesterday as I reflected on the 26th anniversary of the Montreal massacre. The Calgary Police Service via the YWCA reported a 16 per cent year-over-year increase in domestic conflict calls in Calgary this year alone – that's one clear indication that the problem is not getting better; it's getting worse – yet another reason why we need important legislation like this, to allow those fleeing gender-based violence more tools to find safety.

I will give the government credit for the increase to funding, the badly needed and overdue increase to funding, for shelter spaces throughout this province. As women flee violence, they have somewhere to go. Turning women and their children away from shelter as they flee violence is something no one wants to do, but it's been the unfortunate reality in this province for a very long time.

We all have a role to play. A big part of the role that we can play today, obviously, is passing this bill. It's telling victims of domestic violence that we believe them, it's helping them out of that situation, and it is advocating in our communities for all of the supports to break that cycle of violence so children growing up know that this is not an acceptable way of resolving conflict. Perhaps with leadership like the Member for Calgary-Bow has shown, we can end that cycle of violence permanently.

I stand to enthusiastically support this bill, and thank you again for the opportunity.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thanks very much, Madam Speaker. I, too, want to briefly rise and speak in support of this bill. I think it's an important statement about who we are as a society, what this Legislature is really about.

Giving credit where credit is due, I also add my voice to the increased investment in women's shelters that this government has made. Turning away 14,000 women and children a year is not stepping up, and this government has appropriately made an important investment in our future, in mental health, in the success of children and families that are unable to manage on their own because of domestic violence or poverty or addictions issues. These shelters are a critical part of a progressive, healthy social contract.

In that regard I'd like to mention Inn from the Cold, which is an organization that's been increasingly under siege. It's the only family shelter in the city of Calgary. They were forced to expand into a church, Knox United church, in Calgary, where they take an extra 70 families as a result of the increased pressures on these families over the last year. It's a 130 per cent increase in the demands in Calgary over the last couple of years for shelters for families.

Prior to the United church opening their doors to this, families, including children, were bused to churches every night at 5 o'clock, a different church every night: a church basement, a church gymnasium, whatever it was. Volunteers in the church would serve supper, provide supports for the evening – games and reading and play – and then at 6 o'clock in the morning, after a quick breakfast, these families would be shuttled back to Inn from the Cold, in the main part of downtown Calgary, and have to fend for themselves for the day until coming back later, at about 5 o'clock, again to another church. These children were not getting educated. The children were not in any way secure. They were not provided any stability and security during this time.

The condition is desperate for many of these families, and we're setting the stage, if we don't deal appropriately with these folks, for further mental health problems in these children, addictions problems, joblessness, a cycle of poverty, further abuse if they come from an abusive family and don't get the appropriate care and support they need. As I've written to the Minister of Human Services, we need to step up, perhaps even more, to make sure that this winter, when there are more jobless and there are more stresses and more cold conditions and people are out on the streets, we don't have families with children on the streets. This is simply unacceptable in a province of the 21st century, with the wealth that we have and the philanthropy that we also have to draw on. If government and all of us can step up, especially during this season, and ensure that these families are supported financially, socially.

Indeed, in some cases, maybe some families, as we are doing for the Syrian refugees, could extend, if they have space in their own home, provision of temporary accommodation for a month or two for some of these families until they find a place to stay. I haven't heard that recommendation yet, but as many Albertans are stepping up for Syrian refugees to house them for a temporary period, maybe we should also be registering those kinds of intentions for families that have been disrupted by family violence or addictions or mental health issues.

3:20

Enthusiastically supporting this bill with one other comment, I guess. It's also been raised in this House, of course, and beyond that the owners and operators of rental accommodations deserve to be compensated at times when there has been significant loss of finances, as many of us have felt. There is a victims' fund. In this case the victims were both family members in some cases and the owners and landlords of some of these rental accommodations. So I would hope that some of that fairness that is Alberta and some of that recognition – especially those landlords, owners, and operators who have extended themselves and enabled this important provision for victims to escape a contract could also be in some way accommodated. I'm not sure what other avenues besides the

victims' fund the government could look at, but I think that would do well in terms of encouraging that communal support for this important bill.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, I wonder if at this moment I could have unanimous consent to briefly revert to Introduction of Guests.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests (reversion)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Madam Speaker. It's my honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Mr. Doug O'Halloran. Mr. O'Halloran is the president of United Food and Commercial Workers local 401, one of the prominent union locals in our province. He's organized many unorganized workers and given them the rights that all should have. He's been a very good friend of mine, an adviser, and very supportive of me when I was leader of our party and, as well, continues his support today. I'd ask all members to please give him the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

Public Bills and Orders Other than Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 204 Residential Tenancies (Safer Spaces for Victims of Domestic Violence) Amendment Act, 2015 (continued)

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to Bill 204? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It is an honour to rise today to show my support for Bill 204, put forward by the Member for Calgary-Bow. Our government ran on a campaign that promised to better support gender equality and organizations that take initiatives to support women and families who currently face domestic violence. We must do all we can to support those taking the first steps to flee violence in our communities and across the province. I believe that Bill 204 is one way to do that. Besides the initiatives that this bill takes, it is also important that we carry this conversation forward to come up with even more ways to support those who are impacted by domestic violence.

As was stated, Edmonton and Calgary rank second- and third-worst respectively as safe Canadian cities for women. These are very concerning numbers, Madam Speaker. To think that one day my friends or my family or even my little sister may have to deal with such unthinkable acts and, even worse, to think that if they were to come forward, there's a possibility that they wouldn't be believed – we must do our best to show those dealing with domestic violence that as legislators and decision-makers we are here for them.

I will support this bill, and I hope to see more initiatives like Bill 204 moving forward. Thank you once again to the Member for Calgary-Bow for undergoing consultation to find ways to support those fleeing domestic violence as well as those who had the strength and courage to share their own stories within this Chamber.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour to rise today and speak in favour of Bill 204. The debate on this bill has been profound. It's been filled with some incredibly moving and some deeply personal stories of the effects of domestic violence. This inexcusable social ill continues to touch far too many lives, hurt far too many people, and damage the hearts, minds, and bodies of far too many Albertans. As we seek to eradicate this blight, I believe it's imperative that we hear these stories, that we listen to the victims and those who advocate on their behalf, that we honour their experience and hear their voices. It's important that we continue to increase awareness, offer education through our schools, workplaces, and the public sphere to make it known that this behaviour is not acceptable, that we as a society can be far, far better than this, that we can work to ensure that vulnerable Albertans are afforded every possible protection when they seek to flee abuse.

Madam Speaker, I recall an experience from several years ago when one of my roommates at the time invited some neighbours from down the street to join us for holiday eggnog. They were a couple, a man and a woman, and they seemed a bit uncomfortable as they sat in our living room. The woman in particular seemed reticent, avoiding eye contact and not speaking very much. Two days later there was a knock on our door, and there she stood, crying on our front porch. She told us a story of ongoing physical and emotional abuse at the hands of her partner and how she simply couldn't take it anymore. She had no money; she had no family or friends that she could rely on for help and nowhere else she could go. We were able to help her get in touch and file a statement with police and connect her with a local women's shelter.

Unfortunately, the psychological trauma and damage that she was dealing with proved difficult for her to handle. She left the shelter, went to call her former partner, and got drunk. Unfortunately, this was a dry shelter, so she found herself again without a place to go. She found her way back to us. We were able to talk to her for a bit and try to help her where we could, and we were able to find another shelter where we were able to bring her. Unfortunately, in the end she did end up going back to her partner.

These are incredibly difficult circumstances, Madam Speaker. I can't imagine the experiences of these women, the difficulty of enduring these years of abuse, trying to find the strength to overcome it, to break free when many times there's a lack of support and a lack of resources to do so. This bill doesn't fix everything, but it does take a very important step forward. It provides a fantastic means to make it that much easier for men, women, children who are caught in a cycle of abuse to be able to break free. It gives one less reason why they should have to choose to stay in a place that only causes them harm.

So I'm incredibly thankful to the Member for Calgary-Bow for bringing this bill forward. Certainly, we as a government strongly support finding any means and all means we can to support those who are fleeing and dealing with the damage from domestic abuse. I thank the member for all the consultation she's done, the time she spent speaking to so many on the front lines. I thank her for sharing her own story today, her own experiences with this. I look forward to the opportunity to see the member continue working with Service Alberta as they work on the regulations, as they work through the amendments to ensure that this legislation will be as effective and as fair and help as many victims of abuse as possible.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Acadia.

3:30

Ms Payne: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak in support of this bill. Domestic violence is a serious problem here in Alberta. At a December 6 National Day of Remembrance and Action on Violence against Women event last night I heard from a local shelter, the Bow Valley shelter, about how the rate of domestic violence in our province is nearly double the national average. Bill 204 is one simple act that we can take that will help support women who are leaving domestic violence and help ease the passage to safety for themselves and for their families. It won't eliminate the problem overnight, but it offers a needed tool in the tool box for any woman who is trying to leave an abusive partner.

Recently I received an e-mail in my riding of Calgary-Acadia from a woman who had actually been a victim of domestic violence herself and is currently a landlord. She had a couple of concerns about how the bill would impact smaller landlords. That's why I think it's so important that the Minister of Service Alberta will be working with landlords and landlord associations to ensure that details around this bill are worked out through regulation to ensure that her concerns and others' are addressed. By taking the time for regulatory development and consultation with the affected stakeholders, our government will be able to implement Bill 204 effectively and ensure that all stakeholders understand their roles in protecting tenants who've experienced domestic violence.

I'd also like to offer my sincerest thanks to the Member for Calgary-Bow for her very hard work on this bill and the extensive consultation that she has done before and after tabling this bill. I'm very proud to call her a friend.

This bill is an important first step to help support women and to eliminate violence against women. Domestic violence is far too common in our society, and even with additional supports and funding from our government the demand for women's shelters in Alberta far exceeds the available spaces. We know we can do better, and this bill is an important step in that direction. We know that the survivors of domestic abuse are worried about leaving their homes and how that will affect their finances. Many times their abusers have controlled their finances in such a way that they have no access to resources. This bill gives victims of domestic abuse a way to leave their homes without facing additional financial penalty. It is a small but important step.

As the mother of a young daughter I often think about the likelihood that she will one day be a victim of violence against women. I want to believe that if I raise her to be strong, to speak her truth, she will be protected and that if I raise her to know that she deserves to be loved and deserves to be safe and that she has the right to say no or to say yes when it comes to her body, then she will escape the statistics. But, as my friend the Member for Lethbridge-East, who is herself a strong, outspoken woman, has shown us, there is no profile for victims of domestic violence. It can happen to anyone, and I hope that we in this House have the courage of our convictions to do what we can to eliminate this problem.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity.

Ms McLean: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank the Member for Calgary-Bow for bringing forward this piece of legislation. It is innovative and a very creative solution to a problem that I know many of her constituents have come to her with and have discussed at length. I know that she has spent a long time consulting with a variety of stakeholders as well as the people on the front lines of

this issue, whether they be support workers or those who have been directly affected as victims of domestic violence.

I'd also really like to acknowledge MLA Drever's statements today in the House about her own lived experience as a child whose family experienced domestic violence. I know that it is difficult to share a personal story, especially when it's part of the catalyst or driver for some of the work that we're doing in here. That work, you know, is often criticized and fairly so because everybody in the province wants to make sure that we get things right. I really do think that the amount of support that has been expressed from all sides of this House has shown that Ms Drever . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Just a reminder that we don't use names in the House.

Ms McLean: Thank you.

. . . that the Member for Calgary-Bow here has in fact gotten things right.

I would like to address this from a bit of a legal point of view. In my experience, having worked in the courts in the area of domestic violence, assault in the domestic violence context is extremely common, and the law as it currently stands makes it difficult in many circumstances to gain a conviction on domestic violence. So frequently what we see happen is the following. We see, typically, a woman call and make a complaint to the police or a neighbour make a complaint to the police, who then attend upon the scene of what's occurred. The police then have the ultimate discretion to determine whether or not to lay charges. That is not up to the victim themselves.

However, we find ourselves then in court. The victim attends that court appearance, and victim services is typically there in order to provide support to the victim of domestic violence. At that time, the victim is often not sure of what their rights and entitlements are and what supports are in place for them and frequently is also of the impression that they are responsible for laying the charges. I think that we have American media to thank for that misconception. They feel that maybe they have some control over whether or not those charges go forward. In speaking with the victim services folks, who are community social workers as well as representatives from the police force, they find out that they have little to no control over the progress of the prosecution.

Often these women will then turn to the support workers and say: I'm on the hook on this lease for the rent, and the abuser has been the person paying the bills; I ought not to have called the police in this situation because now he's kicked out and telling me that he's no longer going to pay the bills; I'm on the hook, and I can't afford to pay this by myself. Now, through victim services there is some financial help in place, but as much as victim services and other support organizations like Elizabeth Fry and John Howard would try and connect these people with these services, they very frequently do not cover the actual cost of living and the bills that these victims can simply not afford to pay without the other person living on the premises. So you have a family unit of some sort paying two rents, and the victim is left on the hook. This bill very uniquely addresses that situation.

It may sound, as I've been quite detailed in my explanation of a scenario, that this is an uncommon scenario. However, this was, in fact, the most common issue that I would deal with when I was working with the Elizabeth Fry Society and that I would see support workers deal with and the number one reason, really, that the victims of domestic violence would try and change the mind of prosecutors, try to stop the charges from going forward, not because those charges should not go forward or not because the abuser is at fault and ought not to be, you know, brought through the justice

system but simply because the victim was concerned about their very practical situation. They could not afford for the charges to go forward and for the abuser to be prevented from returning to the home. This particular bill gives the victims in those situations an out.

3:40

The interesting thing about this is that other jurisdictions have seen fit to do the same thing. My information is that in Ontario and B.C. they are looking at ways of also addressing this issue in similar forms of legislation. We're not the first to do it, but it's about time that we've gotten on board to help put an additional tool in the tool box of women and men who find themselves at the hands of an abuser so that they're not finding themselves in court trying to convince a prosecutor to drop the charges simply because they cannot afford to continue to live in the home where they resided with their abuser.

From that experience I can very unequivocally state that this provides additional assistance and another option. It's not required that the victim leave their home; it's simply an option. They can leave the home and leave the financial requirements that bind them and tie them not only to the residence but also to the abuser. As it stands, a lease can very much make someone feel tied to the other financial contributor to their situation, and this legislation helps people feel and practically know that they are not tied to that financial situation and that they can find other accommodation. It's very surprising how often a financial relationship can dictate our actions, but at the end of the day when people are looking at being able to put food on the table for themselves and their children, unfortunately, victims will often go back to the abuser just to ensure that their basic needs are met. We as a province and as a government cannot allow individuals to feel that they need to be financially bound to an abuser.

Every opportunity that we have to provide an extra tool such as this, I think, should be supported. This is a unique and innovative solution for Alberta and for Alberta families. I think that we can all be very proud of the work that we've done with respect to this legislation, with respect to the amendments, and with respect to our support and the many stories that also have come forward in this House with respect to domestic violence. It's very timely, the timing of this bill, particularly in light of November being an opportunity to shine light on domestic violence and the Polytechnique massacre that occurred on December 6. Domestic violence has been an ongoing topic in this House, and this is a great opportunity.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Lethbridge-East.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Madam Speaker, I'm very pleased to stand today in third reading. Since I made my statement, I've received thousands of messages. I did not expect that to happen. I expected that it would have an impact here in the House, that would help move the bill forward. I'm pleased that it happened. Certainly, I know that at least two women are safe because I spoke up.

As one of the other members spoke today, we've come so far, but in fact we've only moved a little. When this happened to me over 35, 40 years ago, there were certainly lots of challenges that happened, and there weren't as many women who left those situations. What's happened now is that many more women and men leave those situations. As you can see, the fact that we put \$15 million into shelters says that, yes, lots of other people are leaving those relationships, but the fact that they still have to leave those

relationships and that those situations occur really speaks to: the attitude in society has not changed very much.

Everybody is appalled when they hear a story, but how do we change that? Last night I spoke about domestic violence at the YWCA in Lethbridge. A young man very bravely stood up after I did and talked about how the day after I made my statement, he was speaking because he's actually been doing some work on domestic violence, but he had never told his story. He said that that day he told his story of being a child in a domestic abuse situation and how when he tried to defend his mom, he was victimized by his father. He did share that his mom finally left that relationship after many, many years and how this whole bill has affected his family. He was so relieved that his mother is finally safe.

Some of the other stories that I've heard are from women who thanked me for speaking out and said that as much as they'd like to speak out about their situations, their abuser is still alive, and if they speak out, they felt that that abuser would come after them and that they would be in a dangerous situation again. However, it did allow them to speak out in groups where they felt they were safe to speak out. I think that's moved it a few more steps forward.

The bottom line for this whole situation is that if in our society we treated everyone and respected everyone as we wish to be treated and respected ourselves, when that happens, domestic violence, domestic abuse will stop.

On that note, thank you very much to the MLA who put the bill forward, and thank you, all, for supporting it.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other speakers to the bill? The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just wanted to stand and speak to this in third reading because it takes us a step towards a larger discourse in this province on this issue, that has been kept silent for a very long time. It needs to occur because intimate partner violence and abuse flourishes in an environment where the misuse of power against the vulnerable or less powerful is tolerated. It's tolerated in this province and in this environment that we have today, and it's something that we need to stop tolerating in any way. The environment may be behind closed doors, but in our case it's also in our larger communities because people just don't want to speak out on it. This allows this discourse to open, and it's a larger conversation that we must have.

We heard from the member herself that one of the most common reasons for a survivor of domestic violence to stay is that they feel they can't leave their home, or they haven't been successful in getting the abuser to leave. All forms of violence and abuse are serious criminal matters, with a huge impact on our society. As the National Clearinghouse on Family Violence states: health costs for injuries and chronic health problems caused by abuse amount to billions of dollars every year; we also pay a social cost in the form of children too traumatized to learn or develop normally.

3:50

This isn't just affecting one person; it affects everybody. When there's a child in a classroom who can't develop normally, when there's a child in a classroom who cannot learn, that affects a lot of the children in that classroom, that affects the children in that school, and that affects their parents when they get home. We have adult victims at that point unable to function to their full potential and a diminished quality of life for families and communities.

Intimate partner violence is abusive and pervasive. No one is immune to this. It affects people of all ages, rich and poor, rural and

urban, from every cultural and educational background. The majority of abusers are men, and the majority of victims are women, but that is not the case in every case. Serious abuse is most often committed by men against women and their children. It's estimated that in 30 to 40 per cent of reported cases where the partner is abused, so are the children. However, there is a growing understanding that simply witnessing intimate partner violence in their home can affect children in the same way as if the abuse was directed at them.

The first step for anyone in or close to an abusive relationship is to call and get help, and this bill can help with that. Organizations such as the Victim Services Society of Stony Plain, Spruce Grove and District can provide immediate assistance to survivors of domestic abuse, but knowing that a bad reference from a previous landlord will follow them and make it nearly impossible to find a new home for themselves and often their children, many victims feel they have no way out.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, the time allotted for this portion of business has now expired.

I will call on the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow to close debate.

Ms Drever: I just want to say thank you to everyone here for sharing their experiences and their thoughts on this bill. It's vital for Albertans to get started on this discourse on ending domestic violence. I'm honoured to close the debate at third reading.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 3:53 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Hinkley	Orr
Babcock	Hoffman	Panda
Barnes	Horne	Payne
Carson	Hunter	Piquette
Ceci	Jabbour	Pitt
Clark	Kazim	Renaud
Connolly	Kleinsteuber	Rodney
Coolahan	Littlewood	Rosendahl
Cooper	Loewen	Sabir
Cortes-Vargas	Loyola	Schmidt
Cyr	Luff	Schreiner
Dach	Malkinson	Shepherd
Drever	Mason	Stier
Drysdale	McCuaig-Boyd	Strankman
Eggen	McKitrick	Sucha
Feehan	McLean	Swann
Fitzpatrick	McPherson	Sweet
Ganley	Miller	Turner
Gotfried	Miranda	Westhead
Gray	Nielsen	Woollard
Hanson	Notley	

4:10

Totals: For – 62 Against – 0

[Motion carried unanimously; Bill 204 read a third time]

Bill 202
Alberta Local Food Act

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise today to move third reading of Bill 202, the Alberta Local Food Act.

I think there have been a lot of discussions about the importance of supporting our local food systems and helping them develop. I believe that this bill, by striking the committee, would be essential in developing a system that supports the growth of the local food system. The bill would establish an advisory committee to review the current state of our agriculture systems, and they would look for ways to create connections on a local level that would maximize economic returns and food security.

I think there have been a lot of examples made of community initiatives that have really incorporated our local food system. That creates community, it creates culture, and it creates a knowledge of what Alberta is. Not only that; it provides economic return and invests in diversifying our economy, and I think that's what this local food bill is taking a part in. By having a committee look at the details of where the efficiencies are or are lacking or how we can support the growth, it's vital in making sure that the consumers can also access the kind of food that they are looking for.

It becomes a problem when someone from an urban centre is trying to connect with a farmer and just can't find, you know, a farmer that is growing in a very specific way because they are not connected to it. I mean, farmers engage in a lot of different methods from using Facebook to direct marketing, and finding provincial ways to connect the consumer to the farmer is incredibly helpful in developing a strong system.

Those are some of the things that this committee could look at addressing. They would do that with consultation with the stakeholders – and there are a lot of them when it comes to local food – because that takes in the public sector that procures local food. It looks at the grocery stores, the farmers themselves, the processors, the producers, and that requires a lot of work. That's why the committee has a year to talk to each one of them to develop a system that they feel would support their growth. And it would support it both ways. It would be something that connects both urban and rural areas.

My constituency is somewhat rural, to say the least, because it has a little bit of both. Having things that bring those together is extremely important because it creates a connectivity and an understanding of the situations that farmers face on a daily basis. Urban constituents have already shown – I've talked about the stats of how many people find that it's important to support local food. By providing systems that allow them to procure local food, then we're really supporting their connections.

So as we continue, I hope to hear more discussion about other members' opinions on the bill, and I look forward to that discussion. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm standing in support of Bill 202, Alberta's food act, because I'm a big believer in locally produced food as well as small businesses. When I was in B.C., I worked at quite a few small locally owned businesses, and I saw the importance of what happened when a dollar was spent locally in the economy as it provided economic benefit beyond just the transaction between that consumer and the provider of that good.

For this bill, you know, we can all believe that fresh food is better food. I've gone to farmers' markets in Calgary many times myself.

One of the things I always appreciate about going to those farmers' markets is the great diversity of fruits and vegetables as well as other products such as honey and meat and the ability to see a selection that I otherwise normally wouldn't have had a chance to see or to access through . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, if you could maybe just move your laptop. I'm having a little bit of difficulty hearing you.

Mr. Malkinson: All right. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Where was I there? By going to a farmers' market, I am able to see a selection of products that I might not otherwise get exposed to or see if I'm going to, you know, my generic chain grocery store. It gives me an opportunity to talk to the farmers and the producers of those products, and I always find that very valuable. I find that when doing that, I have the opportunity to get ideas for new recipes as well as suggestions on other products that I may want to try based on other ones I've liked and get solid recommendations from the people who produce that food.

To that end, you know, it was mentioned previously that farmers' markets have actually grown 27 per cent since 2010, and that again is money that is coming from consumers to the producers' good and is activity locally in the economy. Consumers at these farmers' markets also spend, on average, \$55.

Another thing that was brought up before is that according to a 2012 AF study, \$878 million was the market value of farmers' markets and retails of Alberta's food goods. So there is a huge market opportunity for connecting local food producers with local consumers here in Alberta. I believe that this act allows our local producers to seek direct access to those markets. As I talked at length about before, by connecting directly, it allows local agriculture businesses to gain new customers and also educate local Albertans about the industry. As local producers grow the local market, those channels continue to grow in value and are a significant source of farm receipts for farmers.

I will be voting in support of this bill, and I would encourage the rest of the House to do so as well. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

4:20

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise in support of Bill 202. I think that this is an excellent private member's bill that really reflects the sort of spirit and ingenuity and innovation that was shown in Bill 204. I commend the Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park for coming up with this. I think it is a great idea to highlight the interaction between those of us that live in an urban setting versus those of us that live in a rural setting, showing that we all have a common need to support economies, to support a healthy diet, to support, basically, measures to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions. I could go on and on about how beneficial this sort of thing would be if we do enact it.

I was just in a farmers' market in the Premier's riding, in Strathcona. It's one of the largest farmers' markets. It's held every Saturday in Old Strathcona. The place was packed. It's a large building. People were really happy. Most of them were happy with me when I introduced myself, including the farmers. What I was happy about was that it was giving me and my wife the opportunity to shop locally, to participate in an economy that stretches several tens of kilometres outside of Edmonton, and I was getting a very good product. I think that's what this bill is all about. I think this bill is to try to promote measures to promote the benefits of thinking about buying locally and removing the barriers from getting that locally sourced food to our government institutions.

For instance, at the farmers' market I was able to buy some bison. I think the bison was raised probably 60 kilometres away from here. It's a very healthy meat. It's the healthiest red meat. I would recommend it to any of you that are worried about your cholesterol or about the other adverse effects of eating too much saturated fat. It also has a lot of beneficial oils in it such as omega-3 oils. I would not have been able to buy it as readily at a large grocery store, and I was able to talk to the farmer that actually raised, slaughtered, and prepared the bison. I think it was a fantastic thing. Other examples of things that I don't generally get in the grocery store were: fresh pasta, tzatziki, made by hand by probably a great baba, and hothouse tomatoes. Great tomatoes. I had them last night. Very tasty.

In my riding of Edmonton-Whitemud in the summertime we have a farmers' market that is very well subscribed to by my constituents. It's held once a week. One of the most memorable things that I did after getting elected was actually hold, basically, the equivalent of a Klondike Days celebration at the farmers' market. I locally sourced some orange gelato, and I think it was appreciated. I'm not sure if the members across would have appreciated the orange colour, but the gelato was very, very good.

As I've said before in this Assembly, I actually am the product of a family farm. I spent the first 18 years of my life in a family farm environment, and I have had a lot of experiences with locally grown food on my farm. I think it accrued to my benefit. However, I'm wondering and am just throwing this out here. My father paid me a cent for every three potato beetles that I picked off the potato plants. Would that make me a paid employee and subject to WCB? It certainly wasn't minimum wage.

I also learned how to milk a cow. One of the biggest, best tests for knowing if somebody has been raised on a farm is: do you know which side of the cow you approach if you want to milk it? Or taking the horse example – and I learned this from the minister of agriculture – which side of the horse do you get on? If you don't know the answers to those questions, you probably didn't spend a lot of time in a farm environment.

Just getting back to the local food thing, in those days – and this was a long time ago, unfortunately – we would get fresh apples only in the fall because they had to come in from B.C. The B.C. apples, McIntoshes, were brought in only for a few weeks at a time. I remember gorging on them when they did come in because I knew that they weren't going to be available later on. The same thing with the oranges that came from Japan at Christmastime.

Nowadays, with the local food movement, we can be assured of food security. I think this is one of the key things in this bill, that we're talking about making sure that people have access, our citizens have access, to fresh and healthy food that's always available. We have to basically promote a situation for our suppliers on the farms and other agribusinesses to be able to supply those things. It's kind of a codependency. That's a word that you often use describing sort of adverse psychological things, but this codependency here is a positive thing. We're codependent as urban citizens with our friends and supporters in the rural areas to provide this food.

I had mentioned just briefly about climate change. I think that this is something that hasn't been discussed enough. We have to be doing everything we can to reduce the release of greenhouse gases. Those aren't gases coming from the greenhouses; those are gases coming from fossil fuel combustion. If you fly in food from someplace or if you truck it in or if you bring it in behind a locomotive, you're burning a lot of fossil fuels that add to the total of the greenhouse gas emissions. This local food initiative is an important part, I believe, in mitigating that sort of situation.

In summary, we're promoting a good economy for particularly our rural colleagues. We are promoting a healthy diet. We are promoting a way to mitigate against greenhouse gas emissions. We are teaching our youth, and I think that the experience I had picking potato beetles is an example of this. If my children come with me to the farmers' market and see the fresh food and see the choice that's available there and learn what a good choice is about food, it's a very, very positive thing.

So I would urge all members of this Assembly to be in full support of this excellent bill.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today also to speak on proposed Bill 202, the local food production act. There are many farmer co-operatives and commissions in the province that also are local food producers, and they produce it in commercial volumes. They all have websites. They are the Alberta Wheat Commission, the Alberta Barley Commission, the Western Barley Growers Association – that's an organization which I used to be secretary-treasurer of – the Alberta Canola Producers Commission, and the Alberta Elk Commission. We also have many associations: the Alberta Pulse Growers Commission, Landscape Alberta Nursery Trades Association, the Alberta Greenhouse Growers Association, and the Alberta Oat Growers Commission. These are all local Alberta producers, and they, too, provide local food in various ways.

The member opposite had spoken about eating bison. I have neighbours who raise bison, and he is exactly correct that it is a wonderful health food, but it is not singularly available at a farmers' market. It's available in a commercial fashion. You can buy it commercially through restaurateurs, and you can buy it online through their website organization.

4:30

Mr. Speaker, the Alberta Beef Producers is also a large commercial organization which has complete and absolute traceability of their products. Most any grocery store in the province of Alberta carries their products, and that is a sign of local food production. Many of you will see those animals at the side of the roads.

The Alberta Beekeepers Commission is also a prominent organization, and you'll see the development and the wealth creation that this organization continues to have when you drive through the southern part of the province and, particularly, in irrigated areas, where they have multicoloured hives throughout the canola fields and also the alfalfa fields, where the leafcutter bees are at work doing their function in the pollination of those plants to increase the development of that.

These are local food producers. Many of them are and have been in function for some great deal of time. Also, we have the Alberta Cattle Feeders' and the Alberta association of – excuse me. I think I've overstepped my list there.

Mr. Speaker, the goals of this bill are indeed admirable, and the intention, not unlike what we've seen with Bill 6, is indeed admirable, but in some cases to the extent of the organizations that I've already mentioned and who are already in effect and in operation – actually, today and tomorrow are the annual general meeting of the Alberta Beef Producers in Calgary. Western Stock Growers', for example, is also a long-term, local food production organization. It's been in effect for I believe it's some 90 years, but I think that with the recent letters that they've penned in public, they feel that there is legislation that's coming forward in this province

that is redundant and onerous to their opportunities and their ways of operation.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that Bill 202 is similar to that. Even though it's simply believed to be an advisory committee, these organizations that I've spoken of already are and for a great number of years have been in operation and producing food – healthy food, traceable food, with recordable food sources and supplies – going forward for a great number of years. The supply management sector that is in the province, that I've mentioned here in this list, has great consternation when they see a gentleman like – I think his name is Buddy – the turkey demonstrator that goes to many of these rallies. He is cause for consternation because there is no traceability to his whereabouts, and that can cause great issue in regard to the viability of that poultry industry. There are diseases that are transmittable by that, and that causes great consternation for large commercial producers that produce local food in a sustainable, large volume.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 202 in some cases, in many cases, is unnecessary. I'm hoping I've given enough evidence that Alberta farmers already are local producers. One can't help but think that the phrase "local" is a code word for some set of producers that the government approves of and others that it may not. These organizations in many cases are voluntary, other than the supply management organizations. There's an organization in Nobleford, Alberta, called Galimax, that is a voluntary co-operation of producers coming forward for the marketing of eggs.

I have to ask: why is this government bent on creating a new form of legislation and indeed a subsection or a subculture of agriculture? Would it not make more sense to expand the scope of farmers' markets rather than, in this case, starting from scratch in a new environment, a new era, whether it's voluntary or not? There are questions there.

I have difficulty learning: what is the evidence that any Alberta farmers are having difficulty in getting their direct products to market? In the case of commercial agriculture I've been the subject of the failure of the commercial market in regard to grain transportation. The government has come forward now with new taxation on the fuel that those very trains use to distribute or transport their commercial products to market. It's a hindrance on the activity that they do.

I have to question whether these difficulties are so great that we need to have the government intervene and promise to buy a certain amount every month. Is it the mandate of a government organization to supply or procure food for certain government entities, whether they be schools or hospitals or some other form of institutions? There are issues of safety and security of supply that these organizations depend on. Once the government mandates that the government agencies buy food from certain people, what's to prevent those prices from going up unnecessarily to supply this captive bureaucratic buyer?

The proposed Alberta Local Food Act purports to give rise to more local production of agricultural products, yet this proposal still has not determined which producers will qualify under the program.

Mr. Speaker, the government hasn't identified exactly who this bill is intended to help, and it's entirely unclear what problem, particularly, this bill is attempting to solve. There are many organizations, farmers' markets, et cetera, and the member opposite has talked about the full and fulsome development of that. Do we need to create more legislation going forward to assist that? It seems to me that it's operating in a fairly healthy environment already.

It's also unclear what kind of added cost will be put on taxpayers and whether more taxes or services, pro or con, will help or be incited by this legislation.

Mr. Speaker, for these reasons I believe I cannot and will not support Bill 202.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to take this opportunity to speak in support of Bill 202, the Alberta Local Food Act. I know that the sponsor of this bill put forward some very thoughtful amendments during the committee stage, and I'd like to thank the member for the work that's been put into this bill.

You know, Mr. Speaker, Alberta farmers have a lot to be proud of. They work hard at all times of the year, and they produce goods of outstanding quality. I know that other jurisdictions do an excellent job of promoting their local produce, and perhaps there are some things that we can learn from them as well. One example is Foodland Ontario. They promote recipes, food facts, an availability guide for the seasonality of their different produce, and also nutritional facts. I remember fondly, growing up as a child in Ontario, when my mother would bring home baskets of fresh peaches, raspberries, strawberries, apples – you name it – grown in Ontario. We'd make apple crisp, apple pie. So many great things came out of the ground there.

I think we also have the same thing right here in Alberta to be extremely proud of. You know, look at the popularity and basically the world-renowned status of Taber corn. Everybody knows Taber corn. People look forward all year to when the first Taber corn stand appears. That's something that we can be proud of. My mouth is starting to water just thinking about that. Look at the world-wide popularity of Alberta beef, too. This is another thing where our international reputation is something that we're known for all around the world. We produce excellent produce right here at home, Mr. Speaker. Our farmers are proud of what they do, and we are very proud of them, too. They already do a great job at marketing their products.

4:40

As I said before, we have an international reputation, not just for our food but also as a reliable source for agricultural technology expertise and the food that we grow. We have over 50 million acres here in Alberta that are used for crop and livestock production.

I also know that the minister of agriculture was recently over in Japan. They were praising the quality of the pork. Is that correct? Yeah. They were, you know, really impressed with the quality of the pork: the way it tastes, the way it cuts, just about everything around the pork. I'm sure there was much more. I was just following the minister's Twitter feed and happened to see that, and I thought that was a really interesting revelation. I'd like to thank the minister also for the work that he's done promoting Alberta on the world stage like that.

You know, Mr. Speaker, I also support this bill because it works towards enhancing the development of a sustainable food system for Albertans and by Albertans. It will enhance the ability of local producers to achieve more direct access to markets and also give Alberta consumers better access to locally grown food.

Another reason why I would urge this Assembly to support Bill 202 is because of the way it will promote the value-added supply chain as it relates to some complementary industries such as the food and beverage and tourism sectors. As I've mentioned previously, Mr. Speaker – but I think it bears repeating – Alberta-based craft brewers and distillers have told me that the raw ingredients to make the best possible products are found right here in Alberta. Bill 202 will also further enhance a mutually beneficial opportunity for Alberta brewers and distillers to open up new

markets to Alberta farmers to showcase the world-class grains produced right here at home.

Indeed, the Alberta Small Brewers Association has given high praise to some recent changes the government made to markup rates on beer, and I'd like to actually quote from their news release from October 28, 2015. I'd be happy to table this document tomorrow. Here's the statement.

As one of the world's premier barley-growing regions, Alberta has the potential to be a national brewing powerhouse. Alberta's brewing entrepreneurs are ready for this challenge.

Budget 2015 has taken the [most] important step of streamlining the "Brewer Mark-up" to align taxes levied with the organic growth of the brewery. In the past, brewers faced barriers to growth due to sharp tax increases at arbitrary volumes. The change contained in Budget 2015 removes this barrier, and is warmly welcomed by ASBA members.

I think we have a lot to thank the Finance minister for in putting some of those changes forward in his budget, Mr. Speaker.

I also believe that Bill 202, like I said before, acts in a complementary manner to further showcase the delicious, frosty beverages that are being produced right here at home. Mr. Speaker, of course, beverages and food go hand in hand. Alberta's diverse and vibrant culinary scene is another element to the value-added chain that Bill 202 will support. There is a huge potential for enhancing the dining experience if more restaurants were to serve a greater proportion of locally grown food complemented by locally sourced beer and spirits. I also know, coming from a tourist destination like Banff and Canmore and other portions of my constituency, that food and beverages play a big role in attracting tourists as well.

Many destinations around the globe already pride themselves on marketing the freshness of their locally grown food, wine, and beer, and we can do the same thing right here in Alberta, Mr. Speaker. Jurisdictions around the country and around the world have seen their tourism numbers increase through successful marketing campaigns. They have diversified their economies with this simple formula. You see, Bill 202 has the potential to promote and enhance not only local food production and agriculture but value-added sectors such as beer, spirits, and tourism. At this time, when Alberta is striving for a more diversified economy, Bill 202 will promote an increased awareness and capacity for food grown right here at home.

Once again, in closing, I'd like to thank the Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park for thoughtfully introducing Bill 202 and the amendments that were tabled by that member. I would urge this Assembly to support this important piece of legislation to enhance local food security and sustainability and the economic diversification that it will usher in.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise in support of this bill. I wish that the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster was here today because I wanted to start praising him . . . [interjections] Okay. Sorry.

I wanted to praise you for starting Open Farm Days. I understand that you were influential in making that happen. I wasn't sure how many people in this House knew that you had been so involved in doing that. It's definitely something that I have enjoyed. I think it's been a very great initiative, so I wanted to make sure that you were recognized in this House for this.

I am also very lucky in my constituency to have somebody who has been teaching me a lot about the work that the government has done around local food, and I've appreciated this person's wisdom.

Sometimes I am not sure if I'm a farmer or a rural dweller. I belong to a community-supported agricultural project in the riding of the Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose. For those of you who may not have heard of community-supported agriculture, I've actually bought a share of a farm, and I get products every week during the summer and during the winter. I am taking a risk with the farmer so that the farmer can be sure of having a market for their product. I think this is the kind of thing that this bill is intended to do, to make sure that our farmers who are growing local food can have a very viable operation. I'm delighted to be a member of this community-supported agricultural project. I'm also very delighted in the fact that I have to spend a number of hours every summer digging potatoes, digging carrots, and preparing the products.

I'm not only a member of a CSA that supplies me with my vegetables; I'm also a member of a CSA that supplies me with a chicken every two weeks, a free-range chicken, and eggs every week that are free range. Again, by having bought a share in the production of the chicken and a share in the production of the eggs, I'm helping those farmers.

In my house we have not bought meat at the supermarket for a very, very long time because every year I buy half a pork, a quarter of a beef, and half a lamb, again, so that I can support local farmers in my area, and they have the assurance that they can sell the products that they grow.

I'm really delighted that this bill has been introduced in this House. I think by doing that, we are valuing the work and the importance of all of these local farmers, who very often take a lot of risks. Now, I take some risk in being a member of a CSA. This year the carrots didn't grow very well, but the squash grew very well. Between the squash that I grew in my own garden and the squash that I got as part of the CSA, we've been eating squash. But at least the farmers knew that they had the money to grow their products and customers for the product.

What this bill I think is going to do is focus on the fact that even though Alberta is not seen as a place where you can grow a lot of food, what we're going to be doing is valuing all of these farmers that are growing food for all of us that live in the urban areas. I'm really hoping that every single member of this House can support this bill and in a way tell the farmers that are growing our local food that we value them and that we support them. We want to make sure that they have the support that they need to enhance their production and the food that they give to all of us, that they sell to all of us.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

4:50

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

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's certainly a pleasure to have the opportunity to rise and speak to Bill 202. The act, of course, was brought forward by the Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park, and I'm certainly happy to support that. This act is going to allow our local producers greater direct access to markets and consumers, just like my constituents in Edmonton-Decore, to enjoy more homegrown products. I know my household tries to take part in a lot of those local products as much as possible, and my wife is certainly trying to convince me to eat a little bit more healthy from time to time despite our busy schedules.

When we're talking about consumers, they want to see the choices to be available to them, and that choice is starting to lean more to local producers. Having come from a warehouse atmosphere, I've seen all the different producers that come in, and they're coming in in great big loads, but I've noticed that there are not a lot of grown-in-Alberta labels; not to say that there aren't any, but it would be nice to see even more, especially when you're talking

about folks like myself: very busy schedule. I sometimes will tend to pick convenience over what is probably better. For me to try to reach out to these local growers and get out to the farmers' markets, it's a little bit harder just because there simply aren't any in Decore that I'm aware of.

I know that there have been arguments saying that they already have this access. In part that is true, Mr. Speaker, but, like I said, when you're talking about having to travel outside – you know, it may sound silly. It's only 20 minutes away. Well, that's 20 minutes that for myself I could be dealing with a constituent's concerns whereas if I can stop at my local big grocer, get really good locally grown foods, that will certainly make my wife a little bit happier with some of the choices. The reality is that we do live in a fast-paced world, and the Alberta food act will greatly expand that access, providing fresh local products that my constituents have been looking for without that extensive travel time to purchase them.

I see this bill, Mr. Speaker, definitely as a win-win situation here. Our local producers get to have that greater access, more so than they currently have. Constituents like mine get to have access to those local food products that they're looking for, thus growing not only the businesses here within Alberta, but consumers get a chance to support those businesses. It just becomes a great big circle as our economy gets to grow. We're still getting those quality products that we're all looking for.

Mr. Speaker, I'm certainly urging all of my colleagues in the House to support Bill 202, support the growth of local producers, support the consumers that are looking to support those producers, and we'll even get some really good products on our dinner tables at the same time.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there any other members who would like to speak to Bill 202?

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Ms Woollard: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I'm very glad to have the opportunity to speak in support of Bill 202. The previous speakers have made some really good points about the growers and availability to market. A few things I was thinking of.

Another reason for supporting locally grown food is, number one, that you've got a decrease in cost. We've talked a lot about distances. The farther food is conveyed, that's going to add to the cost because we are paying for the transportation, and it tends to result in some deterioration of food quality. If food has to be able to travel long distances, sometimes it's grown to be tough rather than flavourful. Sometimes it doesn't travel as well as it's supposed to, so there's a loss. There are a lot of things that can happen over a 1,000 kilometre trip.

Another thing that I was thinking about was the variety of food. One of the things that we've all seen, especially with our mass-produced foods and foods that are not locally produced, is that there's a decrease in the variety. It's like with apples; 30, 40, 50 years ago commonly available apples would have included about, I think, 30 to 40 kinds. Nowadays you'd be lucky to find five or six in a grocery store. The ones that they keep producing are the ones that are the best sellers. What happens is that some of those varieties just die out. They're no longer available. The more people that you have growing, especially small operations, locally produced foods, the more likely it is that the varieties will be maintained, and for the future that's very valuable. We're in the situation right now where bananas might be a disappearing food from our diets because there's only one seed. There's only one type, and, you know, they figure that it may disappear in the next 10, 20 years.

One last point I need to make is that the more encouragement there is for people to continue using good agricultural land for agriculture of any kind, the more it is kept. It's not being built over. Building over doesn't destroy the land, but it takes it out of production, and around cities that's a terrible loss.

Those are the main things that I wanted to add to the conversation. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Government – Opposition Leader.

Mr. Cooper: The Government House Leader? In one fell swoop, just like that? Someday. We can all dream, Mr. Speaker, of a better day. No; I'm just teasing.

It's my pleasure today to rise and speak to Bill 202, the Alberta Local Food Act. We've heard a lot of fairly robust debate in the Chamber today, particularly around some of the good things that are happening when it comes to local food. I myself couldn't be more pleased about those really positive things that are happening already with respect to local food. We heard the hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud singing the praises of farmers' markets, and we heard the hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane speaking about honey, I believe. I might just add that in the constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills Canada's the third-largest producer of honey exists right there in the constituency. I would welcome everyone to come down, and I would be happy to – I know that he is very receptive to touring his facilities. A lot of the exciting things are happening with local food right there in Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, particularly with respect to honey.

Also in the constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills there's a meadery, which many in this House will be familiar with. Some would say honey wine. They wouldn't say that because . . .

An Hon. Member: Meadery?

Mr. Cooper: Yes, meadery, not to be confused with a meatery. But while we're speaking of a meatery, Olds College produces wonderful local meat.

I guess my point is that we see situations all across the province . . .

The Speaker: I would hesitate to interrupt the Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills; however, the time for consideration of this item has concluded.

5:00 Motions Other than Government Motions

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

Liquor Regulations for Live Music Venues

507. Mr. Shepherd moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to consider amendments to the Gaming and Liquor Regulation, Alta. reg. 143/96, that would extend the hours associated with the provision of liquor for venues that offer live music and to consider supporting further initiatives that will allow the live music industry in Alberta to prosper and grow.

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is truly my pleasure to rise today to bring Motion 507 to the floor for debate. Over the last six months I have been working with local musician and studio engineer and producer Thom Bennett and city of Edmonton councillor Scott McKeen on the Edmonton live music, or ELM, initiative.

This is an initiative to enhance and increase the presence and value of live music in Edmonton by offering supports to new and existing venues by considering changes to the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission, or AGLC, regulations and, in partnership with the city of Edmonton through the Edmonton Arts Council, exploring how we can best support and remove the barriers to the culture of live music within our city and around our province. This motion today supports the work of the ELM initiative by urging the government to consider reviewing and encouraging changes to the AGLC regulations to accomplish this goal, including the possibility of allowing venues which host live music to stay open and provide service one hour later.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta is home to an amazing array of incredibly talented musicians. This is evidenced by the incredible number of talented performers that we have catapulted onto national and international stages, including such stalwarts as Ian Tyson, k.d. lang, Tommy Banks, Jann Arden, Corb Lund, Feist, Jr. Gone Wild, Shout Out Out Out Out, and the smalls. This continues with the steady climb of newer artists such as Michael Rault, Faith Healer. . . [interjections] Yeah. That, too. The Emeralds: how could I forget the Emeralds? And, of course, we have many new artists coming up like Michael Rault, Faith Healer, Rueben and the Dark, Purity Ring, Joe Nolan, the Wet Secrets, and the band formerly known as Viet Cong.

Mr. Speaker, all of these bands have one thing in common. They cut their teeth and perfected their skills in venues right here in Alberta. Our province has an incredible wealth of institutions which provide fertile soil for an incredibly rich and diverse music scene. Through postsecondary programs offered through MacEwan University, Red Deer College, and Mount Royal University, arts-focused elementary and secondary schools like Victoria school for the performing arts, and independent initiatives like Edmonton School of Song and the school of rock, we consistently generate an incredible number of skilled and talented musicians, performers, and songwriters. These performers, in turn, are supported by local radio stations such as CKUA, CJSR in Edmonton, CJSW in Calgary, and CKXU in Lethbridge.

Once they're established, they have the opportunity to play at the dozens of festivals which take place across our province every year. But their first opportunity to practice and hone their craft, the first thing to which they are able to aspire is the stage at their local music venue. Mr. Speaker, over the last few years Edmonton has seen the loss of many beloved venues, which were loved for offering that chance. Local venues are the lifeblood of a music scene, providing musicians the chance to cut their teeth and local residents the opportunity to discover and support up-and-coming acts.

They bring vitality to our communities and create cultural hubs which support and celebrate our local communities and draw business to other nearby restaurants, cafés, and shops. This, in turn, makes our communities more attractive places to live, drawing in businesses and young professionals. In cities like Austin, Nashville, Memphis, London, Melbourne, or Berlin music tourism generates millions of visits, billions in revenue, and thousands of jobs. Mr. Speaker, given the incredible cultural resources here in our province, with focused work and effort we could begin to lay a real foundation for the same.

In terms of the motion, Mr. Speaker, it's common knowledge that liquor sales play a key role in the profitability of live music venues. Therefore, one of the most effective ways we can support these venues and ensure their long-term sustainability is to ensure the regulations surrounding these sales work in venues' favour and not against them. One way we could possibly do this is by extending the hours of service for venues hosting live music by one hour, to 3 a.m.

This suggestion was presented to the ELM initiative by one of their board members, the former senator Tommy Banks. According to the senator prior to 1960 Alberta had largely been a dry province, where the only alcoholic beverage you could order in a bar or restaurant was a glass of beer. Other adult beverages were required to be smuggled into one of the local ballrooms or nightclubs. However, in 1960 the government of Premier Manning moved to allow that, under very strict regulation, dining lounges and their attached bars would be permitted to serve alcohol until midnight Monday through Saturday. However, from Monday to Friday a venue could serve until 2 a.m. if they offered entertainment consisting of at least a three-piece musical act. To quote the senator: only an arithmetic-challenged idiot would fail to see the benefits and fail to take advantage of such an offer.

Accordingly, the music scene in Alberta exploded. According to the senator Edmonton soon boasted no fewer than 15 live music venues within one block of Jasper Avenue between 100th and 109th Streets, all of which hosted live music six nights a week. Musicians in Edmonton went from a select few scratching out a meagre living to hundreds that worked full-time. This remained the case well into the late '70s and to the new Liquor Control Act of 1980.

Of course, I recognize that now that we have much more liberal legislation in place, making tweaks to the regulations isn't going to have nearly so dramatic an effect. However, allowing venues hosting live music that additional hour of service could help provide a much-needed boost in revenue that, helps them offset the costs of paying musicians and maintaining the equipment required for live music.

Currently the regular hours of sale and service set by the gaming and liquor regulations are 10 a.m. to 2 a.m. However, as we've seen in the past, the AGLC regularly considers requests for extended service hours. These are evaluated on a case-by-case basis, with consideration given to the scale of the event and the operating track record of the licensee making the request.

For example, during the 2014 Olympic Games the AGLC authorized blanket approval across the province for early liquor service for the gold-medal hockey game. The AGLC also . . .

An Hon. Member: Hear. Hear.

Mr. Shepherd: Yes. Thank you.

The AGLC also allows early openings for licensed establishments in Calgary during the Stampede. So far the AGLC has not received any reports of concerns or issues with these practices. Of course, any decisions related to extending liquor service past 2 a.m. would have to be based on broad support from industry and community stakeholders as well as the public, and consideration would have to be given to the broader impacts of extending liquor service in regard to policing needs, availability of transportation and transit, and other necessary services. However, I'm pleased to report, Mr. Speaker, that the AGLC remains open to discussions and that they've stated that they're committed to maintaining an innovative liquor model, responsive to industry and consumer trends and considerate of public safety and obligations of social responsibility.

Now, while today's motion is mainly focused on this extension of the hours of service, it's my hope that opening these discussions could allow us to consider some other innovations as well; for example, for smaller venues like Edmonton's Blue Chair Café, which is geared around offering dinner and a show, or the, hopefully, soon-to-be-open Aviary. Such venues don't have an interest in extended hours and staying open until 3 a.m., but perhaps, instead, we could consider offering such venues a small reduction in the provincial liquor markup rates. Any loss of revenue

from this reduction would likely be offset by increased sales at the larger venues who do choose to stay open later, which would make the proposal, effectively, revenue-neutral.

Or we could explore removing the regulations introduced in 2007, which forbade underage musicians from playing in licensed venues. This is a cause that's been championed by Terry Evans of Edmonton station K-97, whom I met with a couple of weeks ago myself, himself the father of a talented young musician. As he pointed out to me, this is a form of apprenticeship that is allowed in Ontario, Manitoba, B.C., and Saskatchewan, that gives advanced young musicians the opportunity to hone their skills and gain valuable experience by working with and being mentored by older musicians. In turn, this grows the audience for live music by drawing out their family and friends.

We could also examine ways to ease restrictions on hosting all-ages shows and independent hall shows, helping us to create a new generation of Albertans who truly appreciate and support a culture of live performance. In the years I spent playing with long-time Edmonton musical icon Mr. Mike McDonald, I heard many stories of the vibrant music scene of the 1980s and how so many bands, including his now reunited band, Jr. Gone Wild, thrived in a culture of independent hall shows. Young promoters capitalized on their entrepreneurial spirit, helping to develop the local music community while honing their own business skills. Finding ways to provide easier access to liquor licences for these kinds of shows could improve access to live music in . . .

5:10

The Speaker: Hon. member, your time has concluded.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I continue to learn a lot of history of this province by the various presentations in the House.

The hon. Member for Peace River.

Ms Jabbour: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm thrilled to rise in this House for the first time to actually engage in debate on a motion. This motion actually addresses something that's very near to my heart. As many of you know, in another life I was a musician. I had my first band when I was 16 with some friends, and this eventually over the years kind of morphed into different incarnations of groups. I had a dance band with my siblings, and we travelled all across Alberta. We went from Sundre to Fort Mac to – you name it – Jasper, Athabasca, Cold Lake. We were everywhere, and it was a great experience.

Later on I formed a show trio with my brother and sister, and we became fortunate enough to actually land a house gig at the Beverly Crest. Now, the Beverly Crest was one of those in the '80s that was a big supporter of musicians. They had three rooms running all the time with different kinds of music. We were fortunate to get in on that, and we were there for six years. I got to do something I loved and got paid for it. It was fabulous.

Mr. Cooper: Like now.

Ms Jabbour: Like now. This was even better, though. Playing as a musician is a lot more fun, and you get more appreciation.

Back in the '80s, of course, the music scene in Edmonton and across Alberta was vibrant and alive. There were venues. There were players. We had people like Tommy Banks, already mentioned, P.J. Perry, Big Miller, Charlie Austin, Kennedy Jenson – they were everywhere – and so many talented people. We had these venues and, you know, musicians were out there. We could go any night. We could go anywhere and enjoy live music. It kind of started to

die, though, over the years. The DJs took over, and a lot of the venues started to close.

My own band over the years also ran afoul of the AGLC regulations against underage performers. My sister was only 16 at that time and in our band, and when we had arrived for a weekend gig, they shut us down when they discovered she was 16 – “oh, sorry; you guys are cancelled for the weekend” – leaving, of course, the room with no entertainment. They finally compromised, and they said: “As long as you don't let anybody know, you can perform tonight only. But she has to go and stand outside during your breaks.” That was the compromise. Again, later on I performed with my daughters. We were able to get an exemption based on a special permission letter. But in 2007, as mentioned, AGLC again cancelled all musicians who were under 18 performing in licensed venues.

It's something I'm very much in favour of. There are so many talented young people out there. My own daughters learned from that. My own band benefited from being able to perform. I think it's important that younger people get that chance and that it becomes more of a family-friendly kind of a venture, encouraging appreciation of live music from a very young age.

It's sad, too, to see that so many wonderful venues have shut down. I mean, when we lost the Sidetrack, many of us mourned. More recently we lost New City, which was another fabulous live music venue. I know that one of the reasons that they were forced to shut down – Brad, Terry, and Tabitha were a family, and they worked really hard to run this business. But their margins were so small, even though they were packed every night, they simply couldn't make a go of it, and they had to shut down. My own brother-in-law tried for a while. So I know first-hand how hard it is for these venues to support live music.

Really, we all benefit when we have a vibrant live music scene. We have talented musicians who can practice their craft. We support small businesses and entrepreneurs who flourish not just through the direct music venue but the peripheral industries and the businesses that support that. We have tourism, as already mentioned. One of the first things that I ever do when I go to visit a city is that I check what's happening, what's out there. Is there a band or music I can go listen to? Unfortunately, Edmonton kind of has fallen back on that, and I think that it's something we would do really well to promote. It would put Alberta on the map. Again, as I mentioned, being able to have all-age performers could promote family-friendly venues. We all benefit because listening to music makes us feel good. You listen to live music, it makes you feel better, you get up and you dance. It's good for our health, it reduces stress, and it's just positive all around.

I'm really in favour of this motion because I think that anything we can do to help support and grow the live music industry in Alberta is a positive. Extending the hours is just a small step. Reducing some of that red tape, these regulations that maybe are prohibitive and prevent owners and the venues from being able to at least turn a profit, however small: I think that's just the first step. We can go from there and find other ways to support live music. I'm very much in favour of this motion, and I thank the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre for bringing it forward.

Mr. Cooper: Sing us a song.

Ms Jabbour: You know what? We can all sing together. How's that?

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm honoured, actually, thrilled to be able to speak to this motion. It's a proposal that is aimed at encouraging Alberta's music industry, and I do think that the performing arts are truly an integral part of our culture, something that we really do need to grow, to enhance, to encourage. Our province does boast a truly flourishing music scene. It makes sense that we can make some of these services more accessible. I believe that I'm correct in saying that Alberta actually is the second-largest live music area in our country. I'm essentially in support of much of the idea.

I think it is important, though, that we also consider striking a bit of a balance between free society and the ramifications with regard to public safety. That would be my only real concern. By extending the hours associated with the provision of liquor for venues that offer live music, there are some obvious benefits for music but some real potential risks that I do think need to be examined. I guess the real question is: will this have an increase or a decrease in the likelihood of impaired driving issues? That's an important thing in my riding. With a more staggered exit from bars and pubs, will taxi services find it harder or easier to keep up with late-night demand? Will it decrease impaired driving? I don't know. Will later closing hours mean later consumption and possibly higher risks for impaired driving? That would be the question.

I think that organizations like Mothers Against Drunk Driving and particularly our law enforcement agencies really should have some opportunity to speak to this. I would hope that they would be consulted when it comes time to actually consider where this might go and give them the opportunity to actually share their thoughts and if they would add anything to it all.

I do agree that on the surface and for culture there are probably some significant positives and also for businesses, business owners, musicians. One possibility is that later hours of operation will allow for more alcohol and ticket sales, which is positive for businesses, and potentially, hopefully, a growth of the local music industry. However, I think the question also has to be asked: what actually constitutes live music? DJs, open-mike nights: do they count as live music? If so, would that remove the incentive for business owners to actually hire more costly live musicians and eliminate the benefit to them? If hours of operation are extended but consumption and alcohol sales are not, then there's less incentive for business owners to increase their operating costs and, again, no benefit to real musicians. In reality, you can see how different tweaks to this legislation could create numerous kinds of outcomes, actually.

The motion proposes further examination, which is great, into how we can foster the music industry in Alberta. In reality, that's what I'd like to see us do with all legislation: have a comprehensive analysis of the proposal, ample opportunity for stakeholders to submit their input, analyze that in conversation with various people, and produce results that best reflect the engaged stakeholders and enhance our quality of life here in Alberta. Doing so will provide a more thriving and safe Alberta. I think the success or failure of the motion, like most legislation, in terms of the public eye, will be contingent on transparent and comprehensive consultation.

5:20

As arts and culture shadow minister, though, I have to say again that I am deeply interested in this subject. I think that as a society both the commercialization and the mass production of music has in fact led to somewhat of a decrease in the cultural engagement of people with amateur music, and it's a great loss to our society.

Personally, I'm drawn to live music like a moth to a street lamp. That's the kind of restaurant I always look for to go for dinner or whatever. But I do grieve with the victims of drunk drivers. The carnage and the sorrow that it produces – wow, I didn't know this

would affect me. Sorry. In my riding a teenage girl just two years ago, three years ago was in a crosswalk, and she was hit by a drunk driver. She lost her leg. She's finally beginning to find her way again. She's trying to speak about it in various places. I've met her. I've talked with her.

I truly wish that the music and the artists could be enhanced without it being tied to increased reasons for intoxication and a drinking culture. I think that is a risk, and I would really encourage the Member for Edmonton-Centre to truly look at what he said about: are there other creative ways also to enhance the music industry? I think that would be a great result if we could enhance it and somehow decouple it from the alcohol that seems to have to go with it in this case.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Northern Hills.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak in favour of Motion 507. I see this as a great opportunity to support local bands and artists on the music scene by allowing venues to stay open later to host them. Service extended by one hour, until 3 a.m., is offered in other regions of Canada such as the province of Quebec, and I believe that the extension would help venues offset the cost of hiring musicians through increased liquor sales and cover charges. Some might be critical that the 3 a.m. finish time might be quite late, but in some of the tourism markets in this province such as Banff and Jasper many people are on holiday and would enjoy a vibrant music culture of live music and the late nights. They're also often within walking distance of their hotels and homes. This is good for the tourism economy and good for the Alberta economy as a whole.

Some might not realize this, but in my younger days I worked as a bartender in an Austrian ski town [interjection] – that's a true story – to help raise money for lift passes, ski wax, Wiener schnitzel, and schnapps. Then in Hamburg, Germany, again I worked in a bar area and made some extra money when I wasn't teaching English by day. I was in Germany teaching English. In both cases the bars were open until 6 a.m. or later, so I don't see how a 3 a.m. finish would be much of a problem, based on my former experiences.

Also, during certain times of the year the AGLC regularly considers extending service hours for major events such as the Calgary Stampede right here in this province, like previously mentioned by the Member for Edmonton-Centre. No concerns have been reported by the AGLC so far regarding this practice.

In the case of Calgary-Northern Hills we have a mix of larger bar and pub venues, and I'm quite convinced that they would benefit from the opportunity to extend the hours to offer live music at their locations. When considering many of the advantages of this proposal, I will be supporting this motion.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today in support of this motion. As a professional live musician I've been doing this pretty much my whole life.

Mr. Rodney: Could you sing, please?

Mrs. Aheer: I would happily sing a song, but we'll wait till 4 in the morning – how about that? – and then I'll sing. It might be necessary at that point.

My experience as far as the alcohol portion and all of that goes: it's relevant. I think it'll be dependent upon the business, and I'm

assuming that most businesses will be able to make that decision based on what is best for their business.

One thing to consider, though, that I'd like to bring up and that my colleague brought up, is to perhaps look at the overall idea of what is considered to be live music, Mr. Speaker. I've had the privilege of working with many DJs. They are creative, amazing people that actually offer a humongous amount of artistic creativity to this particular genre. There are so many ways that you can look at a performance. I would highly recommend – I don't know if it's worth doing a definition of what that is, but I think that it would be worth opening the door to what we consider creative expression at that level.

Like, you were mentioning the open mikes. There are a lot of different opportunities to look at that. I think, too, for myself, I've been dragging my kids out, too. There are certain open mikes that we have in Calgary, actually, that are all ages. They're a wonderful opportunity. My son has been at them since he was eight years old. As a result, he's also pursuing a career in music and has in fact taken over my studio since I'm here now. I really, really think that it's a beautiful opportunity, as you had mentioned, Mr. Speaker, for new musicians to cut their teeth, to bring in other musicians that have already, you know, blessed us with their music, and to bring older music back to the new generations that have an opportunity in a small venue to be able to see these things.

However, there are a few things, I think, in terms of sort of the approach that we're taking as far as extending the hours. To bring up a few of the things that the hon. member had mentioned, we just want to make sure, as far as all venues go and whether it's live music or not, that we don't take away any sort of competitive advantage for any of the venues that have the opportunity to benefit from people who are out in the evening for whatever reason, whether you prefer live music or not. We want to make sure that it's sort of an even playing ground for all of the proprietors for those late-evening situations.

We already have mitigation in terms of consumption. We have existing ProServe legislation. I think it's been meaningfully applied in the province, and it will mitigate a lot of the overall concerns that we have. I think that due to the effectiveness of ProServe, extending consumption hours could probably bring in numbers, and it has positive externalities. Like has been mentioned, there's the staggering of those times so that as people are going home, if they are not within walking distance of the venue, then grabbing cabs, getting to other spaces may be a little bit easier for people going home so that we do get them home safe and sound from these venues. I'm sure that that's at the top of the list of the priorities, Mr. Speaker, as we're deciding how to go forward with this legislation.

I think that overall the idea of encouraging the arts is really the guts behind this, and any time we can open up that aspect – and I've been performing for 20 years. It is an absolutely magnificent part of this province, and I truly believe that anybody who's given that opportunity adds to the fabric and the culture of our province. If we're able to give them the opportunity to do that by way of extending the hours, then I think that that's a wonderful, wonderful idea. But I think that we do need to consider the part about the alcohol, make sure that that's not the guts of why we're doing this, that the reason for doing this is exactly what the hon. member had mentioned, that our artistic fabric is actually growing.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. member, if you and the Member for Peace River would like to team up, I have a grandson who plays a mean Jimi Hendrix.

The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to stand and speak on this motion today. I think it's a good idea, and I'm happy to support it. Let me say this. I think it's great that you're encouraging live music. To be clear, I would probably support this motion even if you weren't, only for the simple reason . . .

Dr. Starke: You want to drink at them?

Mr. McIver: Yeah. Well, I just don't think that it's up to the government to tell me or any adult when to go to bed. That's all. I'm just like that. At my age the chances of my staying up to listen to music till 3, 4 in the morning are getting pretty slim. There was a time when that might have been a regular occurrence. That time has passed.

5:30

Nonetheless, for people that want to do that, I just don't think the government should be looking over their shoulder. There are certainly lots of people who work in the hospitality business and things and other businesses that finish work at 1, 2, and 3 in the morning, and I don't see any reason why they can't go out and enjoy the same type of hospitality that a nine-to-fiver can enjoy after the end of their shift.

To be clear, Mr. Speaker, for those watching who might decide to be offended, the fact is that I'm making no excuses for drinking and driving and any of those things. On the other hand, I've often thought and have articulated it publicly – so I'm comfortable saying it again – that if bars and restaurants that serve alcohol are open later, then I think there's a good chance that when people leave those facilities at 4 in the morning, there will be a taxi available rather than kicking everybody out the door at 1 and 2 and then, you know, having 50 people who need a ride and 25 taxis sometimes. In my opinion, that can lead to bad decisions. I'm not excusing any of those bad decisions. I'm just saying that sometimes it can lead to bad decisions.

Whatever you can do to have people go out on the street after enjoying themselves with the best possible odds of them getting a safe ride home the better. If you wanted to extend it just a little bit further, public transit sometimes starts running at 5 or 6 in the morning. [interjections] I'm just saying. I'm just saying. Safety first, Mr. Speaker. Safety first.

I in no way want to diminish your support for musicians and, you know, people that want to perform in bars and restaurants. I think that's a wonderful way to spend time when I'm out with friends and family. Like I said, in my case it's bound to be a little earlier than 3 in the morning. Nonetheless, your idea is a good one, and I'm happy to support it.

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

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to speak in support of this motion. I have the privilege of living, actually, on 17th Avenue in Calgary, which many will know as the Red Mile. Thinking of my street in relation to this bill is quite easy. I can sort of walk out my door and look down the street, and the restaurant closest to me on my left would be a Mexican restaurant, that often hosts Latin American acts, local as well as brought in. Looking further down the street, there's another bar, that specializes in metal music and '80s revival glam rock.

Going down the other way on the street, there's a place that specializes in jazz music. Going down further, there's yet another restaurant, that focuses on Atlantic music and folk music. And going even further into downtown, I can think of several places that also specialize in rap music, underground music, and other up-and-

coming urban acts, including things such as synth pop, which, if you don't know, is the '80s synthesizer music you thought died long ago. It's back.

I am supportive of this motion. You know, it allows venues to stay open an extra hour later, which helps offset the cost of hiring live musicians through the increased liquor sales.

Also, some of the other members here pointed out the experience during the 2014 Olympic Games, where there was a blanket approval process for the early gold-medal hockey game. Now, as somebody who lives on 17th Avenue, if there were going to be residents that were going to be adversely affected by that, I would like to think it would probably be me, from the location where I live, and it was fine. Everyone behaved themselves. There was hooting and hollering after the game, but besides that, everything was fine. I think that is an excellent example of how, you know, the sky will not fall with an extra hour of responsible drinking at particular venues. As was mentioned, too, there have been no concerns reported thus far by the AGLC about this practice.

You know, what I'd like to highlight is that for communities that may have concerns about this, this motion doesn't preclude an individual community from deciding that they do not want to go to 3 a.m., that they would like to stick to the current regulations or some number in between based on stakeholders from their community or based on the history of that particular venue.

I agree with what some of the other members said here as well about, you know, how we obviously have concerns that we do not want people to be out drinking and driving. That's not acceptable under any circumstance, but having lived on 17th, there is definitely something to be said for the importance of staggering when various people who are out on, say, a Friday or Saturday night having a good time leave the various establishments. I have seen many a time lines on 17th Avenue waiting for cabs around these particular venues that are letting out right at 2 o'clock. So there's something to be said for staggering it.

Also, another member mentioned about good-quality sound systems and that potentially an establishment might not want to upgrade because they've been hiring DJs. Well, I can tell you, as somebody who has gone to a DJ show or two in my lifetime, that a good-quality sound system that would be used for a live music act is also a good-quality sound system for a DJ act as well.

With that, I am going to be voting in support of this bill, and I hope the other members of the House do as well. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to speak to this motion. First things first: nothing good happens after midnight. My mother was right on many occasions.

In listening to some of these concerns, first of all – I just wanted to get this out of the way – I've worked with the Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission in the past. I ran an events company. I mean, these guys are top-notch professionals. Depending on what this looks like down the road, I have no doubt in my mind that they'll be able to regulate whatever changes are made to this industry. I think that's okay, and I think that through continual marketing programs aimed towards not drinking and driving, we'll be able to achieve some of those goals down the road.

I was also living on 17th Avenue during the Red Mile, and I didn't sleep for however long those hockey games went on. It was sort of, you know: if you can't beat them, join them. Certainly, it would have been quite handy to have an extra hour, if you could get into a bar, to enjoy the festivities.

Having worked in the bars as well, I do know – I mean, we all live and work at different times and different hours. We used to have hockey groups that would actually come at about 1:30, and these poor guys just want to have a beer and some nachos. Unfortunately, I think, you know, the carbon tax and the minimum wage are going to affect that price and make it a little bit less affordable, so perhaps we should give them a little bit more time to consume the liquor.

Now, I realize that this is a motion – and I'm happy that it's a motion – to explore the opportunities that this presents to all those involved. I'm excited for that. I don't necessarily think this encourages, you know, an overconsumption of alcohol, but it perhaps allows for two members of a party of four to stick around for an extra hour of music because they can have beer, and the other ones will just enjoy their ginger ale or whatever that might be. If this helps to encourage live music and musicians, certainly in the constituency of Airdrie, in which there has been a big push for this more recently, this is definitely a motion that I can get behind and support. I think it's actually a really unique, creative motion, and it's exciting to be a part of something like this. [interjections] There are some things we might disagree on every now and then, but I think this is really good. I think it's really great. Kudos for the creation of this motion. I'm excited to see the progression of this. [interjections]

5:40

I believe that maybe the movers are up here. It's good to see some supporters live. Unfortunately, I just sort of found out about this this morning. I've been able to reach out to some interested stakeholders. My other brother, Steve Jevne, is, I think, an up-and-coming musician, so check him out. I think he has a website. He also runs an open-mike night at Bambino's in Airdrie that's really successful and brings in a lot of different musicians. Christian Hudson, the kid who won the Calgary Stampede talent search, is from Airdrie. He donated his prize winnings of \$10,000 to the homeless in Calgary.

Anyway, really great people in Airdrie, really great musicians. I think this is something that they will get behind and support. As I said, I look forward to the rollout of the results that come in, I guess.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise and speak in favour of Motion 507. I think that it's an excellent initiative on the part of the Member for Edmonton-Centre and something that I hope we can all support.

You know, over the years that I've been in the city, I've enjoyed many live music venues in the past. I know that for many people going back to the Sidetrack is maybe the earliest one that comes to mind, but being a little older than some, I can remember a music venue in Old Strathcona called Dante's, where the music was excellent. I remember one evening dancing to Big Miller in Dante's, and it was very exciting. And just to really, really date myself, Mr. Speaker, when I was in university, there was a place, a coffee house, near Jasper and 109th called the Hovel, that had a wide range of folk music venues and so on.

There's a long history. I think that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre has identified the policy change that helped create that and generate that, and I can see that he is seeking to draw on that historical experience to try and initiate the same kind of thing. I think it's a very worthwhile thing.

I know that in terms of hours there's been considerable concern on the part of many in the Old Strathcona area on Whyte Avenue

and, I think, probably in other areas that all the bars get out at the same time and that it creates a real difficulty. I know that Edmonton city council has discussed this from time to time. I think that having some different hours is actually a good thing and helps manage some crowds and so on.

The last point that I want to make is relative to the point made by the hon. member with respect to underage performers. There are many excellent, outstanding even, performers who are younger than 18, and I understand that Alberta is the only province in which they are not allowed to perform in licensed premises. Nobody is suggesting that they're there to drink, but as performers I think it's somewhat discriminatory to exclude them from being able to perform as part of a group. I hope that that's something as well that the liquor board will take a look at. I think that whatever we can do to encourage live music and to encourage, particularly, younger performers in our province is something that's worth supporting.

I want to commend the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre for this initiative and indicate that I'll be very much supporting his motion. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. Government House Leader, I think that some of those places you identified may be historical resources that are being protected.

Mr. Mason: As am I, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gottfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also wanted to congratulate the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre for bringing this motion forward.

I think that some of the concerns raised earlier are ones that we all note about responsible drinking. But responsible drinking is not about the time; it's actually about the responsibility of individuals to make appropriate decisions, whether that be at 8 in the morning or 8 at night or 3 in the morning as the case may be. I think that education around that, not only of individuals in the community but, of course, of people within the hospitality industry, is important for us to address, and I'm sure the AGLC will do so.

But culture is another great and interesting thing that, I think, comes in many, many forms. I think that we've all enjoyed culture in Alberta in many ways. I like to think of Alberta as a place that works hard. We also like to play hard, and sometimes that involves playing some great music. In my wayward youth we used to do something we called the seedy bar tour, and that involved places like the National, the Shamrock, the King Eddy, Mad Trapper's, Lucifer's, Ten Foot Henry's, which was a nonalcohol venue, surprisingly. We usually took taxis there with the intention of listening to some great music and perhaps imbibing a few alcoholic beverages during that time. Again, great music and great responsibility. I think that that's a tone we have to set.

Mr. Cooper: With great music comes great responsibility.

Mr. Gottfried: There you go.

The other thing, of course, is that through the musicians that we encourage in this province, we also get great activists and community leaders, Paul Brandt being one, who's done a lot of great work for Habitat for Humanity. More recently maybe he's not quite as popular with the members on the other side. Indeed, we have some activists that move forward with that through their musical endeavours. A young man I know well, Aaron Pollock, who actually used to be an employee of Culture and Tourism, is now a budding musician and has just written a song with the Calgary Homeless Foundation. Once it's produced – he's producing

it in conjunction with them – all the download proceeds are going to the cause of homelessness in Calgary and possibly across Alberta. I applaud those sorts of initiatives, that are brought forward through culture and through talent and through young people and people of all ages taking those talents and using them for great causes.

The other thing, of course, for us proud Calgarians is that 2016 will be the opening of the National Music Centre. Hopefully, that will be a source of pride not just for Calgarians but for all Albertans as well. Enclosed in that centre, obviously, will be the rebirth of our wonderful and favoured location of the King Eddy in a much newer and enhanced facility, with the Rolling Stones' mobile recording studio in the halls there. As important, we'll have the Canadian Country Music Hall of Fame, the Canadian Music Hall of Fame, and the Canadian Songwriters Hall of Fame. I think this is a great time for us to embrace this.

I will be supporting this motion enthusiastically, and if any of the venues that the hon. Government House Leader mentioned are still open or if there are any younger members who know Edmonton better than I do, I look forward to enjoying some of those venues in the future, hopefully, with the motion taking effect sometime in the new year.

Thank you.

The Speaker: I feel the need for all of the members in the Assembly to know that *Hansard* and the LAO will be sending a bill to you for all of the free advertising that you've provided.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Mr. Connolly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my pleasure to rise in support of this motion, and I kindly disagree with the Member for Airdrie, who says that nothing good can happen after 12, for the plain reason that most gay bars don't really have anyone going there until about 11 o'clock. About gay bars: the best thing is the drag shows, and those are amazing live shows that start usually around 10 and then can go anywhere between then and the close of the bar.

Dr. Turner: But is it music?

Mr. Connolly: It is music. There are live drag singers. Some will just dance and mime, but there are live drag singers. Thank you very much, Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

In Calgary we have the Backlot as well as Twisted, which are amazing venues where many Calgarians often go to view such shows. In Edmonton we have Evolution, which, again, is a bit newer than the two in Calgary but is very popular with the LGBT community, especially with their copious drag shows.

I want to thank the Member for Edmonton-Centre for putting forward this motion to support live music in all of its kinds as well as entertainment including the drag community.

Thank you.

5:50

The Speaker: The hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

Mr. Rosendahl: Yes. I'm in full support of this motion. There are two parts that – I don't sing or dance or anything; that's probably a good thing. Anyway, I own a fairly large sound system, and we set it up at the local Legion. We promote live music, and we encourage people throughout the community to come and enjoy the festivities and those kinds of things, plus it promotes the Legion, which is a good thing that we do.

Also, on top of that, that hasn't been mentioned yet, are music festivals. Being one of the main organizers for the Wild Mountain Music Festival, in mid-July, in Hinton – we have thousands of

people that arrive there for that weekend event, and of course it's promoting live music across Canada. Musicians and people show up, like I said, from across Canada. We even get some people up from the States. CKUA helps to sponsor the event, and of course we have big Baba, that shows up and helps to do the announcing and everything like that. It's a great promotion for live music. I was hoping that – with the music festival, of course, is the liquor portion of it – changes to the liquor side would be a good thing for the festival. We allow camping on the site. We have buses going to and from the site all the time, to the community, so that nobody is drinking and driving. We have these things, so it's great.

I'm in full support of this because we need the additional alcohol to help pay for the singers that we bring from all across Canada. So it's great. Thank you.

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

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a former restaurant manager at this time last year I was getting ready to stay up till 1 a.m. for the busy Christmas rush, and now I'm getting ready to stay up till 1 a.m. for other reasons. I want to thank the hon. House leader for supporting an extra hour of folk music as well.

You know, in the restaurant industry this is something that we've been talking about in the last few years, looking at ways to diversify, to promote growth within our sector. One of the things that gets thrown around a lot is live music, except that with live music comes a risk. It's a monetary risk. You're taking a gamble any time you bring a live act in, and you need to recoup that cost, that comes with having a live act. So providing an extra hour in which you can provide some service – I even noticed that the Member for Calgary-Hays spoke about attracting people who may not be able to come out to these venues because they work till 1 in the morning – would be a good way for us to really promote growth within the industry as well.

You know, we've seen this with special events like the 2014 Olympics. We've seen this with World Cup events as well, where there are modifications or amendments made to liquor laws for a single basis. When those occur, we never hear about any problems that occur with that. Usually people are quite responsible with events like these. Having seen venues where they're hosting musical events, you tend not to see binge drinking compared to venues that aren't doing musical events as well.

As it stands for AGLC – and, you know, I heard the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View speak briefly about this as well – there's very strong training in place. Having been in the industry when AGLC started implementing things like ProServe, you actually start to see a little bit of change when it comes to the service of liquor and the responsible service of it as well, and I have complete faith that people with ProServe certification will be responsible with the service of liquor as well.

You know, there is some opposition that may say that some cities would be opposed to this. There are a lot of systems in place for municipalities who might not see this as the best option for them as well. They can put bylaws in place. They are the ones who are issuing business licences and can put restrictions on those businesses' licences as they see fit. We see that in areas like Cardston, which actually is a dry town. So that gives them options there as well.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I hesitate to interrupt you, but Standing Order 8(3) provides for up to five minutes for the sponsor of a motion other than a government motion to close debate.

I would invite the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre to close debate on Motion 507.

Mr. Shepherd: Well, thank you so much to everyone that's risen and spoken today. It's fantastic to hear so much support for an issue that is truly very near and dear to my heart. I'm very happy that Mr. Thom Bennett was able to join us here today – he was, as I mentioned earlier, the driving force behind the ELM initiative – and Mr. Terry Evans, a great supporter of young musicians here in Edmonton.

Mr. Speaker, we're incredibly fortunate that in this province we have so many people who are deeply passionate about and committed to growing our local music scenes. You know, I've been greatly encouraged watching musicians, promoters, booking agents, people that have spent decades here in the trenches, people that I came up through the Edmonton music scene with rise into positions in municipal and provincial government, where their dedication to live music has the potential to yield great dividends for our music communities. Many of these individuals are deeply involved in discussions with colleagues in other provinces, with an eye to growing more Canadian municipalities as music cities, cities with thriving grassroots music scenes that generate measurable value for their local economies and communities.

Again I thank everyone who has risen to speak today. I thank the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka for his thoughts on the potential challenges and how we'd have to examine how some elements of this bill might be defined. I think that's an important consideration, something we need to look at closely to make sure that any adjustments to the regulations don't leave loopholes that could be exploited. We'd want to make sure that we word things very carefully to ensure that we achieve the intended benefit of supporting the hiring of professional live performers. I also appreciate the considerations you brought forward about potential effects in smaller communities, where there may not be transit services or as many taxis available. That's certainly something that's important to consider, and for that reason, I'd certainly want to ensure that in considering these changes, we have good conversations with police, municipal authorities, and community stakeholders to make sure that we get their views on how we could mitigate those kinds of potential effects.

I also really appreciate the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek's observation that, you know, these performers do become great leaders, advocates, and activists in their community. I know for myself that the skills that I learned and that I honed on the stage played a large role in leading to my standing in this House today, so those are incredibly important and very transferable skills, Mr. Speaker. As he noted, we have many other cultural and musical resources across the province – certainly, the National Music Centre, in Calgary, is another one of those – that we could couple with a vibrant music scene to create a much stronger music tourism industry here in our province.

Of course, more vibrant music scenes in our large urban centres support musicians who then play all across our province, so it's a benefit to all communities in Alberta as many of these musicians then go on to play in festivals and venues in smaller areas around Alberta, things like the North Country Fair, the South Country Fair, Pembina River Nights, the Canmore folk festival, or even in smaller venues like the Twin Butte general store.

Lastly, Mr. Speaker, a vibrant culture of live music has strong economic spinoffs. It supports local recording studios, music stores, other businesses. It has spinoffs that benefit other cultural groups as well. There's an enormous amount of potential here, enormous opportunity. We have so many wonderful musicians that we grow here in this city, so many institutions that help nurture that. I think that by taking this opportunity, we could really look at continuing to develop and truly benefit from a great cultural resource here in this province.

Thank you again to everybody for your support on this motion today, and I look forward to the opportunity to open discussions.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. Everyone else mentioned venues that weren't here, but it seems appropriate that you would have somebody who's live here today.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 507 carried]

The Speaker: The Assembly stands adjourned until 7:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Monday evening, December 7, 2015

Day 29

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

First Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Monday, December 7, 2015

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Please be seated.

Private Bills Second Reading

Bill Pr. 1

The King's University College Amendment Act, 2015

Mr. Mason: Hi, Madam Speaker. I'll move second reading of Bill Pr. 1, The King's University College Amendment Act, 2015.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other speakers to this bill?
Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 1 read a second time]

Bill Pr. 2

Bethesda Bible College Amendment Act, 2015

Mr. Mason: Madam Speaker, I'll move second reading of Bill Pr. 2, Bethesda Bible College Amendment Act, 2015.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to this bill?
I see none.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 2 read a second time]

Bill Pr. 3

Rosary Hall, Edmonton Repeal Act

Mr. Mason: Madam Speaker, I move second reading of Bill Pr. 3, Rosary Hall, Edmonton Repeal Act.

The Deputy Speaker: Any hon. members wishing to speak to the bill in second reading?
I see none.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 3 read a second time]

Bill Pr. 4

Canadian University College Amendment Act, 2015 (a)

Mr. Orr: Madam Speaker, I move second reading of Bill Pr. 4, Canadian University College Amendment Act, 2015.

The Deputy Speaker: Any hon. members wishing to speak to this bill?
I see none.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 4 read a second time]

Bill Pr. 5

Concordia University College of Alberta Amendment Act, 2015

Mr. Mason: Madam Speaker, I'll move second reading of Bill Pr. 5, Concordia University College of Alberta Amendment Act, 2015.

The Deputy Speaker: Any hon. members wishing to speak to the bill in second reading?
I see none.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 5 read a second time]

Bill Pr. 6

Covenant Bible College Amendment Act, 2015

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Please bear with me. It's my first time going through this. I move second reading of Bill Pr. 6.

The Deputy Speaker: Any hon. members wishing to speak to this bill?
I see none.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 6 read a second time]

Bill Pr. 7

Living Faith Bible College Amendment Act, 2015

Mr. Cooper: Madam Speaker, I move second reading of Bill Pr. 7, Living Faith Bible College Amendment Act, 2015.

The Deputy Speaker: Any hon. members wishing to speak to the bill?
I see none.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 7 read a second time]

Private Bills Committee of the Whole

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill Pr. 1

The King's University College Amendment Act, 2015

The Chair: Hon. members, we have under consideration Bill Pr. 1. Are there any questions, comments or amendments with respect to this bill? Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that Bill Pr. 1, The King's University College Amendment Act, 2015 be amended as follows. Section 7 is amended in the proposed section 6 by striking out clause (a) and substituting the following:

has authority to provide programs of study, approved in accordance with the Post-secondary Learning Act and the regulations made under that Act, that lead to the granting of baccalaureate, master's and doctoral degrees; to provide institutionally approved programs of study that lead to the granting of diplomas and certificates;

I have a sum total of one copy of the amendment. Oh, hey, look at that. The script doesn't tell me where to stop speaking, so do I just fill the time until . . . [interjections] I'm going to filibuster my own bill, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions regarding the proposed amendment?
I see none.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Chair: We are back now on the main bill as amended. Are there any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[The remaining clauses of Bill Pr. 1 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

7:40

Bill Pr. 2
Bethesda Bible College Amendment Act, 2015

The Chair: All righty. Moving on. Are there any questions, comments or amendments with respect to this bill?

I see none.

[The clauses of Bill Pr. 2 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: That's carried. [interjection] Opposed? I figured everybody was in agreement, so I didn't ask "Opposed?" What can I say?

Bill Pr. 3
Rosary Hall, Edmonton Repeal Act

The Chair: All right. Moving on to Bill Pr. 3. Are there any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill?

I see none.

[The clauses of Bill Pr. 3 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Any opposed? That's carried. We're getting there.

Bill Pr. 4
Canadian University College Amendment Act, 2015

The Chair: On Bill Pr. 4. Are there any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill?

Seeing none, I will call the question.

[The clauses of Bill Pr. 4 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Bill Pr. 5
**Concordia University College of Alberta
Amendment Act, 2015**

The Chair: Are there any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to rise and move an amendment to Bill Pr. 5 on behalf of the Member for Calgary-Varsity. This bill was reviewed by the Standing

Committee on Private Bills, and the committee recommended that the bill proceed with this amendment, being as follows. Section 6 is amended in the proposed section 4(1) by striking out clause (c) and substituting the following:

- (c) to provide programs of study, approved in accordance with the Post-secondary Learning Act and the regulations made under that Act, that lead to the granting of baccalaureate, master's and doctoral degrees.

The copies of the amendment are being distributed.

The Chair: All right. On amendment A1 to Bill Pr. 5, are there any speakers with respect to this bill?

Mr. Cooper: I just would love a moment or two to have the amendment in my hand prior to the vote.

Thank you, Madam Chair. I will rest.

The Chair: You're welcome. Thank you.

All right. Everyone now has the amendment. Are there any questions or comments with respect to the amendment?

I see none.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Chair: On Bill Pr. 5, are there any further speakers, questions or comments, amendments?

Seeing none, get ready for the question.

[The remaining clauses of Bill Pr. 5 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Bill Pr. 6
Covenant Bible College Amendment Act, 2015

The Chair: We are now on Bill Pr. 6. Are there any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[The clauses of Bill Pr. 6 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

Bill Pr. 7
Living Faith Bible College Amendment Act, 2015

The Chair: Finally, Bill Pr. 7. Are there any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[The clauses of Bill Pr. 7 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.

**Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole**

Bill 7

Alberta Human Rights Amendment Act, 2015

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you. I will be relatively brief. It's a pleasure for me to rise to speak to Bill 7 in committee and to outline my personal pleasure in the fact that our government has been able to move forward on this bill as quickly as we have. I'm also, of course, very pleased with the level of support that it is now receiving throughout this Assembly as we move forward on this bill.

You know, it's interesting, going back to when I was first elected, in 2008, Madam Chair. At that time, the big get in our human rights legislation was to get the legislation to actually include reference to sexual orientation. Soon after I was elected, we celebrated – celebrated, in quotations marks – the anniversary of the Vriend decision, when the Supreme Court of Canada essentially told the previous government of Alberta that it had to read in protection for people on the basis of sexual orientation. That was a wonderful decision, but, notwithstanding that, it took over a decade for the previous government to move and actually have that language included in the human rights legislation, and that was unfortunate.

In fact, even when it did finally get introduced – some people here, being rather new to the House, might not recall – it was paired with the rather unfortunate section 11.1 of the bill that brought in sexual orientation, which allowed for all that weirdness where teachers could be disciplined were they to talk about sexual orientation in classrooms without first having gone through a rather laborious process to get permission and to warn everybody that that topic might possibly come up. It's a pleasure to see that we've moved such a long way from that.

Instead, in our case, you know, our government has been in office now for just over seven months, and assuming that we pass this bill in this session, it will be before eight months that we're able to move to that point of including the issue of protecting Albertans on the basis of gender, gender identity, and gender expression. While we know that it would be read in by the Supreme Court of Canada anyway, it is highly symbolic not just to Albertans who need their rights protected on the basis of gender, gender identity, and gender expression, but quite frankly it is symbolic to all Albertans who care about human rights and care about the actualization of protecting critical human rights and the rights of minorities each and every day in our province. That's what this bill does.

I'm very pleased that the Minister of Justice worked very hard to ensure that this bill came forward as soon as we could bring it forward. I want to thank her for that. Of course, I want to thank the many members of caucus who've worked so hard as well to advocate for this bill and who have spoken in favour of it and again thank my colleagues across the way for their support of this bill. I think it matters a great deal to, as I say, all Albertans who care about protecting the rights of minorities, particularly those Albertans who find themselves in positions where they suffer discrimination as a result of their gender identity and gender expression.

I'll finally just end on the fact that it really is so incredibly refreshing to see the differences amongst our young people. If there are people, perhaps not in this House but still across the province, who are nervous or uncomfortable with this, all you need to do is go, frankly, to most schools now and walk down the halls and see

that the majority of kids get it now. The reason they do is because we talk about it and we make it real through doing things like including this in the legislation. Certainly, when I talk to my kids, it's just so amazing how far they've come compared to where I was, many, many years ago when I was in school.

So we can make progress as a community. It doesn't just happen with young people; it happens with people changing the way they view things, understanding the importance of protecting minorities, understanding the importance of people being able to be who they are, express who they are, live who they are without fear of repercussions. I'm so pleased that we now will have legislation that ensures that here in Alberta.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

7:50

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Again, it's my great pleasure in standing to support this bill and give credit and congratulations to the Justice minister. This was timely, this was needed, this was very welcome to, I think, most Albertans now, in the 21st century needing to see evidence that we actually will enshrine some of the uniqueness that is now identified as not abnormal, not bizarre, not in any way to be condemned or treated. Even the medical profession, unfortunately, over some decades – it's not been a decade that it's not been considered an anomaly or an illness or a disorder needing treatment.

Fortunately, we have come into a new age in understanding gender issues, gender identification and ambiguity, and the range of issues that have to do with how we identify ourselves. It's been a real education for me, too, going through this, having grown up in the '60s and having seen and experienced a lot of the prejudice in my own family and now having several members of my family who are ambiguous, gay, lesbian, not yet transgendered as far as we know, but it's quite okay.

I've hesitated to bring forward an amendment simply because I did not want to in any way distract from the main focus of this bill, the recognition under the Human Rights Act that gender identity, gender expression have to be singularly spelled out, but I thought it would be good for us to have this discussion around, in this case, aboriginal heritage. I think that although it's not identified specifically, this may be the only chance we get in the next decade to look at the human rights code and ensure that it's very clear that we are protecting aboriginal heritage as a prohibited grounds of discrimination.

I hear, especially in this mental health review, that there are a lot of people that feel the effects of racism and have somehow lost confidence in government to protect their rights. I will pass out the amendment and chat a little bit about it so that we can move along, having said that that is another dimension of the Human Rights Act that I think people sense is there, but it isn't explicit that aboriginal heritage would be a prohibited grounds for discrimination.

I can tell you that almost every First Nations, Métis, or Inuit person that I talk to feels that they are being discriminated against. Whether it's in school, in the workplace, in other venues, there is a sense that aboriginal heritage is somehow a disadvantage for them in the lives that they lead. People tell me they feel discriminated against in the health care system, which is absolutely unacceptable to me as a health care professional.

If it's not explicit, then maybe since this is one of the rare times that we will be opening this act, it's an opportunity for us to show it in a very clear way, as this Premier and this government have tried to do. To ensure that First Nations, Métis, and Inuit are clearly given a high priority by this government, we are going to honour

the UN declaration on the rights of indigenous persons. We are going to revisit the whole TRC, Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and ensure that we bring forward some of the recommendations around that to all levels of government, all levels of society, be serious about the reconciliation process, that is so needed if we're going to move our First Nations people to the forefront of healing and reconciliation with our society.

This is an opportunity, I guess, while we have this bill open, to recognize something that may have been an oversight. I think it's assumed in the existing human rights code. It's not explicit, just like transgendered was not explicit. We could, I think, make this a little more explicit, send a message, and let everyone in this society know that this is an important area of consideration and reconsideration for many of us, to think about the way that we treat our First Nations people.

I won't say anymore. I want to hear the debate. We've singled out transgendered because it, too, needed to be highlighted. In my view, aboriginal heritage is just one of a number of areas, and by singling it out, we highlight it, we say it's important, and we register it on the minds of Albertans, that maybe it's something that we haven't taken quite as seriously as we should if we really want to see healing and success in our First Nations community. Any ways that we can find to highlight them and encourage their full participation and feel that we're there to protect those rights in a very explicit way, I think, would be to all of our benefit.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any speakers to amendment A1? The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to speak to this amendment. We are somewhat surprised by its arrival. I think that the intention behind it is absolutely noble. I'm somewhat confused because this particular ground would be subsumed into at least one if not two other grounds which are already listed in the Human Rights Act, so that has confused me somewhat.

I do absolutely think that the hon. member is correct. Indigenous people in this province suffer a great deal of discrimination, and there continues to be, I think, even at this time a substantial sort of disparity in terms of educational attainment and a number of other things.

I guess my question to the hon. member would be why he thinks it's important to include this explicitly given that it's already covered under additional grounds and, in addition, why he thinks we want to move forward with this at this exact moment without consultation. Of course, we had considerable consultation on the amendments we were moving. Those would be my questions for the hon. member.

Thank you.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you. Madam Chair, again, I guess it's an oversight that we didn't send this around earlier to give a chance to discuss it. I do not in any way want to detract from the importance of the transgendered identification in this addition.

What I don't see in the Human Rights Act is an explicit statement about aboriginal heritage. By explicitly stating it, I think we would gain not only awareness in our population, confronting a very blatant issue, probably one of the more unfortunate aspects continuing in our society; it would also send a very strong message to First Nations that we honour that, and we are going to champion it, and we are going to make it so that it's not ambiguous in any way by saying that on the basis of ethnicity, which is the way the act currently reads – discrimination on the basis of ethnicity is not specific enough as far as I'm concerned.

For the indigenous people in this province and this country, many of them there is a strong sense that this is not good enough. This is not clear, and in practice it is certainly not something that they have been successful or even chosen to take to the Human Rights Commission. Apparently, given that there have been no cases, that I'm aware of, brought forward to the Human Rights Commission, they don't feel that it's worth while.

8:00

I think it's an opportunity to send a much stronger message than we have about our respect and willingness to single out First Nations, who have not seen improvement in the last few decades in terms of the protection of their human rights. I don't think there's anything to be lost by adding this. It just simply makes something more explicit that has not been as explicit as I think it should be.

The Chair: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Well, the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View has proposed an amendment to the bill, which is in itself an amendment to the Human Rights Act, which is specifically to deal with gender, gender identity, and gender expression, and he's added an additional category; specifically, "aboriginal." Now, there are some concerns, and quite frankly we could have probably dealt with these concerns had we known that this amendment was coming.

First of all, with respect to the word "aboriginal" the government has adopted the UN declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples. The preferred word with respect to that policy is "indigenous" as opposed to "aboriginal." That's one point.

Secondly, there's the question of singling out one particular group. The act clearly contains protection on the basis of ancestry and of race. There's, I think, a risk here of starting to add individual groups within that when it's clearly covered.

While we think that the intent of the hon. member is very honourable and we can certainly see the good that he is trying to achieve through this amendment, it is unfortunately catching us by surprise. There are some outstanding issues that would need to be sorted through before we could support this amendment at this time. With appreciation to the hon. member and the greatest of respect for his intentions, unfortunately we're not in a position to support this amendment at this time.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just rise very briefly to echo some of the same sorts of concerns – and I know we might want to circle the calendar – that the Government House Leader just provided to the Assembly. I think that the intent is quite noble, and certainly there is lots that can be done around this issue. But I think that in light of just receiving the amendment and some of the other risks and challenges that it may pose, I would suggest that while I and quite likely many of my hon. colleagues on this side of the House appreciate the intent of the work that the Member for Calgary-Mountain View was intending to deliver, at this time I think it would be better if we revisited this in the future and possibly had a bit more of a fulsome discussion on some of the nuances around challenges that he has specifically identified.

The Chair: Any other speakers to the amendment?

Seeing none, we will call the question.

[Motion on amendment A1 lost]

The Chair: We are back on the bill. Are there any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Mr. Connolly: Thank you, Madam Chair. We've spoken a lot about consultation lately in this Chamber, so I would like to ask my colleagues in the Official Opposition a few questions, starting with: who did they consult with about Bill 7? Have they spoken with their constituents or the party executive? Have they spoken with a single trans or gender-diverse person about this bill or, for that matter, ever? Do you they know why this bill is so important for an entire community? Do they know what the concerns of this community are and why they're being told to vote for this bill? Finally, why did the Leader of the Official Opposition vote against an identical bill, Bill C-279, only two years ago, when he was in Ottawa?

The fact that the Leader of the Official Opposition stated only last week that transgender and gender-diverse Albertans should have the right to choose their gender shows a complete lack of understanding of an entire community, that the Official Opposition chooses to now support. Only one member of the Official Opposition has spoken to Bill 7 thus far, and when that member was asked if his support for the bill was echoed by his party and their grassroots, he remained silent. Well, I'm happy to say, Madam Chair, that this whole caucus and the entire Alberta NDP supports the trans and gender-diverse community, and we will continue to fight for their human rights, which are so often dismissed and forgotten. I look forward to my colleagues, hopefully, answering some of these questions, especially the Leader of the Official Opposition.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Chair. I might just rise and point out that the bill received significant support from all members on this side of the House, and I look forward to moving the bill forward as expediently as possible.

The Chair: Any further comments, questions, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just rise very briefly to sort of outline what it is that this bill does. I'm honoured to rise to speak to it today. This bill adds gender identity and gender expression to the list of prohibited grounds for discrimination. For clarity and for the sake of the record, gender identity refers to a person's internal, individual experience of gender, and gender expression refers to the varied ways in which a person expresses their gender through a combination of dress, demeanour, social behaviour, and other factors. Protection from discrimination on the basis of both grounds is relevant for trans and gender-variant people. Their gender identity and expression may differ from the sex that they were assigned at birth.

In summary, Bill 7 amends the list of prohibited grounds as well as the preamble and the educational mandate of the tribunal to expressly include gender identity and expression. There are numerous sections within the act that deal with prohibited grounds.

Madam Chair, we have consulted with members of the trans and gender-variant community. We know that these individuals feel that having their gender identity and gender expression expressly listed in the act will promote awareness and understanding of the issues they face on a daily basis. We believe it will empower them to confront the stereotypes and discrimination that we know still exist today. Madam Chair, no one should have to fear being who they are.

The Alberta Human Rights Commission is supportive of this update. Madam Chair, the government is committed to upholding the rights of all Albertans. We know that this bill makes trans and gender-variant people feel more welcome in this province. We have heard concerns from members of the trans and gender-variant community, and Bill 7 is one way that we're acting to help address those concerns now although we must take more in the future.

Madam Chair, this is a historic step forward, and I would encourage all members to support this bill. Thank you.

The Chair: Any further questions, comments, or amendments to the bill?

Dr. Swann: I was just going to ask – and there was someone else who was ready to speak, too – whether we could move to one-minute bells.

The Chair: No. Unfortunately, the way the standing orders are written, the first bells always have to be 15 minutes, and then subsequent bells are always one minute automatically. That gives everybody the opportunity to know that the members have been called in.

Hon. member, go ahead.

8:10

Mr. Feehan: Thank you. I appreciate this opportunity to speak to something which is so significant and very important and allows us all to take one of those profound and significant steps forward in our world, where we take the ideas that we've been building for literally hundreds of years under the Magna Carta and move them forward. I'm delighted to be here to speak to Bill 7, the Alberta Human Rights Amendment Act, 2015.

I was happy to hear Premier Notley refer to the Vriend decision and how that was a transformative moment. I have a personal relationship with that decision as I shared space in a co-op house with Mr. Vriend just at the time of the decision. Having met him and admired his determination to stand up and to be counted, I'm happy to hear that his work is being acknowledged yet again these many years later.

I wish to move on and speak about the issue of providing rights for transgendered individuals in the community because this issue has touched my own life in a variety of ways. As a therapist working with people who have experienced a variety of forms of trauma, I did encounter a number of people who were in the process of discovering their own identity and making courageous decisions to move forward, and I supported them as they underwent various forms of transition, including surgery.

As well, I had the opportunity to support students at the university who were undergoing the same kinds of transitions. Actually, I was privileged to witness that moment when a student makes a decision to, for the very first time, declare who they are to a whole class of 30 people and to watch that class receive that statement with openness and warmth in a way that would not have been seen many years ago and to assist that student to process their emotional work with the class as they made their decisions and changes and moved on. Now, I have run into that student in the community and have seen how their life has been so fulfilled by following up on that courageous decision and how all of the grief that they experienced at one point in their life, including having their life threatened by their own parent, was now put aside, and they were moving on in just a beautiful way to contribute to the community, fulfilling themselves and fulfilling beautiful roles in the province of Alberta.

Thirdly, it's touched my life in that I have someone very close to me, someone who I have deep love for, who is just now beginning this process, and it's just great to feel like this is happening in a new

era, in a new place, a new time, when we can embrace this moment and celebrate it and go through this journey, just like we go through so many other journeys with the people in our lives.

Having had this touch my life in so many different ways, I can tell you that it is both joyfully and with some sadness that I stand today because I know, from my experience with all of these people, that they have had to go through so much unnecessarily up to this point. They've had their lives threatened. They've had their families reject them. They have become addicted to various substances or even to self-abuse. I'm just thrilled that we're part of the message to these people that none of that is necessary anymore and that we're moving on, away from all of those terrible statistics that we heard last week about people who have experienced this: the fact that the average income of people, individuals in the trans community, is below the poverty line, approximately \$15,000 a year; the fact that about 77 per cent of these individuals have considered suicide and 43 per cent of them actually have tried to commit suicide; and that 20 per cent of them have experienced physical and sexual assault just for being who they are. They're terrible statistics, and I know they're only numbers, but I can assure you, having been present in heart-wrenching therapeutic sessions and conversations with people closer to me, that those are not just statistics; they are traumatically disgusting and awful numbers.

Recently I had the opportunity to attend the Transgender Day of Remembrance here in Edmonton and was deeply saddened to learn that they were going to read out 270 names of people who had been killed largely as a consequence of the transgender reality, so much so that I didn't stay till the end. With some shame I say that, but it was an unbearable horror, like listening to a listing of names from Auschwitz or one of the other tragedies that we have experienced in our history. While I have that sadness, I also have the joy: here we are. As Premier Notley said: we're having a very different discussion about this now. We are moving forward, and we're embracing all of those people from gender and sexual and romantic minorities.

I'd like to pause for a moment and say thank you to the groups that have been working on this issue relentlessly for decades. There are many I can point out, but I've had some involvement particularly with the Pride Centre of Edmonton, so I just want to take this moment to do a quick shout-out to the Pride Centre and tell you that while they have done this profound work, they are continuing to struggle financially. I'd like to take this moment to encourage everyone who listens to consider donations to the Pride Centre, support to the Pride Centre, whether it be the Edmonton one or the similar centres in Calgary or outside of the major cities.

This is really a profound change for all of us. One of the things I learned, many years ago, is that when we make a significant and important change for one group of people, it really isn't just about that one group of people. It's really about all of us and how it expands our lives and our world and how each of us then lives a different form of life than we would have if we'd allowed one of our brothers or sisters to live a diminished life.

I'm reminded of a man named Pierre Garipey, who worked with the CPA. He was injured during the Second World War, a spinal injury, and was in a wheelchair from that time, came to Edmonton, where he married, adopted and raised beautiful children, and helped to raise a grandchild who I now call my son. He was a wonderful man, and I'm reminded of him because he is the fellow, amongst many, who came to the city of Edmonton and asked the city of Edmonton: would you please put curb cuts on all the corners so I can get my wheelchair up and down? At the time he was admonished for wanting to waste public monies and do terrible things and cause nothing but grief and slow down the process of construction.

Nowadays, how many of you have stopped at a street corner and thought, "That's a waste of money"? None of you, I'm sure. What you have done, though, is that you've used those cuts in spite of the fact they were built for one community, people in wheelchairs. Now they're used by everyone with a stroller, everyone wheeling their bicycle along, everyone who has difficulty stepping up onto a curb. As we expand the rights and recognize the reality of some people, we expand our own understanding of who we are as human beings, and it is a good thing for all of us.

I'd just like to finish by thanking everyone in this House who has offered support, including the Official Opposition, who has provided some unanimous support for Bill 7. I want to thank you for the respect you're showing for gender diversity as an expression of human diversity. I want to also thank the Wildrose for their support of the notion of gender diversity and gender fluidity, that they exist and that they need to be recognized and that they need to be supported. I would like to thank the Wildrose for their support of the right of children and youth to be affirmed as the gender that they understand themselves to be rather than the one that they were assigned at birth.

Thank you for the support for all of these ideas and notions and to everyone else in the House as well. Thank you very much.

8:20

The Chair: Thank you. Hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford, just a reminder that we do not use proper names in the House.

Mr. Feehan: I'm sorry?

The Chair: We don't use proper names in the House.

Mr. Feehan: Oh, I am sorry.

The Chair: Just a reminder.

Mr. Feehan: Yes. I apologize. You may withdraw that.

The Chair: Thank you.

The hon. Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Madam Chair. It is my pleasure to stand today briefly and speak in support of Bill 7. I just want to share a bit of a different perspective than perhaps some have been sharing. I grew up in a family where trans rights would not have been defended, and I grew up where it was not okay to pass judgment on most things. However, it was okay, seemingly, to pass judgment on those of other races, religions, women, and, sadly, the LGBTQ community. Thankfully, I did not take that with me as I grew up, and I've come to really appreciate the saying that you rise above your raising sometimes. I was really glad to be able to rise above my raising.

I stand proudly in this House to help defend trans rights, to do my small part in being able to help with that cause. I know that some are more ready than others in their journey towards the acceptance of others and, lots of us, towards self-acceptance. I know that this will be one more step for all of us down this road together, but I know that it is one meaningful step that we can take as a province.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Any other comments, questions, or amendments to the bill?

[The remaining clauses of Bill 7 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? That's carried.
The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Madam Chair, I'll move that the committee rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

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

Mr. Feehan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bills: bills Pr. 2, Pr. 3, Pr. 4, Pr. 6, Pr. 7, Bill 7. The committee reports the following bills with some amendments: bills Pr. 1, Pr. 5. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 7

Alberta Human Rights Amendment Act, 2015

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's an honour to rise today and move third reading of Bill 7, the Alberta Human Rights Amendment Act, 2015, which would add gender identity and gender expression to the list of prohibited grounds of discrimination in the Alberta Human Rights Act. I would like to thank the hon. members for their unanimous support of this bill. It was clear to me, while listening to the sincere and positive comments of support from all parties, that our province's shared sense of justice and inclusiveness is reflected in these amendments. I would also like to thank the hon. members who shared with the Assembly their very moving personal experiences.

Madam Speaker, no one should ever be denied basic services or be singled out simply for being true to themselves. By including gender identity and gender expression in the Alberta Human Rights Act, we would be doing more than clarifying an essential piece of legislation. This amendment would empower trans and gender-variant Albertans to confront discrimination that we know continues to exist within our society. It would reinforce the promise of the Alberta Human Rights Act, that everyone who calls this great province home is ensured fair treatment and equal rights regardless of who they are.

Madam Speaker, I commend the Assembly for its support. This is an important step in terms of standing up for Albertans. This bill is an opportunity to send a clear and powerful message that no one should be afraid to walk down the street or go to school, that no one should worry about being fired or refused medical treatment simply because they express who they are. Most importantly, it's an opportunity to say to our family members, friends, colleagues, and neighbours: love who you are, and know that you are loved because of who you are.

Madam Speaker, in the name of acceptance, equality, and diversity I ask all hon. members for their support in moving Bill 7

through third reading. Going forward, we know there needs to be more done to support trans and gender-variant people, specifically in regard to changing perceptions and attitudes, raising public awareness, and sweeping aside harmful stereotypes. Today we take a big step forward.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other speakers to the bill in third reading? The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Just very, very briefly, it is remarkable how far this Assembly has come in what seems like a short period of time, that we're all here on the same side. It all seems relatively easy to be where we are here today, but this day is hard won, especially by those who join us here in the gallery today and so many others. I think it's very important that we acknowledge that. I just wanted to rise here at third reading and acknowledge the tremendous respect I have for the work that you have done and the work that so many others have done to blaze this path and acknowledge the work that remains. There is still work to do.

I think, most notably, we've seen the steps that the Minister of Education has had to take, and I encourage him to continue down that path. Should the imposition of policies on certain school boards to recognize gender expression and gender identity be required, I certainly encourage the Minister of Education to do so. I think that would be very much in keeping and consistent with what we've heard tonight.

With that, I will end my comments and thank the House again for its unanimous approval of this very important bill.

8:30

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to the bill? The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I will keep my remarks brief. Well, it's getting late, and I'm only getting started. I believe we have a very long evening, potentially, ahead of us tonight, so I'm not going to speak long to this. I'll save most of my comments for the rigorous debate we can expect this evening.

I wanted to add my voice to all members of this House that this is the kind of thing that we can work together on, the kind of thing we should not attempt to politicize. It's the kind of thing that Albertans want us to do regardless of our party stripes. I know I've met independent members and members of the government side, Progressive Conservatives at the Strathmore Rocky Mountain international rodeo, great events that bring people together. [some applause] Oh, that was unique applause. It's always interesting when I get applauded by the government members.

I'll keep my remarks on this brief, but I wanted to add my voice to something that I'm so proud to see all members of the House support and that I believe we're going to pass unanimously tonight. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other speakers to the bill?

Seeing none, the hon. Minister of Justice to close debate.

Ms Ganley: Thank you again, Madam Speaker. I will simply close by saying that I think this is a fantastic step forward for all Albertans. I'm thrilled to have unanimous support in the House on this bill, and I think that we have made Alberta a more welcoming place for everyone who lives here. I'm just thrilled.

[Motion carried unanimously; Bill 7 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders
Committee of the Whole
(continued)

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: I'll call the committee to order. Just before we start, I need to clarify this 15-minute division bell thing for the members. The first one always has to be 15 minutes, but the subsequent ones are one minute only with respect to the bill that is under consideration. If we move on to a new bill, it goes back to, again, the 15 minutes, one minute. If we want to do a motion to shorten the bells after the first 15-minute bell for the rest of the evening, we can do so. Does that make sense?

Mr. Mason: Madam Chair, I'm just curious. It's my understanding that an exception to the standing orders can always be made with unanimous consent. Is that not the case here?

The Chair: Not in Committee of the Whole.

Mr. Mason: Oh, okay. I didn't know that.

Bill 4

**An Act to Implement Various Tax Measures and
to Enact the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act**

The Chair: Are there any further amendments, questions, or comments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Well, that's my cue, Madam Chair. I'm thrilled to continue our fulsome debate on Bill 4, An Act to Implement Various Tax Measures and to Enact the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act. This is an act that replaces the Fiscal Management Act, the Fiscal Management Act having replaced the Fiscal Responsibility Act and the Government Accountability Act. We've put forward so far a series of amendments: five amendments from the Official Opposition, one amendment from the fifth party, and one amendment from the third party.

Our goal in these amendments has been to put forward constructive improvements to the legislation. Our goal has been, as I put it in the opening part of this debate between the leader of the third party and myself, to make the legislation less bad. We've spoken about the broad strokes of this legislation, that I believe it is fiscally irresponsible . . .

Mr. Cooper: Totally irresponsible.

Mr. Fildebrandt: . . . totally fiscally irresponsible, that it is reckless, that it is asking the members of the Legislature for a blank cheque, that it is omnibus.

It touches on the budgetary framework of the government, its very structure around borrowing, financing, deficit rules, debt rules. It also includes in it various tax measures, as the title enthusiastically points out: measures to raise insurance taxes – I'm not sure why we would want to be doing that to begin with – measures to raise tobacco taxes, perhaps a little less controversial; measures to raise beer taxes, that is a bit more controversial with some members, I'd imagine; measures to raise locomotive taxes. It's a very far-reaching piece of legislation that no self-respecting fiscal conservative or even mildly fiscally responsible person could ever hope to vote for. It's a piece of legislation that we as legislators have a responsibility to examine in-depth, carefully, line by line.

I remember being in the technical briefing for Bill 4, approaching a month ago, a few weeks ago at least, with the Department of

Finance's bureaucrats, who sat down the Official Opposition, the third party, and the fifth party and ran through the legislation. I recall there being a few small improvements, particularly in the area of tightening up the language around quarterly reporting, language that had been significantly watered down when the Fiscal Responsibility Act and the Government Accountability Act were repealed. The repeal of those two acts is a day that will live in infamy for many a fiscal conservative in Alberta because it really put us on the wrong track.

The bill positively firms up some of the language around quarterly reporting but then goes in entirely the wrong direction. So we've begun to put forward a series of amendments to try to make the legislation less worse.

8:40

An Hon. Member: Thank God for us.

Mr. Fildebrandt: We're just here to help. We're here to help all night long.

We put forward an amendment that would tighten up the rules around the use of the contingency account, once named the sustainability fund. I suppose it became embarrassing for the government to refer to something as a sustainability fund when it was nearly out of money, so it had been renamed. Our goal had been to tighten up the language and the rules around the use of the contingency account so that the contingency account could be used for what it was originally intended to be used for; that is, covering off short-term cyclical deficits, where there would be an emergency or there would be a significant economic disruption. In those cases it would be unfortunate but sometimes necessary to run a limited and short-term deficit.

The sustainability fund had grown to such a level, \$17 billion at one point, and the level of the sustainability fund allowed the government, beginning in 2008, to run deficits, perhaps reasonably at first, but those deficits never seemed to stop. It went to one year, two years, four, six. We've now completed eight years of deficits in the province, at least deficits as we once defined them here, that we have been spending more money than we've been bringing in, that our net financial assets have been on the decline for some time. We wanted to tighten up the rules around the contingency account so that use of the contingency account would be limited to short-term cyclical deficits, not long-term structural deficits, as we now find ourselves in. Unfortunately, the government did not see fit to support the amendment.

We tried to bring some sensibility to the debt ceiling that's been proposed. Once upon a time Alberta was debt free. That was something for every single Albertan to be proud of. It was something that every single Albertan could be justifiably proud of when they talked to someone from Quebec or Ontario or British Columbia. Everybody across the country remembers the front page of the *Herald* and Postmedia outlets from coast to coast with Ralph Klein's beaming smile, holding a paid-in-full sign over his head. We were justifiably proud. It had been hard work to get there. It required sacrifice. It required toughness. It required grit. It required political courage. It required a government willing to say no. It required a government willing to clean up the mistakes of the past and not compound them further. I believe that's what we're seeing today.

Sure, there's plenty of blame to go around for the previous government. I've talked about it for years. I've made a living out of it. In some ways I'm still making a living off it, but I'm trying to limit that. There's plenty of blame to go around, and I'm sure there'll be a time to talk about that, but I think that rather than focus only on the sins of the past, we need to look at how we fix the future.

To say that the last government took on lots of debt would be accurate, but it would be irresponsible to say that we should just keep on doing so because, hey, that's what we were already doing. How bad can we be?

When this government took office, the sustainability fund was about to run out. The debt, the exact debt on the debt clock, stood at \$14 billion and was projected to continue running up. The previous government had projected deficits, as defined by net change in financial assets, of \$6 billion to \$7 billion, and it was a bad spot to be left in, but it is our job to fix it moving forward, not to merely shrug our shoulders at how the past had been managed and say: well, that's not our fault, and we're going to continue doing what we're doing; in fact, we'll accelerate how fast we're going.

Well, once upon a time we had been debt free, and the province had legally banned debt. The province had made reasonable changes for financing of infrastructure through P3s and very limited borrowing for assets like toll roads that earned a cash return, smart business investments. Unfortunately, it didn't stay there for all that long. The borrowing of the province began to spin out of control. It began to go off the rails. Our debt laws in the Fiscal Responsibility Act and the Government Accountability Act were gradually loosened and loosened and loosened until eventually a Premier said that debt was not regrettable but that it was hope, and so much hope we now have. We're drowning in hope. We have to check the debt clock. I print it off about every week or so. I come into the office. I go to debtclock.ca, and I look at the screen. It makes me very, very sad. I click Print Screen, and it comes off, and I tape it to the wall right behind my chair, and it reminds me what we're doing, what we're fighting for every week: to stop that bloody clock, to make it go away.

I remember being in Medicine Hat – yes, you can plug Medicine Hat – in the summer of I think 2014, where I stood beside then two Wildrose members from Medicine Hat as they signed pledges. We called it the balanced budget and debt-free Alberta pledge. The Member for Medicine Hat and the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat put their signatures to that pledge standing in front of the debt clock underneath a giant teepee.

An Hon. Member: It was a nice teepee.

Mr. Fildebrandt: It was a nice teepee, I agree.

It was a nice photo op, but, you know, perhaps one of the people who signed the pledge thought it was just a photo op. Another one took it very seriously, and he's standing right beside me today. I'm very proud to have him here. He's a guy who stood beside his principles and has been fighting for fiscal conservatism through the darkest days of the conservative movement in Alberta, when there were only a small handful of members who would stand up in this House and fight against reckless tax increases, who would fight against continually taking on debt, who would fight to live by the pledge that they had signed. When they had inked their signatures on that pledge, they were willing to stand up and fight for it. Because they were willing to fight for it through that dark period, we're able to be here today in greater numbers than ever, fighting for it.

8:50

To that, we put forward an amendment to lower the proposed new debt ceiling from the 15 per cent that the Minister of Finance has proposed in this bill down to a still very high but, I believe, much more reasonable 7 per cent. That would have been a \$25 billion, roughly, debt ceiling. The government in its wisdom and spirit of co-operation decided that that amendment would just not do, that \$25 billion of debt would not be enough but that they would have

to run up \$50 billion in debt. You know, every time I say "\$50 billion," I feel I just need to put my pinky to my mouth and say: \$50 billion; \$50 billion of debt. I just can't get tired of doing that. It is truly something Dr. Evil would do, to take on \$50 billion of debt and make his poor kid pay for it. But I'm here to tell you that the international caucus of mystery is here to fight against Dr. Evil. I think that's Scotty in the back who's going to pay for it.

Mr. Cooper: Do we have the power?

Mr. Fildebrandt: We certainly have the power to fight against raising the debt ceiling, and we're going to fight against it all night long if we have to. Unfortunately, the government has not managed to see things the way that the fiscal conservatives on this side do, so I'll take this opportunity to do you all a favour and present another amendment to make this bill less bad. I love my job, Madam Chair. I love making bills less bad. One day I'd like to just write a good one from scratch, but we'll have to wait three and a half years for that.

With that, I will hand this out.

The Chair: This will be amendment A8.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll speak to this in some more detail as the evening goes on. In short, to keep my remarks brief – it is getting on, but it'll probably get later – this is to ensure accountability in this year's quarterly update. It was discussed earlier that improvements have been made in some of the quarterly reporting aspects here. I like to give credit where credit is due. It's probably a habit that I'm going to have to work myself out of in politics eventually, but I want to give credit to the government where credit is due, that they are a few minor tinkering in quarterly reporting, but we seem to have missed a quarterly report this year. That's against the law. I generally don't think that politicians should be allowed to break the laws that they make, and that is why, as I've got five seconds left, I want to put forward an amendment that corrects that error.

The Chair: Before I recognize someone to speak to amendment A8, can we just have unanimous consent to briefly revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

The Chair: Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like to rise and introduce to you and through you some members from the Livingstone-Macleod riding. Their names are Nicole Monkman, Laci Pighin, Allen Topp, Derek Ully, Kyle Kohut, Eric Kinserdhal, Vern Habraken, Freeman Herron, and Wade Nelson. They're here as part of the group of industries against Bill 6. They're here to support the Wildrose along with their PC colleagues to fight for hard-working farmers and ranchers. They have travelled here from a long distance, and we'd like you to rise and receive the warm welcome of the Legislature.

Bill 4

An Act to Implement Various Tax Measures and to Enact the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act (continued)

The Chair: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills on amendment A8.

Mr. Cooper: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to speak to the amendment. I know that it might come as a bit of a surprise to the House, but I'll be speaking in support of the amendment. One of the significant challenges with this bill is the continual eroding of accountability of the government to the people of Alberta, and we've seen a number of things happen with respect to this eroding of the trust of Albertans in a number of pieces of legislation. I hope that later we'll have the chance to talk about some of the concerns around Bill 6 that speak specifically to that trust of the government by Albertans being eroded and this real lack of accountability. This real lack of transparency, a real lack of openness: that's exactly what we see in Bill 4 as well. We see the government taking all sorts of steps to be less accountable, to increase debt, to change legislation around the borrowing of operational spending, and this headlong rush to \$50 billion in debt.

So we have an opportunity here – and I've said this before in the House, but I think it bears repeating because it's so critically important to what we do here – and that is that we have to not only think about today, but we have to think of tomorrow. In every single piece of legislation this is exactly what we should be considering, which is not just the ramifications of today but the ramifications of tomorrow. We've seen this government with a lack of reporting around the quarterly updates, and the Finance minister rose just a few days ago in the House saying: well, Bill 4 changes the law; I don't have to provide a quarterly update.

9:00

Madam Chair, the challenge is that the law hasn't changed yet, so we're in a situation where Albertans and the Alberta public should have a much better idea of our fiscal picture. They were entitled to an update, and the law that's still in place today speaks specifically to a requirement to provide updates. These updates are critical to the openness and transparency of the government, and right now we don't have it.

I can tell you that in conversations that I've had with people in Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, they're disappointed. They're disappointed in a number of things, in the lack of consultation around, I mean, obviously, Bill 6. Certainly, some school boards have raised concerns around the lack of consultation. It looks like over the weekend they might have tidied up some of that. They're also concerned with this question of trust and whether or not they can continue to trust this government, that's only seven or eight months old or whatever it is. We didn't see a quarterly update, and we ought to have seen a quarterly update.

One of the things that my hon. colleague from Strathmore-Brooks is intending to do – and I hope that all members of the House, including the Finance minister, will stand in their place and recognize that it is critically important that these quarterly updates take place. They're so important, Madam Chair, that my hon. colleague from Strathmore-Brooks has proposed an amendment that will do exactly that, that will ensure that what happened just a few days ago doesn't happen in the future, that the government won't be able to say: "Oh, don't blame us. We're just in the process of changing a law. Don't worry about the fact that we kind of might have broken the last law, that's in place right now. We're just going to move forward and do our very best to try and get this new law passed quickly, but disregard the old law that's been in place."

Say what you want – and I know that the government likes to blame the third party for all sorts of things – but one thing I can tell you that the third party did consistently and without skipping a beat, even when the numbers were disappointing, even when the numbers weren't perfect, even when the numbers told a story that wasn't great to tell, was that they stood in their place and provided a quarterly update. For that, we should all be thankful because it's

not the same transparency and openness that we're getting from this government.

It's my hope that my hon. colleague will expand upon some of the nuances of this amendment because it's a sound, solid amendment that provides a path forward, that will ensure that the government isn't tempted to break another law in the future.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much. I won't be supporting this amendment. It's no surprise. I like not surprising people. The reason I won't be supporting this amendment is because of the late timing of the fall budget. I mean, it was unusual. I'll give you that. The budget that was proposed in March did not get passed. The new government had to create a budget, and we created that budget. We were hearing a lot from the other side: when are you going bring the budget? Well, it came out on October 27. It was put in front of this House. There was a lot of pomp and circumstance and ceremony, but the budget did get presented.

The budget was a month and three days before the proposed time for the quarterly updates, the second-quarter updates, the first six months, so because we provided a complete budget on the fiscal situation of this government going forward, we did not believe there needed to be an update before November 30. That's why we wrote this the way we did. We said, "notwithstanding subsection (1)(b)," which is with respect to a three-month update by August 31, a six-month update by November 30, and a nine-month update by February 28. It says, "Notwithstanding subsection (1)(b) [above], the responsible Minister is not required to report on the accuracy of the consolidated fiscal plan for the first 6 months of the 2015-16 fiscal year." Just this year, not every year. Going forward, there will be budget updates at three, six, and nine months: August 31, November 30, and February 28.

So the statements by the opposite side saying, you know, "If you give them this, they're going to take a mile; if you give them this, we need to shut it down," are not accurate. It's written in here that notwithstanding the above, we'll do it all the time for three, six, and nine months, but this year only, because we provided a full and complete budget, we are not doing a six-month update. It's logical. It makes a lot of sense. We're not asking for the moon. We're just saying that we gave you more information than you could possibly need. That's what we're going to do.

This amendment is not needed. It'll never be needed. It will never be our place in the future to come forward with another change to this with regard to not providing a three-, six-, or nine-month update.

Members of the government side: please refuse this amendment, the next one, the next one, and the next one that comes before you.

The Chair: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Chair. I listened carefully to the Finance minister's comments just now, and that's why I'm rubbing my forehead.

Dr. Starke: Your brain hurts?

Mr. McIver: Yeah. My hair is falling out fast enough.

Madam Chair, I'm sorry, but the explanations just don't hold water, unfortunately. I heard the hon. minister talk about how they provided a full budget. Even that little piece I have to take issue with. There is 4 and a half billion dollars in capital that actually isn't disclosed as to how it's going to be spent. I don't call that a complete budget. I don't call that a reasonable budget. I don't call that any kind of disclosure to the public, that they deserve. You

know, if you're going to take a billion dollars from the public, maybe you should kind of tell them where you intend to spend it, and if you take 4 and a half billion, maybe you should really tell them how you're going to spend it. Unfortunately, that's a gaping hole in the budget process that we've seen so far. So the explanation that it's a complete budget doesn't hold water.

I'm going to have to agree with my colleague from the Official Opposition on this one that breaking the law just once: really, Premier? Premier, I'm picking them over you this time. I'm telling you. You know why? Because they're right. I'll tell you why. It's because – you know what? – breaking the law just once isn't good enough. It's like saying, Madam Chair: "If I just do this one bank job, forget about the fact that I broke the law once. I won't break it again. I won't break it again."

Now, I appreciate, to be fair to the Minister of Finance, that I know you're not robbing a bank, okay? But the fact is that you're breaking the law, and the law of this province says that you need to report to the citizens. You haven't followed the law, and making an excuse that it's okay just this time really doesn't do it.

The problem is that I also heard the minister talk about how: well, we just did this budget; it took six months. Well, respectfully, Minister, it didn't need to take six months. We talked to you right after the election, in the first sitting, and we said: Albertans need to know.

9:10

In fact, the budget that you brought really was pretty unsatisfying for Albertans. They've been unsatisfied with a whole bunch of things in your budget. They're unsatisfied with the tax increases. They're unsatisfied with you not telling them where you're going to spend the money on the capital. They're surely unsatisfied with promising – talk about a great promise: we're going to put Alberta \$47 billion, \$50 billion in debt, and then we're going to start paying it back with \$1 billion five years from now.

I've said in this House before, standing here, and I'll say it again because it's that important. You're putting Alberta, based on the fact that Alberta spends – well, it's going to be more with your government but historically about \$47 billion. So you're going to put Alberta a whole year's wages in debt, and then five years from now you're going to start paying it back with a whole week's wages, \$1 billion. Albertans would lose their homes if they handled their mortgages that way. That's why I think they deserve to be reported to on a regular basis, particularly when you're promising such precarious financial policies, such risky and dangerous debt levels.

Again, I'll give the government credit. They say that Albertans love their services. The problem is that the way this government is going, they're putting those services at risk. Not this year, not next year, but four or five years from now then suddenly they become at risk. It's bad enough that you're trying to pay off a year's worth of government revenue with a week's worth of government surplus five years from now, but the fact is that when Alberta loses their triple-A credit rating, which is highly likely to happen on the path we're on, then even that bill is going to start multiplying faster. Everything is going to get more expensive for the government. It's going to be harder to buy things at the right price. Even borrowing money is going to cost more. Then this negative roller coaster that you've got the taxpayers on and you've got this province on is going to speed up in a very negative way.

I think the very least that the taxpayers of this great province should be able to depend upon is a quarterly report, that the law says is required. It's not much to ask for. It's the law. It's a reasonable request. In this particular case this is a very reasonable amendment and one that the government ought to stand up and say: "We'll

support it. We'll get the report out to you." It's late. It's against the law, but I'm sure that the citizens of Alberta will be somewhat understanding if the government at least makes an effort to obey their own laws, particularly on the quarterly report, you know, a quarterly report for a government that spends \$45 billion, \$50 billion a year, depending on what year it is. I think that if spending 12 and a half billion dollars isn't worth a quarterly report, then I really have to wonder how big the number has to be before citizens deserve to hear where their money went.

Madam Chair, I could go on longer, and I know there are a lot of people here that want me to, but I think I've to a large extent expressed what I think is right. I think I've to a large extent expressed what I think a lot of Albertans feel. With that, I will sit down, with the assurance that I will be supporting this amendment when the opportunity comes up.

The Chair: Any others? Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Chair. I thank the leader of the third party for his remarks. I find myself in agreement, I think, with the vast majority of what he had to say. This is a breakthrough in our relationship. I believe we had a moment. We felt the moment here where there was a coming together of people in some kind of a common-sense sense of fiscal responsibility here.

The minister has made many excuses that just don't hold water. If I made excuses to my mom like that, I wouldn't get dinner.

Mr. McIver: That's why you're so skinny.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Watch it, Calgary-Hays.

You know, this amendment: its purpose is accountability. The quarterly update, the quarterly fiscal and economic update, was due on November 30. For those keeping time – and I'm sure many are watching the clock – November 30 has passed, and this bill is not law. I'm not a lawyer, but I think that if you've broken the law and if the law you intended to pass to make it legal to break that law has not passed, then you're in violation of the law. It seems a pretty simple point to me, Madam Chair. Perhaps it's not a simple point to the Minister of Finance and President of the Treasury Board, the Premier, and some members on the other side.

I've asked the minister in question period – and Oral Question Period can be a little more exciting than debates going to midnight on individual amendments on specific clauses of bills in Committee of the Whole – a simple question: did he break the law? Well, actually, I asked: why did he break the law? He by implication admitted that he'd broken the law, but the minister has not really fessed up to breaking the law. I'll repeat at the end, but I'm going to ask a question of the minister. Why did he break the law?

Now, he might think that it was reasonable. If he thought it was reasonable to break the law, he can make that argument, but first he should explain why he broke the law and admit if he did break the law. I think it's quite obvious to anyone who has a second-grade reading level here that the minister has in fact broken the law. The quarterly update, as I said, was due on the 30th of November 2015. It's too late for this clause to be abided by as the minister has already contravened the law, a point that I think has been established by most people who are thinking about the issue.

I think that it sets a very, very dangerous precedent – it's a dangerous, dangerous precedent – to have ministers of the Crown, ministers responsible for our government, especially a minister responsible for the budget, passing laws that retroactively say that their previous violations of the law are now legal. You know, in other amendments we've discussed the issue of retroactivity, of changing a law when the government is in violation of the law. It's dangerous. If you get a parking ticket, you can't go to city council

and ask them to pass a bylaw two weeks after you got the parking ticket and say, "Give me a pass on this one, Mayor Iveson" or "Do me a solid, Mayor Nenshi; can you pass a bylaw and give me a mulligan on that parking ticket?" Oh, how I wish they could. I wish they could. I've tried. Alas, you can't. But it seems that at this level of government you can. The government is asking for a \$50 billion mulligan.

9:20

An Hon. Member: How much?

Mr. Fildebrandt: It's a \$50 billion mulligan.

You have to excuse me. My voice is a bit hoarse from our rigorous discussions into the evening last week.

The government is asking here for a \$50 billion mulligan from Albertans. Well, I think that's dangerous. Since the date for this has already passed, however, the section is moot, but it would compel the government, after the bill is passed, to abide by the law. They'll have still broken the law, they'll have still been in contravention of the law, but they'll be compelled to follow it afterwards. It allows me to come to question period day after day and ask the minister to finally present the quarterly update.

I remember that my first quarterly fiscal update for the province here was roughly around the end of August 2012. The Minister of Finance of the day was giving a quarterly update in the press theatre in the basement of this building. He went in and gave a report, a quarterly update. I called it a brochure. It didn't provide a balance sheet. It didn't provide a breakdown of revenues and expenditures. It was really just sort of: everything is fine, folks; move on. That got the minister in a lot of trouble. The Auditor General called him on it. He got in a lot of trouble. But at least the minister gave us a brochure. At least he tried. You know, he may have gotten an F, but at least he did his homework. He turned something in.

The Minister of Finance today didn't even do his homework. He didn't hand anything in. You know what happens to – well, maybe not in Alberta anymore under discovery learning education. Do you know what happens if you don't turn any work in, at least when we were kids? You got a fail. That's what happens when you don't turn your work in although I'm not sure if teachers are allowed to fail kids for not doing the work anymore. Perhaps that attitude has permeated its way into the cabinet.

So that part is moot because the law has already been broken. But it would compel the minister to finally give us something. Like a tolerant teacher, we'll allow him to hand in his homework late. There's no penalty for breaking the law, as we've already discussed. When governments break the Fiscal Responsibility Act, which became the Fiscal Management Act, which is now proposed to become the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act, an Orwellian term if there ever was one, there is no penalty for it. There won't be a penalty for the minister if we pass this amendment, however much I think there should be. It will still require the minister to put one in.

If the minister is saying that the budget, which was likely, I think it's fair to say, written more than a day or two before it was tabled on the 27th of October 2015, was written more than a few days before then, all of the second-quarter information in it would be there. If it's all there, then why aren't we doing these quarterly updates only a month after the quarter ends instead of two? It speaks to how ready the data is. It speaks to: if the government has this data one month after it's done, then why not give it to us one month after it's done instead of two? It's a legitimate question: if the Minister of Finance and the government would be open to an amendment to move the dates up a month.

What does all this say about our deficit laws? We understand the circumstances, which the minister was speaking of, when the

budget was tabled, but the best way for us to make up for this slight oversight, the \$50 billion mulligan, is to simply produce some minimal second-quarter financial and economic update.

An Hon. Member: This is slight?

Mr. Fildebrandt: It's a slight oversight, a \$50 billion oversight.

The old law is quite lax, and it is at the discretion of the minister what form that takes. That was part of my problem with the Fiscal Management Act as it currently stands.

It would not take very much work for the government to do this. The Minister of Finance could ask a bureaucrat in his department to produce this report in probably about an hour's work. They have the data, surely. Surely, they know what their second-quarter results were in the economic update, in the fiscal update. The government has the data. It would take a low-level official about half an hour to put this all together, no more than an hour. They don't need to do a fancy press release. They don't need to hold a news conference. They just need to give us the data, give us a second-quarter financial update. It would make those of us on this side who care about the numbers oh-so happy.

Things have changed for the worse since the budget was tabled, and by the time the third-quarter update comes, we'll be about ready to talk about the next budget, however much taxpaying Albertans probably fear it. Things have changed quickly. The price of oil has continued to stay low. It is significantly below the government's projections, \$37 today. Did the government project that oil would be \$37 in its budget? Did the government project that oil would go down, not up? No.

9:30

It seems to me that the government is probably not on track to meet its second-quarter results, that its second-quarter results would not meet their targets. That is exactly why we need our second-quarter update. We need each quarterly update to ensure that the government stays on track. We have quarterly updates because in the 1980s and early 1990s governments would regularly budget one thing and tell Albertans in between budgets that everything was fine and everything was going to be just fine; trust the government. Well, we've been asked by this government to trust them quite a bit lately, haven't we? And I think they've shown quite clearly why they don't deserve that trust. Albertans don't trust them with the finances. Albertans don't trust them with farmers. Albertans don't trust them with the carbon tax.

Things have changed for the worse in our financial picture since the budget was tabled. That budget is now working off old data, data that was flawed to begin with: oil assumptions that were far above most market rates, GDP growth that predicted a superboom, a 15, 16 per cent increase in revenues in the fourth and fifth year of the budget without an iota of explanation about how they would do that.

Albertans deserve an update on their fiscal situation at times like these, in good times and in bad. Governments shouldn't provide quarterly updates only when the times are good and then get a good-news story in the *Herald* or the *Journal* on it. They should also provide it when times are bad. In fact, that's when we need it. That's why we have it, because governments in the 1980s would tell people it was fine and then finish the fiscal year having blown their budgets and coming under budget on revenues.

It was not a fiscally responsible thing to do, so Finance minister Jim Dinning put forward the strongest set of financial rules and budgetary framework in the country. He put forward a set of rules that served us well for nearly a decade and a half. Jim Dinning is a Conservative that we can look to for a good example of how we

should be conducting ourselves in our budgetary framework, about where we should be getting back to basics.

It is our duty as legislators and representatives of the people to be careful with people's money, to report regularly on how we're using that money. If you have investments in a portfolio and they don't give you your quarterly update as you've agreed to in your contract, you probably want to pull your money out. Well, some businesses are pulling their money out right now.

We'll have to continue this some other time.

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

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thanks to my hon. colleague for presenting this amendment. I'm rising to say that I support this amendment. I'd like to ask the House to support it as well.

I want to compare the promise, the law to have this second quarterly update out, to one that we all had to deal with in May. The last government made a law that we would have fixed election dates every four years. Of course, it turned out that it wasn't quite a law or that the law wasn't written quite fairly or that it just wasn't quite the way it should have been. So because the Lieutenant Governor asked for one, it was okay to have an election.

Now we have a situation where the hon. Minister of Finance is saying: yeah, I know it was the law that I had to do the second update, but we did do a budget even though no one knew when that budget was coming. Many, many Albertans for certainty, clarity, and to get their finances in order would have liked to have had it sooner. "Okay, but we have a reason now where we sort of don't need it," even though many of the hon. members from the opposition have clearly explained how Bill 4 is not law yet, hence why we're here tonight and hence why we're debating these amendments and debating the law itself. To me, it comes squarely down on the Minister of Finance and the government's shoulders for trust. You know, the shock – Albertans told me after the budget that they absolutely couldn't believe that our great province, with high revenues and tons of entrepreneurs and hard-working, educated people, is actually borrowing to pay for the groceries now. An operational deficit: the shock that that has reached.

The other thing equally as much is when my neighbours, friends, community members in Cypress-Medicine Hat and all around Alberta, Madam Chair, look at the job losses, 10 to 30 per cent reductions. The shock and awe of Albertans who told me that this government appeared to look for no efficiencies. "Yeah, we absolutely don't want to cut front-line workers and front-line services either, but, my goodness, we want more value for our hard-earned tax dollars," many, many Albertans have told me. Then to be \$47 billion in debt just three years from now . . .

An Hon. Member: How much?

Mr. Barnes: Forty seven billion dollars in debt.

And that is based on oil being at \$56 or \$53 this year and around \$62 next year, I believe, when today it closed at \$37. My goodness. Three years from now we'll be running an election, if the fixed election date law is valid, with you guys some side of \$60 billion in debt. If that doesn't shake the trust of Albertans to the core, I don't know what will.

So what do you do to earn trust? What do you do to make it so more than 50 per cent of Albertans show up at the polls? What do you do to make it so when we go to coffee shops we don't hear that Albertans aren't able to be involved in their system in their province? You do it by being as open and as transparent as you can, and that means living up to fixed election dates even though there might be a little technicality in the law. That means filing the second

quarterly report. Okay; maybe you don't have to. Maybe it's a loophole, but, darn it, there are many, many Albertans that rely on that information, Madam Chair, so they can make capital investment decisions, so they can build jobs, so they can plan their family, plan whether they think they can afford to send their daughter or son to university, and that information was not here.

You know, I'm pleased to see so many Albertans up in the gallery tonight. Government, I think that's a trust issue, too. Albertans everywhere don't trust writing a blank cheque, don't trust a law that's vague, without information. Again, many, many Albertans have given their hard-working lives, many hard-earned tax dollars, fourth, fifth, and sixth generations working to make our province strong. At the very least they deserve an update as to their financial position. They deserve an update to know where they're going to be, going forward, when it comes to being able to afford the tax-and-spend government that we've had since May 5. They need to know that they can afford, you know, that they can live up to their business and their family and their community commitments and their not-for-profit donations rather than a government that gets bigger and bigger and seems to hide where they stand.

In closing, I will support the amendment for openness and transparency, and as often as I get the chance in this House, I will stand up and I will speak on behalf of as much openness, as much information, and as much transparency as possible.

Thank you.

9:40

The Chair: Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am very happy to rise and support the amendment tabled by the Member for Strathmore-Brooks. It's becoming painfully obvious that we have a minister in this House that has already contravened the law, and now he's trying to retroactively make a special exemption, which is a truly enviable position to be in. I'm reminded that the chairman of the Alberta Securities Commission was late reporting one time, and the Ontario Securities Commission fined him a thousand-dollar penalty for being late in issuing a report. That particular report was only to report that he'd made a \$171 profit on a deal. So for a \$171 profit and a late report the Ontario Securities Commission, which had rules about reporting on time, fined Chairman Rice of the Alberta Securities Commission \$1,000.

Of course, had the chairman been of the same mindset as our Minister of Finance, he would have gone back and said: well, I would like to make an amendment to this existing regulation, and let's make it retroactive so I don't have to pay the thousand-dollar fine for filing this report so late. But, no. He paid his thousand dollars. He fessed up, and he paid his thousand dollars.

Of course, he wasn't the only person that's had that kind of an issue. I'm sure that everyone in this room remembers the collapse of the mortgage-financing industry in the United States and that the rating agency Standard & Poor's changed their rating metrics following that collapse after they did an investigation into why it was that their rating metric wasn't downgrading some of these companies as fast as they should have been downgraded. Well, Standard & Poor's changed their rating metrics to include, quote, such things as timely filing of required reports.

So my point in bringing that to the attention of this House is that if the Minister of Finance believes that the bond-rating agencies are not watching the timely reporting of quarterly reports, he is sadly mistaken. You know, we have already heard that we are on a watch by these rating companies. They are watching Alberta. If this was a corporation traded on the stock exchange, the bond-rating agencies,

at least Standard & Poor's, would say: uh-oh, a red flag; they missed filing a quarterly report.

It's not going to go unnoticed. It is an indication, according to their own words, of competence in management. Competence in management. So the corollary of that would be true, that if you're a company that can't manage to get your reports out on time, that's an indication of incompetence, and it reflects on your ultimate rating from that rating agency. That's how important this is. This is not a minor, little thing. It's serious. It is very serious.

Now, something else was an interesting study that was conducted by Glass Lewis, who is an organization that studies market trends when companies do bad things. In one of these reports they studied what happens to publicly traded corporations when they file late. I'll quote this to you:

As for late filers? Companies that let their deadline pass "without filing a management report or auditor opinion on the effectiveness of the internal controls," the study found, saw their share prices drop.

In other words, the stock market itself punishes those companies that file late.

Glass Lewis actually quantified just what the impact was from the market when publicly traded corporations failed to do their reporting on time. They found that the share price dropped an average of 2.13 per cent after just one day late; after seven days, 2.89 per cent; after 30 days, 3.81 per cent; and two months late, a 7 per cent decline in that company's share price. That is a significant amount of money. We're talking, in some cases, billions of dollars with some of the larger corporations. What we see in the marketplace, what we see in the Alberta Securities Commission, the Ontario Securities Commission, the United States securities commission is that there are consequences, adverse consequences for failing to provide necessary quarterly reports. It's not just a little thing.

Though our minister is required by section 11 of the Fiscal Management Act to make public the actual results of the fiscal plan for the first six months of the fiscal year on or before November 30, this Finance minister failed to do so. In order to get around the law, the minister has now included in this act an exemption excusing them from bringing this information in in time for the law. This was in spite of a long-delayed budgeting process, which, I would have to conclude, took so long for no other reason than to help their federal partners avoid suffering any consequences from this Alberta budget.

Then for the minister to stand in this House and say, "Well, I'm sorry it took so long to get this budget out, and then we had to get this report out, too," frankly, just doesn't hold water. It doesn't hold water at all. This government, in my opinion and in the opinion of many other people, purposely delayed bringing this budget out on time, in a timely manner, for no other reason than to skirt the federal election. Now, to blame that as the reason why this report was not filed on time according to our law is simply unacceptable.

Furthermore, the minister told this House that the budget meant that there was no need for a November 30 update. I want to provide the minister a little bit of information, that a budget is a projection of the plans for the future. It's a projection. The quarterly report is the actual. To suggest that having a budget therefore negates the need for a quarterly report indicates a very serious misunderstanding of what a budget is and what the quarterly report provides us.

The minister is claiming that this fulsome budget somehow impedes the reporting of what's been spent and received or that the budget is somehow good enough and that we don't need a quarterly report. It's quite nonsensical, actually, and it causes me to wonder. Is the minister trying to hide something? The reason that it causes

me that suspicion is because the very law requiring quarterly updates was brought into this provincial body of law to hold governments accountable for their handling of Albertans' money and to have a quarterly report that all Albertans could look at and say: oh, look at what's actually happening. The budget is one thing; quarterly reports are another.

This action, actually, is an affront to Albertans, and it shows a disrespect for transparency and accountability, a direct contradiction of the name of this thing. With the inclusion of permission for the minister to skip this year's quarterly update, we are now building a new precedent. We've seen this government, you know, take away accountability laws before. We now have a change in the borrowing cap. We now have this government getting rid of a law that would stop the government from borrowing for operations. We see this government time and again actually becoming less transparent and less accountable, and that's not what you promised Albertans during the election.

9:50

Now, regardless of external pressures it was really unacceptable for the Finance minister to not table the actual results of the fiscal plan for the first six months of the fiscal year in time for this requirement. At the very least he could have been up front about the reasons why he was not following this law. He knew about this law from the beginning. His staff knew about this law. They've had it in place for a very long time. It's not that it came as a surprise to him, and the fact that he made no mention of the issue and tried to sneak the November date past us all, well, without mentioning it shows that he was not proud of what he was doing. Tabling these figures would have been transparent. Tabling these figures would have demonstrated accountability. Tabling these figures would have demonstrated competence. You owed this information to Albertans. It's their money.

I'll remind this government that disrespect for our laws and our people took down a governing party before you, and this disrespect will do the same to any government. This NDP government already asked Albertans for a blank cheque this summer. To then turn around and break the laws designed to prevent irresponsible politicians from spending beyond our province's means without accountability is disrespectful and, furthermore, shows quite a callous lack of concern for Alberta's taxpayers of today and those even of future generations. The NDP has already committed themselves to a continuation of the funny-money accounting of the previous government. To break this province's fiscal law in addition to these practices is, frankly, a step too far. This is not the kind of precedent that we want to see set in this government's processes.

However, let's grant the minister his main line of defence, that because of the timing of the budget, it is somehow acceptable to skip the update. That issue is now moot. November 30 has come and gone, and the damage, however extensive it is, has been done, and there's no need to clutter up this bill permanently with a reminder of this minister's failure to follow the law. The government put it here with the intention of passing it before the critical date of November 30 but failed. I ask the government to seriously consider whether they really want this testament to their ineptitude sitting on the books, enshrined in law. Laws are supposed to be permanent documents, not filled with little one-offs that excuse the transgressions of the minister of the day.

A government using its powers to make their misdeeds retroactively legal is insulting to the province's fiscal laws, Alberta's taxpayers, and it is also a mockery of democracy. Albertans deserve to see these laws, that promote accountability, respected and upheld. This is the wrong course to be taking our province on. Today it is the actual results of the fiscal plan; there is

no telling what law this government will break tomorrow only to retroactively change it. There should be no wondering why Albertans have already lost faith in a government that was elected on a mandate to change the old tide of corruption. Voting down this amendment today is a slap in the face of Albertans that elected you. The voters in our province have been disrespected for too long. Good governance is transparent governance. Good governance is self-disciplined, holding itself accountable to the law. This is about transparency. This budget and our time today should be used toward increasing transparency. Is that not what we all heard on May 5?

Albertans deserve an update on our fiscal situation, especially in these troubled and rapidly changing times. Given the grave state of our economy at the hands of this socialist agenda Albertan mothers and fathers and young adults are being forced to make many very serious and painful decisions, that are going to affect their future. They need to be able to assess the state of the economy and hedge appropriately. So I implore all of you to rectify the Finance minister's very grave mistake by making it clear that there are no circumstances under which it may be permitted to happen again and not to let him compound his failing by enshrining this little episode eternally in law. Let's just delete that clause, that this amendment attempts to do, since as of December 1 it is meaningless.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Any others wishing to speak to amendment A8?

Seeing none, we'll call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A8 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 9:56 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Fildebrandt	Nixon
Barnes	Fraser	Panda
Clark	Hunter	Pitt
Cooper	Loewen	Starke
Cyr	MacIntyre	Yao
Ellis	McIver	

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Goehring	Miranda
Babcock	Hinkley	Nielsen
Bilous	Horne	Notley
Carlier	Kazim	Piquette
Carson	Kleinsteuber	Sabir
Ceci	Larivee	Schmidt
Connolly	Littlewood	Schreiner
Coolahan	Loyola	Shepherd
Cortes-Vargas	Luff	Sigurdson
Dach	Malkinson	Sucha
Dang	Mason	Swann
Drever	McCuaig-Boyd	Turner
Feehan	Miller	Westhead
Ganley		

Totals: For – 17 Against – 40

[Motion on amendment A8 lost]

The Chair: Are there any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Madam Chair. I stand today to speak to Bill 4, An Act to Implement Various Tax Measures and to Enact the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act. This bill is about enabling the NDP government to implement higher taxes and more debt because this government refuses to reduce its bloated spending practices. No government has ever borrowed its way to a balanced budget, and certainly no government will ever be able to borrow its way to a surplus budget. We need to somehow curtail the money this NDP government is throwing around in this province. Let's get it straight that deficit budgets lead to higher debt, which eventually leads to an unstable economy, something we're already seeing because of this government's and the previous government's spending practices. The costs associated with paying off this debt take away money that could be used to build schools, bridges, hospitals, roads, and the list goes on, Madam Chair. In fact, if we continue down this road for too long, it could have an impact on how many people will be feasibly employed in the future. The unionized workers that the NDP are trying to protect right now will be the same people they will not be able to afford to keep because there won't be enough money.

The members on the other side of the aisle have tried to make Albertans fearful of Wildrose fiscal policies. [interjections] Yes, you tried to do that in the Calgary-Foothills by-election, and we saw that. But the damage that will be caused by this government's fiscal policies is something to be really afraid of, and Albertans are afraid in sitting there listening to this.

If we calculate the amount of money we'll be losing every year that could be used on infrastructure projects like the Calgary cancer hospital, the amount we will lose is eight hospitals every year that we pay \$2 billion in interest alone.

Mr. Nixon: How much?

Mr. Panda: Two billion dollars in interest alone.

It's not a good plan to increase the debt limit. The unavoidable effect is that we are throwing away money through interest payments, \$2 billion in interest payments. That's a ton of interest, Madam Chair, an amount of money so large that most of us have to really think about what that number means. In this bill we have seen the government raise the debt ceiling at the stroke of a pen. They have shown that it is really not that hard to do. There are not any real consequences for doing it since they turned down some of our amendments that would have instituted real consequences.

Let's break this bill down and be clear about showing what will eventually happen. This bill is about enabling the government to inflict higher taxes on Albertans and to run operational deficits, which for decades have been illegal. You say that you want both businesses and those who are well off to pay just a little bit more, but you have a 266 per cent tax increase on railroad fuel. Is that what you call just a little bit? This is another disappointing move. This government seems to feel that pipelines for getting our oil to market are a low priority, and they're also willing to increase the cost of shipping that product by rail. Businesses may look at other jurisdictions to get their fuel at a lower cost and look for all sorts of other possibilities to reduce their costs. We must create a business-friendly environment by keeping the cost of doing business as low as possible. It just makes sense.

10:20

The analogy is almost the same as giving someone irresponsible a credit card and them having the idea that the money borrowed is free money. Their thought, just like this government, is that as long as you max out the credit card while prices are low, you will get more for your money. This government needs to take the time to go

and talk to a financial adviser to find out if their concepts are accurate and how long they would be able to keep their house if they ran their personal finances the same way. The tax on cigarettes went up \$5 a carton, and on loose tobacco products it went up to 3.75 cents per gram, a product I neither consume or I advocate for, but it will have, I believe, unintended consequences.

In my constituency office in Calgary-Foothills, if I exceed the budget allotted to my office, I personally have to pay back every penny. Why is the government not held to the same principles? I wish there were some sort of penalty they would legislate every time the government exceeded a certain percentage instead of legislating something that in the past had been considered illegal.

An Hon. Member: In three and a half years.

Mr. Panda: Yeah. Help is on its way.

We need consequences in place when they exceed the budget. What protections do we have in place for future generations? Maybe we should legislate that. Unfortunately, the only possible consequence of reckless spending and irresponsible tax increases will be to drive money and jobs right out of Alberta. They will only be able to borrow so much money, and the next generation will be the one responsible to pay it back. I'm afraid that young families, such as of the Member for Calgary-Shaw, will be burdened to pay this debt. I believe that this government's view is short sighted, and it needs to be stopped. You need to reconsider what these changes will do to this province.

Unfortunately, Madam Chair, this bill is going to give this NDP government full permission to spend Alberta into further debt. For this reason I'll be voting against Bill 4. I encourage my colleagues to do the same.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other questions, comments, or amendments with respect to the bill? Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's that time again, when we're going to try and make the bill a little less bad than it is in its current form. I will introduce this amendment to be distributed.

Thank you.

The Chair: This amendment will be A9.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that Bill 4, An Act to Implement Various Tax Measures and to Enact the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act, be amended in schedule 2 in section 1 by striking out subsection (27).

Now, I always feel a little strange reading the title of the bill. Any bill that begins with the title "An Act to Implement Various Tax Measures" has probably lost my support right there. I try not to judge a book by its cover or even a piece of legislation by its cover, but in this case I feel pretty safe doing so.

This amendment seeks to repeal the government's inexplicable move to increase the insurance tax rate. It's a nonsensical idea. Increasing a tax on something that is mandatory for Albertans is gouging. If the NDP across like to rail against the idea of a conspiracy, of a cartel working together to price-fix or drive up the cost of a particular product that people need, well, they call that gouging. In this case the government is increasing the cost of something that their own laws make mandatory for Albertans, not just necessary but mandatory, and they're increasing taxes on it. Cigarettes, liquor, carbon: the government can make at least a

reasonable argument that they want less of these things, but do they want less insurance? [interjection] Apparently, it's bad.

I get the idea of taxing a social ill – they call them sin taxes – that gasoline is bad so we should tax gasoline, that cigarettes are bad, quite obviously, so we should tax cigarettes.

Mr. Mason: Opposition members.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Taxing opposition members, taxing our time, taxing the government's patience. If we taxed the government's patience, I think we could have gotten out of the deficit by tonight. [interjection] It is perhaps the only tax I will support.

Taxing cigarettes, taxing alcohol, taxing gasoline: I get that these are sin taxes. These are things that government wants to discourage. They're called sin taxes because we're taxing sins. But is insurance not a good thing? Does this, then, constitute a virtue tax? Shouldn't government be encouraging insurance, not discouraging it? Insurance is a social good. It benefits everyone. Why should people be punished for being responsible? Why should they be punished for insuring their home? Why should people be punished for insuring their car or if they've got a boat? Why should they be taxed for life insurance? Why would we want to make it more difficult or more expensive for people to protect their families with life insurance than it already is? Do we not want more of that, not less of it? For some reason this lumps insurance tax in with cigarettes. Well, it is strange that we've gotten to the point where we are increasing taxes on both cigarettes and life insurance at the same time.

With over 60 taxes and fees raised on Albertans, surely we can rescind at least one of them. Madam Premier, do taxpayers a solid. Give them one. With a massive increase in income tax, a 50 per cent increase at the top marginal rate; a 20 per cent increase in corporate income taxes on our businesses; a \$3 billion carbon tax on everything; a myriad of small taxes and fees on gasoline, cigarettes, alcohol, and on countless products and activities that Albertans engage in – 60 taxes and fees are being raised – can you do one for them? Can you do them a solid?

Madam Chair, I think this is a pretty reasonable amendment. It will not cost the government a significant sum of money, but it would be perhaps a spiritual breakthrough for the government. I mean, we've had a few moments in this place where we can all get along, where we can come to consensus on a few issues.

10:30

Now, we're not likely to vote together on many things tonight. But insurance tax – I saw an interesting eyebrow raised over there, so that probably is a good idea. Well, this is unlikely to have any significant impact on the budget. It's not a huge tax increase. The huge tax increases are elsewhere, in personal income taxes, business income taxes, and carbon taxes. This is not going to significantly affect the budget, but as I said, it would signify a spiritual breakthrough that they could actually cut a tax or rescind a tax, especially one that is on something that we should be encouraging, insurance. We should want more insurance, not less.

Mr. McIver: WCB.

Mr. Fildebrandt: I suppose, while we're on the topic, the government is extending mandatory workplace insurance and WCB. They are trying to make it mandatory on swaths of people, many of which do not want it. But they're going to tax it. Interesting question: would WCB be taxed under this? A new definition of government recycling.

I suppose we can give the minister a few moments to ponder this one and think about it. I think he already said, roughly half an hour

ago, that there won't be anything good coming even though he hasn't seen it. But I ask him to really think on this one. This one makes sense. It makes sense for all Albertans. Let's try to get along on this one and pass amendment A9.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any others wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you. I would certainly like to speak to this amendment. Man, there are so many similarities between the PC budget and this budget: taxes, taxes, taxes. This one has, you know, unfortunately, quite a few extra taxes. Cigarettes and liquor: I think it's sort of a general understanding; it's the first tax that goes up. It's the one that nobody argues too much about. It's unfortunate, but it happens, and we expect that.

Carbon tax is shocking because people aren't going to drive less. They're really not. They're going to choose to not do other things like eat out, go to the movies, you know, spend some quality time at Calaway park with their children. It's just absolutely unbelievable. There are a lot of things that are going to change for a lot of people.

But insurance? The people of Airdrie, specifically, are not going to take well to this one. We just had an epic hailstorm come through, and everybody's rates just went up. Now they're going up again. I'm not quite sure when this stops. Insurance is something that is supposed to protect the people, protect their property, and it's hurting. It's absolutely hurting. This is surely one amendment that we can all agree on that would make just a small, little pea in the pot. It would make a big difference for so many families, so many children. I'm really hoping we can work together on this one.

The hail in Airdrie was just absolutely devastating. What would we have done without insurance? I mean, surely there are some. Still, we're paying our deposits on the insurance, and then the rates go up, and now thanks to this government they're going to go up one more time. When does it end? We can't even imagine what's going to happen in the springtime. This is just absolutely shocking.

You know, fortunately for those in this room, you just got fancy pay raises. You're probably not used to spending that kind of money yet, which is a great thing for your family budget because you might be able to make ends meet. But there are a lot of people out there that are suffering, and this government doesn't seem to care.

I'm really not quite sure why this government is choosing to punish people. They're punishing Albertans. You're borrowing money and making strange decisions on how to spend it, and that's only the money we know about. Please. I plead with you. On behalf of the people of Airdrie and Albertans: please. When there are 60 other taxes and fees that you've implemented, we, please, ask for this one little take for the people of Alberta. We will surely appreciate it.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Calgary-Currie.

Mr. Malkinson: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I am rising to speak against this particular amendment. I know it shocks the Member for Strathmore-Brooks. We've heard a lot of talk in the debate for Bill 4 and for the various amendments that it is important to take into consideration the people of our particular ridings. We have often heard many of the members opposite talk about how they need hospitals in their ridings: hospitals in Airdrie, hospitals in Wainwright, Lac La Biche, Fort McMurray. We've also heard from other members opposite that their particular ridings have a need for more staff at various facilities that are publicly funded.

Cortes-Vargas: Maintenance.

Mr. Malkinson: Maintenance as well.

All of those things, of course, are good. You know, good on the various members for advocating for those needs in their particular ridings.

Also, the members opposite have talked at length throughout this debate about the importance of having zero debt, the importance of having zero structural debt even in times of a downturn.

Now, unfortunately, for me, that math doesn't add up. You know, my question would be that if you are advocating for things, for new hospitals in various areas, that, of course, would cost large sums of money, I would say billions of dollars. If you want to cut back by not going into debt some say for capital spending, some say for structural deficit when we have a massive downturn, that we have right now – the price of oil, for example, not that long ago was over a hundred dollars a barrel. Now it is under \$40 a barrel. That leaves a massive hole in our budget for the province because of the downturn.

Now, if we want to have those hospitals and extra services and we don't want to be in debt in the time of a downturn, if we do not want to act as a shock absorber, which I believe Albertans have wanted us to do, then I would ask the members opposite: what do they want to give up? You cannot have new hospitals and new services and not go into debt in a downturn. I just don't see how that would work.

Now, this particular amendment, if passed, would take away a bit of stable revenue – granted, a small amount but a bit of stable revenue – to help in a time of a downturn, a downturn that is definitely affected by the price of oil. It would also keep our premiums and tax rates comparable to other provinces. This rate was also mentioned in the March version of the budget.

I think it is a reasonable amount in order to have us act as a shock absorber, to provide the services that Albertans want, and of course I'd like to point out to the members that we recently passed a budget that has a path to balance.

10:40

Dr. Turner: A very clear path.

Mr. Malkinson: I highlight that the member beside me said: a very clear path to balance.

For those reasons, I will not be voting in favour of this amendment. Thank you very much.

The Chair: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Chair. This is an interesting amendment. It talks about taking away the increased taxes on insurance. I'm a little surprised, actually, that this particular government would put this in place, because you know whom it's going to hurt worse than anybody: the lowest income people in Alberta, the people that have the hardest time paying the monthly bills. Of course, these are exactly the people that this current government says that they care about, and they're the ones that are going to pay the price for this new tax. Now, people of high income can afford it, I suppose, although every time they afford it, they will spend less money in the economy, and a lot of that money will be spent in places that provide jobs for lower income Albertans.

But the real place that I think it'll hurt lower income Albertans is that there are going to be some of them that will probably have to choose not to continue their insurance. Nobody likes it when disasters happen: fires, floods, all those types of things. In terms of fires, we have seen instances where multifamily units have burned down, whether it's a high-rise or townhouses or whatever it is.

Sometimes it's homes close to each other, where the fire jumps from one to the other. You know, the saddest thing when that happens is that some of the homeowners or apartment owners or renters don't have insurance.

It's not good for anybody, and I'm not trying to make light of this, but the fact is that I always feel bad when I hear, you know, that in a building of six, eight, 10 units, whatever it is, there are four or five them that didn't have renters' insurance or homeowners' insurance. What happens, then, is that they lose some of the biggest investments that they have in their life, some of the possessions that they have. Now, whether it's a little or a lot, the fact is that it's the family's possessions. This is a tax that is going to make it particularly hard, particularly for those low-income Albertans, to make that decision to pay that much more for the insurance.

It's particularly going to make it hard for Albertans that have lost their jobs due to this government's policies. You might say: what Albertans have lost their jobs, you know, due to this government's policies? Well, it could be one of thousands of people in the coal industry. We know they're under attack. It could be one of tens of thousands of people in the energy industry. We know they're under attack. Soon it could be farmers and ranchers. We're really sure they're under attack. It could be somebody that has a small business that's incorporated, and they're paying more taxes. It could be somebody of middle income that has a business with the additional income taxes put on. Every time you do this, you make somebody make a different decision about what they can afford and what they can't afford. Of course, what you don't hear about when something happens, when a multifamily unit burns down – I'm sorry to say, but it's typically low-income Albertans that are the ones that don't have insurance on their possessions or on their home. So this is this government putting more pressure on the exact people that they're purporting to want to help.

So many times through the taxes in Bill 4 it is the case. Unfortunately, this doesn't seem to be the end of it. You know, there are more things coming up. I mean, we haven't seen all the details yet, but the government has even talked about, with the carbon tax, that they want to give money back to 60 per cent of Albertans. It's just another case where, again, all Albertans will pay more for their energy. With low-income Albertans, that are going to pay more for their energy – and the government is going to artificially inflate the price with the carbon tax. Then they're going to rebate low-income Albertans back to where it was in the first place and then say: we want you to thank us now by voting for us next time because we artificially inflated your energy price, and then we rebated it back almost to where it would be anyway, and then we sent you a cheque for what we hope will be the difference. It will probably be light of the difference, but hopefully that will buy enough gratitude to get their vote next time.

It's really indicative of a pattern here from a government that actually doesn't seem to realize yet – I'm not sure if they ever will – that low taxes are actually better for Albertans. Low taxes are actually better for low-income Albertans. It provides more opportunities, more jobs, more places. It actually provides more incentive for those people with money to invest, who want to invest in Alberta, to create those jobs.

This insurance tax is just one more way in which – all Albertans will pay it, at least the ones that can afford insurance in the first place. But the ones that will find it the most tough to pay are the ones that are closest to the line in making ends meet at the end of the month. You know what? Every family will make a different decision. Some will have less food. Some will have less entertainment. Some will, you know, maybe drive an older car, have older appliances. Some, unfortunately, Madam Chair, will decide

that they can't afford the insurance anymore, and that, of course, just puts them at greater risk.

There is the stress of worrying about it day after day as opposed to people that believe they have their affairs in order, that are properly insured and looked after. All of those, of course, worry about fire and other things happening, too, but they'll have the peace of mind of knowing that they have themselves protected. This, of course, will take some Albertans that can least afford it – some of those will likely have to make the decision to forgo their insurance and then lose that peace of mind. Even if they don't have a fire, it's hard on them. It adds stress. It probably takes time off their life because stress will do that. This is just one more pressure that this government is putting on Alberta families, the ones that can afford it the least, adding stress to them. That's why I'm going to support the amendment, because I think the less that you put Albertans under financial pressure artificially, the more opportunities there are and the better their lives will be.

This, unfortunately, is an example of going in the exact opposite direction from what will most benefit Albertans. I'm hoping that the government members will have an appreciation for how hard it is for a lot of Albertans to make ends meet, particularly those that have a fine line between what they bring in in their family income and what has to go out to pay for insurance and rent and food and utilities and car payments and repairs and all those things.

Please don't add more pressure onto them. Please support this amendment.

Thank you.

The Chair: Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Chair. I guess some of the concerns I have with Bill 4 but speaking specifically to this amendment are that, you know, when the government has an \$8 billion hole that they need to fill, obviously it makes a lot of sense for them to go after a captive tax audience. What's sad about this is going after insurance. Many of the insurances are mandatory. It is the law that they have to have this insurance. With vehicles you have to have a minimum of PL/PD. Members will have to have at least a minimum insurance, and this tax will affect them.

People who are on fixed incomes: I'm concerned about them. It may not be a lot, but everything that this government has brought forward like the carbon tax, which is just another way of saying PST, will add to the costs for fixed-income people, to the point where they have no ability to make up the extra money that it's going to cost them.

10:50

I understand the idea about sin taxes, as has been said before, even though I think that again is a cheap shot for people who have addictions and are struggling. They know that it's an easy way to be able to get more money. In fact, a brother of mine who smokes like a chimney always says: "You know what? The first thing the government will do is that it will go after me because they know I have a hard time. I can't quit." I think it's a cheap shot. But this is the worst kind of shot, Madam Chair, because people who are on fixed incomes don't have the ability to go shop anywhere else. They can't say: "You know what? That insurance company hasn't earned my business, so I'll go to a different insurer." They can't do that because this tax will go to every insurance company out there, and they will have to pay this.

All of these costs that this government has added onto senior citizens, fixed-income earners, will add up to the point where they will feel the burden, and they will make them pay in the next election. They say that hindsight is 20/20 vision. Well, I don't need

to go three and a half years down the road to tell you that seniors have excellent memories. They have excellent memories, and they will remember this day when they had the opportunity to say: we're not going to tax this group; we're not going to add this tax to people who are fixed-income earners. Yet the idea that we've heard from some of the members opposite is that the government needs this money. If they don't get it, then they can't do the things that they need to do.

Albertans need the money in their own pockets. I'm going to tell you something, and it's very important to realize this. There are three types of purchases: first-party purchases, second-party purchases, and third-party purchases. A first-party purchaser is a person who says: I know exactly what I want to buy, and I know how much money I have to buy it. That person is using their own money, and they're going to consume that product. That's a first-party purchase.

Second-party purchasers may buy something for someone else, but they're going to use their own money. They're concerned about their money, but maybe they're not going to consume it themselves.

A third-party purchase is where someone buys something with someone else's money, and they're not going to personally consume it. All government purchases are third-party purchases. I think the problem is that this government doesn't seem to understand that all government purchases are third-party purchases. This is the reason why as the Official Opposition we need to be vigilant with where the money is going. We need to make sure that the tax dollars are spent effectively and efficiently. We need to make sure that they only take the bare minimum because the people who have the money, the people who have the means, have the ability to be able to make first-party purchases, and it's the most efficient and effective way to be able to spend money. That's why the most successful countries in the world are the ones that keep the most money in individuals' pockets because they know how to spend it and they spend it the best.

This amendment is trying to make a bad budget a little better. It's a small concession to make. This is why I will be voting for it, Madam Chair, and I hope that all members will take this seriously. This isn't just a little bit of money. This is a lot of money for someone who's on a fixed-income.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to the amendment?

If not, we will call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A9 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:55 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Ellis	McIver
Barnes	Fildebrandt	Panda
Clark	Hunter	Pitt
Cooper	Loewen	Starke
Cyr	MacIntyre	

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Goehring	Miranda
Babcock	Hinkley	Nielsen
Bilous	Horne	Notley
Carlier	Kazim	Piquette

Carson	Kleinstauber	Sabir
Ceci	Larivee	Schmidt
Connolly	Littlewood	Schreiner
Coolahan	Loyola	Shepherd
Cortes-Vargas	Luff	Sigurdson
Dach	Malkinson	Sucha
Dang	Mason	Swann
Drever	McCuaig-Boyd	Turner
Feehan	Miller	Westhead
Ganley		
Totals:	For – 14	Against – 40

[Motion on amendment A9 lost]

11:00

The Chair: We're back on the bill. Any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to the bill?

Mr. Fildebrandt: Well, Madam Chair, I did have two more amendments, but I'm going to make the government a deal. This is your last chance to do something good. This is your last chance to repeal at least one tax, to have a spiritual awakening, as it were. I assure Madam Premier that she has missed many opportunities to make this a better bill tonight, but this is a limited-time offer. As people are watching late night TV right now, if you dial the number below your screen, you can get a tax cut.

I'll distribute this now.

The Chair: This will be amendment A10.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Chair. This is a limited-time offer, if members vote now, to finally vote for less taxes somewhere, that An Act to Implement Various Tax Measures and to Enact the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act be amended in schedule 2 in section 3(7)(a) by striking out subclauses (iii) and (iv). In short, this is to undo the proposed railroad tax hike, the cost on locomotive fuel. This poses huge problems for market access in Alberta. It hurts the grain growers in my constituency, the barley and canola growers, the beef producers, and oil producers.

I urge all members of the House to support it.

The Chair: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to amendment A10? The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. McIver: Thank you. It's my pleasure to speak to this amendment on the railroad fuel tax. Madam Chair, this is probably one of the most harmful elements out of the current bill, largely because it attacks essentially all of Alberta's core industries. Albertans, as we know, are very industrious people. They produce more of almost everything than they can consume themselves. Albertans produce more forest products than Albertans can use. They produce more agricultural products than Albertans can consume. Albertans produce more energy products than Albertans can use. And how do we move these products? Well, one of the main ways is on the railway.

This is essentially an attack on the forestry industry, the coal industry, the agriculture industry. The minister in charge should actually be real nervous about this particular tax. You should be voting for this because this would be one of the things you could do to indicate that you're actually in support of the industry that you get paid to support.

On top of that, this is something that will make virtually every consumer product in Alberta more expensive because anything that comes from anywhere else, or at least a good part of those things,

travels at least some part of the way on a train. When they come from overseas and land in a port in Vancouver or Montreal, very, very often they get closer to here on a railroad. Really, again, this is a tax that is going to hurt the low-income Albertans by making the consumer goods that they in many cases can barely afford more expensive.

It will make the coal industry less competitive by making it more expensive to ship their products. I know that there are probably people on the government side that don't like the coal industry, but the fact is that some of that coal goes over to Japan to make the Priuses that you're so fond of. In fact, some of it actually produces your electricity. I appreciate that the government doesn't like that, but the fact is that the coal part of the load is the most reliable, cost-effective part of the electricity supply. It is. I appreciate that some of the older plants aren't as efficient as the newer ones are, but the newest coal plants in particular are reputed to be about as clean as burning natural gases. Why would we make that industry less competitive?

Why would we make the forest industry less competitive? It's a very competitive business. Lord knows, our province and our country have been in trade wars with the U.S. over the lumber trade for years, one appeal to the World Trade Organization after another after another after another. Canada won the vast majority of those if not all of them. So you know that it's a competitive business.

What's our government's answer to low energy prices and high unemployment? To make the industries that we have left even less competitive by making it more expensive to get their goods to market. The same goes for the energy products. Now, I appreciate that we've heard the Premier and some of the ministers say that they're in favour of pipelines – maybe they are; maybe they aren't – but I don't think that the evidence has really supported that to date. Certainly, we've heard the Premier say that she's in support of a pipeline to the east but not to the west coast, which is the closer one, not south to the U.S., not to the north. In the absence of pipelines, how is most of the energy that leaves Alberta getting shipped? On rail. So what's the answer to saving jobs? To make the energy that we're producing less competitive by making it more expensive to get to market. Well, Albertans actually know better.

I appreciate that the government has big spending plans and that they're trying to raise money. But at the end of the day, I think that it's going to be obvious that if you make Alberta less competitive, there will be fewer goods leaving, fewer jobs, fewer people with those jobs paying taxes, fewer corporations providing those jobs paying taxes, or they will be there and they'll be less profitable, which means there are fewer taxes to pay. Any way you look at it, this is a tax that directly negatively affects the core economy of our province. Why would you support that?

Certainly, the agriculture minister should be voting for this amendment because I've heard him say: I'm the champion of agriculture. I've also heard him say in this House: I'm the champion of forestry. Well, here's a place, champ. Now you can be the champion. This is the opportunity.

Energy minister, I know that you want to support the energy industry. This is an opportunity for you to stop them from being less competitive. This is an opportunity for you to stand up for the energy industry and say, "As the minister I am your advocate; I'm your champion; I'm the one you can depend upon to make it easier for you to make a living and provide jobs for Albertans and pay taxes," which, of course, pay for schools and roads and hospitals and social services, and you can say: "Today I stood up for the energy industry. I voted for this because I know that it's going to hurt jobs in the energy industry."

11:10

What a great opportunity. What a tremendous opportunity for the ministers who are advocates for those industries to stand up in the Legislative Assembly of Alberta and do their jobs and say: "Today I was that champion for the industry I'm responsible for. Today I kept the promise to the forest industry and the energy industry and the agriculture industry. Today I was what I promised to be. Today I stood up for you. Today I stopped you from being less competitive. Today I protected the jobs that Albertans depend upon in the industry. Today I was a good minister."

You know what? I will thank the hon. member that made the amendment. You are providing these ministers with a tremendous opportunity to be able to go out to their industry stakeholders tomorrow to say: "I had your back. I had your back after 11 o'clock last night. I was there in the House doing my job. I saw an opportunity to make the industry that I am responsible for either more competitive or stop it from being less competitive, and I did my job right." Don't let this opportunity go by. I'm not sure when the next time will come.

That's why I will be supporting it, because I care about Alberta jobs. I care about Alberta families that depend upon those jobs. I care about having a place where industry will be competitive, where there will be opportunities for my kids and my grandkids 20 and 30 and 40 years from now. Don't waste this opportunity. I know I'm not going to because at the end of the day – and the Finance minister should probably get his pencil out and think about this, too – this may well cost Alberta more tax dollars for the treasury in the long run than anything close to what it might gain in the short run.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I rise to speak in favour of this amendment and enthusiastically so. If I'm going to be here this evening, I'm sure you all wanted to hear from me. So here I am, finally.

There are some very curious tax increases in this bill and in this budget, but this is one of the more curious tax increases because it makes exporting Alberta goods more expensive. As an exporting province and an exporting country surely we should be trying to make our goods less expensive to get to market. You know, one of the rationalizations for increasing the rail fuel tax, I've been told, is to prevent train companies from filling up their train engines in the lowest tax jurisdiction while using infrastructure in other jurisdictions. If that, in fact, is the case, it seems a little odd that we in Alberta would want the train companies to purchase less of our product. It seems a little bit odd. But it seems consistent, perhaps, that when you make rail transportation more expensive, it makes it even that much more difficult to get one of our core products, that being oil sands bitumen, to market in the absence of pipelines.

I sincerely hope the government members on that side are working diligently day and night to ensure that Alberta oil sands and products of all kinds get access to markets east, west, south: all directions. We need safe, reliable, efficient pipelines ... [interjection] We could go north, absolutely. Pick all four. I have no preference. In fact, if I were to express a preference, my preference would be all of the above.

Let's get access for this product that adds a tremendous amount of value to our society, to our economy, to our province, to our country, and to the world. Let's get that to market, and let's do it through pipelines, which we know are safer, which we know are more cost-effective, which we know are less carbon intense than rail travel.

In the meantime and in the interim we need to get it to market somehow, and markets will always find a way. The way they found is rail travel. To make that more expensive now seems at odds with what it is we're trying to achieve in this province or what we ought to be trying to achieve in this province.

The other thing that I think is important to talk about is this government's bringing in a price on carbon. We're adding a price on carbon on top of a fuel tax increase, and costs quickly start to spiral out of control. I've said many times that I think, broadly, the idea of pricing carbon is a good idea so long as it is, in fact, revenue neutral. The definition we've heard from this government of revenue neutrality is a very odd definition indeed given that the dollars are to be recycled back into the economy. My question would be: would this fuel tax be revenue neutral because the dollars would be cycled back into the economy? It seems unlikely, not by any normal definition that I'm familiar with.

So I absolutely and enthusiastically support this amendment and would hope that perhaps we could convince the government also to do the very same. Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other speakers to this amendment?

Mr. Ceci: Maybe to continue on with the theme, prior to the last speaker, that the previous speaker was on, today I stand up to support the locomotive fuel tax. Back on March 27, 2015, the previous government brought in a gasoline and diesel tax of 4 cents per litre. The previous government brought that in in March, and they didn't include locomotive fuel, but what we found with the absence of locomotive fuel was that the trucking industry became less competitive to railways. So we have decided to do what should have been done in the first place and not favour one industry over another, as the previous government had done, and we brought in a locomotive fuel tax at 4 cents. That starts on November 1, the 5.5 cents per litre of locomotive fuel, but if you look at the fiscal year, the average for locomotive fuel will be 3.15 cents or 3.25 cents for the whole year. It only starts in November, so there's an averaging down for the entire year if you look at it from a fiscal-year basis.

As the hon. member on this side talked about on the previous amendment, which got defeated, that helps our health care, education, and other services because we are able to have more sustainable financial resources to address those needs. We haven't had sustainable financial resources in a very long time, and we have taken the tack that to be a good government, there needs to be a range of revenues and not just a single commodity. So we have brought in this 5.5 cents a litre for locomotive fuel, which puts us in the middle of provinces with regard to this tax. We believe that it is going to assist us to diversify the revenues and be able to afford the things like health care and education, and we are committed to following through.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other speakers to the amendment?

Seeing none, we'll call the vote.

[Motion on amendment A10 lost]

The Chair: We're back on the bill. Are there any further comments, questions, or amendments with respect to Bill 4?

If not, we will call the question.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 4 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

The hon. Government House Leader.

11:20

Mr. Mason: Madam Chair, I move that the committee rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Cross.

Miranda: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 4. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders

Third Reading

(continued)

Bill 4

An Act to Implement Various Tax Measures and to Enact the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act

The Deputy Speaker: Go ahead.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm happy to rise today to move third reading of Bill 4, An Act to Implement Various Tax Measures and to Enact the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act. I'd like to touch on a few points to recap two important streams of legislative changes covered in this bill.

I'll start with the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act. We heard a lot of interesting points raised during Committee of the Whole with respect to the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act. Members from the other side focused a lot of their attention on the debt cap, and I certainly appreciate that. We are concerned about Alberta's long-term fiscal health, and we don't want to saddle future Albertans with an excessive debt burden. That is why the government put a debt cap in the bill based on 15 per cent of debt to GDP. Credit-rating agencies see this as a prudent and manageable level of debt consistent with a triple-A credit rating.

A member across the aisle brought forward some interesting suggestions to compel the government to live up to its legislation, and the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake stressed the importance of trust. Budget 2015 shows how we are implementing our commitments over the next three years, and this bill will help us to deliver on many of them. I believe that we will keep Albertans' trust by keeping our commitments and, as the Member for Calgary-South East put it, by doing our job. Madam Speaker, that is why we are protecting front-line services, so that Albertans know their children will have teachers in the classroom when they go to school. That's why we are reinvesting in our public infrastructure and working to diversify the economy, to ensure that we lay the foundation for long-term economic growth, and that is why we are showing a reasonable and responsible path to balance.

For the record I want to reiterate that the main points of the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act along with Budget 2015 will deliver on our promises. They will be that Alberta's finances will be presented in a three-year fiscal plan. The fiscal plan will be presented on the same scope and basis as the consolidated financial statements in the annual report, following public-sector accounting standards and supported by the Auditor General.

The contingency account will continue with its defined purpose, to provide funding for years in which the actual expense of government exceeds the actual revenue. Government will continue to inflation-proof the heritage fund through the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Act.

The legislation continues the requirement for a government strategic plan and ministry business plans as well as the requirement that government and ministry annual reports be released by June 30. Regular quarterly fiscal updates will continue with an exception for this fiscal year only because the quarterly fiscal update was released as a part of Budget 2015. Quarterly and annual reports for the Alberta heritage savings trust fund will continue.

The 1 per cent rule limiting in-year spending increases and operating expenses to 1 per cent of the budget, included in the fiscal plan, will remain in effect under the new legislation, and as was debated at length, a new debt cap based on a debt-to-GDP ratio of 15 per cent will be established, ensuring that government maintains a prudent level of debt, consistent with a triple-A rating.

To sum up, the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act reflects our government's commitment to fiscal responsibility and transparency, and it reflects that we're keeping our debt under control, with a set of fiscal rules that are firm yet offer just enough flexibility to respond to economic and fiscal challenges like some of the ones we face today in Alberta, while presenting the government's finances in a format that is clear and easier for Albertans to understand.

There are tax changes. There were also some important points raised with respect to the tax changes covered in Bill 4. I recognize that the opposition put forward some amendments, and I appreciate the contribution of all of the hon. members to that. But, Madam Speaker, we all know that this government faced a number of challenges with the budget. It's no secret that we have a significant revenue shortfall, that has to be addressed. The tax changes outlined in this bill strike the right balance between moving away from volatile resource revenues and protecting the tax advantage that all Albertans have become accustomed to.

Raising the locomotive fuel tax was a platform commitment, one that Albertans supported and one that helped level the playing field with the other forms of transportation in this province. The increase will generate approximately \$13 million in new revenue in 2016-17 and still keep the locomotive fuel tax well below the fuel taxes paid in other industries.

As for the insurance premium tax, this represents a stable source of revenue also. The modest 1 percentage point increase will generate an additional \$158 million in 2016-17.

Madam Speaker, as I've also said, the tax changes brought forward this year provide necessary revenue to help sustain funding for the public programs and services Albertans rely on, and it's important to keep in mind that even with these tax changes Albertans will continue to benefit from an overall tax advantage of at least \$8.5 billion compared to all other provinces.

Once again I thank the hon. members for their input and discussion on this important bill. The changes proposed here will not only enable us to move forward on our path towards balance; they will also ensure that we can continue to provide the programs and services that Albertans value.

I'd ask that all members of the House support this bill, and I move third reading. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any hon. members wishing to speak to the bill? Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Increasing taxes, any taxes but especially a series of cumulative taxes that universally impact the cost of everything like these taxes do, during a recession is an atrocious and hurtful economic decision, impacting the hundred thousand or so unemployed in this province at the worst possible time. I don't care if you follow the principles of Keynes, Hayek, or any other economist. It is never a good idea to take more money out of the pockets of Albertans during a time of great suffering like we are suffering right now. In a time of recession prices should fall. While the supply of money retracts, so too should the prices being paid for the goods and services that they depend on. Instead, this government has added taxes, increasing prices, making it harder for everyday Albertans to put food on their tables, to pay their bills, to make ends meet, especially Albertans who have lost their jobs and those that are on fixed incomes.

This government has ignored our warnings and increased a series of what are known as regressive taxes, taxes that inescapably harm the most vulnerable Albertans, those on fixed incomes. That's what regressive taxes do. A regressive tax is called regressive because people of little means pay a higher proportion of the money that they earn to satisfy their family's basic needs for things like food products. As a percentage of their overall earnings they will be paying more towards this tax increase than a family of higher means, hence the word "regressive." So the very people that this government claims to be fighting for all the time are the ones that are going to be hurt the most by these taxes.

11:30

The NDP is entirely and directly responsible for increasing the cost of every single good imported into this province by train and truck, goods that Albertans need to survive. The vast majority of these tax increases will have a regressive impact. The NDP is literally paying for their pay raises to their public union cronies on the backs of the poorest Albertans.

Government services are great, and the Wildrose believes that they are of the utmost importance and would not have cut any of the front-line workers that provide these services. In a province with a population as industrious as ours and in a year where we have taken in amongst the province's highest ever revenues, providing Albertans with the front-line services that they need is more than possible.

What is not possible is providing these services and maintaining the bureaucratic bloat of agencies like AHS. What is not sustainable is increasing the pay for public-sector unions while the Albertans that pay their wages are facing job losses and pay cuts in every sector every day. We have these ludicrous ideas coming from other parties about our policies, claims that we in opposition would make unemployment worse by insisting that overpaid managers reallocate their skill set to a more industrious purpose in the private sector, managers like the AHS manager making seven figures to dictate the type of art on the wall. What they fail to understand is that taxpayers are paying these salaries for nonproductive and inefficient pursuits, that Alberta taxpayers do not receive any value in return for make-work projects. Instead, the Albertan taxpayer is facing a slow and unnecessary, redundant social system with rapidly declining levels of satisfaction.

You know, we used to have among the best education systems, among the best health care systems, and now we're paying well

above market value on the backs of taxpayers for inferior services. It is time that this government does the right thing and looks inward to fix the problems that our people are facing every day. It is time that this NDP government admits that they are responsible for our province's slow, expensive, ineffective, and underperforming government services. We're paying billions of dollars more than British Columbia on infrastructure, more than a province that literally has to build its roadway by carving through mountains. The government is competing against itself, drastically driving up the costs of these infrastructure projects.

Albertans are not like this government; they cannot leverage their children's future to balance their books. We have to live within our means. Albertans cut costs when times are tough. They do everything in their power to manage their expenses. And while our people are struggling, this government has increased taxes on those same people to run a series of inefficient and underperforming services. What they fail to understand is that every dollar wasted on government inefficiency is a dollar taken directly from the wallet of an Albertan, which will produce nothing of any value.

Government inefficiencies only serve to amplify the dead weight losses inevitably produced through taxation. Every time that we increase a tax, we are lowering the value of transactions to both buyers and sellers. Whether the buyer is paying more for the product or the seller is receiving a lower return for the product, there is a loss in the marketplace, and that is known as dead weight.

Economists have long acknowledged that the losses to either the consumer or the producer are far greater than the revenue received by the government from this taxation. With every tax increase Alberta's economy is losing market value. Raising taxes forces businesses out of the market. A supplier that is otherwise able to satisfy the consumer's needs for a good at a fair and competitive market price will often no longer be able to do so with all of these cumulative taxes. Businesses need to cover their economic cost of doing business. They need to make money or break even or they cannot produce goods and employ people. Taxes change the prices of goods and inevitably push more businesses out of Alberta as Alberta businesses become less competitive.

The same principle applies to the consumer. A consumer that might previously have afforded certain goods and services from a producer such as the purchasers of insurance will often find himself or herself unable to do so after a price increase is induced through higher taxes or new forms of taxation or the cumulative effect of these many taxes. Consumers have a willingness to pay for items, and, especially in the case of economically vulnerable Albertans, this willingness to pay for an item is fixed by the restraints of their income.

What this government should be the most ashamed of is that they have chosen to flaunt that an NDP government's spending is somehow fixed by absolutely nothing. Alberta has a government that refuses to acknowledge the negative effects of cumulative taxation on an already fragile economy with an ever-growing population of unemployed and fixed-income people. We are living in a time when Albertans are already struggling to put food on their table and pay their power bills, and this NDP government is applying taxes that will push these products even further out of their reach. You're shutting down businesses that provide jobs. These tax increases are edging our fertilizer producers, our coal miners, our oil and gas companies, our grocery providers, our farmers out of the market and, with them, the good-paying jobs that they provide.

There is no job plan better for Alberta business, for the creation of jobs, than tax cuts. It has been proven time and again around the world. Businesses are profit maximizers. They know how to increase efficiencies, and they will always hire more staff where they have the potential to increase their productivity. This

government has done the exact opposite and could not be more wrong about how to satisfy the economic needs and the social needs of Albertans. This bill will only serve to compound the effect of every other terrible economic policy and risk experiment that this NDP government is pushing for.

One last time I will urge my fellow members of this House to vote this bill down.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wishing to speak?

The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Deficit spending is a poor economic policy, and it will erode services in the long run, contrary to the government's claims. These are real numbers, real people, and real dollars, and they're being diverted for what? So the government doesn't have to look inward and cut significant amounts of inefficiency and waste? The government is more comfortable abusing taxpayer money than improving their operational efficiency in a manner that every other private-sector company does during a recession.

This is a structural deficit. You cut taxes during a structural deficit. You do. The reality is that Albertans are being forced to contribute billions of dollars to servicing debt. These are billions – we've mentioned this before – that are being ripped from an economic cycle. There's nothing new that can be produced from these funds that are being allocated to debt servicing, Madam Speaker, and they do not go into building more infrastructure like roads, something everybody needs to use to get to work, to move product, to be useful, to work, thereby influencing the economy positively. It's an investment. It creates. It means you go to work. You get paid. This debt servicing disrupts an important economic driver. It's a disrespectful management of our funds, and it undermines the proper use of taxpayer money.

The industries are suffering right now, Madam Speaker. Oil prices are low, as we all know. These companies are counting on every penny when it comes to trying to lower the cost of getting their products to market, and the companies are taking every step to reduce their barrel costs, including layoffs of their staff, any staff that can be spared. In fact, a lot of these companies have taken upwards of 20 per cent cuts themselves in order to keep their companies running, in order to maintain their staff. They've looked inward. They've cut from within in order to be able to manage their own companies. It's a wonderful example of how the resilience of Albertans works in order to maintain the companies' productivity during these times. Making it more expensive for these companies to get their product to market will only force these companies to make more cuts.

11:40

In 2013 the rail moved about 280,000 barrels per day, almost 8 per cent of western Canada's oil production. Without pipelines we need rail, and in this industry right now we don't have a whole lot of other options. Worse than that, the government has made no progress on pipelines. It's not surprising. I mean, we're hopeful, but we have a lot of protesters, and they've doubled down by hiring a number of noted antipipeline lobbyists. Right now we need pipelines. It's clear that in the oil and gas industries the demand for shipping their products by rail is increasing. The statistics say that 12,054 cars carrying fuel and oil and crude petroleum moved through western Canada in August 2015 compared to just 9,086 in August 2013. To be clear, that increase in the number of cars is in spite of an economic recession. Our most important job-creating industry is dependent upon rail, at least for the foreseeable future, without a pipeline.

As has been mentioned before, we can't seem to get any ideas about what pipelines are going to be built. We know which ones are not going to go through, and we can't seem to get any answers about ones that need to go through. Not only is the government kicking the oil and gas industry when they are down, but on top of that, they're taxing one of the only ways that we have to get product to market. That's not only oil and gas. That's for food, and that's for fertilizer and any other products that are necessary to be transported in this country, in this province.

The spokesperson for CP Rail noted that, quote, the increased fuel tax in Alberta will substantially increase CP's cost of fuel in the province; this change comes at a very difficult economic period for the province, and there is no doubt that it will be compounded by the government's other announced tax increases; this will negatively impact future investments and jobs. End quote. The NDP has not done the analysis to indicate how expensive this will be. The government is choosing to strain the pocketbooks of every Albertan to pay for lavish plans and bureaucratic excess. This is not the right method, Madam Speaker, for attempting to increase revenues. We cannot further hinder the industry this way and the consumers as well.

Reducing taxes has a stimulative effect on the economic activity. In fact, as the hon. member had mentioned, it's a supported aspect of the very economists often invoked favourably by the NDP government. You cut taxes in times of structural deficit. Money left in the pockets of innovators and job creators and industrious Albertans will find productivity given the right encouragement, given the right space to do that in. Innovation is born from these sorts of situations, but the government has to support that.

Higher marginal rates have a directly negative impact on innovation and growth and, most significantly, employment, something that I think is important to all of us right now, especially given, again, the economic environment and the job losses in this province, something all of us should be thinking about right now in all of our constituencies. All of the people in all of our constituencies are suffering right now. The result is lower incomes for individuals and less revenue for the government. The NDP policies are hurting Albertans. These policies are killing jobs. This is a tax that is sure to provide a final blow, and this is what we're talking about right now, the tax on the rail.

Just to reiterate, the hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks has given a great deal of thought and a tremendous amount of opportunity for this government to look inward and to find ways to improve what could be better policy at this point.

Mr. Panda: A spiritual awakening.

Mrs. Aheer: A spiritual awakening, as it was called, or however you want to look at that.

The most important thing right now is for the government to understand that we have job losses and that our economy is suffering, and I urge the government to within this third reading take a look at the amendments that were thoughtfully constructed, that have been supported by this side, and to please look within and to cut from within, cut from the bloat, cut from the bureaucracy. That's what we're asking you to do, to look at that from within and find other places. There are places from within that we can cut, Madam Speaker, in order to create the services that Albertans need and have come to expect. We need to start looking at ourselves first in order to make that happen before we go into the pockets of the taxpayers, who are suffering right now.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Cooper: Madam Speaker, if you seek it, I think that you will find unanimous consent of this House for one-minute bells for the duration of the evening.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Deputy Speaker: Any further speakers to the bill? The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd like to rise today to speak against this horrendous bill. This government is asking for a blank cheque to cover their unprecedented levels of spending. We know that this government has little regard for the taxpayers of Alberta and instead sees them as their own personal ATM. We Albertans are a sensible lot, and we expect our government to reflect this. Albertans understand that there are consequences for our actions. We cannot act like someone with their first credit card. We need to live within our means.

Unfortunately, this government doesn't believe in the Alberta advantage, brought in by Premier Klein in 1992 through lower taxes, an investment-friendly economy, ending corporate welfare, cutting red tape, and an education system that was the envy of the world. The members opposite would remember the mid-1990s as the lost decade. I don't disagree that it was a time of hard choices, but the decisions this government makes today will, like the Getty government's, have the same repercussions that caused the Klein government to make those hard choices. We simply cannot burden our youth with the debts from this government's risky fiscal economic experiments. Much like someone with their first credit card, this government will eventually wake up and feel the full ramifications of their decisions to spend recklessly now instead of making prudent, common-sense, responsible decisions, and I can assure the members opposite that a couple of Tylenol won't help alleviate their fiscal hangover.

This bill allows for the government to run operational deficits for the first time since before some members opposite were even born. We make no mistake. The only reason we are forced into this unenviable situation is because the government refuses to rein in a budget that exceeds our British Columbian neighbours' not only by \$2,000 in per capita spending but even in total spending in spite of B.C. having a larger population. We should focus on spending taxpayer dollars more efficiently before hiking over 60 different taxes and fees, that this government raised in their recent budget. Their tax increases include personal income tax, the ND PST carbon tax, gasoline fuel tax, diesel fuel tax, propane fuel tax, locomotive fuel tax.

Look at the locomotive fuel tax. We talked about that a little earlier. That was actually an NDP campaign promise, where they said that they were going to have reliable, sufficient, and fairly priced rail service to markets. Madam Speaker, our resources rely on rail to get to the market. Of course, Canadian Pacific Railway said about this raise that the NDP government tax hike on trains is sending Alberta down the wrong track. They said that the NDP government's budget decision to raise the locomotive fuel tax rate from 1 and a half cents per litre to 5 and a half cents per litre, effective November 1, will cost both the company and the province. That's a broken campaign promise right there.

Other rises in taxes: corporate income tax; tobacco tax; alcohol tax; application fee for public land leases; royalty rates on sand; royalty rates on silt; royalty rates on gravel; royalty rates on soil; royalty rates on peat moss; royalty rates on clay; base camping fees; campsite electricity rates; base group camping fees; dump station fees; Canmore Nordic Centre fee; in-park interpretive program fee; cottage lot leasing fee; industrial-commercial land-use, disposition,

administration, and land-rent fees; permit and special-event fees; on-site pump-out service fees; 15 different court fees increased; land titles caveats fee; corporate registry for incorporations; corporate registry for annual returns; corporate registry for searches; and an insurance premium tax.

11:50

Of course, we just finished talking about the insurance premium tax. This is the tax that includes a tax on vehicle insurance, which we're mandated by law to have, so that's something we can't get out of. For some of these other taxes we have a choice, whether we're going to purchase or use that service, but we're forced to have vehicle insurance, so we're forced to pay this tax. That's not fair, Madam Speaker. That's not right.

What we should be doing is creating legislation that determines how we will save our surpluses, not how we will spend ourselves deeper into debt. We already had a spending problem. At \$100 a barrel for oil the Alberta government wasn't able to save anything. For the past eight years we've run deficits, and the plan is to have deficits for the next five years. This bill will simply enable this government to put off addressing this problem. There are no provisions in this bill if the government exceeds 15 per cent of GDP. What is the point of having a law without any consequences for breaking it? Why are there no protections in place? While there may be no penalties placed on the Finance minister or this government, Albertans will be the ones punished when our triple-A credit rating is downgraded because of this government's perilous spending habits.

[Mr. Feehan in the chair]

In a recent *Globe and Mail* article the DBRS rating agency stated, "We rate Alberta [triple-A] with a stable trend for the time being; primarily that has been based on a strong balance sheet and low debt." Obviously, the low debt has gone out the window. Further, they warned that they would "rethink the province's pristine [triple-A] stable credit rating if provincial debt surpasses 15 per cent of GDP." But let's be clear. The DBRS's version of 15 per cent isn't what this government uses. In the same article DBRS estimates that the total taxpayer-supported debt in Alberta would be \$29.3 billion, or about 10 per cent of GDP. Of course, this government's budget is forecasting \$47 billion worth of debt. Well, this government is at half of that. Therefore, DBRS has us hitting near 15 per cent before the next election, so a credit downgrade is coming soon.

Mr. Speaker, it should be clear to this Chamber why we must vote against this bill. Like a late-night infomercial cure-all, this bill falsely promises a quick and easy remedy to an issue that requires a long-term, reasonable course of care, something like the responsible, gradual financial recovery plan that the Wildrose proposed during the spring election. Ralph Klein famously said, "Never again will this government or the people of this province have to set aside another tax dollar on debt." Those days are over, and the way this government is going, they will be gone for a long, long time. Even Ralph Klein couldn't foresee the path that this government is heading us down.

Please vote against Bill 4 and force the government to come back to this House with a responsible plan that respects taxpayers and future Alberta generations, a plan that we can be proud of instead of the shameful burden enabled by Bill 4.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Any questions or comments under 29(2)(a)? No? Okay.

Any other speakers to the bill? Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Nice chair. It suits you.

Mr. Speaker, it is the eleventh hour. It isn't too late for the government to change course although it's getting pretty darn hard at this point. The Official Opposition has proposed many amendments, I think about eight of them, which I'm sure government members have enjoyed debating at every moment. But at every moment the government has rejected them, well-meaning, reasonable amendments that would make Bill 4 less bad.

Bill 4 is possibly one of the most damaging pieces of legislation that this House could possibly pass. It is a piece of legislation that increases our debt limit again – yet again – becoming little better than the U.S. Congress's. We are following down a dangerous path, where before even the next election the government might come back to us asking for an increase in the debt ceiling again. We'll be able to say, "I told you so," but the cost of fixing it won't be worth the gloating. We want to fix it now.

This bill retroactively makes legal the government's illegal actions, the Finance minister's failure to comply with the financial management act and introduce the second-quarter fiscal update on or before the 30th of November. They seek to go backwards in time and give themselves a legal mulligan, a one-off gimme so that they are not in noncompliance with the law. Not that it would make any difference, because the government has in the series of amendments we've debated refused at every single turn to accept legal consequences for breaking their own laws.

We've put forward amendments that would limit ministerial stipends if they broke the debt ceiling. Any investment manager that doesn't do their job is not going to get paid as well. It's performance pay. Many Albertans are paid in their regular jobs based on performance pay, and I think it's time we introduced a little bit of that into this House. Unfortunately, the members on the other side are just working union hours. We are working a little beyond them tonight; I'll give that. But they've rejected the idea of performance pay. They've rejected the idea that there should be any penalty whatsoever for breaking the laws that we ourselves pass in this House. It's a principle that I will fight for in the coming years.

Mr. Mason: Is that how long you're going to go on?

Mr. Fildebrandt: Don't tempt me, House leader. You know I could.

This bill changes the framework of our budget at a macro level. It legalizes borrowing for the basic operations of the government, something that we have not done since 1992, something that was so bad that this province learned a lesson for a time. We made it illegal. We made it against the law to do that. But we've watered that down over the years, with the best of intentions at times, to the point where now the Alberta advantage has died with a whimper. Well, there are three and a half years for the Alberta advantage to squirm under the bus, but the Official Opposition will continue to fight for fiscal responsibility, for conservatism, for the ideas that built the Alberta advantage, the Alberta advantage that made Alberta the greatest province in the greatest country in the world, Mr. Speaker. This is what we will continue to fight for.

Bill 4 is almost sure to pass tonight. We haven't won many votes in this Chamber this evening. Perhaps we'll do better on Bill 6. But before we get to votes on Bill 6, I hope that the government has taken stock over what's happened in this province over the last two weeks. Albertans are waking up. Albertans know that this government can't be trusted, not with farmers and not with finances.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I will conclude our debate on Bill 4. Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: Does anyone wish to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing no one, would anybody else like to speak to the bill?

Seeing no one, I call on the hon. Minister of Finance to close the debate, then.

12:00

Mr. Ceci: It's done. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I don't wish to belabour the – oh, look at that. Midnight. I thank all members for their input. Bill 4 will make a more sustainable set of revenue resources going forward for all Albertans to therefore be able to provide the many programs and services they rely on.

Thank you.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 12 a.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, S.	Ganley	Miller
Babcock	Goehring	Miranda
Bilous	Hinkley	Nielsen
Carlier	Horne	Notley
Carson	Kazim	Piquette
Ceci	Kleinstauber	Sabir
Connolly	Larivee	Schmidt
Coolahan	Littlewood	Schreiner
Cortes-Vargas	Loyola	Shepherd
Dach	Luff	Sigurdson
Dang	Malkinson	Sucha
Drever	Mason	Westhead
Feehan	McCuaig-Boyd	

Against the motion:

Aheer	Ellis	MacIntyre
Barnes	Fildebrandt	McIver
Clark	Fraser	Panda
Cooper	Hunter	Starke
Cyr	Loewen	

Totals:	For – 38	Against – 14
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[Motion carried; Bill 4 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 6

Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act

Mr. Cooper moved that the motion for second reading be amended to read that Bill 6, Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

[Adjourned debate December 2: Mr. Bilous]

The Deputy Speaker: Any hon. member wishing to speak? Hon. minister of economic development, you're not choosing to speak at this time? I think you still had some time.

Mr. Bilous: Sure. Thank you, Madam Speaker. This is on the bill, is it not?

Mr. Cooper: It's on the referral motion to committee. You're supporting it.

Mr. Bilous: Right. No, I'm not.

So this is on the motion, Madam Speaker, just for clarification, the referral amendment?

The Deputy Speaker: Yes. It's on the amendment.

Mr. Bilous: Right. Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak against this amendment. I'll make my points very, very quickly. Quite honestly, you know, farm workers are the only workers in this province who aren't covered under OH and S and WCB, and by bringing forward this bill and enacting it, it will ensure that paid farm workers have that minimum basic coverage, which every other worker in the province enjoys except for farm workers. This is a piece of legislation that is long overdue.

Madam Speaker, I look forward to the continued debate in this House, including amendments that will be brought forward when we move into Committee of the Whole. But, again, to remind members: one life lost is one too many, and we need to ensure that those who have been injured while working on a farm have basic protections and coverage. That is why delaying is not the path forward. I think there's definitely a way to ensure that we have a made-in-Alberta solution that applies and takes into account our workers, our farmers, and our ranchers in this province and ensures that we protect family farms. Again, this comes down to ensuring that paid farm workers have the same basic protections as every other worker in this province. Alberta, unfortunately, is the only jurisdiction in this country that doesn't afford paid farm workers that type of protection.

I look forward to the debate as it continues on. I was very clear this afternoon, Madam Speaker, speaking with folks in Leduc, that we are going to ensure that we are protecting family farms and acknowledging the uniqueness that farmers through their occupation, their way of life, that there are unique aspects and elements to it, which we are listening to and that we have heard. We will ensure that we come forward with a made-in-Alberta solution.

For those reasons, Madam Speaker, I cannot support the referral motion. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. member wishing to speak to the amendment? The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Speaker, for once again allowing me to rise and speak on Bill 6. I will be supporting this amendment, which sends this bill to committee, where it can receive the respectful consideration and expert input it deserves.

I want to express my disappointment that once again the members across the aisle that previously served with me here in opposition ranks are going against the ideals they previously held on this side of the aisle. Under previous governments we all knew that there was a problem with the misuse and, frankly, the non-use of legislative policy committees to call expert witnesses, hear public feedback, and iron out important details of legislation out in the open. In fact, many other parliamentary jurisdictions, including our federal government and other provinces here in Canada, already do these things quite frequently. They use policy committees to a much fuller and comprehensive extent than Alberta. I think this is to the benefit of democracy.

12:10

Unfortunately, it seems that we are headed right down the same path as previous administrations that preferred to move quickly and without complete public oversight of the legislative process. Madam Speaker, I'd like to remind this Assembly of the words of

the Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood, who said in regard to pension legislation:

First of all, Mr. Speaker, there was not adequate consultation, especially with the people who are enrolled in the pension, who will receive it or who are receiving it now. That's a critical point . . .

I think that the government has shown that at this point in time, at least, it's prepared to make some compromises, and I think that's a good thing. I think that this Legislature and the opposition have proved their worth in this debate and in this fight, and it has shown that we can indeed influence the course of government policy. We can stand up on behalf of our constituents, fight for them, and get results.

Boy, does that sound familiar, from pensions to changing the way that fifth and sixth generations interact with their families, continuing their heritage, continuing the hard work that built Alberta.

In the same debate the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview stated:

I mean, for a government that loves to talk about the word "consultation" and how they speak with folks, their actions don't seem to live up to their words. Although I could stand here and give numerous examples where consultation never took place even though it was asserted, I won't do that.

This government is the latest to amass quite the impressive list of examples where consultation was asserted and never offered, Madam Speaker. So much for change.

I've attended a number of rallies and town hall sessions now where I've had the chance to speak with hundreds if not thousands of deeply concerned Albertans. What I've come to understand is that this issue is not about urban versus rural. It transcends regional and partisan politics. For every single farmer and rancher I've spoken to, it has nothing to do with skirting the need for safety. While this government as per their own briefing materials may have wished to legislate the family farm as a workplace, I can assure you that each one of these families sees their farm or ranch as their home first and foremost. They take a great deal of pride in their home and the safety of all those on their property, as we all would.

What this comes down to is trust, Madam Speaker. After seeing so much conflicting, confusing, ill-conceived, and rushed information coming from this government, there are precious few Albertans, let alone farmers and ranchers, who are prepared to write this government a blank cheque that unfettered regulatory power could offer. The vast majority simply don't trust that you will take this and get it right. They don't trust that as of yet undefined and mostly unwritten regulations will truly reflect the unique circumstances of our province's farms and ranches.

What we've seen so far, even from government members themselves, is a stream of changes and admissions of the sloppiness and lack of thought that preceded the creation of this bill. We have the minister of agriculture unwilling to give his full support to it and calling its rollout odd, with the consultation coming after the legislation was intended to be quickly rammed through this House. The standard line for the government has been, essentially, that we just need to sign over complete regulatory control; then they'll be able to fix everything they have bungled already through unseen regulations.

But then the curtain comes down, and we have the Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose openly admitting that – and I quote – the target and intentions of the bill are constantly changing. It seems that he may have inadvertently given the government's game away. With so many conflicting reports posted right on the government pages and coming from the government side, it's no wonder a few of these members have a hard time keeping their story straight. Ultimately, that's the problem. Nothing this government has done

gives anyone any confidence in its ability to get this right or to carry out the will of the people. This legislation was conspicuously absent from the NDP election platform, and their attempt to whisk it through the Legislature has burned any residual trust they might have had.

I would suggest to this government that restoring trust first involves consulting with Albertans in a meaningful way. I'm not talking about the sessions that were planned to take place after the bill was well on its way to becoming law. I'm not talking about going out to sit in front of a crowd of farmers and ranchers and hearing nothing but criticism, then ignoring every single piece of it and pushing blindly ahead. I'm not talking about sessions booked in venues that were far too small, involving bureaucrats who can't even be bothered to take notes but, instead, simply repeat talking points. I'm talking about the kind of consultation that could easily and effectively happen in a true legislative policy committee like this motion is asking for. I'm talking about consultation as a meaningful discussion, a meaningful two-way street. I would like nothing more than to see this government inviting the affected parties in and hearing their unique concerns, challenges, and recommendations.

I don't trust this government to make the right decisions behind closed doors any more than the majority of Albertans who oppose Bill 6 do. They couldn't even get it right out here in the open. Why would they think they will suddenly become trustworthy legislators once they have unbridled regulatory authority and no transparency for their actions? One farmer I spoke with over the weekend put it best when he said that nobody would ever operate his or her business or personal life the way this NDP government is proposing, where the signature on the bottom line is required before the body of the contract is written.

Questions still linger, Madam Speaker. As much as the government desperately tries to patch this broken bill together with half-formed amendments and shaky assurances, we still have no clear definition of what it means to hire a worker and what regulatory burdens would come with that. For example, if a farmer or rancher were to hire a roofer to fix the shingles on the barn or an electrician to install a section of electric fencing, would that operation then need to come into full compliance with every single detail of the OH and S code, that was never ever created with farming in mind? What costs would be associated with this?

We have not yet addressed an issue that many have brought to my attention: foisting an inferior Workers' Compensation Board insurance product upon farmers and ranchers that already carry private insurance. It's no secret to anyone in this House that workers' compensation is badly in need of some reform, and I consider it disrespectful to the agriculture community to mandate their participation in a system that even the Premier feels is broken.

12:20

I know these concerns linger, because I'm hearing them every day. It's gotten to the point where I'm hearing from Albertans outside my own riding boundaries, and I'm sure I'm not the only one of my Wildrose colleagues to experience this. I'm hearing from people who want us to represent them because their own MLAs are steadfastly refusing to take their concerns seriously and to actually advocate on their behalf.

Madam Speaker, this is the kind of feedback government members would hear if they were interested in representing their constituents first. From an e-mail from Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley:

I want to express my absolute and unequivocal discontent with Bill 6. This Government has broken the trust of Albertans due to their lack of respect and transparency that you as an NDP party

collectively have displayed. Had the Government come to farmers and ranchers to discuss the issues and formulate a plan for future regulation, or alternatively if they came with a fully developed plan to present for review and comment we could have had something factual and concrete to discuss. Instead this Government asked us to give a blank page for you to design the regulation at your will and a blank cheque to pay for the consequences of it after.

Here's another for all the government members in Edmonton.

I feel the NDP government is pushing this bill ahead too fast for the enormity of the outcome it could have. We don't appreciate that farmers and ranchers were not adequately consulted with regards to this piece of legislation either.

This next one comes from the minister of agriculture's riding, where, it's my understanding, my Wildrose colleague will be hosting a town hall.

Why, I wonder, if this legislation is being put into place for the right reasons . . . is it being fast tracked through the system without following proper procedures . . . As farmers we have all taken the time to care to make sure our farms are the safest they can be for everyone on the farm. We have been taking these precautions for many years and nothing will change. Please put a stop to Bill 6 or at least slow it down so you can research it properly.

How about another, this time from Stony Plain?

I truly believe that this bill should be put on hold until you have afforded the people of Alberta . . . their say . . . I was always taught that there was a right way and a wrong way to do things.

Your way is the wrong way. Open communication, honesty, and being accountable for your actions is the right way.

We have one from Medicine Hat, and – trust me – this is one of many I've been tasked with bringing to this government.

If our provincial government truly seeks to have an effective new farm safety legislation, then it needs to engage and enlist the farming and ranching community in creating a truly made in Alberta solution and not attempt to impose legislation that might hinder, hurt, and frustrate those who have helped build our province and who provide us with such a rich heritage and the promise of a prosperous future.

Madam Speaker, through you, I implore all of my government colleagues across the floor to please listen to their constituents, who are so desperately pleading for consultation and to provide their input from experience and expertise. You are representatives of your riding first, and I beg you to remember that.

I will be voting for this amendment to send this bill to committee. Madam Speaker, thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Standing Order 29(2)(a) is applicable if anyone would like to ask questions. The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Speaker. My hon. colleague has spent some significant time in this Assembly, and I'm just wondering if you have any recollection if in previous terms, when the government was on this side of the House, they had ever made any sort of comments or statements about the importance of consultation, the importance of committees, perhaps generally around these types of issues, particularly when you saw in the public large, large amounts of feedback. I seem to recall some around bills 9 and 10, which were some pension reform bills, I think. As well, I think the hon. Member for Calgary-Varsity mentioned Bill 10, which was maybe even this time last year, and I seem to recall some discussion around the importance of consultation.

Mr. Barnes: Hon. member, thank you very, very much. Yeah, in the three years of sharing the opposition lounge and on this side

watching a 44-year-old government struggle many, many times with consultation and with spending taxpayers' money efficiently, I kind of remember three the most and the shared concern that I had with the NDP, which was in opposition at the time. I remember when the last government tried to do the law about the industrial levy and consultation with First Nations. I remember a government standing here saying how they had total agreement from everyone concerned, and, lo and behold, the very next day there was some side of 50 or 60 people in the gallery who claimed they hadn't been consulted and wanted several changes. I'm absolutely sure that I remember my New Democrat opposition colleagues at the time, you know, expressing laughter and surprise that the government at the time had claimed that this consultation had happened. Obviously, it hadn't and was one of the factors that, no doubt, cost the last government a lot of their support.

The ones that I think of most, though, are the land bills: bills 19, 24, 36, and 50. I absolutely will never forget the meetings that rural property rights advocates used to have around the province, with 250 to 350 landowners, in wanting to understand the issue, wanting to explain the issue to their neighbours and other Albertans. It was amazing, too, how Medicine Hat, the 63,000 of us in Medicine Hat – sure, we're urban based, but, my goodness, our rural roots run deep, whether it's because we've come from the country or we have friends or family in it. A company came – it was Stantec, I think – and did a big meeting so, so similar to these ones that the government is doing now, bringing people in, sitting there and giving them a chance to vent and a chance to say what's on their mind but, at the end of the day, not doing at all what the people were asking for.

What I like about this amendment: they're just asking for the chance to consult, the chance to come here and in a respectful, proper manner share their needs. I actually have a quote here from the Premier from May 7, 2014, where something had happened.

A week ago this PC government apologized to party members for its failure to listen to the grassroots. Yesterday they backtracked again, this time on pension rollbacks, because they failed to listen to Albertans. It's clear that they still don't get it because now they plan to ram through an omnibus bill without written briefings to Assembly members and without listening to Albertans.

Madam Speaker, unfortunately, it sounds like déjà vu. It sounds so similar to this process now.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to the bill? Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you for the opportunity to speak here to this amendment to send this particular bill to committee. I think the predominant aspect of this particular discussion and indeed the entire discussion surrounding Bill 6 has been one of confusion, one of misinformation, and one whereby farmers, that are directly affected by the legislation that is being proposed, feel that the information that has come from this government, by the very admission of this government, has been inconsistent and inaccurate.

12:30

You know, it is particularly difficult to obtain the trust of any group of people, whether that be farmers or any group that you're dealing with, when you're not consistent in what you're telling them. I want to use, you know, just a few examples of the inconsistencies in the messaging and what has gone out on critical issues with regard to this piece of legislation. The question of paid versus unpaid workers and whether paid or unpaid workers would be subject to workers' compensation and OH and S regulations: the initial information that came from this government was crystal clear

that this legislation would be applicable to both paid and unpaid workers, not just the paid, as now the amendments are saying and now is being said was always the intention.

Another area of confusion was the applicability of the legislation to the work of children on farms. The initial information that went out: I want to stress that this is information that went out well before the first meeting in Grande Prairie on November 26. This was information that was on the website at the time that the legislation was first introduced, the information with regard to the work of children on the farm that caused so much concern amongst farmers, amongst ranchers, many of whom had come through the 4-H system, a system that has been operating in this province for over a century. Indeed, it was felt that 4-H would become something that was threatened by this legislation. Now we're told: no, no, no; that was never the intent. Very clearly, in the information that came out initially with this bill, the work of children and the work of children through 4-H clubs would definitely be affected.

Now the most recent thing that has caused once again not just confusion but, in fact, has now caused division and has caused resentment is the exemption for the members of Hutterite colonies. Now, in my practice I work with Hutterite colonies. I have five colonies in my constituency, and I find, you know, actually, my interaction with them quite interesting. They speak German, and I speak German as well, and it's an interesting interaction that we have. The Hutterite colonies have been very clear on this message, and that is that they do not want a special exemption that separates them from their farming neighbours. They feel a kinship with those who share the land around them, and they do not want to be treated in a way that is special or different from the others that till the land.

These sorts of things are causing the kinds of anger, the kinds of confusion, and the kinds of mistrust that are now the hallmark of this legislation, a legislation that clearly requires the trust of the people, not the kind of distrust that we've seen.

Sadly, we've also seen some myths crop up. You know, one of the myths that I think is the most damaging and one of the myths that I find the most I'll use the word "disgusting" is this myth that farmers don't care about safety and that to suggest that if you're opposed to this bills, somehow you're opposed to farm safety. You know, that is the easy way out. That is the easy way out, that when you're showing opposition to this piece of legislation, you say: oh, well, those that are opposing it just don't care about safety. I can assure you, Madam Speaker, and I think that this is something we should put to rest right now, that whether you're for Bill 6 or against Bill 6, you care about the safety of farmers, you care about the safety of farm workers, and you care about making sure that everybody gets home safely at night. To suggest otherwise is disingenuous and, in my view, lowers the debate on this subject.

Just the same is this myth that workers' compensation is the be-all and end-all and that workers' compensation will somehow ensure that all workers will be adequately protected in the event of an injury. We know that the Premier is on the public record as being extremely critical of workers' compensation in this province. We know that she has said that workers suffer and that workers' health and their dignity and their future are threatened by a Workers' Compensation Board system that does not properly serve injured workers in this province. They've had seven months to correct all of the deficiencies in the Workers' Compensation Board, but that hasn't happened. Despite the fact that this flawed system, or at least the system the Premier says is flawed, is still in place, still has not been changed, still has not been amended in 23 days now, this system will be foisted upon the farmers and the farm workers of this province. I would suggest that the thing to do first is to fix the problem with WCB before you foist it on those that will supposedly receive protections from it.

But there are myths on all sides. You know, the kind of hyperbole and the kind of myths that then spring up is, for example, one that came around on social media. I was discussing this just a couple of hours ago with the minister of agriculture. I find this myth to be incredible, that somehow Bill 6 allows for wind turbines and solar panels to be established on farmland without the permission of the landowner. This somehow is something that Bill 6 allows? I mean, that's preposterous. It's crazy. Unfortunately, Madam Speaker, when the temperature is elevated in this kind of debate, you all of a sudden get these sorts of myths propagated. They're propagated on both sides.

You know, the problem we have now is that we have these amendments, six pages' worth of hastily thrown together amendments to amend a five-page-long bill. You have to just read something into it. When you need six pages' worth of amendments to amend a five-page-long bill, there's something wrong with the original piece of legislation.

Madam Speaker, this piece of legislation has been poorly conceived, poorly communicated, and dismally executed by this government. They are finding out, to their dismay, that, in fact, governing is not an easy thing to do. They're relatively new at this process, so mistakes can be made. We can acknowledge that, you know, to a certain extent some degree of, shall we say, forbearance should be allowed because mistakes can be made. But the way to then realize that it is in a bit of a wreck right now is not to forge ahead, not to go ahead and just step on the gas; it is, in fact, to pause. It is, in fact, to take time to step back and say: "Look, there are some problems here. We need to basically take a step back and take the opportunity to do some real consultation, to bring in some of the experts."

You know, there has been a lot of work done on farm safety in the past, and I would be curious to know from members of the government: were members of the Farm Safety Advisory Council consulted? Were they brought into the discussions? Indeed, were any of the discussions and any of the recommendations that they brought forward in their 2012 report incorporated into this legislation? Not based on what I've seen in the legislation. No. Yet that particular consultation was province-wide, had representation from a wide range of community and commodity groups, and was provided with some of the most cogent and most well-thought-out recommendations on this issue.

Furthermore, our farmers that have come to us at these various meetings, that have communicated to us through e-mail and other means have given us suggestions as to how farm safety could be incented, how it could be encouraged through a number of means. For example, under the Growing Forward 2 program there is a financial incentive to farmers who improve their animal handling facilities. You know, I've experienced this myself in veterinary practice when doing animal handling. Some people have very good facilities, and some people have very poor facilities. Quite frankly, the risk of injury to either the animal or the operator goes up considerably when facility design and facilities are poorly put together. This is something that, wherever possible, we need to avoid.

12:40

There are a number of a means whereby safe practices can in fact be acknowledged, can be recognized, and can be rewarded, but instead of using an encouraging and educational system that moves the farm safety issue forward, we have punitive measures. We have measures that are intended, you know, to cause things like the shutdown of farming operations sometimes at critical times of the year. That does not move this debate forward.

You know, today we had the Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour saying that we want to create a culture of farm safety in this province. That's astounding to me. Create a culture of farm safety? Again, I think this is a tremendous insult to our farmers. What do you think they have had as a culture of farm safety thus far? That's suggesting that there has been no concern about farm safety prior to today. To me, knowing many farmers who are tremendously concerned about farm safety, I think that is a tremendously insulting thing.

Finally, Madam Speaker, there's the whole process of legislating first and then putting regulations together afterwards, a process that the minister of agriculture described as odd, a process that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, when he sat on this side of the House, when he was debating the condo act last year, said was the wrong path to go, that, in fact, legislating before the regulations were worked out was a disservice to condo owners, was a disservice to those who made their residences in condominiums.

Well, Madam Speaker, the situation for farmers is no different than it was for condo owners. This is a bad way to proceed. It does not engender the trust in those individuals that will be directly affected by the legislation that is being discussed.

Madam Speaker, the entire execution of this piece of legislation has been poor from the outset. It has been poorly communicated, and it has been, as I said, very poorly executed. The government should recognize this. I believe they have, given the number of apologies that have already been made by members of this government. If they wish to save face and if they wish to save credibility, not just with rural Albertans but with all Albertans, they would recognize that they have done a ham-handed job on this piece of legislation and they would step back and say: we're going to take a step back and give Albertans the opportunity through a legislative policy committee to properly consult on this piece of legislation. That's the mature and prudent way of doing things.

Now, there will be some that will say: "Oh, you're flip-flopping. Oh, you're blinking." Quite frankly, I think the sign of real leadership is to recognize when things have not been executed well, to recognize when things have not been done in a proper manner, to recognize and to admit it. As we say sometimes: if you mess up, fess up. This is what this government needs to do. This government needs to recognize the poor job that it has done in communicating Bill 6 and in executing Bill 6 and recognize that in doing so, it has insulted the very people on the land that feed us, the very people that provide us not just with the food that we eat but the stewardship of our lands across this province, the very people that built this province and the very people whose pride has been shown over these last few weeks, not just on the front steps of the Legislature, not just in town hall meetings across our province but in hundreds of cards and letters and e-mails that they've sent to legislators right across this province.

Madam Speaker, it behooves us to refer this piece of legislation to a committee so that it can be properly discussed, so that we can have proper consultation, so that all Albertans, not just rural Albertans but Albertans in all parts of the province, can have a proper say and we can properly take a look at this legislation and properly study it and, hopefully, improve it so that it can actually do what it is intended to do.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments under 29(2)(a)? The hon. member.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Speaker. My hon. colleague from the third party, you know, is a veteran of this House, and I'm just curious to know what his thoughts are. He touched on them briefly,

but I thought perhaps he would be happy to comment on a comment that the Premier had made just last year and some of the change of opinion from one side of the House to the other, when she said:

Because this has such an incredibly far-reaching set of consequences to the lives of so many Albertans, I would suggest that this not be a bill that we ram through at, you know, 4 o'clock in the morning as this government is scrambling to get out of the Legislature so they can run off and slap a whole bunch of ineffective bandages [on] their broken political vehicle.

Now, I understand that it's not quite 4 a.m. yet, but just last year she recognized the far-reaching set of consequences that affect the lives of so many Albertans. As we head towards the close of a session, I wondered if you're just surprised as much as I am that she said one thing in opposition and now another in government.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Starke: Well, Madam Speaker, I think it is very safe to say and certainly I think that members of government who once sat here and, certainly, members of the Progressive Conservative caucus that are now sitting in opposition that once were in government will tell you that perspective is everything and that perspective on either side of the House certainly changes. I would suggest to you – and I had this conversation with the hon. Government House Leader – that we have been learning over these last seven months how to sit in opposition, indeed an experience that none of us knew very much about prior to May, in the same way the government is learning how to govern. I would suggest that any suggestion that they can do it right and that everything can be done perfectly right from the get-go is, I think, asking a lot of anyone.

Certainly, the hon. Premier, when she sat in opposition, was very effective in calling for a number of things for government to do in order to improve legislation as it made its way through the House, and she was also very effective in reminding us, when we were in government, that there were certain procedures and that there was a process you had to go through in order to engender the trust and engender the support of, especially, those that were directly affected. I would think that those words would be words that she would do well to remember now that she is in the position whereby she and her government can move forward on these pieces of legislation, that are indeed so profound and so far reaching in their potential effects on our agricultural community, on farmers and ranchers across our province, that she and her government should think twice of doing the selfsame ramming through of legislation, that she was so critical of not more than a year and a half ago.

That is the kind of, I think, learning process that certainly we are doing here in our new role as members of the opposition, as legislators that are interested in developing legislation that is, in fact, good-quality legislation. I would suggest that the government is also interested in passing good-quality legislation, and one of the mechanisms for passing good-quality legislation is indeed having the opportunity for parties to come together to discuss this in a less pressure-packed and in a, shall we say, lower temperature environment, whereby good, solid thoughtful decisions can be made with regard to the legislation that we are discussing.

The Deputy Speaker: Any further questions or comments under 29(2)(a)?

Any other speakers to the bill? Cardston-Taber-Warner.

12:50

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Speaker. This has been a very interesting two weeks. I have to admit that when the bill first came out, I applauded the efforts of the government to try to address farm safety. I remember that as the whole process started, I took a look

at some of the e-mails that started coming in, and there was one gentleman that e-mailed me. It was a very conciliatory e-mail, saying that he applauded the government as well and thought that their intentions were noble.

The second e-mail that I received from the same gentleman was not so conciliatory. It was an e-mail saying, you know: we're trying to contact the government; we're trying to find out what they're trying to accomplish, what their intentions are; we're getting nowhere with these consultations, or I-told-you-so sessions.

Then I got a third letter from the same individual, and he said: I am disgusted by the lack of consultation that we have received from this government. Now, Madam Speaker, I say that because we have seen in two weeks a progression – or maybe I should say a regression – from one voter, where he started out wanting to believe that the government would do the right thing, wanting to believe that they would actually listen to farmers and ranchers, the people who are in the trenches every day. Yet what he found in a short, two-week period is that the government was unwilling to listen to his concerns and even to contact him back.

Now, we've seen over the last couple of weeks a lot of people upset. We have heard letter after letter, we've read letter after letter about farmers who are distraught about the government's intention to bring this forward. It could have started out, Madam Speaker, with a simple: let's send this to committee; let's figure out the best way to be able to move forward so that all people, both the farmers and the farm workers, are taken care of. I think that this five-alarm fire that we have today would never have been here if you had done that. But that was not done. What happened was that an ideological government dug their heels in.

But there's one thing that the government did not realize. They did not realize who they were up against. Farmers are some of the most hardy, hard-working, and can-be-stubborn people in Alberta. You think that you have met a formidable foe? You haven't met a formidable foe until you've met a farmer, because you're not dealing, Madam Speaker, with a farmer that is concerned about how much he's going to make and that you're going to be taking some of his money from his pocketbook. You're dealing with a farmer that is about to lose that which he or she loves to do.

When you go after the heart and you take away a piece of a person's heart, that's when it becomes personal, and this is the reason why I realized farmers are not going to back down on this issue. They have asked, they have pleaded, they have rallied, they have written letters by the thousands, they have indicated their desire to see this bill killed. The message has been crystal clear. They have travelled from all parts of this province to the Legislature to tell you one thing. They're not happy, and they want you to kill the bill. Yet what we hear from this government is that they are not willing to actually listen to Albertans. They're more concerned about being able to bring forward legislation that will help some other program that they have in store. This is unacceptable to farmers and ranchers, this is unacceptable to me, and it's deplorable.

Now, I received another letter that talks about some of these fallacies or some of these misconceptions or miscommunications, maybe we'd even call them, about Bill 6. Well, the first miscommunication is that farmers have been waiting for this bill for 98 years, and this is what he writes. He says:

I've been on the ground for 56 of those 98 years and have definitely not been waiting for this legislation or anything like it. I live on a family farm and know a lot of farmers, none of whom have been waiting for this type of legislation.

There are approximately 43,000 farms in Alberta. Currently there are nearly 50,000 members on the Facebook page "Farmers against NDP Bill 6."

Fifty thousand members on this Facebook page. I think this almost is the number of our farmers.

An Hon. Member: Do you think that all 50,000 of those people are farmers?

Mr. Hunter: Actually, you know, Madam Speaker, I think the member opposite makes a great point, and I'd like to point this out. This is actually not just a farmers' movement. We have found people from the cities that are also marching with them in solidarity. This is actually starting to become a movement rather than just a few rallies. This is important for the government to understand. Lesser things have taken down governments. This could be the start. This could be the start of the undoing of this government. I think that farmers have the resilience to be able to make this happen, and they are not to be taken lightly.

The second miscommunication that he talks about: "Stakeholders have been consulted." Sitting nose to nose with the NDP government, I can say that I have rarely seen true, proper consultation. In this situation, Madam Speaker, there is no difference. They have said that they will consult, but you can't legislate and then consult. That's not the process. The proper process is to consult, to gather information so that you know the best practices and the best way to be able to go forward. If you legislate and then consult, you have a very good chance of making the mistakes that we have seen over and over and over again with this government.

Now, we in the opposition have said this before, and we've been mocked. We are here to help. That does sound like a cliché, but the reality is that we have warned the government numerous time in past bills that if you go down this path, there are going to be bad consequences. We're here again at the same juncture, saying once again that you're going down the wrong path. The people have spoken. You don't represent Albertans when you pass this bill. Now, you do have a majority. Albertans, I believe, would probably say that they made a mistake on May 5, but you have the mandate. I don't discredit that. You have the mandate. But what are you going to do with the mandate? This is the question. I think a lot of Albertans are hoping that you will say: we're going to do the right thing; we're going to do the right thing for Albertans.

In this situation, Madam Speaker, we have people who have been begging for proper consultation, to send this to committee so that we can gather the right information and make sure that farmers and ranchers are taken care of, not just a certain sector but all farmers and ranchers. Good legislation doesn't pick winners and losers. Good legislation is good for all people. This is the type of legislation that we need to work for. This is the type of legislation they sent us to this House to do. When we don't do it, we do our people a real disservice.

The third miscommunication that he talks about:

"Every province . . . has this legislation." B.C., Saskatchewan and at least two Maritime provinces have exemptions for family farms.

Yet I don't think I've actually ever heard the government say that. They continue to skirt the issue. They forget that these other provinces have studied the issues. They've studied the complexity of a family farm and realized that it's different than a commercial operation. They understand that a family farm has issues that they deal with, the economies of scale, that the way that they deal with issues doesn't work the same as a commercial farm and that they can't be treated the same as a commercial farm is treated. Putting a square peg in a round hole doesn't work. This is the situation that we're seeing with this government and this bill.

1:00

Another point that they forget to state is that as a regulated industry Quebec has the least safe standards, safety numbers and that Alberta has some of the safest in terms of numbers.

The fourth miscommunication is:

“Employees have a right to collective bargaining.” Except, evidently, in Ontario where it was struck down by the highest court with respect to farming activities. Collective bargaining makes sense when there is an employer with a large number of employees.

If we had sent this to committee, we would understand that large commercial operations probably do need to have some kind of OH and S and WCB regulations. The problem, again, is that applying the same OH and S and workers’ compensation regulations for a large commercial operation to a small family farm just doesn’t work.

So it was a fantastic letter that this individual sent me.

I would like to maybe take a little different tack, though, and talk a little bit about a book that my family and I read just this summer. It was called *Animal Farm*, by George Orwell, and I thought it was applicable to this discussion today. Now, in that book it talks about the animals taking over the farm from the humans, who are mistreating them. The animals wanted change. They wanted a better life for themselves. Hey, who would ask for anything less? They wanted owners who listened to them and who had their best interests at heart. In the end the animals that took over the farm turned into the exact same people they had been trying to overthrow. They became the people who did not listen to the animals, who mistreated them, and who did not have their best interests at heart.

The similarities of this situation today are startling. I mean, there are literally goats, turkeys, horses, and pigs outside on the steps protesting on a regular basis. [interjections] *Animal Farm* has been reincarnated and become Animal Legislature. Every single person here needs to take a look at themselves and ask if this is who they wanted to be and what they wanted to represent. They need to ask themselves if this is how they hoped they would govern. Every single person needs to put themselves in the shoes of those on the steps of the Legislature and ask what they would hope the government would do. [interjections] I know that if I were in their shoes, I would hope that this government would listen to them.

Now, I can tell by the laughter and the mocking tones from the opposite side there that they probably haven’t read the book, so I would recommend it. [interjections] It would probably be one of their favourite books because it actually talks about socialism in the light that it needs to be cast.

Madam Speaker, I do want to say that I don’t really want to bring this into an issue of arguing about this.

The Deputy Speaker: Under 29(2)(a), a question for the hon. member? Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would love to hear more about this book. Would you mind finishing up your story and relay this book forward to the rest of these wonderful colleagues across the row?

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to my colleague for asking the question. In fact, I was hoping that I would be able to kind of finish my dialogue here. Maybe I could finish here by saying that this is actually, really a serious issue, and I did not want to make light of this. I actually wanted to be able to help the members opposite understand the importance of this issue, and that is that farmers need to be consulted.

The best approach to be able to do that, the best way to do that, Madam Speaker, is to send this to committee. This is what this amendment is for. A referral amendment will send it to committee. The idea that we cannot wait is throwing caution to the wind, and it’s showing the real, true colours of this government, that rather than consulting and then legislating, they are more interested in legislating. The reality is that farmers have been begging to have education, not legislation.

It is extremely important, Madam Speaker, to remind the members opposite that there is absolutely no one that wants better safety on the family farm than the moms and dads who run them, and there is no one who will do it better than they will. Farm families deserve an exemption. I think that if we send it to committee, we would see that, and we would see that they have all the right in the world and that they can have a safe environment for their family farms.

Thank you very much. I appreciate being able to talk about this issue. It is a very important issue to Albertans, not just to our farm families but to all Albertans. This is where our food comes from. This is where hard-working Albertans come from. This is where the bedrock of Alberta comes from. They deserve to have this go to committee.

The Deputy Speaker: Any further comments under 29(2)(a)?

If not, I’ll recognize the hon. Minister of Agriculture and Forestry.

Mr. Carlier: Madam Speaker, I’d like to move to adjourn debate.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Mr. Carlier: Madam Speaker, you know, looking at the clock on the wall, it’s getting very early in the morning. We have made great progress today, so I’d like to move that we adjourn until 10 a.m.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 1:08 a.m. on Tuesday to 10 a.m.]

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The 29th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday morning, December 8, 2015

Day 30

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

First Session

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Payne, Brandy, Calgary-Acadia (ND)
Phillips, Hon. Shannon, Lethbridge-West (ND),
Deputy Government House Leader
Piquette, Colin, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater (ND)
Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie (W)
Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (ND)
Rodney, Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC)
Rosendahl, Eric, West Yellowhead (ND)
Sabir, Hon. Irfan, Calgary-McCall (ND)
Schmidt, Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (ND),
Government Whip
Schneider, David A., Little Bow (W)
Schreiner, Kim, Red Deer-North (ND)
Shepherd, David, Edmonton-Centre (ND)
Sigurdson, Hon. Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (ND)
Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (W)
Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC),
Progressive Conservative Opposition House Leader
Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (W)
Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (W)
Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (ND)
Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (ND)
Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (W)
Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (ND)
van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)
Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND)
Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)

Party standings:

New Democrat: 53 Wildrose: 22 Progressive Conservative: 9 Alberta Liberal: 1 Alberta Party: 1 Independent: 1

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W.J. David McNeil, Clerk	Stephanie LeBlanc, Parliamentary Counsel and Legal Research Officer	Brian G. Hodgson, Sergeant-at-Arms
Robert H. Reynolds, QC, Law Clerk/ Director of Interparliamentary Relations	Philip Massolin, Manager of Research Services	Chris Caughell, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms
Shannon Dean, Senior Parliamentary Counsel/Director of House Services	Nancy Robert, Research Officer	Gordon H. Munk, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms
		Janet Schwegel, Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>

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Rachel Notley	Premier, President of Executive Council
Deron Bilous	Minister of Economic Development and Trade
Oneil Carlier	Minister of Agriculture and Forestry
Joe Ceci	President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance
David Eggen	Minister of Education, Minister of Culture and Tourism
Kathleen T. Ganley	Minister of Justice and Solicitor General, Minister of Aboriginal Relations
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Danielle Larivee	Minister of Municipal Affairs, Minister of Service Alberta
Brian Mason	Minister of Transportation, Minister of Infrastructure
Margaret McCuaig-Boyd	Minister of Energy
Shannon Phillips	Minister of Environment and Parks, Minister Responsible for the Status of Women
Irfan Sabir	Minister of Human Services
Lori Sigurdson	Minister of Advanced Education, Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour

STANDING AND SPECIAL COMMITTEES OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund

Chair: Ms Miller
Deputy Chair: Mr. Nielsen

Cyr	Sucha
Ellis	Taylor
McKitrick	Turner
Renaud	

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Miranda
Deputy Chair: Mr. Schneider

Anderson, S.	Hanson
Carson	Hunter
Connolly	Jansen
Coolahan	Piquette
Dach	Schreiner
Fitzpatrick	Taylor
Gotfried	

Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee

Chair: Ms Gray
Deputy Chair: Ms Payne

Anderson, W.	Miranda
Clark	Nielsen
Cortes-Vargas	Nixon
Cyr	Renaud
Jansen	Starke
Loyola	Swann
McLean	van Dijken
Miller	

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Sweet
Deputy Chair: Mr. Smith

Hinkley	Pitt
Jansen	Rodney
Littlewood	Shepherd
Luff	Swann
McPherson	Westhead
Orr	Yao
Payne	

Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

Chair: Cortes-Vargas
Deputy Chair: Ms Sweet

Bhullar	Nixon
Connolly	Shepherd
Cooper	van Dijken
Horne	Woollard
Kleinsteuber	

Special Standing Committee on Members' Services

Chair: Mr. Wanner
Deputy Chair: Mr. Schmidt

Cooper	Nielsen
Fildebrandt	Nixon
Luff	Piquette
McIver	Schreiner
McLean	

Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Ms McPherson
Deputy Chair: Mr. Connolly

Anderson, S.	Kleinsteuber
Anderson, W.	Littlewood
Babcock	McKitrick
Drever	Rosendahl
Drysdale	Stier
Fraser	Strankman
Hinkley	

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

Chair: Mrs. Littlewood
Deputy Chair: Ms Fitzpatrick

Carson	McPherson
Coolahan	Nielsen
Cooper	Schneider
Ellis	Starke
Hanson	van Dijken
Kazim	Woollard
Loyola	

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Chair: Mr. Fildebrandt
Deputy Chair: Ms Gray

Barnes	Malkinson
Bhullar	Miller
Cyr	Payne
Dach	Renaud
Gotfried	Turner
Hunter	Westhead
Loyola	

Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

Chair: Ms Goehring
Deputy Chair: Mr. Loewen

Aheer	Kleinsteuber
Babcock	MacIntyre
Clark	Rosendahl
Dang	Stier
Drysdale	Sucha
Horne	Woollard
Kazim	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

10 a.m.

Tuesday, December 8, 2015

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Hon. members, let us reflect. Bow your heads. Our Jewish citizens recently celebrated Hanukkah, and last week, with the lighting of the Christmas lights at the Legislature, began the celebration of Christmas, a time of peace. As we continue to celebrate, let us be reminded that the one thing we all have in common is the desire to make our province a better place for generations to come. Let each of us reflect on how we can individually and collectively achieve this goal of a greater good here in this Chamber.

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 6

Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act

Mr. Cooper moved that the motion for second reading be amended to read that Bill 6, Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

[Adjourned debate December 7: Mr. Carlier]

The Speaker: The hon. member of the third party.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm happy to rise on Bill 6. I'm going to look at it here. I'm going to try not to break the rule of not having a prop, but I'm not sure that the amendments of Bill 6 can legitimately be considered a prop; it's something that we all have.

Mr. Speaker, six pages.

Mr. Nixon: Longer than the original bill.

Mr. McIver: It's longer than the original bill, as my colleague says. Mr. Speaker, this is not an amendment. The government has shredded, essentially, the original bill and brought forward something completely inconsistent, completely different, completely new. There's just no denying that. The only thing the government hasn't gotten around to doing is actually admitting all of that because if they did that, then they might have to say: let's actually put this thing on pause, let's go back to talk to farmers and ranchers, and let's do it right. Why wouldn't they?

You know what? I'll give the government credit. What's in the amendment is way more consistent with what their ministers have been saying, at least for the last week. Just forget for a minute what they were saying the week before; that was completely different. But in the last week the government has tried to get their act together, in fairness, and struggled, and we'll continue to taunt them about that. But, in fairness, they tried to get their act together, and they've struggled, and what's in the amendment is more consistent with what the ministers have been saying, at least for the last few days. So that's a good thing. We're late to the party – we're late to the party – but the government is trying to get its act together.

But it does really highlight how there's no possible way, Mr. Speaker, that the government can say that they've consulted with farmers and ranchers on any bill that includes this amendment. Why are we all sure about that? Because the amendment was just dropped on the world yesterday, which means the government ministers, probably somebody in their staff, wrote it on a napkin a week ago or four or five days ago, had it typed up nice, sent it to Parliamentary Counsel, and probably the government members and the speakers at best saw it three days ago. If they said five or six days ago, I would believe that. If they said a week, I wouldn't believe it, simply because that's just how it works. In fairness to the government – I'm giving them lots of credit this morning – they haven't even said lately that they have consulted with farmers and ranchers on this amendment because they couldn't have. There has just not been time. We don't blame them for that. There just hasn't been time. So it does actually blow them out of the water their argument that we've talked to people already.

The other thing that government said yesterday in their media conference – they said a lot of things, but I'm going to highlight right now from the notes that I took directly while I was sitting there listening to the two ministers. The minister of labour said that we are going to, after we pass this bill, wait 18 months to two years before we put the regulations in place. Their words, Mr. Speaker, on the record. I'm sure they won't deny them because they're good, honest people. Their words are that they're going to wait 18 to 24 months.

If they're going to take 18 to 24 months, which might be a good idea, just for the record, it does actually put to rest their concern that the previous government wasn't moving fast enough. But it also might actually indicate that the government, having dealt with this bill now, having had all the trouble they've had, having people all over Alberta angry with them – I mean, I've got well north of 3,000 e-mails in my constituency office angry about what the government is doing in Bill 6. I can only imagine how many e-mails the government ministers and the Premier have on this. It occurs to me, Mr. Speaker, again, in fairness to the government, that maybe they're starting to get it. Maybe. We'll know based on their behaviour in the next day or two, but maybe they are.

But, Mr. Speaker, I'm saying to the government that if they're going to spend 18 to 24 months anyway, why not spend six to 12 of those months talking to farmers and ranchers, which is really what they're asking? Why not let them be heard? Why not talk to those farmers and ranchers, show them the bill as it would look if the amendment was passed, find out what the farmers and ranchers can teach the government about what's wrong with it, take credit for what the farmers and ranchers may give the government credit for that's good in it, come back with a bill with the full support of the farming and ranching community, high-five, shake hands, get our picture taken, and have a good bill?

There is a path to success for the government, and it fits on their timelines, Mr. Speaker. Since they've already said that they're going to spend 18 to 24 months, they could actually get it done on their own timelines, look good, force us on this side of the House to stand up and vote for the bill that they could come up with and say nice things about it and be supportive as long as they actually listen to the farmers and ranchers when they're doing this. There's a great opportunity for a great win for the government available if – if, Mr. Speaker, a big if – they will put their pride in their pocket just a little bit and say: you know, we didn't get this right. But they've got a great defence, and I'll give it to you right now. You already know what it is. It says: "But we listened to Albertans. We recognize that they are our boss. We want to do the right thing for Albertans. We want people to be safe on farms. We want people to

be safe on ranches. We want to put legislation in place that farmers and ranchers will support.”

Mr. Speaker, if farmers and ranchers have the opportunity to help build the legislation and if they're truly listened to, they will support it. The government could probably save a bunch of money after that on inspectors because you'll have a bunch of farmers and ranchers that'll be obeying the legislation because they support it. Let's face it. They're going to obey most of it if not all of it anyway because they are law-abiding citizens, but wouldn't it be nice if it wasn't painful for them to obey the law? Wouldn't it be nice if the law made sense because their input was heavily considered when the law was written? There's a big win here, folks. There's a big win available for this government and on their timeline. Again I'll go back because I just can't get past that 18 to 24 months. It was music to my ears. It means the government has time to do the right thing.

Now, the wrong thing, Mr. Speaker, would be to ram this through. You know what? I'm sure it's well intentioned. I'm not accusing anybody of anything. But the wrong thing to do would be to ram this through and then talk to farmers and ranchers and maybe find out that some of the common-sense things that you could only know by working on a farm or managing a farm or working on a ranch or managing a ranch are somehow inconsistent with what's in black and white in the amendment. Wouldn't that be a shame? Wouldn't it be a shame if the government's best intentions were unable to be fulfilled because they were too stubborn to wait to put the legislation through?

Wouldn't it be better – it really would – if the government said: “We're going to spend the 18 to 24 months before”? Because – you know what? – when you pass legislation, it becomes cement. Yes, you can come back to the Legislature and chip away the cement and change it – governments do it all the time; that's what we do here – but wouldn't it be better if we didn't have to do that? Wouldn't it be better if, before we put the legislation in cement, the people that work the farms, that work the ranches, that feed the rest of Alberta and feed the rest of the world – Mr. Speaker, Alberta farmers and ranchers produce way more food, way more livestock than Albertans can possibly eat because they are industrious, they work hard, and they're gifted because they're in Alberta, and it doesn't get any better than being in Alberta. It really doesn't. You know what? We're blessed. Alberta has been successful because we're blessed. We've also been successful because the people in Alberta are industrious, hard working, honest, entrepreneurial, excellent people. Partner that up with a government that cares and listens, and who knows how far we could go?

10:10

The listening. I'm sure the government cares. I don't agree with the government a lot. I disagree with them on a lot of things, but I've never doubted that they care. I've never doubted that they want to do the right thing. It's just that sometimes they're a little stubborn. Right now they're a little stubborn, Mr. Speaker. They're a little ideological. But there's still time, and that's why I'm on my feet. I'm just trying to help them understand how instead of being the villains of a story, they could be the heroes of the story. It's a pretty simple choice, and it's pretty easy to shift gears from villain to hero just by listening and talking to the people that you care about, the farmers and ranchers, talking about them being successful, talking about them being safe, talking about their families being safe, talking about their children being safe, talking about having coverage that employees may need and want. There are so many wins available. I can't stop talking about it because it's just so huge.

Mr. Speaker, it's important to have this conversation because there's misinformation out there. I saw this morning on the news

before I came in that the leader of the Alberta Federation of Labour had a bit of a media event, and at the event the leader of the AFL laid on a desk or a table or a podium 112 pairs of gloves, representing, I believe, what the news story said were 112 people that have died in farm and ranch events. At least as far as I can tell, I'm not sure that that union leader is keeping up because if he read the amendment that was put on the table yesterday, it did some of the right things. It excluded farm and ranch families, and it excluded Hutterite colonies. So if you do all of that, then half or two-thirds of those pairs of gloves would have had to come off that desk because that wouldn't apply to the current legislation.

That doesn't mean that these changes are bad. I'm not saying that. All I'm saying is that at the media event the AFL had, they haven't kept up with what the government is doing because the 112 pairs of gloves are in no way consistent with what the legislation is that the government is trying to put on the table. It isn't. In fact – and I'm trying to be as generous as I can – it's not consistent with the numbers that the Premier has been using in the House about farm and ranch deaths over the last few days either. With the amendments – and the amendments seem to be an improvement, in fairness – the legislation is in no way consistent with the numbers that the Premier has been using in the House about farm and ranch deaths and injuries. When you consider all of that, it really might be time to take a breath and start over, Mr. Speaker.

You know what? Farmers and ranchers have had their feelings hurt, and rightly so. I hate to raise it except that it's important. The labour minister said yesterday at the news conference – and I quote based on what I wrote down, so if there's an error there, it's all mine. But I was sitting right there, so I'm pretty sure I'm right. She said: we are creating a culture of safety. Mr. Speaker, farmers and ranchers should have been really offended by that. The assumption from that silly statement – I was going to use another word, but let's go with “silly” – is that farmers and ranchers have no culture of safety now. I couldn't think of a crazier, less respectful thing for a minister of the Crown, for the government of Alberta, to say in front of a media conference and a microphone, to suggest that farmers and ranchers don't care about safety. I'm sure that probably the minister regrets it. Nonetheless, I haven't heard an apology for it yet, and I think that's overdue.

You know how that minister could apologize and kind of make it right? By saying: “We are going to take the time to talk to farmers and ranchers. We're going to take this legislation off the table. We are going to respect the hundred-plus years of history, the hundred-plus years of caring about safety, the hundred-plus years of feeding Albertans, the hundred-plus years of caring about the safety of your children by stopping and listening to you, the experts.” As bad as it is, it can be made better, Mr. Speaker. It's really quite simple how to do it.

We're at a place, you know – and, again, I'm trying to give the government as much credit as possible because they haven't done everything wrong. I think, actually, they're coming to the conclusion that the previous government didn't do everything wrong. They probably still think they did a lot of things wrong, but I think they've finally come to the conclusion that they didn't do everything wrong. So I'll try to give equal credit to the current government. They are coming around. They just haven't quite crossed the divide where they can be the hero of the story instead of the villain.

I'll tell you what. The other thing that I heard a couple of government private members say the other day was: well, if we do this, the farmers and ranchers won't remember in three and a half years. [interjections] I know. I know. It's hard to say it with a straight face, but I actually did hear that, and I'm not going to bust the members on the other side that said that because I'm a little

afraid for their future in the party that they've chosen. But, Mr. Speaker, they don't know farmers and ranchers very well. Three and a half years? I think that if they are mistreated, it will be 30 years, and they'll still remember.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Under 29(2)(a), any questions to the Member for Calgary-Hays? The Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for the comments from the hon. member. He alluded to a demonstration that had occurred yesterday with regard to 112 gloves that were laid on a table. Of course, I had heard about this and had made the decision to go and see what this demonstration was about. Essentially, what they had done was that since 2009 for each fatality that had taken place in the agricultural industry, there was a set of gloves. They went a step further and broke them up into each separate year, so in 2009 they had a stack of gloves, in 2010, and so forth. I have to admit that it was a little unsettling. Of course, the other thing that the hon. member had mentioned was that, you know, based on certain criteria, maybe we could take out half of those gloves. You might be right; you might not be. I don't know. But I'd still like to know.

Mr. Speaker, even if we did take out half the gloves, there are still 60 gloves left, 60 fatalities, 60 families where their loved one did not come home. So I have trouble looking inside of myself and thinking about taking away a potential safety net and having to stand in front of those families and tell them I had a chance to fix this, that I had a chance to offer you something.

The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane had mentioned about a family whose wife spent six years in litigation to finally get a decision. What was the result? They destroyed a farm. Mr. Speaker, I'm just wondering if the hon. member might be willing to tell me just how many families he'd be willing to stand in front of and say: we had a chance to put in those safety nets, but we decided to wait over the next year. And based on those figures, there was an average of 18 people. Is the hon. member prepared to stand in front of up to 18 people and say, "We could have had those there, but we decided not to"?

Mr. McIver: I'm glad the hon. member raised this because it does really put this to a point where it belongs here. Unfortunately, he's left himself open because I would say: why haven't you acted when there's a person a day dying from fentanyl? We point that out in this House every day. Every single day.

Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's own party says that they're going to wait 18 to 24 months, and I agree with that as long as they listen to farmers and ranchers before they do it. Every life is important. Every farm family is important. Every injury is important. It all matters. But legislation by itself doesn't fix it.

10:20

Alberta's injury and death statistics are as good as other provinces', and we don't have the legislation, so there's no magic bullet here. I'm not sure. This legislation might be a good idea, particularly to listen to farmers and ranchers, even though it may not save a single life, and it may not save a single injury. There are some good elements to it if you just take the time to talk to farmers and ranchers and get it right.

I'm not even asking you to go slower than your own schedule. Your minister said: 18 to 24 months. I'm saying: use them wisely, talk to farmers, talk to ranchers, get their support, get their buy-in, and then maybe we'll all have a chance of helping them save a life or an injury. Even then there's no guarantee that we'll save a single life or an injury, but your best chance is if you talk to farmers and

ranchers, bring them onboard, get their support, have them understand it, and work with them to put in things to educate them and their kids and their families.

You can be the heroes of this story. Don't be the villains. Be the heroes, please. You've got a chance. Your own timeline is 18 to 24 months. I'm running out of time, but that's my appeal to you. We're not even asking you to slow down. We're just asking you to win instead of lose when you do this. Please win. I shouldn't be telling you that. I should say that I want you to lose so that we can get rid of you. But you know what? I love Alberta. I love farmers and ranchers. I love the three meals a day that farmers and ranchers provide for me.

This government could be the hero of the story if you'll just slow down and listen. Please do that.

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

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a privilege to rise and speak against Bill 6. Just with regard to building a culture of safety . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, it's to the amendment that you're speaking?

Mr. van Dijken: Exactly.

The Speaker: Okay.

Mr. van Dijken: We need to send this to committee. We need to take the time to do it right. We need to consult with the farmers and ranchers. We need to do it right. As the hon. member before me stated, when we do legislation poorly, you put legislation into concrete, and you chip away at it and chip away at it and chip away at it to try to get it right after the fact. We need to do it right now.

How do you build a culture of safety on the farms? I'm going to allude to some of my experience with building a culture of food safety on farms. Alberta quality pork is a program that's focused on food safety. How did this program get built? Over two years of consultation with producers and with industry and with processors. Take the time to do the consultation. Get the farmers to help build the legislation, build the regulations, and then after the fact, you already have buy-in because they've had the opportunity to put their words into the process. They've had the opportunity and the respect that's due to them, being part of the industry, to actually build something that will help build the culture of food safety.

We can do the same thing here if we do it right. But if we do it wrong, there's going to be continual push-back and more push-back and more push-back. So it's time to wake up and recognize the problem that is in front of this House at this time. The government needs to start to listen and recognize that they have to get to the country and consult with the farmers and ranchers, that this legislation has the largest impact on.

Now to my notes. Mr. Speaker, Bill 6 is a bill with sweeping changes in one of Alberta's most important segments of the economy, the agricultural sector. My family and I are extremely proud and thankful to be farmers in Alberta. As recent history has shown, with protests over the closing days of November and into December, this bill has been the subject of considerable ire for many thousands of Albertans who have long and proud histories in this noble occupation of farming and agriculture. I'm proud to represent so many voices who might not otherwise be heard in the process of creating legislation intended to enhance safety for farming families and their workers, although with all the deficiencies pointed out today and to date and with the constant

changes being introduced, I would question if safety on Alberta farms is really the true intention of this bill.

As I stated yesterday in my member's statement, the Premier has chosen to introduce a bill so wide open to interpretation that no Albertan knows what her true intentions are and what will come next. Bill 6 legislation does not exist on all farms in every other jurisdiction in Canada, as the Premier would have us believe. As the minister stated on November 27, the legislation as it's put forward today gives them the flexibility to develop common-sense regulations. Essentially, Mr. Speaker, it gives them the flexibility to do whatever they want to after they get the bill passed, and that is concerning.

I'd like to share some words spoken by the hon. Minister of Economic Development and Trade in May 2014, when he sat in opposition.

The other issue, quite frankly, is that gender is not something that should be left to the whim of the cabinet to decide behind closed doors, without consultation and without assurance of proper consultation. I would imagine that there are several members of this House that are quite surprised to learn that these types of decisions will be made behind closed doors and through regulation, not through legislation.

While his specific comments are directed towards a separate issue, that does not make the words ring any less true for any other group that will be affected by the enactment of particular legislation. In fact, this government while in opposition had plenty to say about the importance of crafting transparent legislation out here in the open debate of the Legislature instead of behind-closed-doors-solely-with-cabinet regulations.

Albertans who work on farms are no less deserving of legislation that is properly drafted with specific input from experts from around Alberta, from the industry, whether it's oil or gas, manufacturing, the service industry, or any other, and, in this case, agriculture. These Albertans do not deserve pronouncements from on high, to have specifics sorted out through regulations when we are capable of doing so much better.

Here's another quote for you, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Member, for the question. We have heard concerns from care providers, service providers, and PDD individuals that these regulations were brought in without proper consultation. What we have done is extended the compliance deadline for another six months. We are in the process of putting together a consultation plan, which I will have more to say about fairly soon.

Thank you.

If those words sound familiar, Mr. Speaker, they should. They were spoken in question period on November 16, just three weeks ago. The hon. Human Services minister recognized that the House had failed in its duty to provide Albertans with the best law possible and was seeking additional time for proper consultation with those people with expertise in dealing with PDD individuals and their needs. As with so many issues, they certainly talked up the importance of consultation on that matter.

So I'm curious, Mr. Speaker, as to why this government is willing to risk getting it wrong on this piece of legislation. Instead, they should take the proper time and get specific industry knowledge up front so that regulations aren't necessary to define the tone and shape of the law, but the law itself can be made to do so. If we get it right, the law will be able to tell us what the true intent of the law is, not where we're continually coming after the fact, trying to explain, trying to identify what our true intent was. It just leads to a lot of miscommunication if we do not have proper legislation in place.

10:30

The MLAs from the NDP who had served their constituents in the days before May 5 of this year, so vocal in their criticisms of how legislation was introduced and pushed through without proper consultation, are now even going against their own previous actions to correct this improper practice.

The Minister of Treasury Board and Finance travelled Alberta to gather input from Albertans as to what should be part of Budget 2015, Mr. Speaker, an act that the government wasted no time promoting with great fanfare. In fact, I understand that this government is so committed to promoting their budget to Albertans that they have decided to throw a great deal of tax dollars at that project.

One of the inputs to climate change and royalty reviews is where we saw the creation of specific panels in order to give Albertans a chance to voice their opinions on these major issues. This is a major issue in the agricultural community. This is their livelihood. This is their families. This is their culture. We are playing with their culture. We cannot afford to get this wrong.

Consider that these things were things the government had campaigned on and not hidden, secretive platform planks. If it's worth consulting with the energy industry and other affected stakeholders on these issues that we knew about, how much more important it is that we should consult on this legislation, that has blindsided so many.

Of the panels created, one has reported; the other is due to release its findings by the end of December. On November 26, Mr. Speaker, the hon. Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour was quoted in the *Calgary Herald*, saying, "It's really important for us to hear from Albertans and we want to make sure there's enough spaces for everybody who's interested."

The speed with which Bill 6 is being pushed through this Assembly, then being enacted before the end of 2015 appears to be just another manifestation of orange being the new blue. Ideals and principles are fine until you gain political power, it seems; then do whatever you see best fits heedless and regardless of the consequences.

Mr. Speaker, not a single person will argue the importance of safe operations, not in this House and certainly not out there on family farms. That being said, with so many people standing up and stating that they have not been consulted on an issue that affects their very livelihood, their families, their communities, and their culture, it causes me great concern that full and proper advance consultation with the industry is not what is wanted in this House. The agricultural sector has been singled out and treated differently than how this government treated others before it in their short tenure as leaders of this province.

Thirteen government MLAs represent constituents who have significant interests in the agricultural community. I can scarcely believe that these thousands of concerned and vocal citizens, the ones we have all heard out in front of this building, are only present in ridings represented by opposition members. I know you are hearing the same things I am, and I only wish that these government backbenchers would show the courage to speak up for their concerned constituents. The responsibilities of the office of MLA are to represent all of your constituents, not just the ones you agree with politically.

This bill needs to go to committee so that actual industry experts, the people, the stakeholders involved can be involved in making sure these issues get dealt with correctly. This bill needs to be given the proper time for its creation and passage so that the voices of all Albertans are heard before we get into this building to do our work, not after. The alternative, passing Bill 6 prior to such input, has a

very high potential to cement in the minds of farmers and agricultural sector workers that the NDP government is every bit as paternalistic and patronizing of the people subject to the laws it enacts as the PC government they swept from power. Albertans didn't choose orange to be the new blue. Albertans made a change so that things could be done better. Please do it better. Send this bill to committee. Help to rebuild the trust in the agricultural sector in this province.

Trust, Mr. Speaker, is built out of mutual respect, and what is being voiced at this time from the agricultural community, from the farmers and the ranchers that this bill will have the most effect on, is a segment that doesn't feel like they've been heard, that they have not been respected, that their views and their opinions are not of validity here. All they're saying is to respect the people, respect the communities that they come from, respect the culture that has developed over 100 years in this province, and come and talk to them. Come and consult before legislating this type of legislation, essentially pushing it down their throats.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are there any questions under 29(2)(a)?
St. Albert.

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock. You talked a little bit about the consultation work around persons with developmental disabilities and how it is that a government could take on that process and not a process similar with Bill 6. Well, the reality is that the legislation for persons with developmental disabilities was already passed. What was not done by the previous government was consultation on the regulations, and as a result the regulations do not reflect the needs of the people. I believe that's what we're trying to get to and what we're trying to do here, to get through this so we can actually have meaningful consultations with the experts that you continuously pop up and tell us about, and then we can craft regulations that work.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. van Dijken: I think what's missing here, Mr. Speaker, is the fact that we're developing legislation, and the very people that it's going to impact the most, the farmers and the ranchers, have not had that due consultation. To be quite honest with you, with this government being in power for seven months, they need to start building an environment of trust. The people in the country, the way this is being forced down their throats, are essentially feeling like this government does not respect them, and they don't trust this government to do what's right for them.

There's a lack of experience in the cabinet, there's a lack of experience in the caucus of the current government that would allow common sense to come to regulation that will be developed in the future, and I believe a lot of that common sense comes from experience in the agricultural community itself. A lot of the safety programs that are already in place were developed over years and years of consultation within the industry-specific groups, whether they're the beef operations, the dairy operations, the chicken operations, the hog operations, the grain operations. These are things that are learned over many, many years, handed down from generation to generation to generation. A lot of people don't recognize that, and these are things that our farming communities do not want to lose through this legislation, so it's really critical that we have the ability to continue to operate in a way that continues to hand those safety culture aspects down through the generations.

In order to do this properly, this government needs to regain the trust of those people in the country. They need to build respect, start

to get respect, do the proper consultation, do what is right here, be heard. The people want to be heard, and right now it's as if the people are not being heard.

I would really try to encourage this government to slow down, as we've heard from so many of the groups already through letters. The municipalities are concerned. The very industry-specific lobby groups, associations that represent industry are concerned that this is going way too fast and that they need to have more time to actually digest what is being thrown at them and to understand what implications will come from this.

I really encourage the government to take a look at bringing this and putting this before committee to get it right and then proceed. If we don't listen to the people, it's going to be very hard to get the people's buy-in after the fact.

10:40

The Speaker: Under 29(2)(a), questions?

Mr. Nixon: The member talked about trust. I'll be quick because I know he's running out of time. That's what I heard when I was back home. One of the reasons I think we need consultation is how much this government has lost trust with the people this legislation affects. One of the things that they're most upset about is that this Premier has stood inside this Assembly, Mr. Speaker, for the last couple of weeks and continued to stand up and say that she's trying to rectify a great wrong that farmers and ranchers have been doing to their employees for the last hundred years, which is an absolutely ridiculous and insulting thing to say to my neighbours and friends. I would like my good friend, who is a farmer, to comment on how that is making people feel back home.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you for the question. I think it has everything to . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The Leader of Her Majesty's Official Opposition.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a great privilege to be able to rise today and speak a little bit about the referral motion on Bill 6. I don't have a lot of time. I do have some information that I would like to share, and I'll try to share as much as I possibly can.

I think that what has been said in this House has been very clear, specifically relating to consultation and making sure that Albertans feel they actually participate in this process. Today I will be dealing with several matters relating to this bill and to the referral. Specifically, I will introduce it. I will take a position on the bill, Mr. Speaker, and on why I can't support this particular bill. I will go through the specifics of the bill relating to employment standards, labour relations, occupational health and safety, and, of course, the WCB portion of the bill.

Then I will talk a little bit about jobs that are exempt from WCB legislation. You'll be surprised. There are over 170 different categories of jobs exempt from WCB legislation in Alberta, including, of course, unions, Mr. Speaker. I don't know if you're aware of it, but many unions are exempted, including the Alberta Federation of Labour. It's kind of odd that they would come forward with such a dramatic pleasure statement on this particular bill, endorsing it and thinking it's so great, when they themselves are exempt from WCB. Why they think it should be on farmers' heads I'm not quite sure. If it's good enough for farmers, why is it not good enough for them? Why, indeed, would the government take a position, especially if they themselves are exempt from that? I will of course go through that with some interest because I've gone through it a couple of times already and was surprised to see all of

the exemptions that are currently in place for WCB in Alberta. Then, of course, I will deal with the number of farms currently in NDP-held ridings and how those people feel about it.

I don't know if you're aware, Mr. Speaker, but I had the pleasure last night, speaking of referral motions, to get somewhere in the neighbourhood of over 16,000 people on a phone call last night, all from NDP ridings, all from ridings that are held by the NDP that are farmers, and I can tell you clearly that the amount of polling that was done on that particular phone call was 88 to 92 per cent relating to the questions we asked. Some of those questions were on how they felt about this bill and how they felt about consultation on this bill. To see, you know, first of all, that we would poll exclusively NDP-held ridings – NDP-held ridings, Mr. Speaker – and that we would get in the 90s, for most of the questions, against the bill, certainly I would think the government should take notice of that if nothing else.

In fact, I see the Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater. I know that member and his father. I would just say to him that, clearly, people in his particular riding were contacted, and they were very excited and very negative about this bill. I would suggest that he take the opportunity along with the other 11 MLAs from the NDP side, that represent more than 11,000 Albertans, and talk to the Premier, talk to the House leader, talk to the three or four members of the NDP that actually have any experience whatsoever in this place and that had the opportunity before to legislate and to listen to their constituents and to persuade them that maybe, just maybe, they should listen to Albertans and have the opportunity to send this particular bill to committee.

The reason I say that, Mr. Speaker, is especially because the original position of the government and the Premier was that this was a great bill and that it was overdue, that this bill was absolutely necessary. They came forward with the bill, and they trumpeted how good the bill was and how wonderful it was and how great it was going to be for Alberta and Alberta's future and how Alberta and the farmers and ranchers in Alberta had been waiting for 95 or a hundred years.

Actually, Mr. Speaker, you may not know this, but my family has been farming in Alberta for over a hundred years. That's right. We have one of those homesteads down in Michichee that has actually been farming for over a hundred years. My father was a rancher, and my mother was a farmer. So I do have some understanding of it, not nearly as much as the people that actually farm and ranch today, with all the challenges they go through. As my father used to say to me when I asked him why he got out of ranching: son, if I won \$10 million, I'd ranch until it was all gone. It's a tough life. It's not that easy to work on the land, to be a farmer and rancher. To have things thrown in front of you is just not the way to do it in Alberta, especially not without proper consultations.

Mr. Speaker, if this was such a great bill when it was originally brought forward – what I find difficult is that the bill was originally five pages long. Five pages. And it was a great bill, right? The Premier said that it was a great bill. Her entire caucus said that it was a great bill. They couldn't understand why we would speak against it, why we would come to this House and stay until 1:30 in the morning. It's because, as you know, the only power that we have in this place as opposition is the power to speak. We have the power to speak, and of course the government has the power to legislate. They have the power to call the bills when they want, to speak on what bills they want, and to allocate time on what bills they want. They can decide at any time to pull this bill, and the only opportunity that we have to speak to the bill is, like now, to stand up at 10 to 11, after we were here until 1:30 in the morning, and speak to the bill and to try to slow the process down so that farmers and ranchers can have their say because they haven't had their say.

Whether it be on the Legislature steps outside here, where there were a thousand people and then 1,500 people – we've had three different rallies here. There have been rallies and protests right across the province, in every corner of the province, hundreds upon hundreds and thousands upon thousands of farmers and ranchers coming to tell people that they're not happy. Clearly, some people have said, as my reports have been, that most of these rallies were gong shows. Basically, they were come-and-be-told meetings. You come, and you're going to be told what you're going to get as far as legislation, without any ability to have input to change that.

If it was such a good bill when it originally came out with five pages but now the government has come forward with six pages of amendments – now, how can you say that it was such a good bill before if you're now bringing forward more pages of amendments than the original bill was? Mr. Speaker, they've had seven months to come up with the bill, the five pages that were so wonderful that farmers were going to bend over backwards to implement immediately because it was going to be so good for farmers and ranchers. Then they took a couple of days and came out with six pages of amendments to that wonderful bill.

Mr. Speaker, the other part about this bill that's so interesting – you know, I couldn't believe it at first, so I actually had my staff highlight it and make them different colours. I just couldn't believe that there are, I'll say, two pages to the legislative part of Bill 6, that can be changed by legislation only. That means that if they want to change those parts, which are two pages, they have to come back to this place, and they have to deal with the Wildrose caucus again, who, of course, is a strong opposition and will represent farmers and ranchers, and then we can debate it, and we can bring it back to farmers and ranchers and see how they feel about these parts of the bill, those two pages of the bill that have to go through legislative changes to be changed. They have to go through the legislative process, and again we would have more opportunity to have time to debate this bill. We'd have time to talk to farmers and ranchers and go across the province to hold more rallies and more town halls so that we can understand what ranchers and farmers want.

Mr. Speaker, the disturbing part is that when you look at the bill, there are one, two, three, four parts of the bill that are shaded in a different colour, and those four parts are regulations. Now, most Albertans don't realize this, but you can change regulations any time you want. Those people over there can do it without even talking to us, without doing anything related to consultation, not even letting farmers and ranchers know. That's not unlike what they're proposing in this bill. Believe it or not, they're going to make this bill active as law on January 1 but have no regulations, so farmers don't even know what's going on. We're sitting across here, just a few feet away from them, and we still don't know what's going on. We still don't know the specifics of the amendments or how they're planning on going forward with regulation, yet in the bill they've put four pages of regulations that can be changed any time they want without any notice to Albertans whatsoever. Any time. You know, that is not democracy. That's not the rule of law. That's not making sure that Albertans get the opportunity to speak their mind.

10:50

Now, we have over 40,000 family farms in Alberta. They're spread all over Alberta. I think there are 43,000 family farms. Now this bill is going to change their lives. For multigenerational farms it's going to change their entire culture, how they believe that they should do things. The thing that I want to bring to the attention of the government is that those 43,000 family farms probably represent over 200,000 Albertans, voting-age Albertans. Yes. That's right: 200,000 voting-age Albertans that are very upset right

now. I want this government to have an opportunity to go again in another election and actually not be devastated, because that's what I see, clearly, is going to happen. They're ignoring farms. They're ignoring farmers and ranchers. I've heard from a number of people in Edmonton and Calgary, in Fort McMurray, in many communities right across this province that they're attached to the farm. Their uncle or their grandfather or maybe just a friend has a farm, and they have fond memories of going to the farm and milking a cow or tossing bales. I remember, Mr. Speaker, because I did it. I remember working on a farm very hard, long hours. It's not an easy thing to do, to have that kind of constant, necessary attention.

Now, I did have a speech, Mr. Speaker, but I don't think I need it today because I'm pretty passionate about this. I'm concerned. You know, in grade 10 I remember going to Vilna, Alberta, just outside of Smoky Lake, having a good friend there with a farm and working on that farm from time to time. They had animals. I asked them a question in my 16-year-old lack of understanding. I said: "When do you go on vacation?" "Vacation? Well, there's no such thing as a vacation for farmers. You have to hire somebody to go on a vacation." Hire somebody. You have to hire somebody to go on a vacation.

Mr. Mason: If you have animals.

Mr. Jean: I hear from the House leader on the other side: if you have animals. Well, that's not the case of any farm I've ever been on. All farms need attention because farmers are the stewards of the land, not just the animals but the land. They take care of the land, and they have to be there.

When I ask a farmer about when they go on vacation, they say to me: "Well, the only people that would be capable of running my farm, of taking care of my animals, my livestock, or what I'm growing is another farmer, and it's going to take me just as long to teach them what to do on my farm as it would for me to do it myself." Of course, they would have to pay that other farmer. And who's going to take care of that other farmer's farm? That's the problem. That's why it's a cultural issue.

The government doesn't understand the cultural issue. They don't understand that these people work together at calving season or branding season or when there's harvest. They work together. They trade labour, and sometimes they pay people. They keep track of hours. They T4 those people. In fact, most farmers T4 themselves and – surprise, surprise – they T4 their spouses. Do you know why they do that? Because they're sophisticated. They know what they're doing. They get accounting advice. They get professional advice. They get advice on how best to divide their income because, Mr. Speaker, as you know because you're from a farming area, farming is not something that pays great dividends. It's not something that pays a lot of money. I don't see a lot of multibillionaire farmers out there. Sometimes there are increases and decreases in land that enable somebody to take advantage of a situation like that, but the truth is that many farmers work 12-, 14-, 18-hour days in order to do what's necessary for their farm to be viable.

I remember a time not that long ago, just 10 years ago, when farmers in Alberta were discussing how difficult it was to stay afloat. I remember in 2005, Mr. Speaker, when I was a Member of Parliament, speaking to farmers in Athabasca-Redwater. They were crying to me, this couple. They were in their 50s, and they were crying. They were talking about how they couldn't decide whether they were going to be able to go to church that Sunday because they couldn't afford the fuel because of the situation with farming in Alberta. Now, it's turned around a little bit, but it hasn't turned around that far. That's why I'm very concerned about the four pages

of regulations in this proposed act, this bill, that could be changed by them at any time whatsoever, without any consultation, without any ability for anybody to understand what's going on until OHS officers come to their farm and shut them down. There are 43,000 farmers.

They say that they've been waiting a hundred years or 95 years to get this in. Well, what's wrong with another 95 days, just a couple more months so we can have proper consultations, so we can talk to Albertans, farmers and ranchers, OH and S officers, WCB officers, people that are going to be right in this process, not just unions? I mean, I know they have an ideological agenda. They want unions to be on everything. They want unions to be on big farms, small farms, medium-size farms. They want unions everywhere, Mr. Speaker. We know that's their ideological agenda. But, truly, this is a way of life. This is something that is very important to Albertans, and we need to make sure that Albertans are properly consulted.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I did do some research last night. I sat on the Finance Committee federally in Ottawa, and referral motions are, of course, very consistent processes in Houses right across Canada, legislative Houses. This is a parliamentary democracy. Well, at least you'd think so, not necessarily in this case because democracy has gone from this place as far as this government is concerned, in my opinion. [some laughter] I hear them laughing on the other side, but there are only three or four people over there that have any experience whatsoever with any form of government except for looking from the outside in. You can laugh all you like, but I'll tell you clearly that this is not like democracy in the parliamentary democracy system.

Now, let me tell the House leader because he's twerking out, Mr. Speaker. He doesn't understand either that there are actually jobs that you get to do on the backbench. You don't just sit there and parrot what they say. You actually get an opportunity to decide things from time to time, to vote, and to represent your constituents. Yes, that's right; you have constituents. This person is not your boss here. The Premier is not your boss. As you know, our bosses are the people of Alberta, and that's why we listen to the people of Alberta. That's why we're here until 1:30 in the morning. We don't want to be here. We want to be with our families. As you know, this is a family-friendly environment, right? Not. It's not.

The truth is that this government, being ideological, knows what it's like to be in opposition, so they took away the opposition's opportunities to debate things properly. That's why we're sitting from 9 a.m. until 1:30 in the morning. That's why we will consistently do that, so they can shove through all of these things they want to and not give the opposition parties the opportunity to debate them fully so that Albertans can see what's going on. That's why Albertans right now are holding rallies right across the province.

Now, tens of thousands of people, Mr. Speaker, were on the phone call last night objecting to this bill. Tens of thousands of people have been in the rallies, not just one rally but multiple rallies right across the province. They've driven their farm equipment on highway 2. I know that farmers and ranchers have a lot better things to do than watch us in this place, yet we have record attendance on the television. Record attendance. Television, rallies, blockades as far as up and down roads: we don't want that kind of thing.

That's why we're saying to you: pay attention. Pay attention. This is about the people that you represent, folks. This is about the people of Alberta that say: "You're not doing it right. Stop. Slow down. Take a step back. Breathe and listen." Don't just tell them what to do. There's nobody on that side that actually makes a living from farming. None. Zero. That's right: none. We have farmers on this side, but I'm not even saying that they're right. I think they are,

but I'm not saying that they are. I'm saying: listen to farmers and ranchers. There are eight agricultural groups that oppose this bill, eight Alberta agricultural groups that have said: "Don't pass this bill. Step back. Consult." Eight of them.

How about communities, Mr. Speaker? They take the time to consult with communities. The Municipal Government Act: they're going to go around; they're going to take a year, apparently, to consult with communities. How many months, how many days have they consulted with farmers and ranchers? Zero. Your come-and-be-told session is not consultation. It's being told. It's dictatorship. That's not what we want to see in this place. We want to see the opportunity for citizens to partake in democracy, to have the opportunity, this referral motion, to go to committee so it can be studied.

You know, I was talking about the federal Finance Committee before. I sat on a lot of committees – a lot of committees – over a 10-year period. This one that I sat on was the Finance Committee. I couldn't believe it when I went through this, Mr. Speaker, and I saw how consultations actually happen. It talks about the federal fiscal situation and projections, and it talks about focusing on fiscal sustainability and economic growth. I'm a bit of a geek, so I read through this stuff. When you go through it, you say: well, what report is this from? Where does this come from?

11:00

It's 107 pages of discussion, and on the back page it's – wow – Liberal recommendations. During a Conservative government there were Liberal recommendations in this report. You know what? If you look fairly closely – you're not going to believe it – there are NDP recommendations in this report. The Conservative government under Stephen Harper even listened to the NDP, and they wrote a report after the committee met. It's hard to believe – isn't it? – that Stephen Harper has more democracy than the NDP government in Alberta, that he offered to the NDP opposition in Ottawa the opportunity to discuss, and that's because it took months to prepare this report through committees.

You know, if you look at it, under background it talks about small business and tax compliance, and it talks about changes. Section B: Changes Proposed by Witnesses Invited to Address "Focusing on Fiscal Sustainability and Economic Growth." Witnesses: changes proposed by witnesses. Section C: Changes Proposed by Witnesses Invited to Address Issues Other Than "Focusing on Fiscal Sustainability and Economic Growth." Witnesses: proposals. Now, that's just sections B and C. I haven't even gotten past section C, and already eight of the items out of 12 are about witnesses proposing changes.

Then we get to chapter 3, Helping Vulnerable Canadians. It talks about aboriginal Canadians, beneficiaries of charities, children, youth, and those other things and people that are so vulnerable that we want to make sure that we listen to them. Under section B it has: Changes Proposed by Witnesses. Unique, isn't it? So changes proposed by witnesses, witnesses that come before a committee and give testimony, experts, whether they be fiscal experts or experts on aboriginal people or farmers or ranchers. Unique, isn't it? Witnesses participating in democracy. Mr. Speaker, those witnesses, that came forward, were aboriginal peoples, charities, children's advocates, youth advocates, student advocates, organizations for disabled persons, low-income Canadians, seniors, women. Then you go to section C: Changes Proposed by Witnesses Invited to Address Issues Other Than "Helping Vulnerable Canadians." Witnesses: more testimony. Now, I'm only on page 2 of an index four pages long: Changes Proposed by Witnesses Invited to Address "Supporting Research and Innovation." That's about committees, about committees participating.

I know that nobody over there has ever seen a committee participate because they go into a committee and they do what they're told. They parrot what they're given, and they vote how they are supposed to, supposed to by the Premier, not by the people of Alberta, who elected them, because there is no accountability there, and that's why nobody is going to get elected there. So I'm saying to you here: the Wildrose opposition, who's here to help, is reaching out to you and saying, "Here's a good strategy in the next election, for the next election." Listen to the people, the people that pay your salary, the people that elected you. You know, this is not a confidence vote. The government will not fall. Rats. It's not a confidence vote, which means that the government is not going to fall, so you could actually listen to your constituents and vote how they tell you to vote, because they are your bosses. The NDP government needs you more than you need them.

Mr. Speaker, I could just go through this, but the highlights are obvious. The majority of this entire report – again, a 107-page report – is about witnesses and about changing the testimony, and the report, the 107-page report, where there are Liberal and NDP suggestions and recommendations, is about changing it for witnesses, based on witness participation.

Now, you can't tell me that you had a great bill if you've changed it already, and your changes, your amendments are more than the bill was itself. Now your bill has more pages of regulations, that you can change at whim, than it actually has legislation. Is that the government that you want? Is that the government that you want us to be if we ever get that great privilege to be over there, or do you want that government, the PCs, to do it? Is that how you want to be governed for the future of our children and grandchildren, or do you want the participation of the people of Alberta? Those people will re-elect you or not based upon how you decide on this particular bill. I firmly believe it, and not just . . .

Mr. Westhead: Talk to the Speaker.

Mr. Jean: I am talking to the Speaker.

. . . on this bill but on all bills, like Bill 8, which, of course, Mr. Speaker, we'd like to see go to committee on a referral motion just like this. That's why it's very accurate for this because, of course, we want consultation for all the bills, whether it be teachers or farmers or ranchers or businesspeople. When you campaign on a promise – I agree – you have to follow through with that if it's the right thing to do. If this is the right thing to do, then they have to complete their promise, but let's get the details right. If you want WCB, OH and S to apply, then let's get the details right. Let's listen to the people that it affects.

An Hon. Member: They didn't campaign on this.

Mr. Jean: Yes, they didn't campaign on this.

Especially, then, if you see a good piece of legislation or a good initiative, bring it back a little bit. Just lower the tempo. Let's stop the people campaigning against you, which is happening: farmers against the NDP. We don't want to see that. We want to see a good democracy. We want the opportunity to have good and fulsome debate so that we get proper bills.

We have a job to do, just like you have a job to do, and we understand that job. Our job is to make sure that you get your job right, and that's why we're here today. That's why you've had to go until 1:30 in the morning, because farmers and ranchers and Albertans hired us to make sure that you get it right if we can, but you're not even listening to us. We're right across the aisle from you, and you're not listening to us. You're not listening to the third party, the fourth or fifth parties. It's fairly shocking.

In fact, the most shocking part is that these are some of the biggest rallies we've ever seen in Alberta, the biggest ones I've ever been part of or seen. This is certainly the most letters I've ever received on any single issue, Mr. Speaker, in 11 years as a parliamentarian, through the gun registry, through a lot of different issues, a lot of issues. This is the biggest I've ever seen, the most upset I've ever seen people.

Mr. Speaker, you know that second reading, of course, is the stage where MLAs are supposed to speak to the principles and purposes of a bill, and we know that the purpose of this bill is to change the way of life of farmers and ranchers in Alberta. That's what it's doing, and we're not sure why this government is so ideologically bent on doing exactly that when farmers and ranchers have been clear that the bill wasn't right the first time. The bill is not right the second time even though the amendments are more than the original bill. So, obviously, you didn't get the bill right. Now that you've already agreed that you made a mistake, why don't we just take the tempo down, go to farmers and ranchers, send this bill to committee, and have a referral motion approved? We have a great motion here. We all like it, don't we? Don't we like the referral motion? And it took a Wildrose MLA to propose that, to send it to committee.

Let's talk about committee, Mr. Speaker. We know that the government still has the majority of members on the committee, so they can still decide to do what they want, but democracy has an opportunity to be heard. The perception of democracy is very important. The reality is more important, but certainly nobody even believes that there's a perception of democracy here because nobody is being listened to. There is no venue for these people to be heard except in their own booked events in their communities, and there are a lot of them. There are some today. It's also an opportunity to review the methods a bill uses to achieve its principles and purpose and to express an opinion on them.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I know it's going to be hard to believe, but I'm only on page 1. This government says that this is about farm safety. Well, if it was about farm safety, then why did they change the bill? Why are their amendments more than the original bill? Why have they now made it so that the regulations are contained inside the bill and they can change those regulations 15 minutes after they pass the bill? They can totally change the entire meaning of the bill and purpose of the bill 15 minutes after they pass the bill. What recourse do farmers and ranchers have? Zero. None. They can't even be heard. They don't get heard the first time. That's why farmers and ranchers are so upset, because you're not listening. You're not consulting. You're not giving them an opportunity to participate in something that is their way of life.

Safety is very important. I come from a culture of safety. A culture of safety, yes. In Fort McMurray safety is job number one. Syncrude, Suncor, every oil sands plant: there is nothing more important than safety. Nothing. People that aren't safe don't stay on the site. It's as simple as that.

11:10

I'm very proud as well that for 10 years I represented the largest percentage of union members in the country. I'm very proud of that. I got 72 per cent in the last federal election. So it's not about being antiunion. In fact, I thought one of the private unions came out with a great proposal, Mr. Speaker, as you're aware, and maybe this will come forward in the referral motion if, in fact, we get to go to committee and we can hear evidence from that particular union. That union proposed that there would be a zero increase for three years because they know that the fiscal position of this government and the fiscal position of oil now – I think it's down to \$37 per barrel this morning – are bad. So they've proposed to the managers:

“Listen, we see what's going on. We're proposing to our members no increase for the next three years.” Now, that's good management. That's a good step by a union that understands the realities of the economy.

But, Mr. Speaker, what are we getting out of these people? We're not getting the issues of safety. We're certainly not getting issues of consultation. I don't understand why they wouldn't consult at this stage given how many opportunities Albertans have had to express themselves right across the province. I've seen the pictures – and I'm sure they have, too; I hope so – although we don't get much time outside of this place because we have to be in here. We've not as many members as they have over there. Hopefully, in the next election Albertans will remember that and bring more Wildrose members back here. But the truth is that we have to rely on social media to see what's going on. We see miles and miles of convoys of agricultural machinery on roads, highways, streets, parked outside of buildings where these consultations, or come-and-be-told meetings, are happening with the government.

I might remind you, Mr. Speaker, that the Wildrose MLAs have actually had more town halls just this last weekend, I believe, than all of the government members put together over the previous two. That's because we actually believe in democracy. We believe that the people of Alberta should have the opportunity to be heard. You know what? Ironically enough, they are our bosses. They are your bosses. They should be able to decide what is in legislation that affects their life, that changes their life, that changes their culture and their belief structure.

I know that this NDP government on the other side has not been to many farms, or if they have, they obviously haven't participated very well because they don't understand that farmers and ranchers want to participate in the changes that will affect their lives. It is a way of life; it's not just a job. They don't stop work at 5 o'clock. There's no punch clock. They don't get to go home at a certain time. They don't say: oh, Mr. Calf, Betsy, don't give birth at 2 in the morning and have a problem. They don't pick that. They don't have a time clock.

Some of the questions that have been brought forward were very amusing, Mr. Speaker, as I'm sure you know because you check social media as well, as all of us do. Some of the questions brought forward by the NDP participants in these meetings were laughable at best. You can check out Facebook to see what happened there. But it shows a clear understanding that they don't have any understanding of what's going on on farms and ranches across this province. I don't know who they're listening to, but it's certainly not farmers and ranchers.

What they don't understand – I think the most important thing is that ranches and farms are very complicated places. It's not like they run one machine, then go home, go to a lube shop, and get the oil changed. They do it themselves, Mr. Speaker. Very seldom does a farmer go to a heavy-equipment mechanic and say: fix this. That's because they are a heavy-equipment mechanic, and they fix it themselves. That's because they go and get the part themselves, and they install it themselves. That's because in between lunch being called and lunch being ready, they change the oil in their son's motorcycle or in the combine or the forklift. That's because their jobs are so varied. I don't think there's any job on the planet, frankly, that is more complicated and involves more different things, whether it be heavy equipment such as backhoes, like a 320 backhoe, or a dozer, a skid-steer, all of those things.

You'll find them all on a farm as well as a combine. You find them all there, whether it's scaffolding, heavy equipment, whether it is the chemicals that are found on farms, Mr. Speaker, and not just one or two types of chemicals but chemicals to keep their livestock healthy, chemicals to make sure that their farming is as

productive as possible. Some of these chemicals are dangerous, and they do make sure that they're out of children's reach and out of reach of those people that shouldn't be playing with those chemicals.

Why are farms so safe in Alberta compared to the rest of the country on a per capita basis? Well, it's because it's their family, Mr. Speaker – there's nothing more important than keeping your family safe – and it's the reputation of their family. These family farms have been in their families for hundreds of years in some cases or at least a hundred anyway. That's a hundred years' worth of reputation. Nobody wants to see that reputation taken out in one stupid accident, and that's why they're so safe. Their kids are on that farm. That's why they want to make sure it's safe. It's their children, and nothing is more important than our children. Nobody is going to keep it safer than farmers and ranchers.

Now, Mr. Speaker, you know, my oldest brother – he is in British Columbia now – raised llamas. Llamas are quite an interesting animal. My father raised cows, and my mom's family raised sheep for a couple of generations. I was actually raised in that family. Quite an interesting background. We farmed quite a few different things. In fact, my brother also raised dogs for a trapline that we had up in northern Alberta, and he also ran a lot of dog races, so he had about 20 or 30 dogs at one time. So we've raised a lot of different animals. I'll tell you that raising a llama and making a llama work so that he doesn't spit at you or stomp on your feet or bite you is a lot different than raising a horse or a pig or sheep. That's why farmers do an incredible amount of research and talk to their neighbours and talk to their friends, to make sure that they know what they're doing with the kind of animal that they're raising, whether it might even be an elk farm.

It's a very complicated process, and there are so many different idiosyncrasies to farming. That's why I wish that, you know, when Albertans do have an opportunity, they do call the minister of agriculture at 780.786.1997. That's 780.786.1997. If you have closed caption on, that should come right across the bottom of the line right here. I have a lot of other phone numbers, but you can find them on the website. I think that the NDP did take it down earlier this week. I would encourage you to call 780.786.1997 and talk to the minister and let him know what's going on. Now, I don't know if his phone still works. I know that ours are ringing off the hook, and we're asking them to call the NDP, so I don't know how many phone calls they're getting. But call the minister of agriculture.

He did say clearly in one of the meetings that happened last week that he thought that the bill should be pulled, and he was going to talk to caucus about it. Now, the bill has not been pulled. Caucus is not talking very much. In fact, we haven't seen them stand up and actually talk about how their farmers feel about this. We've had somebody stand up and say that they have a farmer that lives in Edmonton now that is in favour of this bill. Okay. Well, how about all the farmers that are against the bill, the 95 per cent of them that are against the bill, the 95 per cent of them that think this bill should stop, at the very least? In fact, I think that that number is closer to a hundred per cent, Mr. Speaker, that think that it should be stopped or slowed down.

Even the left-leaning columnists – I have to hold myself sometimes to stop myself from falling – are some of the people that are saying: slow down; change course; listen to the people. Left-leaning columnists, Mr. Speaker. In fact, I read a story this morning where one columnist out of Calgary was saying that Bill 6 is going to dog this government forever. I think what they meant was for three and a half years because that's forever for these guys. When even the left-leaning columnists come out and say that, that should give somebody pause, like an opportunity to slow down.

Maybe, just maybe, Albertans are right. Let's say that they're right. We think that they're right. If they're right – and we've already seen you change your mind once. Mr. Speaker, this government changed its mind once. As I mentioned, there are more pages of amendments than the actual bill, just recently in two days rushed through. If they are right and if you're wrong, not once but twice, maybe, just maybe, we could get a better bill if you held off a bit. Maybe we could get a bill that farmers and ranchers would actually like.

11:20

There are some laudable parts of this bill – there are, Mr. Speaker – but some of the parts of this bill are so interfering in their lives that it actually borders on dangerous. When I say dangerous, I mean this. When you stop listening, which means at a referral motion in committee, when you stop listening to your witnesses, when you stop listening to Albertans, when you stop listening to the people that elected you and that are looking to you for hope – I think Albertans were looking for hope, and they're not finding it – that's dangerous because that's when governments lose their authority to govern. They lose it. They can keep governing, but Albertans don't listen anymore. They lose their moral authority to govern because they're not listening to the people who elected them.

Now, I've seen governments, conservative governments in the past, come forward with legislation telling Albertans what they want or telling Canadians what they want. Well, we saw what happened in 1993 to a conservative government that told them what they wanted. Governments are not here to tell people what they want, Mr. Speaker. Governments are here to listen, act, and govern according to the best wishes and needs and desires of the people that they represent.

There is no other work environment like a farm, like a ranch. None. It is very, very complicated. It doesn't matter whether it's with the machinery, with the chemicals, the relationship between other farms and other ranches, with professional organizations, agricultural organizations.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I have to tell a little story. I know I don't have a lot of time left. I think I have about 40 minutes left, but that's going to go pretty quickly. I'm glad we've got a couple more amendments coming forward.

I remember when I was in Three Hills – I spent four years in Three Hills – and I would get up in the morning to go milk cows. I did work on a farm, Mr. Speaker, just like yourself and many people on this side of the House. I would get up at 5 o'clock in the morning, and I would travel about 20 minutes to Linden, just outside of Three Hills, and I'd milk cows, about 170 cows, if I remember correctly. We'd bring them in, and I'd be pretty tired but excited because I love animals and I love farms. We would milk those cows, and sometimes they had bad milk. We'd have to give the cow a shot, medicine, and we'd have to make sure we'd watch that milk carefully so we wouldn't contaminate the entire batch. We'd have to make sure it wasn't bad and that it was tested properly, and if it was bad, we'd obviously discharge it into the ground or into the sewer system so we'd only get good milk.

Now, why that is important, Mr. Speaker, is because you're trained there by farmers and ranchers, that care about the quality of the product that they put out. I would go in at 5:30 in the morning to milk those cows, spend a couple of hours milking those cows, and because you have to milk them again at night, that's a long day. Of course, OH and S might not let farmers milk in the morning and night. This new legislation might not let them do that. That's interesting. We'd sure like some more details on that, and I know farmers and ranchers would like it, too.

Then we'd go spend some time – and I know the number one or number two habit of farmers is to go make sure gophers don't exist

anymore. So at the ripe age of 14, 15 I would go shoot gophers on that farm and then come back and do other farm work, whether it would be mending fences or making sure that the animals were kept separate or behaved properly – there would be just so many things – changing the oil on a motorbike or a forklift. The jobs would change dramatically from one job to the next job, and often there would be a lot of time off in between for a young guy like me.

Mr. Speaker, I don't think that I would be permitted to work in that kind of situation now unless there was a tremendous amount of legislation and regulations in place to govern my ability to or not to do that. I don't think I would be allowed under the proposed amendments by this government. In fact, I think most of the things that we did in those days – I had many friends there who are still friends of mine today – I would not be able to do.

After I had come back from farming and milking cows and doing all those wonderful things, picking rocks and shooting gophers, I would then go back to my friend's place. He had a honey farm. That's where I would stay on weekends. He had a honey farm, and I'd build frames on that honey farm, and I'd take the honey off. I would make sure that that honey, of course, was properly dealt with, hairnets and all that kind of thing. But, Mr. Speaker, under this legislation I wouldn't be able to do that either. I would not.

I learned how to do some very important things in my life during that period of time that have helped me in many, many different things. In fact, those particular lessons help me today because I understand that I am not an expert on farming and ranching. I am not, Mr. Speaker. I can promise you, from what I've seen, that there's nobody over there that's even close to being an expert.

So besides the Alberta Federation of Labour and some other unions, who are they consulting with? I know they're happy that unions are going to be all involved in big farms, small farms, medium-sized farms. They're all going to be unionized now. [laughter] That's what the bill says. It gives them the opportunity to do so. They laugh on the other side, Mr. Speaker, but the problem is that there's no certainty there. [interjections] We don't know, and they tried to give some certainty with the regulations. You know what? We had on the website, we had on handouts – I wish they would control themselves a little bit, Mr. Speaker. They're getting out of hand.

They had on the website and they had in what they passed out to the Wildrose opposition information that now they say was wrong – wrong – although they sent it to the opposition. We're not known for being the biggest cheerleaders of the NDP. The Wildrose sort of have a thing about that. We're trying to be helpful, but it's difficult, especially when they bring forward legislation like this. But they had it wrong in the pamphlets they handed out to us. They had it wrong in the pamphlets they handed out to the media. They had it wrong – you're not going to believe it, Mr. Speaker – on the website. They had it wrong, a miscommunication. Four different places they had a miscommunication. It sounds like a misrepresentation to me. It wasn't wrong. It's just that they saw the pressure, and they backed up and they changed it.

The pressure is still there, Mr. Speaker, but the biggest issue here is not about the pressure. The biggest issue is that they had it wrong once, so how do they know that they've got it right this time? Slow down. Let's listen to Albertans. Let's have the opportunity to bring in Albertans, farmers and ranchers, agricultural groups, experts in the field, and let's hear how they're going to be affected. Let's do up a 107-page document after listening to a committee, listening to experts, and having an opportunity for the Wildrose to present our dissenting opinion or our agreement so we can have the legislation go through. Let's have the opportunity for the third party to come forward with some recommendations. They'll have a couple, I'm sure.

Mr. Rodney: I have one right here.

Mr. Jean: In fact, they have one right there.

Even the fourth and fifth parties: we could have them come in with some recommendations. But, Mr. Speaker, the more important recommendations than all of those would be the recommendations of farmers and ranchers, who actually deal with this every day.

Why would you do this? Why would you ignore farmers and ranchers? Why would you treat them like second-class citizens? You're prepared to consult with the municipal governments across this province. By the way, if you're prepared to consult with them – guess what? – the AAMDC said: don't go ahead with this bill. They said: stop; don't do it. You're prepared to talk to them about the Municipal Government Act when it comes up and to consult with them and get it right, but now they're saying to you, "Don't go ahead with this bill," and you're still pushing ahead like there's no tomorrow, making us sit until 1:30 in the morning, 14 or 15 hours a day. We're prepared to do that. We don't have a problem with that.

But, Mr. Speaker, the referral motion . . .

The Speaker: Point of order by the Government House Leader.

Point of Order Factual Accuracy

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I would not normally raise this, but it's about the third time I've heard the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition talk about going to 1:30 in the morning. In actual fact, because of Wildrose delaying tactics and failures to keep commitments that had been made in the House with respect to the timing of Bill 4, we were here last night debating Bill 4, not because we were debating Bill 6, as the Official Opposition leader is suggesting. He is not being accurate in his characterization of the debate that took place.

The Speaker: Hon. member, do you have a response to the point of order?

11:30

Mr. Jean: Yes, Mr. Speaker. He doesn't have a point of order. He's wrong.

But I can carry on with my speech if you like.

The Speaker: Do you have any additional information with respect to the point of order?

Mr. Jean: Yes. I would submit that he's wrong, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: That's the extent of it?

Mr. Jean: I don't see any point of order. It's called argument.

The Speaker: Hon. Government House Leader, is there a specific citation that you would refer to in your point of order?

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I would suggest 23(i), imputing false or unavowed motives to another member. He's suggesting that we have kept – that the House was up debating Bill 6 till 1:30 in the morning. Nothing could be further from the truth. It's just simply not true.

The Speaker: Hon. member, that is noted.

I would ask that the Official Opposition leader avoid touching on that issue. Let's respect the continuation of the discussion, if you wouldn't mind. Please proceed.

Debate Continued

Mr. Jean: Mr. Speaker, I apologize that we were here until 1:30 in the morning debating this and other bills because they don't want to face Albertans and consult properly, with this referral motion. I totally apologize for that.

Speaking of consulting, let's talk about what consulting is, Mr. Speaker. If we look at the early 15th-century definition of consulting – I tried to bring a dictionary in, and they said it might be a prop – it's to deliberate, consider, to call together, and to gather, to ask for advice. Now, they haven't done any consultations. That's not consulting, what they've done. They've gone to meetings, and they've told people what is going to happen. That's not consultation.

I want to talk about another definition here that I looked up as well, which is "ineffective consultation." Those are considered to be cosmetic consultations. This is a cosmetic government, so cosmetic governments do cosmetic consultations, that were done due to an obligation for show and not for true participatory decision-making.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I think farmers and ranchers deserve to be consulted. If they were consulted properly, I think what they would choose is to have this bill divided into four different bills. The reason they would want that is because it is so dramatic so far as changes. While we're sitting in here debating bills until 1:30 in the morning and while this government is pushing through those bills without any proper consultation, we've actually been thinking about it and consulting with farmers in town halls right across this province, and they've told us clearly that we should break this bill up into four different parts.

The first part is employment standards and the employment standards changes that are being proposed by the government. Mr. Speaker, you know that there are many, many issues with employment standards in this province that are very complicated. I know that because I've owned and operated over 15 businesses in this province, and I've had hundreds of employees. It's very difficult, it's very complicated, and oftentimes you need a lawyer to be able to interpret this, which is not the way I would like to see it. I would like to see it be in simple language so that people can understand simple concepts, that make sense to everybody, so that anybody reading those documents would understand the full consequences of those documents. If you look on the website of employment standards – and I invite Albertans to do so right after they call their NDP MLA or any NDP MLA from Edmonton or wherever they like – you would have an opportunity to see how complicated those changes are in employment standards and how difficult they would be, especially this one, where it actually changes the employment standards.

The next part, Mr. Speaker, after employment standards changes, that I would bring forward to consult on properly would be the labour relations changes. Of course, this should be done in a separate bill as well so that we could hear those experts. We could have employment standards experts listening to one committee and bringing forward suggestions for that committee and those laws, which, obviously, will change farms and ranches but for employment purposes and employee purposes, and then we would have another that would deal with the labour relations changes. Maybe that would be the proper time, in my humble opinion, to actually do the consultations that this government has already done with the Alberta Federation of Labour and the unions that they've already consulted with. It was surprising how fast the unions got onboard. In fact, I think it was within minutes that they came out with their own press release talking about how great the

government was with this piece of legislation. The only people they consulted with, Mr. Speaker, were unions. Are we surprised?

This would be the right place to consult with unions, Mr. Speaker, all unions that are affected by this, not just one union that might be applauding the NDP position and the NDP government – all unions that are affected by this – just like all Alberta farmers and ranchers should be consulted at the appropriate time based upon how it affects them and, even more so, the agriculture industry associations, that have clearly indicated to this government that this bill sucks and should be stopped. They're not even listening to them.

Occupational health and safety changes would be the third bill that it should be separated into, Mr. Speaker, to make sure that we get that right, because it's very difficult. You know, some of the rules that apply to my brother, who's a scaffolder, a member of the carpenters' union for 35, 36 years in Fort McMurray – different rules apply to him on a Syncrude site or a Suncor site than should apply to a farmer because it's a unique environment and it's a much different environment.

You know what? The government might say that they're going to get it right, but the truth is that they're not going to get it right because they've already admitted that they got it wrong. How can you be right this time if you were wrong last time? Last time, by the way, was just a couple of days ago. You wrote out some amendments on the back of a napkin and submitted them, and you said that it was right then, three days ago, and now it's right again.

Then, finally, Mr. Speaker – and I know you're aware of this – the fourth piece of legislation would of course be workers' compensation changes. I did have an opportunity to represent people that were on workers' compensation. I will tell you that I have heard nothing but bad stories from people on workers' compensation. When they're exclusively only allowed to be covered by one piece of legislation and one insurance, it doesn't work out well. That's why farmers want choice.

It's been heard by Wildrose MLAs on this side that farmers already make a choice to have better insurance to cover their employees and their families because most times the employees are their friends or families or people they have long-term relationships with. I'm not talking about, you know, three and a half years like these people have left here. I'm talking, like, 10, 20 years of relationships where one person or one family works with that other family that owns a farm. They want to protect them. That's why most farmers already have better insurance than WCB.

If you look at how WCB covers Albertans on the job site, it is not sufficient. It is not a good piece of legislation. I know that the people that have been here before, the four members of the NDP caucus that have been here before, all know – all know – that the number one complaint they have is about WCB. Or it should be because it's the number one complaint I used to get. It's a big complaint. WCB does not work correctly. Now you're going to impose it on 43,000 family farms, and it's not working right. There are so many different options, and that's the best option you can come up with, to impose a broken system on 43,000 farm and ranch families.

Let's go back to the drawing board. Let's listen to the people that are outside this place and are saying: "Stop. Slow down. Please pay attention." You've heard it. I can tell that you've heard it because I can see it. You're worried, and you should be because you're not listening to the people. And when governments don't listen to the people, governments get tossed aside.

If we did have the opportunity to consult properly on the details of the bill and if we did divide the bill into four separate parts, four separate pieces of legislation, you could then have the opportunity to share those four sets of proposed legislation and regulations with

farmers and ranchers, with farm and ranch groups, with agricultural groups, with the people, the organizations that have been doing this for a long, long time. A long time. They have a lot of history. They know what they're doing. They just want the opportunity to tell this government how they can do it better. That would be actual consultation. That would be actually listening to them, taking six months, having an opportunity for them to hear you and then for them to be heard by you. That's what communication is called because that's what communication is.

11:40

Then we would come back with four good pieces of legislation, probably four good pieces of legislation, that Wildrose MLAs on this side could support. Wouldn't it be great to go to the people of Alberta with a bill that's supported by the Official Opposition, a bill that's had full opportunity to be vetted by farmers and ranchers across the province and by agricultural groups, and to have them come before a committee, that this referral motion deals with, to be heard, to be listened to, to be consulted, to hear their stories, and to make it better? I think we can do that. Then we can go through the three readings, have the opportunity to vote, and maybe – maybe – just listen to the Wildrose opposition as we propose some good amendments, that reflect what the farmers and ranchers are telling us. That seems to make a lot of sense to me.

I especially found, during the period of time I was a parliamentary secretary in Ottawa, that I had about 25 bills that came before my committee. Now, Mr. Speaker, some of those bills – I made a list. I know you're surprised at that, but I brought a list, a couple of other documents here that I want to go over. One of those was strengthening aviation security. That was Bill C-42. My job as a parliamentary secretary was to take the government's position to a committee, in a minority government, mind you – this is a little different because it's a majority – and try to convince the NDP, who, of course, had a federal presence of two members in those days; the Bloc Québécois, who, of course, are the separatist party and had three members at that time; and the Liberals, who were down to two, I believe. I had to convince at least two members from another party that this was a good bill, or we had to come forward with amendments that they would agree to, or they would come forward with amendments, and we would listen to those amendments.

We would have counsel there, a lawyer there from the government, that was supposed to be impartial, and frankly they were impartial. They do good work. They would tell us what they thought of those amendments, those proposed by the NDP and even by the separatist party. And do you know what? We were able to pass more bills through that particular committee than had ever been done by any Liberal government in the past. Two a year, I think, was our average. Most Liberal governments get about one every two years, I'm told. But two a year, Mr. Speaker.

Yes, Mr. Speaker, whether it was the Strengthening Aviation Security Act, whether it was the Motor Vehicle Safety Act – remember all those recalls with Toyota and other brake recalls and floor mat recalls? That was part of our portfolio as well.

The Marine Liability Act, which dealt with a lot of different things, Mr. Speaker, mostly pollution and strengthening the environmental provisions on a federal basis to make sure that people who polluted actually paid.

The Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act: Mr. Speaker, you must know that things that happen in the Arctic are much more serious than things that happen, environmental spills that happen anywhere else because they stay forever, almost, and that's why the Conservative government brought forward some very hard legislation on that.

The Transportation of Dangerous Goods Act, Mr. Speaker, which was a very important act, of course, because there are a lot of dangerous goods that travel through our country on roads, rail, otherwise.

Even, Mr. Speaker, the Canada Transportation Act, Railway Safety Act, and the railway shippers' rights act: I was very proud to be part of that, where the federal government brought in legislative changes to make it easier for farmers to ship their product, to make sure that CN and CP actually listened to the farmers and were prepared to provide to the farmers what they needed. That was a good bill. I don't think it went far enough to protect farmers and to make available what they need as far as rail to get their product to market, but we went through that process.

We went through it with the Canadian Transportation Act and Canada's Clean Air Act and even the International Bridges and Tunnels Act, Mr. Speaker, that deals with bridges and tunnels between the United States and ourselves. There was no legislation in place before that. It took a Conservative government, after 100 years, 200 years, to bring that into place.

Mr. Speaker, the important part in all these acts and probably about 10 or 15 others, including – you're not going to believe this – budgets, is that they consulted. They consulted with experts. We had prebudget consultations. You know, we went across the country often and certainly across places in Ontario and eastern Canada, including Newfoundland and Labrador, and even different parts of Canada in the west, where there was an economy that wasn't doing very well, and we heard from people how we could do it better, how we could make it better. We did weeks and weeks of consultations before every single budget. We heard from experts in Ontario, we heard from experts right across, and we heard from stakeholders.

Even the manufacturers' association of Canada came forward and gave us really good evidence. You know what they told us, Mr. Speaker? It's funny. He was the president of the manufacturers' association of Canada, and he had a forklift operation company in Ontario. He told us, the Finance committee – I think it was two years ago now; 2012 I think it was – that he would be out of business if it wasn't for the oil sands. I was surprised. He would be out of business if it wasn't for the oil sands. All he did was manufacture forklifts. I was, like: how in the world? Like, oil sands companies use forklifts. I know that they do for the purchasing and different things. He said that over 50 per cent of his forklifts went to the oil sands from Ontario. That's why this country is in a big economic problem right now, because the NDP are not doing the right things relating to our economy, but of course that doesn't have to do with the referral motion. It has to do with the evidence that would be heard on a referral motion if we were successful and got it to committee.

Mr. Speaker, on all of these acts, every single one of them, we listened to the opposition NDP; the Bloc, the separatists. I know you'd find that surprising because I'm a nationalist. I love Canada, and I'm here to stay with Canada. But I was prepared to listen to the Bloc and to have our members listen to the Bloc and to find better legislation because it's not about their ideological views on how the government should work. It's not about their view on how greenhouse gas emissions should be suppressed and we should go back and live in caves and have fires and things like that, how we should stop using oil. It's not about that stuff. It's about listening. It's about consulting. It's about making sure that the people that we work for actually have a say.

You know what, Mr. Speaker? Every person in this place, every person, even down there, except for the staff, of course, was elected by people. That's right. I was even elected by people. I was elected by the people of Fort McMurray-Conklin, and I'm very proud of

the fact that today I'm standing in this place, representing their views. What they want is a government that listens.

If it was just one particular case, where they would bring forward a piece of legislation and then two days later they would bring forward more amendments than the legislation was and try to change the legislation – but it's every single bill they brought forward, I think, except for one. They've brought forward amendments after they've introduced it. Like, seriously, Mr. Speaker. They brought forward amendments days after they've introduced bills that they say are perfect. Is that a government that's ready to govern? No, it's not. In fact, it's so bad that even the amendments they bring forward – they never consulted with farmers or ranchers on the amendments. They didn't, just like they didn't properly consult with school boards across this province. That's why every single school board that I've talked to is opposed to Bill 8.

The referral motion, Mr. Speaker: consulting with Albertans, making sure that things go to committees so Albertans have the opportunity to participate in democracy, to participate in their lives. Now, farmers don't get mad very often. You know that. You're from Medicine Hat. They're great people. They're solid people, and very seldom do they voice their discontent. Look at the news. You know, the NDP are famous for running around with placards that say, "Stop the tar sands," and things like that. It's not very often that they get picketed, especially not by farmers and ranchers, but they are. You've seen it outside. I've seen it outside. They just want to have the opportunity to be listened to, to participate in what they have here, which is 87 people that work for the people of Alberta, but the NDP, the government, the Premier don't listen to that, don't seem to understand that.

Now, I do understand that they want to be ideological in their view and in their policies and their implementation of those policies, but what I'm saying to them here today is that there is an opportunity to take this back to the people of Alberta by agreeing to this referral motion and properly setting aside time and a committee to consult and to make sure that Albertans have the opportunity to be listened to. That's what they want, Mr. Speaker. That's what we want here. We want a better bill. We don't want to have a situation where people are caught in a scenario that is not good for them and that shuts down a family farm or shuts down a lot of family farms.

11:50

Right now there is so much pressure economically on the people of Alberta, not just in the oil sector but in the farm sector. You know why, Mr. Speaker? You know why? Because most of these farmers operate equipment on the farm, and then they go, on their days off that they can, during the winter or different times when they don't have to seed or harvest or brand or calve, and work in the oil patch. I got a letter from a young lady yesterday that said that she had four sons, and when they're not working on the farm, they go work in the oil patch. Well, right now they're all not working in the oil patch.

So how many times can this NDP kick Albertans when they're down? This is the same issue, Mr. Speaker. We've had our number one sector, the oil sector – wow. What this government has done to our oil sector. I mean, sure, there are some low oil prices, but pretty much the average price of oil in Alberta from 1997 to 2008 was about 40 bucks. That was the average price, give or take. The average price right now for this year is over 40 bucks. Now we're down to \$37, but it's better than it was for that 10-year period before, yet we prospered.

In fact, Ralph Klein, a previous Premier, from 1993 to 2004 brought \$80 billion in financial capital, \$80 billion worth of private

capital, into this province to invest in oil sands, to invest in manufacturing, to invest in science and technology, to invest in Alberta. During that same period of time do you know that both Ontario and Quebec had less private capital invested there? Now, Mr. Speaker, we had a thriving economy at the end of that era. It started to really pick up and do really wonderful things. The economy got better, but it got better as a result of a series of things. Yes, even Jean Chrétien brought in a good piece of legislation, capital cost allowance depreciation. That encouraged some work in the oil sands.

Stephen Harper brought in some more things. He lowered taxes. In fact, he lowered taxes to the lowest place they've been since the '50s. Lowered taxes. In fact, Mr. Speaker, I think that by the time Stephen Harper was done being Prime Minister, there were 10 or 12 additional tax-freedom days. That means that Albertans didn't have to pay taxes for those additional 11 days. Instead of paying taxes for those days, they got the taxes in their pocket. They got to decide where they wanted to spend the money instead of the government telling them where they were going to spend money, just like here.

Mr. Speaker, the government is telling farmers and ranchers what is going to be in the legislation: no choice; this is the way it is, lump it or like it. Well, they don't like it. They don't want it, but whether they want it or not, this government has the opportunity and the right to bring in legislation, to force it down their throats. Now they're trying to say: well, you know, it's cough syrup; just throw it back and deal with it, and you'll be okay in the morning. Well, in three and a half mornings from now I think they're going to find that the NDP is not going to be around to see what the doctor is ordering next, and that's because they're not listening.

Oh, excellent. I just got past tab A, Mr. Speaker, and I've only got 43 tabs left. Tab B goes into the specifics of the bill.

Mr. Mason: There aren't that many minutes.

Mr. Jean: I'm sure that I will get unanimous consent to keep going as long as I want, Mr. Speaker. I know that the House leader loves it.

You know, this is actually a small bill, as I've said, only five pages, now six pages of amendments, of course, because the bill was imperfect. Think about that in the back there. Think about that, Mr. Speaker. I want them in the back to understand this, the people that were actually elected by the people of Alberta, that are supposed to represent the people of Alberta, that there are just five pages of a bill and six pages of amendments, which means that the people who are telling you what to do got it wrong. How can you now trust that they got it right? Farmers and ranchers across Alberta don't believe that you got it right, and they're going to keep expressing their opinions. What we want to do is make sure that farmers and ranchers are listened to and that they have an opportunity to participate in this bill.

Even though it's just five pages of original material, it is a short amendment of the Employment Standards Code. It repeals a few sections. It repeals one section in the Labour Relations Code. It even repeals a section of the Occupational Health and Safety Act and changes regulations to that act, and I mentioned already – I know you heard it, but I'm going to say it again. Those regulations, that actually are the details of this bill, they can change at any time they want, and they don't have to tell me. They don't even have to tell you, Mr. Speaker. Can you believe that? That's not democracy, is it? When they don't have to tell anybody what they're doing – they can just do it – that's not democracy.

That's not a government that's listening. That's a government that's doing whatever it wants because they believe they have a

mandate to do whatever they want. They don't. The people of Alberta, through driving in convoys, through coming to the Legislature steps – by the way, I think that there's going to be another rally on Thursday and another one on Tuesday to tell this government what they think. Well, those people don't believe they've got it right, and they want to be listened to, but they can't because this government has closed ears. They're not paying attention. They think that they can just storm through this and everybody is just going to say that it was cough syrup.

Well, that's not the way a government should operate. That's not the way a Premier should act. A Premier is supposed to give people hope during bad times, be a ray of sunshine. [laughter] I know you're laughing because I'm Mr. Sunshine and I'm always smiling. I can't help it, Mr. Speaker; I love representing the people of Alberta. They should try it. I really do. It's the greatest honour of my life to be here. You know why I love being here? It's because I feel that I'm actually here representing the people.

I encourage the backbenchers on the other side, the NDP backbenchers, to represent the people that elected them, not me, not the people here, but the people that elected them. You know what? They even have the opportunity in their budget, Mr. Speaker, to consult with the people that elected them. They could have town halls like the six that we had this last weekend. They could listen to the people. You know what the surprising part about democracy is? If you listen and you act in their best interests, they're happy with

you and they re-elect you. Guess what happens when they're not happy with you? They hold rallies, they set up convoys; 16,000 people participate in a telephone town hall – I've never had that ever before; I've never had more than 4,000 in 11 years – 16,000, and we only dialed the NDP ridings, only the rural ones. A hundred thousand Albertans in your ridings, and 16,000 of them showed up mad. That should tell you something.

Mr. Speaker, there are a few other things that it changes as well, but all I know is this: as a business owner in this province for a long time, a second-generation business owner, the best thing that they can do is to slow down, to talk to Albertans, to talk to the people whose lives are so affected by this, the mums and dads who every day go out there and farm and provide food for our tables, good, quality food. We have the best reputation in the world for our farmers and ranchers, the best. Nobody comes close to us as far as reputation on quality of health.

I don't know if you even know this, Mr. Speaker, but do you know that we are the fifth-largest honey producer in the world and we have the number one honey quality in the world here in Alberta? Something to be proud of.

The Speaker: Hon. member, you have, I believe, some time left, but the Assembly stands adjourned.

[The Assembly adjourned at 12 p.m. to 1:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday afternoon, December 8, 2015

Day 30

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

First Session

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Kazim	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Tuesday, December 8, 2015

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there any school groups today? The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to introduce to you and through you today a fabulous school group from Stony Plain central school. This is a group of grade 6ers who are here this week doing School at the Legislature. I had the pleasure of speaking to them yesterday for a good half-hour, and they asked very good questions. They are intelligent and thoughtful. Their teacher, Mr. Paul McCann, is sitting with them. He's obviously been a great influence on them this week. Please give them the warm welcome of the House.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I hope the students will note that the MLA has lost her voice because in this House there's an awful lot of talking in class.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Ms Goehring: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly several members of AUPE's Committee on Political Action. The committee, chaired by AUPE vice-president Mike Dempsey, seeks to encourage all 89,000 AUPE members to become more engaged and involved in politics. In recent years COPA has spearheaded get-out-the-vote campaigns, reaching out to members, urging them to support the candidate and the party that best reflects their needs. Also joining us in the gallery today are Dustin Abbott, John Lomas, Bruce Macdonald, Edwin Mullin, Danielle Nadeau McMillan, Peter Snowdon, and Henry Wakoluk. I'd ask them to remain standing to receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Ms Woollard: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today with great pleasure to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Ms Nicole Bownes. Nicole is a good friend of mine and a tremendous asset to the people of Edmonton. For many years Nicole worked as a registered nurse. She also served in various positions with the United Nurses of Alberta, including as president and second vice-president of her local. She has also always been incredibly active in politics over the years, serving as campaign manager and official agent for the MLA for Edmonton-Strathcona, our hon. Premier. It is without a doubt that Nicole has made and continues to make a tremendous positive impact on her community. I would ask her to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Calgary-West.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to introduce to you and through you to all members of the House someone who is

no stranger to this House or to its members. Kerry Towle served as a member of this Assembly for the riding of Innisfail-Sylvan Lake from 2012 to 2015, and she is still a tremendous advocate for Albertans and Alberta. Kerry is a lifelong advocate for the rights of seniors and also works hard to bring awareness to Huntington's disease and those affected by it. My guest is seated in the public gallery. I would ask her to stand and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The hon. Member for Edmonton-Whitemud.

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a real pleasure for me today to introduce Bob Zaplachinski, a proud Albertan. He's risen in the visitors' gallery. In 1970 Bob, as a young 4-H'er, was named one of the top 14 4-H'ers in Alberta, and he won a trip to the royal winter fair in Toronto and also a trip to Ottawa, where he got a special certificate of citizenship at Rideau Hall. The person that gave him those awards was the hon. Robert Clark, at that time a 20-something-year-old minister of youth. It was my honour today, actually, to meet Mr. Clark again at the Public Accounts Committee. He is the chair of the board of Olds College.

After his successful trip to Ottawa and Toronto Bob Zaplachinski went on to work for Edmonton Telephones and for Telus for 38 years, and he's now enjoying a well-earned retirement. I would ask the Legislature to give him the usual warm welcome.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Are there any other guests to introduce today? Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to members of this Assembly a number of constituents that have travelled from in and around the Nanton region. They are farm workers, farmers, and ranchers here today to witness the debate of Bill 6 and to stand with the Wildrose and MLAs of like mind to say with one voice: consultation, not information.

There are a great number of them, so I invite them to rise as I read their names and, after I'm finished, to receive the warm traditional welcome of this Assembly. I apologize in advance if I don't get all the names correct: Rita Reich, Pierre Catellier, Alderic Catellier, Bob Kullman, Bunny Maltais, Noel Hyslip, Murray McLean, Kevin Love, Derek Uilly, Ernie Herron, Freeman Herron, Dale Wiebe, Vern Habraken, Eric Kinserdhal, Wade Nelson, Laci Pighin, Nicole Monkman, Alan Top, Kyle Kohut, Tristan Hopper, Ben Loree, Dustyn Ryll, Bernard Lentz, Dana Brown, Bert Vleeming, Melanie Vleeming, Doug Schneider, Mike White, Sabrina Conroy, Ron Wurban, Darlene Bouchard, Romeo Bouchard, Cor de Boon, Kennedy Chaytors, Presley Chaytors, Cody Jensen, Tiffany Fehr, Jennifer Demyen, Albina Demyen, Greg Olsen, Chase Cox, Randi Tajcnar, Celeste Chaytors, Kris Chaytors, and, finally, Cheryl Nietupski. Welcome to the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Are there any other introductions today? The Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature a former Member of the Legislative Assembly, Brent Rathgeber. He's up here as well. He's also a former MP for Edmonton-St. Albert. If he could stand and receive the warm welcome of everyone.

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park.

Farm and Ranch Worker Legislation

Cortes-Vargas: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My riding of Strathcona-Sherwood Park is partly rural, and a lot of my constituents are farm owners or have worked on a farm. This is why I'm glad that our government is taking action on developing a system that supports the protection of farm employees in Alberta while ensuring that family farms continue to thrive. Once Bill 6 is passed, there will be thousands of additional Albertans who will have access to the protections that other workers in this province have received for decades. It will extend protections to employees on farms similar to those that exist in other provinces, where there are thriving family farms.

We know that farmers take workplace safety very seriously, and it's good to see that this government is working with farmers and will continue to work with farmers to ensure that they have the tools they need to protect workers.

1:40

We know that farmers work very hard every day to ensure safety in the workplace. Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, despite best efforts, incidents still occur. Seventeen people died on farms last year. Over the past three decades more than 380 people have been killed on Alberta farms, and for every one of them, it is estimated that 25 or more have been hospitalized due to work-related farm incidents. It's clear that more must be done to ensure that our farm workers are safe.

Mr. Speaker, in 2008 an Alberta court judge who was reviewing the death of a farm worker said, "No logical explanation was given as to why paid employees on a farm are not covered by the same workplace legislation as non-farm employees." It's clear that these changes need to be made, and I'm proud to see that our government is doing so. We must also work to ensure that when farm employees are injured on the job, they have access to compensation that protects them and their families.

Mr. Speaker, we have heard from farmers that it is important that family farms are exempted from the legislation. While it was always our intention to focus on employees, when families . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Co-operation in the Legislative Assembly on Bill 6

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to speak about the principle of co-operation and about the importance of co-operation when it comes to good government and the smooth operation of this Assembly. Those of us who pay attention to history understand that the men and women who were the original pillars of this New Democratic Party spoke constantly about co-operation. Henry Wise Wood, the one-time pillar of Alberta's left, was esteemed by Albertans from all parties because he genuinely sought co-operation.

Now, due to Bill 6, Albertans have been presented with a snapshot that reveals in all its starkness the attitude gap that exists between the old CCF-UFA alliance and Alberta's modern left-of-centre representatives. Those members across the way are responsible for Bill 6.

Mr. Speaker, members across the way have demonstrated that they do not value co-operation, and now some of these same members are claiming that what they blatantly and openly stated at

an earlier time was merely a miscommunication. This government openly stated that under the provisions of Bill 6 workers, regardless of age, family, or pay status, would be covered by OHS. This would include Hutterite colonies and the children of farm and ranch families. This wasn't a miscommunication. There was no vagueness about what the government said, nor was there uncertainty in the documents that the government previously presented to the public.

Mr. Speaker, let me encourage members of this government to step away from their ideological high horse, look to their roots, cooperate, and listen to the people.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Progressive Conservative Caucus

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to recognize the good work done this session by the PC caucus. This is what effective opposition looks like. The Member for Calgary-North West stood up for the good work done on women's issues by the previous government while strongly and effectively advocating for awareness and action on violence against women as well as teen addictions.

The Member for Calgary-West has been relentless in urging the Health and Justice ministers to create a proactive plan to address Alberta's fentanyl crisis. He has also pushed hard on at least two ministers in the House to secure meetings for his constituents.

The Member for Calgary-South East has been a collaborative communicator, working with the ministers of Health and Environment to advocate for front-line health care workers as well as pushing for responsible, industry-partnered planning in our energy sector.

The Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster has regaled us with tales of his days as a veterinarian while also acting as a measured voice in the debate around Bill 6. Between him and the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti there are no stronger advocates for farmers and ranchers. On top of this, the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti has been a strong voice for the forest industry. From the softwood lumber agreement to the pine beetle problem, the member has raised the concerns of an industry largely forgotten by this government.

The Member for Calgary-Lougheed has repeatedly and tirelessly made sure this government takes definitive and measurable action on advanced education and aboriginal stakeholder issues with this government.

The Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, while new to the game, has proven himself more than capable in advocating for increased ASLI housing spaces across Alberta while pushing for increased market access and export opportunities for Alberta businesses.

I am proud we're speaking up for hard-working, everyday Albertans, including farmers and ranchers. I've tried to show Albertans that we are humbled and realize the mistakes of the past. Our party looks to Albertans for guidance as we seek to rebuild and come back stronger than ever.

Finally, we unfortunately had to say goodbye to our esteemed colleague from Calgary-Greenway. He advocated for small business and nonprofits while also being a strong constituency MLA. He spent his own money travelling the globe to advocate for over 2,500 religious minorities in Afghanistan who face ongoing persecution for practicing their faith.

I am proud of our PC team, Mr. Speaker.

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

Alberta Committee of Citizens with Disabilities

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This weekend I had the opportunity to join the Alberta Committee of Citizens with Disabilities, which is located in the Edmonton-Meadowlark constituency, for their celebration of International Day of Persons with Disabilities. ACCD is dedicated to educating our community about disability-related issues, and they aim to dispel the myths that hinder persons with disabilities from participating in society. Through consultation and research, the committee addresses issues facing those with disabilities and provides feedback to decision-makers like ourselves. ACCD's motto, Together We Hold the Power, reflects their commitment to developing partnerships with like-minded organizations and individuals. This organization offers many supports to its clients, including bursaries and awards for those participating in postsecondary studies. I would like to thank ACCD for their dedication to those with disabilities in my community and across the province.

Thank you.

Farm and Ranch Worker Legislation

Mr. Westhead: Mr. Speaker, farm safety legislation is one of the reasons that I ran for election. I knew the Conservatives were dragging their feet on farm worker safety for far too long, and the Wildrose was not to be trusted when it came to workers' rights. Only our hon. Premier and the NDP would provide the kind of leadership to tackle this issue in a way that is fair and reasonable for a group of workers who have been denied these rights based solely on their occupation.

When formulating my decision on whether to support this policy direction, I turned to the evidence. The evidence was overwhelming. The evidence was also heartbreaking. I learned that of the roughly 18 deaths per year, they were preventable, Mr. Speaker, and I learned that for every death that occurred, there were 25 hospital admissions and 11 trauma admissions. I've seen some of those accidents first-hand in the operating room: degloving injuries and people run over by combines. I also learned that over the last several years the agricultural sector has had the highest fatality rate among all occupations in Alberta, and it's on the rise. What's more is that injuries in this sector are underreported. We don't even know the true magnitude of this problem. After examining the evidence, the status quo is simply not acceptable to me.

A wise man once told me that history isn't just a thing of the past; it is also a thing of the present, that we are always making history right here and right now. On that note, I'd like to leave a question in the minds of my hon. colleagues. What side of history do you want to be on? I know that I want to be on the side of history where I can look back and be proud of the fact that I supported equal rights for all employees regardless of their occupation.

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

Government Policies

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For the past seven months this out-of-touch NDP government has done just about everything in its power to break the spirit of Albertans. They've attacked taxpayers; families; the energy sector; businesses, large and small; and now the very fabric of our identity, farmers and ranchers. They call our oil dirty.

The Finance minister doesn't think there's a single penny of waste to cut from the most expensive government in Canada. When we ask him about cutting taxes, he just laughs.

The Energy minister says that unemployed energy workers looking to our government for solutions should go take a hike and get a job in B.C.

The government backbench jeers and taunts when the Leader of the Official Opposition talks about job losses and families getting hurt in the chaos of this government's risky policies.

The NDP said that they'd be different, but they've broken that trust. They're not even acting the same as past governments. They're acting worse.

All is not lost, however. Wildrose is here to stand up for Albertans every step of the way. Even though this out-of-touch government has caused unthinkable economic damage, their mess can and will be cleaned up with common-sense conservative values and ideas. We will fight their regressive carbon tax, we will defend the energy sector, and we will stand against this NDP government's relentless attack on family farms and ranches.

1:50

We will be here when the NDP is just a bad memory, like in Saskatchewan, B.C., and Ontario. We are devoted to Alberta. We will do it because, unlike the members opposite, we came to work for Albertans, not ourselves. We will fight their spending, we will fight their taxes, and at the end of the day we will hold our heads high knowing we did right by the people of this province: past, present, and future.

Wildrose believes in cutting waste and shrinking government, low taxes, trust, and democracy. If the days are starting to feel long, I advise the members opposite to buckle up. We're only getting started. The spirit of the Wildrose is stronger than ever. It is the spirit of Alberta. It is something the members opposite will never understand, and it's something they cannot break.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: The Leader of Her Majesty's Official Opposition.

Government Policies

Mr. Jean: Alberta's economy is in crisis. Financial experts are calling yesterday's markets one of the worst days in 25 years for the energy sector. The NDP's ideological push to implement their risky economic experiments are only making things much, much worse, and here's the social cost for families. Alberta's suicide rate has increased 30 per cent, homeless shelter usage is up 130 per cent, and food bank use is at a crisis level. Why won't the Premier hit the pause button on her radical policies and focus on policies that will actually help vulnerable Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I've said many times before, we are fully aware of the hurt in this province as a result of the drop in the price of oil. We're aware of the problems that occur with so many families when jobs are lost. That's why we were the only party in the last election to run with a job-creation plan, and we are the party that has introduced an infrastructure plan that yesterday the Conference Board of Canada said was the right thing to do and today the RBC said is the right thing to do. Last night these guys voted against a budget bill that supported that infrastructure plan. We are going to stand up for Albertans.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Jean: One hundred thousand Albertans' jobs lost and counting with this government. In neighbourhoods across Alberta accountants, administration staff, engineers, rig workers, truck drivers, and hard-working men and women are sitting at home wondering what's next. They are becoming gripped with self-doubt and a sense of hopelessness. Others are now finding themselves on the streets, fentanyl use is rising, and charities are being overloaded with work. Everyone is looking at the NDP, struggling to understand their stubbornness, pushing forward policies that are hurting Albertans. When will the Premier start listening to these Albertans, who want to get back to work?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Unlike the opposition, we in this government know that the government does not control the world price of oil, but we can act as a shock absorber – absorber – as the economy slows down. That is why we have introduced a plan that (a) stabilizes those important front-line services that work with people that are struggling with the situation, just like the member opposite has talked about. That is why we are investing in infrastructure. That is why we have freed up over a billion dollars in capital. That is why we are moving forward with the job creation incentive plan. These are all things that we are doing in order to ameliorate the very important issues that the member . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Jean: The Premier is right. She is shock observing.

Here's the NDP record on the economy: higher business taxes, higher personal taxes, and higher gas taxes for exporters. Royalty rates are going up, and the review has scared investment right out of Alberta. To top it all off, the NDP are bringing in a punishing \$3 billion carbon tax, which is going to cost every Albertan. Albertans are very worried. They're right to be anxious. Their government is more interested in toying around with the economy instead of doing what's right for Albertans. Does the Premier understand the damage her policies are doing, or is she just not interested?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What I understand is that the platform that the member opposite ran on, to take billions and billions of dollars away from important front-line services that support the families that he claims to be standing up for, is not the way forward and is not what Albertans voted for. What we are doing is that we are stabilizing public services, we are investing \$2.1 billion in making capital available to businesses to diversify the economy, we're investing in technology, we've got a job creation incentive program, and we are putting an extra 4 and a half billion dollars for an unprecedented investment in capital, all of which . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Second main question.

Mr. Jean: One hundred thousand Albertans' jobs lost, and this government has done absolutely nothing. Albertans are worried about jobs and the economy. Unemployment is the highest it's been in decades, and home prices are down and falling. What's the Premier worried about? Attacking farms, introducing a \$3 billion carbon tax, and jet-setting to Paris. Surely the Premier understands the terrible optics that while Albertans are suffering, taxes are going up and life in the government has never been so good. To the

Premier: what is the government going to do to show Albertans that they're sharing in the same pain that Albertans have?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I know the member opposite would like us to show we're sharing the pain by laying off teachers and laying off nurses, laying people off and pulling services back from Albertans, but we are not going to do that because we know that will not help the economy and that will not help Alberta families. That's what Albertans voted for in the last election because they know that we've got to come together as we go through these tough times, not pull back the way these guys over there want to.

Mr. Jean: Alberta is facing the highest personal debt loads in the country. Bankruptcies are on the increase. But it seems the only policy the NDP have for those suffering is to raise everyone's taxes, taxes that will be taken from families and put into an NDP slush fund. Now critics are more determined than ever in their resolve to shut down our energy sector. It's these types of short-sighted policies that are doing damage to families right across Alberta. The Premier did not campaign on this. Will she admit she has broken the trust of Albertans, who are suffering so badly?

Ms Notley: You know, the Official Opposition's approach, for instance, to the issue of climate change is to pretend that it isn't there and to carry on with the same policies that have been in place for over a decade that haven't gotten a single foot of pipeline built and that have done nothing to expand our access to markets or to diversify the economy. That is not the way forward. That is why we are so vulnerable to the drop in prices now. But that's not the way we are going to go forward under our leadership. We're going to change that. We're going to make this economy stronger. We're going to diversify our economy. We're going to diversify our energy sector. We're going to diversify our markets. By doing that, we will be much stronger economically.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Jean: Critics of our energy sector have never been more determined than today to shut us down, and the Premier just doesn't get it. ForestEthics, who the Premier proudly shared the stage with last month, said yesterday, and I quote, there's no way we're going to stop working to prevent projects like Kinder Morgan's from being built. End quote. They bragged later that they had a direct hand in developing the carbon tax and climate strategy. How reassuring. Will the Premier admit that her carbon tax will only do damage to our economy and it won't help Albertans in any way whatsoever?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What I will say is that our plan to deal with climate change, something that all Albertans know we have to do our part on, enjoyed the consensus support of key industry leaders, of small-business leaders, of civil society, of environmental groups because they know that is the right thing to do. The members opposite want to continue to pretend it's 1950. They don't want to change anything. They don't want to move forward. They think that that's somehow going to make things better, but it's not. It's 2015. We've got to move forward.

The Speaker: Third main question.

Mr. Jean: It's 2015, and Albertans are definitely against your carbon tax.

Farm and Ranch Worker Legislation

Mr. Jean: Yesterday was a day filled with misinformation about Bill 6. The Premier said that we had to pass the bill so that the government could write the regulations. That's simply not true. Bill 6 is a weird law. Six of its 10 sections actually amend regulations and not laws. That means that cabinet can change or cancel 60 per cent of the bill through a closed-door cabinet order, and there is nothing anyone can do about it. This includes undoing all the amendments about family farms and the WCB. Why has the Premier . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, I'm very surprised to hear that coming from a lawyer, but anyway. At this point, as a result of that less than professional opinion, the only confusion that is coming on this issue after we had brought forward our amendment is that that is coming from the Official Opposition.

Speaking of confusion, Mr. Speaker, in this week alone the Official Opposition has said that Bill 6 should be killed, then they've said that they agree with parts of Bill 6, and then yesterday their critic of accountability told the media that he has no position on Bill 6. Quite frankly, they sound very confused and not . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

2:00

Mr. Jean: Again there was more misinformation from the jobs minister. She said that it was never the intent of the government to cover family farms or neighbours volunteering in Bill 6. Not true. The government's original briefing for the media made it absolutely clear that the bill applied to unpaid labour from neighbours and family members. The NDP produced flyers, websites, and Power-Point presentations and circulated them to us and everyone else that all confirm this. Either this government didn't read its own documents on Bill 6 or they are willfully deceiving Albertans. Which one is it?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I have already taken personal responsibility for the fact that the wrong information went out. As a result of that, we have introduced an amendment to make it very clear – very clear – that farmers' family members, unpaid volunteers, and paid family members are exempted from the application of this bill. It's now in the act. These guys know it. They won't admit it. They're continuing to sow misinformation and confusion because this is about politics for them now; it's not about doing the right thing.

Mr. Jean: The jobs minister had even more misinformation yesterday. She said that the government-proposed changes to Bill 6 would only allow OH and S farm inspectors to enter a farm if there is an injury or death. That is not true either. Nothing in this bill says that. Nothing in the amendments say that. The minister made it up. The NDP keep deceiving Albertans about their intentions on Bill 6, about what is in Bill 6, and about what is in their amendments on Bill 6 because it keeps changing every day, yet this Premier wants farmers and ranchers to trust her. How can they possibly trust you, Premier?

Ms Notley: Well, as I didn't get a chance to finish this in my last answer, let me be clear. In the last week the Official Opposition wanted to kill the bill, agreed with part of the bill, and then were unwilling to take a position on the bill just yesterday when asked

about it by the media. So the Official Opposition, I would suggest, should take some time to figure out what their position is, and in the meantime we are going to move forward on protecting paid farm workers in Alberta, as should have been done a very long time ago.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Carbon Tax

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to open by saying that the average retail electricity price for major providers in December in 2015 is 5.31 cents per kilowatt hour. Write that down because we need it to compare it to the price of electricity after the NDP climate change policies take effect. To the Premier: since the PC Party will be reminding you how much electricity prices are in the future, what do you say to low-income Albertans who are already struggling to make ends meet even before your carbon tax price increases?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, I will say two things. First of all, as we have said repeatedly, when the carbon price comes into effect, we have every intention of rebating completely to low-income and middle-income families. As well, though, the member opposite should be a little nervous about this issue because as a result of their actions with respect to transmission upgrades, we do have some concerns about the price of electricity going forward, and that will be as a result of decisions taken by that government over the objection of Albertans and the rest of the Legislature.

Mr. McIver: Mr. Speaker, the NDP will artificially raise energy costs, and then they're going to ask Albertans to thank them for paying a little bit back. Some Albertans may think those rebates look like vote buying. Increased utility bills and energy costs will hurt business, agriculture, nonprofits, recreational facilities, community halls, arenas, and individual Albertans. To the Premier: what will your government be doing to make sure these important public services and businesses do not close due to the fallout of this and all your other new taxes?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We will be looking forward to working with impacted businesses, trade-affected businesses, low-income families, middle-income families, to make sure that every single cent of the carbon price is reinvested into the economy to help diversify the economy, to support technological development so that we can move towards more renewable energy, so that we can ensure that technology is invested in the oil sands so that they can produce a lower emission product so that they can expand their markets. This is all about economic diversification. This is all about growing the ability of . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.
Second supplemental.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 6 has demonstrated that repeating nonsense does not make it fact. This government is trying the same tactic with their carbon tax, stating again and again that it's revenue neutral when it is not. To the Premier. You say that you will distribute 60 per cent to low-income Albertans. After that what percentages will go to administration, general government revenue, and what percentage, if any, will be left over for your undetermined climate change efforts? I don't see anything revenue neutral here.

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, what Albertans got on climate change from the former government was action neutral and results neutral. We were the only province in the country without an energy efficiency plan, so that's one of the key things that we will be ensuring that that money goes to. We will support Albertans who want to move towards renewable energy on their farms, in their towns, in their community leagues, in their businesses. All those things will be done so that together Albertans can get support to reduce their emissions and ultimately reduce the cost of their energy.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.
The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Traffic Accidents Involving Pedestrians

Ms Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In August of 2014 the mother and future sister-in-law of one of my constituents were struck by an SUV in Calgary. Tragically, her mother died a week later due to the injuries she sustained. However, if that weren't enough, an unfortunate miscommunication between the Calgary Crown prosecutor's office and the Calgary Police Service traffic unit resulted in the case ending up in the wrong court, and the driver only received a fine of \$690 and a loss of eight demerit points. To the Minister of Justice: what is this government doing to ensure that this situation and others like it . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the critical question. Well, of course, the circumstances surrounding this case were absolutely tragic, and our hearts go out to the victim and to the family of the victim. No one should have to suffer such a loss as this. In the wake of that incident, while I can't comment on specifics because of the case, Crown prosecution service is working with the Calgary Police Service traffic unit to ensure that the terms of a memorandum of understanding are used so that a criminal prosecutor is always informed when there is a death in a traffic incident.

Thank you.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Transportation: given that in 2014 in Calgary alone 411 pedestrians were struck and injured, more than one a day, and that's not including incidents where pedestrians were struck and walked away or collisions with cyclists, what changes are this government considering with regard to amending the Traffic Safety Act to better protect pedestrians?

The Speaker: The Minister of Infrastructure.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. Our government is committed to ensuring safety for everyone who uses our roads and sidewalks, including cyclists, drivers, and pedestrians. In conjunction with the Ministry of Justice we're reviewing the Traffic Safety Act. It's currently under way, and it addresses pedestrian safety, and we're looking at fines, demerit points for a variety of traffic violations, including those which involve pedestrians.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Drever: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the minister: how is this government engaging with municipalities to better ensure traffic safety, especially in regard to pedestrians?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, we're always looking for ways to listen to Albertans and to collaborate with them on ways that we can improve safety for the people of Alberta. As we review the act, we'll be seeking input from within the government but also from our stakeholders, our municipal partners, and members of the public. It affects us all, it's crucial, and we need to make sure that all voices are heard as we go forward with the review of the act.

Thank you.

Economic Development

Ms Payne: Mr. Speaker, oil prices have continued to fall this week, and I'm hearing from families and businesses in Calgary-Acadia that they are worried. To the Minister of Finance: what is the government doing to strengthen our economy in this situation?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government has a responsible plan that will diversify the economy and better protect Albertan families from the boom-and-bust cycles of oil. We're investing \$4.4 billion in new infrastructure for our communities and to get people working again. We're mobilizing \$2.1 billion so that economic growth through entrepreneurship and diversification can occur. Finally, by getting it right on climate change, we're building strong support for new market access for our energy products.

Thank you.

2:10

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that families and businesses are experiencing challenges because of the dramatic drop in global oil prices, to the same minister: when will the province get back on its feet, and when will we see a return to positive growth?

The Speaker: The Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Our government has a sound and stable plan that will see a return to growth next year. In fact, the Conference Board of Canada agrees with our plan and projections. Yesterday they said that the provincial government will be spending billions on infrastructure projects, including schools, hospitals, and roads. Over the next few years that will help meet the needs of a growing population. These measures along with the strength in the bitumen exports will help lift the real GDP.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Payne: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that global oil prices are projected to remain low for a longer period of time, will the minister revise his revenue projections and economic forecasts?

Mr. Ceci: You know, everybody knows that the price of oil is volatile. They also know that we consult with industry, expert economists, banks to develop our own forecasts and that our own forecasts are more conservative than theirs. That's why we keep our

projections conservative, and that's why we revise our estimates quarterly.

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

Job Creation and Retention

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government talks all the time about how important it is to diversify the economy. What they don't seem to realize is that their actions and risky ideological experiments are killing multiple related industries. Today I would like to put a face to those job loss numbers, not to tell them to move to B.C. I would like to ask the minister of economic diversification and trade, the superminister: what do you have to say to the more than 500 people out of work at PHX Energy, a Calgary-based drilling company?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I've said before, we are very concerned about the fact that we're seeing a drop in energy prices and the implications that that has for job creation and economic stimulus in Alberta. As part of the royalty review – interestingly, the member opposite suggested that we already had conclusions and that we already had outcomes. That's interesting because that's not true. One of the things that we are doing is working with industry to talk about how we deal with the current challenges that they are facing in terms of profitability and continuing their economic viability, and you'll see more . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, those in the Wildrose caucus here understand that when work in the energy industry dries up, it has a ripple effect. Given that tens of thousands of Albertans have lost their jobs in the energy sector and also that that trickles down to the support service sectors as well and since we all know that thousands of Albertans are facing this cruel reality, what does this minister have to say to Stephen Scott, who lost his engineering job at Cenovus Energy in Calgary during an October wave of layoffs?

Ms Notley: As I've said, Mr. Speaker, we have a multifaceted program that our budget introduced, that was just passed two weeks ago, that is focused on economic stimulation and job creation. One example of things that we'll be doing is that we have \$2.2 billion of capital that we are freeing up so that small business and innovators and medium enterprisers can get access to capital to help them through the downturn, and indeed some of these drilling companies were exactly who we had in mind when we introduced that project and that process. We've also, of course, as I've said, through our investment in capital . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Panda: Mr. Speaker, the Premier should know full well that the economic downturn our province is facing spreads well beyond the oil patch. Given that I'm very worried about the thousands of families that are sitting around their kitchen tables trying to figure out how to make ends meet and given that we already have seen the impact of some of the NDP government's economic policies, will the Premier commit to killing the risky, job-killing carbon tax at a time when Albertans simply can't afford it?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, what I will commit to doing is not moving forward on some of the ideas that the opposition has put forward

that would have involved laying off nurses, teachers, front-line service providers, and taking job loss and making it worse, which was absolutely the plan that they had wanted to go forward on. [interjections] What we will be doing is working with industry, working with stakeholders, working with economic partners to ensure that we can move forward with diversifying the economy and providing a broader range of job opportunities for Albertans as we move forward.

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, would you keep your volume down a bit, please.
Calgary-Lougheed.

Lower Athabasca Regional Land-use Plan

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since the Aboriginal Relations minister could not assist in this regard last week, I'll ask this question again in a slightly different way. A review panel was struck in June 2014 by the former minister of the environment after six First Nations applied for a review of the way in which the lower Athabasca regional plan was affecting their way of life. The review panel was to have submitted its finding by June 2015. To the Premier: did you receive this report, and if so, when?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Well, again, cabinet has not been in receipt of such a report. However, we will commit to getting back to the member when we can determine what's going on. Certainly, we have been working with our First Nation partners in terms of the lower Athabasca regional plan. They have identified for us that there are some concerns around the way the previous government proceeded with respect to the lower Athabasca plan, and we are working with them to address those concerns.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Rodney: That's alarming.

Again to the Premier: given that section 45(c) of the Land Stewardship Act requires that the government of Alberta publish the review panel report on its Land Use Secretariat website and given that the minister's own rules require the ministry to post the report within 60 days after it was submitted, which means that it is over 100 days late, and given that as of today at 1 p.m. the report is still not public, when are you planning to release the report, and why did the ministry contravene its own law for over three and a half months?

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Well, I'm not really sure why we're going over this territory again, but I'm happy to repeat the same answer. You know, no report has been brought forward to cabinet.

In terms of the lower Athabasca regional plan, we are proceeding forward with our First Nations partners. We are listening to their concerns, which they feel the last government didn't listen to, and we are working with them to develop a way to go forward so that we can respect their traditional territory rights as well as the environment.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Rodney: Given that six First Nations went to the trouble of seeking a ruling by a review panel and that after one and a half years they deserve to learn the panel's findings and given that aboriginal

groups have told us they're at a loss to understand why your government has not shared this information with them as per your own rules and given that your government has been vowing that it's forging a new relationship with Alberta's indigenous peoples, what possible reason could you have for withholding the review panel's report on LARP, and what kind of message are you sending to our First Nations friends when you're blatantly failing to consult with them on issues that are vital to their way of life?

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Well, in my consultations with First Nations on a number of issues, including issues related to the previous government's action on the lower Athabasca regional plan, I haven't heard any particular complaints that we're failing to consult on that issue. But you know what? I am happy to hear voices from First Nations. I've had many meetings with many First Nations and many other indigenous groups, but I'm happy to have more. So if the hon. member would like to bring that to my attention, then I am happy to take that meeting.

Thank you.

2:20 Emergency Medical Services in Southern Alberta

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, as unbelievable as it may seem, Alberta Health Services has spent half a million dollars this year on an unnecessary, unoccupied facility in Calgary. Space has been rented, and staff has been hired, at a cost of over \$60,000 per month. Over half the year and hundreds of thousands of dollars spent and no work done: I thought you had to be an NDP backbencher to get that gig. Will the Health minister immediately put an end to this thoughtless waste of tax dollars on an empty building?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. We want to build an EMS system that's there when people need it. We need to make sure that they get the right care in the right place at the right time for the right investment, and that's why we are taking our time to make sure that we get it right in working with Calgarians. I've met with the mayor, I've reviewed the original Health Quality Council report, I've reviewed operational data from Alberta Health Services and the ministry, and I want to make sure that we get this right for the long term. I'm not going to rush into a decision today if it's not the right one.

Mr. Barnes: There are so many higher priorities. Centralization of emergency services under AHS has been shaky at best and a serious burden for communities at worst. Given that in our own city of Medicine Hat response times worsened once dispatch was centralized under AHS and seeing that Mayor Nenshi and the city of Calgary have said that they don't want to be forced into a top-down, centralized system either, will you commit right now to scrapping this AHS project and listening to the local decision-makers in Calgary?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm absolutely working in collaboration with local leaders in Calgary as well as reviewing comprehensive data from throughout the province to make sure that we get this right moving forward.

I also want to add that I'm offended that the member said that the staff who were working at the facility aren't doing work. They're

doing valuable work. They're doing transfers from southern Alberta, making sure that patients who need support in transfers are getting the support they need. They're taking calls from the central and north zones. I think that the staff who are working there are doing a great service for Albertans, and they deserve our respect, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, I think pretty much everyone on that side of the House was against AHS and the superboard before they flip-flopped.

Given that the waste continues to pile sky-high, it's no wonder that the communities want no part of AHS centralization. To the Health minister. Waste, inefficiency, decreased service, zero accountability of our finances: is this what Calgarians can look forward to once they are forced into this broken, centralized system?

Ms Hoffman: The government that Albertans elected, Mr. Speaker, is there to make sure that they're using evidence to drive solid decision-making, and we're going to be acting in the best interests of Albertans. We're not going to be proposing billions of dollars in cuts, as are being proposed by members opposite. That's not in the best interests of Albertans. That's not in the best interests of comprehensive health care. We're going to make sure we put patients first, and I wish the members opposite would do the same.

The Speaker: The Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Farm and Ranch Worker Legislation (continued)

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Several open letters on behalf of members of the agriculture community – the Alberta wheat, barley, canola, and elk commissions, associations like the Alberta Pulse Growers, landscape and nursery trades, Alberta greenhouse growers, and the Alberta Oat Growers – have all said: stop, consult, and start over on Bill 6. Will the Premier admit our farming community was not properly consulted while her friends at the Alberta Federation of Labour got special consideration?

The Speaker: The Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Limbs are lost, bodies are crushed, and there are fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers, aunts, uncles – family members – who don't come home, and that's the point. The workers, the farm and ranch employees, should be safe at work. They should know that we are all doing our very best to ensure that they can be compensated if they are injured or hurt. [interjections]

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

The Speaker: Point of order noted.

First supplemental.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the Alberta Beef Producers, the Alberta Beekeepers Commission, the Alberta Cattle Feeders, the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties are all encouraging the Premier to stop Bill 6 and start over, will the Premier accept these groups' advice to stand down and send Bill 6 to committee?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 6 proceeds with protecting the very basic, core rights of employees to be protected, to

ensure that if they are injured or they are killed, they have compensation, to ensure that they have the right to refuse unsafe work without punishment, to ensure that if there is an injury, there's investigation on it. We will proceed with the very basic rights and move forward with very full and open and transparent consultation on any other details regarding that.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker. This government stood in this House and promised fulsome consultations with farmers and ranchers. When they demanded more, several ministers proclaimed loudly that there will be more information sessions. As of 2:20 today this government's own website has added no information sessions. Will the Premier admit that they misled farmers, and will she rectify the situation by personally attending one this Friday in Hanna?

The Speaker: The Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have been listening to the concerns of the farmers and ranchers who've been speaking to us, and as a result of addressing their concerns, we have moved forward the amendment to ensure that it is protected, that families are . . .

Mr. Mason: Order. Mr. Speaker, these goons over here are . . . [interjections]

Mr. Fildebrandt: Point of order. [interjections]

The Speaker: Quiet, please.

Mr. Mason: A bunch of gangsters.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Point of order.

The Speaker: I noted it, hon. member. Don't yell, please.

Hon. member, your point of order is taken. However, the phraseology that you used was inappropriate for the House.

Mr. Mason: I apologize, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you very much.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

The Speaker: Hon. members, we're back at it again today. I thought we went fairly well. Today I can't hear the ministers. I also find it somewhat inappropriate on both sides of the House to be pointing to people in the Assembly. I find it inappropriate. I think you should keep that discussion within this House. They are there as observers. Please do that practice into the future.

Now, you have to decide, folks, if you want to have this time for discussion or not. It's up to you.

Calgary-West.

Alberta Law Enforcement Response Teams

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Alberta law enforcement response teams, otherwise known as ALERT, have been fighting organized crime, weapons trafficking, biker gangs, and child sexual exploitation for 10 years, but funds are running so short that ALERT will have to cut 70 of its 268 officers next year. To the Justice minister: given that organized crime is embedded in communities in ways that would shock Albertans and given that

ALERT has a successful record of making our communities safer, what are you doing to ensure ALERT can continue its invaluable work protecting Albertans?

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the critical question. Of course, ALERT performs a number of critical functions. With both the support of ALERT and the Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police we have undertaken an audit of ALERT, and that has come up with several findings. We are moving forward with a strategy that will ensure that there is no loss in front-line services or those critical functions which ALERT performs.

Thank you.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you. Again to the Justice minister: given that the loss of ALERT would impact rural communities the hardest and given that the government has spoken proudly of the work ALERT is performing to keep Alberta communities safe from drug traffickers, child predators, drug cartels, and bikers and given that ALERT is our front-line defence for fentanyl and that this government promised not to affect front-line workers, what consultation have you had with the law enforcement agencies in communities in rural Alberta about the potential eruption of drugs and organized crime because ALERT is about to lose one-quarter of its resources?

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice.

2:30

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Well, as I've just said, we have received an audit of ALERT. We are working on a strategy going forward to ensure that they lose none of their front-line resources. We are looking at restructuring a number of things so they are better placed. We have been working with our law enforcement partners across the province, including the Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police and the ALERT board itself, to ensure that none of those functions are lost and that they all continue to be performed.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: given that fentanyl has become ALERT's priority this past year, with communities such as Bonnyville-Cold Lake and the Blood Tribe all desperately asking for help, and given that since the fentanyl crisis began a year ago, ALERT has seized 26,000 pills, 70 per cent of them in 2015 alone, and given that popping just one pill can be the equivalent of putting a bullet into your head and given that ALERT is running out of money, will you commit today, Minister, to fully funding ALERT to ensure that it can continue to save lives?

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Well, as I've said twice now, we are working with ALERT and with the Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police to ensure that those front-line functions are still being performed. When it comes to fentanyl, of course, this is a critical issue. ALERT has been enormously helpful in this area, and we will ensure that that work continues. In addition, I think that the important piece is to realize that we must work with our partners also in health care

and in education to ensure that we are addressing the underlying drivers of these sorts of addictions.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Condominium Property Act Regulations

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Edmonton-Centre is one of the densest parts of Edmonton, with thousands of existing condominium units and, as of this past January, another 2,600 in development. Now, I've heard from condo owners and organizations like the Alberta Real Estate Association about changes to the Condominium Property Act, with concerns about protecting new condo owners. Service Alberta recently publicized the first draft-regulation phase for public feedback this fall. To the Minister of Service Alberta: can you update the House and myself on the responses that have been received and your progress on these important regulations for condo property owners?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. We are committed to strengthening consumer protection for the condo market for Albertans, which is why we're proposing stronger disclosure and clear options for new buyers when their condos are not completed on time or as promised. We are an open government that values the thoughts and opinions of condo owners, and I'm proud that we've made those regulations available for all to see and provide input on, just as we will proudly provide the regulations to the farm and ranch industry to provide input on. We received nearly 300 responses.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now, given that some stakeholders expressed some concerns about this legislation when it was first introduced by the previous government, though I have heard from stakeholders that they have been very happy with the adoption of many of the things they've brought forward in the past months, how is the minister ensuring that all voices will continue to be heard as we continue this review?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I understand that there were concerns with the previous government's handling of this legislation, but that's why we're here, to move Alberta forward and correct the mistakes of the past. We took the unprecedented step of putting those draft regulations online for all to see and comment on. My ministry continues to meet with both critics and supporters of the bill. All voices are being heard on Bill 9 regulations, and we will continue to take an open, public, and consumer rights based approach to completing these important regulations.

Mr. Shepherd: Well, Mr. Speaker, given that I've spoken with many constituents and, again, stakeholders like AREA, who are eager to participate and certainly have indicated their happiness with their ability to so far, can the minister tell us what further opportunities are going to be available for these people to participate as we proceed?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. More regulations are needed to complete Bill 9, including those that will regulate the

condominium property management sector and create a condominium dispute tribunal, another situation in which regulations come after the bill. As mentioned, we will continue to take an open, public, consumer rights based approach on all phases of regulations to complete Bill 9. That includes opening up future draft regulations to the public and stakeholders for their valued input, and we will get it right because we will take the time to listen and deliver to Albertans on all issues before this House.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Workers' Compensation for Farm and Ranch Workers

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This NDP government is still lost in the wilderness when it comes to Bill 6. The NDP is still committed to making farmers join the WCB, but I want to enlighten the House on the Premier's very own views of this dysfunctional government board. On November 26, 2014, she said, "WCB does not function as an objective, neutral arbiter or judge between workers and employers." To the Premier. Farmers want choice for disability insurance. Clearly, the broken WCB isn't good enough for you. Why do you think it's good enough for our farmers and ranchers?

The Speaker: The Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I answered that question yesterday, it is true that the WCB needs to be improved, and I won't back down on that fact. In the speech that people keep quoting, what I was referring to was the fact that I think that there could be improvement with respect to how the WCB handles occupational disease, how it handles repetitive strain injuries, and how it handles mental health claims. None of those really are the primary kinds of injuries that we're talking about, that occur on farms and that devastate the families of farm employees, who do not otherwise receive income should they be injured or killed. That's why we think . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Schneider: Mr. Speaker, the Premier isn't the only one who called the WCB broken. Given that the Education minister said, "It's really important that we show . . . solidarity with the workers who actually are compelled to make claims to the WCB because . . . they are in a compromised situation to begin with," does the Education minister think farmers are good enough for his solidarity, or does he want to throw them under the bus, too? Can the government look at private disability insurance as an option for Bill 6?

Ms Notley: Well, first of all, the member opposite keeps referring to farmers, and to be perfectly clear again, this applies to the paid employees of farmers who are not related to them – okay? – just those people, not to the farmers. That being said, farmers can opt in or opt out of WCB unless they have paid employees, and then those employees need to be covered because, quite frankly, the private options the member has referred to are not as good as what the workers would get through WCB. There's a significant difference in how they're administered. It would create huge hardship to make those injured paid farm workers subject themselves to the private system you're proposing.

Mr. Schneider: Mr. Speaker, given that many farmers and ranchers already have private, superior, and lower cost disability insurance and they just want to be able to choose and given that this NDP

government is changing Bill 6 by the day and adding amendment after amendment to correct their incompetence, to the point where the Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose described Bill 6 as quicksand, will the Premier just do the right thing, back down on her plan to force WCB membership on farmers and ranchers and give them the choice of private disability insurance?

Ms Notley: First of all, Mr. Speaker, our government has introduced one amendment, one amendment to clarify that farmers . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks, for the second time, please don't yell.

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, first of all, one amendment to clarify what was the intention all along.

Secondly, let us be very clear. The private options that the member talks about are not the same. They're not as good. There is a delay, they are not no-fault, you have to hand off a whole bunch of money to lawyers, and there is a significant difference in the benefit that accrues to either the injured paid farm workers or their family. That is why we will not go that way. It's very, very different.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.
The Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Farm and Ranch Worker Legislation (continued)

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Fifteen different ag focus groups previously mentioned by the Member for Drumheller-Stettler, some oddly applauding this government's apparent efforts to enhance farm safety, have all indicated that the process has sadly been more of a monologue than a dialogue. To the minister of jobs: given the hasty, nonconsultative attempt to remedy the shortcomings of Bill 6, will this government do the right thing and hit the pause button on this legislation to reassure Albertans that safety truly is a priority here and not a hidden big-labour agenda?

The Speaker: The Minister of Municipal Affairs.
2:40

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to emphasize again that this bill is about introducing the most basic protections for paid nonfamily farm and ranch workers. It is the right thing to do, to consult on all the other details, and we will consult on all the other details. I look forward to doing that very intently with the farm and ranch workers to ensure that those details are common sense and meet the needs of those farm and ranch workers moving forward.

Mr. Gotfried: Again to the minister of jobs: given that we now know how many Alberta farmers and ranchers it takes to stand up for their livelihoods and given that they were waiting on the Leg. steps again today to begin the process of true consultation, will you commit to a dialogue around meaningful and appropriate measures to enhance farm and ranch safety across Alberta, or will you continue ramming this legislation down the throats of rural Albertans?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Municipal Affairs.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are committed to moving forward with the most basic protections for farm and ranch workers in this province, but we have fully committed to a very

extensive consultation process in terms of the regulations, which will add those details to ensure the safety of farm and ranch workers in this province. We will work with farmers to ensure that employment standards, occupational health and safety standards meet the needs of those Albertans, and we will have that conversation with those farmers and ranchers over the next one to two years to ensure that we come up with the best Alberta-made solution.

Mr. Gotfried: I think the term is a day late and a dollar short.

To the Minister of Agriculture: given your own laudable personal efforts at real consultation over the past few weeks, including the admission of your government's shortcomings, and given the passionate voices of many hard-working, dedicated, experienced, and safety-conscious rural Albertans, can you honestly say that this government has gotten this bill right? Please tell us what you think about the need for further consultation.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Larivee: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to say that I have been at many of those sessions. I've been at the rally out on the steps, and I have been listening to the farmers and ranchers who spoke with me about their questions and concerns, and I brought them forward. Those very basic protections we will move forward on with Bill 6 because they're very basic and a small piece of the big picture moving forward, but we will consult extensively. We have very openly committed to ensuring, both before they're drafted and after they're drafted, that those regulations reflect the needs of farmers and ranchers in this province.

Notices of Motions

The Speaker: Hon. Government House Leader, do you have a motion?

Mr. Mason: I do, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much. I have three notices of motions. First,

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 6, Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act, is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill in second reading, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of the bill at this stage will be put forthwith.

Second,

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 6, Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act, is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill in Committee of the Whole, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of the bill at this stage shall be put forthwith.

Third,

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 6, Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act, is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill in third reading, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of the bill at this stage shall be put forthwith.

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do have a notice of motion today, and I thank you for recognizing me. I rise today to give notice of the following motion pursuant to Standing Order 30.

Be it resolved that the ordinary business of the Legislative Assembly be adjourned to discuss a matter of urgent public importance, namely the devastating human, health, and social costs of the economic downturn, the resulting employment losses, and the bleak fiscal picture many Albertans are facing.

I have the appropriate paperwork in order, sir.
Thank you.

Tabling Returns and Reports

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite number of copies of a news release, which I referred to last night, from the Alberta Small Brewers Association.

Mr. Hanson: I'd like to table five copies of the letters I referred to in my speech to Bill 6.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have tabled the appropriate number of copies of questions that were put forward to me during Committee of Supply for Education.

The Speaker: Any other members?

Hon. members, I believe there was a point of order raised by the Government House Leader.

Point of Order

Maintaining Order in the Assembly

Interrupting a Member

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I raised a point of order at 2:25 p.m., during answers from members of Executive Council during the question period. I rise under section 13(1) of the standing orders, that says, "The Speaker shall preserve order and decorum and decide questions of order," and, secondly, subsection (4)(b), "When a Member is speaking, no person shall . . . (b) interrupt that Member, except to raise a point of order."

Mr. Speaker, the opposition has done something that hasn't happened to me for a long time. They made me lose my temper, and I apologize for those comments that I made, but the situation is really beyond the point where we can just let it continue as it stands. The Wildrose opposition continuously shouts, heckles, and attempts, essentially, to shout down ministers or to intimidate ministers in the course of their answers. They ask questions and then don't listen to the answer. A number of members are constantly speaking directly across the aisle the entire time that ministers are making their points. Others are yelling. Others are shouting. I've not seen this kind of disorder in the past.

I've always been someone who likes to have a good back and forth in the House, Mr. Speaker, a defender of the occasional bit of heckling. It's not a bad thing. But what we're getting from the Official Opposition, from the Wildrose, is a solid wall of noise, which is nothing more, in my view, than an attempt to prevent ministers from answering properly in this House legitimate questions that are put to them. Quite frankly, I think that it is interfering with our ability as members to perform our jobs, as ministers of the Crown and members of Executive Council. I would ask that you take steps to ensure that in the future ministers are able to answer without having to shout over a chorus of what appears to be co-ordinated heckling by pretty much the entire Official Opposition in this House.

Mr. Speaker, it's essential, I think, that if we're going to have a question period, questions can be put, ministers are able to answer and to be heard without feeling that there's an attempt to intimidate them from giving the best possible answer they can.

2:50

It's a difficult thing. I have been on both sides of the House. I can tell you that I infinitely prefer asking questions to answering them because the pressure is quite great to try and make sure that you get it right and you get an accurate answer. I think that our ministers are doing an excellent job in attempting to answer these questions. As it goes now, it's interfering with the ability of members on this side to provide the answers that they are expected to in question period. I would ask that you rule and take measures in the future to make sure that the question period functions with a little less dysfunction than it has at the present time.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The House leader for the Official Opposition.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the hon. member for his comments. I'm a little unclear as to what is actually taking place here right now. I'm not sure if the hon. member has called a point of order against the Speaker or against the opposition. I guess the challenge lies in that while temperatures in this place clearly today reached a boiling point – obviously, members on this side of the House are extremely concerned with the direction that the government is taking, so from time to time during question period they express that displeasure. It's difficult to dispute the fact, that the hon. member mentions, that the volume did get loud in the Assembly today.

I guess part of my concern, Mr. Speaker, is, one, that it's our belief that it's your discretion that needs to be used during the exchanges that take place in the Assembly, and while I have a lot of respect for my hon. colleague on the other side of the House, it is not his role or job to call this House to order. Unfortunately, that's exactly what we saw happen today. He didn't rise on a point of order; he rose and called for order. I'll speak momentarily on some of my concerns around the language that he used in his efforts to call the House to order.

While it is quite reasonable and possible that this side of the House needs to do things about the volume they're using engaging in the debate during question period, I think that it is concerning for me to see, you know, hon. members taking the decorum and order of this House into their own hands in the middle of question period. Just as the opposition's behaviour today, perhaps, was unbecoming of the opposition, certainly that type of behaviour also isn't assisting the Assembly.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I will be asking the third party, but could I ask you: could you comment on your volume from your side of the House? Is it excessive in your opinion, respectfully?

Mr. Cooper: Well, I think, Mr. Speaker, that I provided some reflection that from time to time the volume on this side of the House does rise, and I think that I did say that perhaps we need to be respectful around that particular issue.

I might add that during the hon. member's discussion he had specified or pointed out the Official Opposition, and certainly today and many other days we've heard members of the third party expressing their displeasure. Certainly, we've heard members on the government side also engaging in this sort of decorum, that from time to time has become a distraction. You know, I think it's a little untoward for the hon. member to only point out the fact that our volume was raised. I have noted that, and I think it would be the right thing to do, for members of this Assembly, including on the government benches and backbenches, to also have that same personal reflection.

The Speaker: The leader of the third party.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's been an interesting little discussion here, and we in the third party do our best not to complain a lot. I would say that we've done our best to have the best decorum in the House. I think even the other parties might even agree that we do that. I'm not saying that we're perfect, Mr. Speaker. I agree with the House leader from the opposition. We heckle a bit. We do. I think it's part of being here, Mr. Speaker. We talk about important things. We represent Albertans, and that's what we're here for.

But in the standing orders 23(h), (i), and (j) it talks about language in 23(j): "... abusive or insulting language of a nature likely to create disorder." We've seen examples of that here. Again, I'm only raising this because it's the discussion now. You know, the government side's members have decided to make a habit of banging the desks long after their last answer so whoever is asking the next question can't hear themselves say it. Without complaining, mind you, I've taken to using this device so I can hear what's going on.

I think there's a little bit of gamesmanship going on here. This is a competitive place. This is where we do that. But I also notice, you know, a minister of the Crown turning around when asked about a different bill, taunting members of the gallery that are there supporting a position that our side of the House is taking. I would definitely say that that qualifies as language designed to incite, likely to create disorder in the House. It was successful. Congratulations, Minister. You wanted to create a ruckus, and the minister created a ruckus, Mr. Speaker. It's to be expected.

You know what? I would say, respectfully, again, that our party will still continue to try to be the most orderly people in the House and the voice of reason here. Mr. Speaker, the government can get their feelings hurt, but I hope they didn't expect to be here and not be held to account by the opposition. You know, there's an old saying about if it's too hot in the kitchen. This is a hot kitchen for all of us. If you're going to be here and you're going to be in government, the idea of question period is to hold the government to account. You don't ... [interjection] Actually, the Government House Leader quietly interrupted me, but I'm going to repeat what he said. He said: it's not to shout them down. I agree with him on that.

But, Mr. Speaker, we need to hold the government to account. Those Albertans watching need to know when the government minister is over the line and when they're not answering the question and when they're not being accountable to Albertans. It's our job on this side of the House to make that known, and we have limited tools. One of the tools we have is to bang and make noise and, I guess, Mr. Speaker, you have the difficult job of deciding when it's too much. We all as a group elected you to do it. God bless you. We know you're doing your best. But, at the end of the day, I think, if people are concerned about having their feelings hurt, they might be sitting in the wrong room.

Mr. Clark: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I just want to rise very briefly. Let me say this. It is the role of the Official Opposition, of course, to hold the government to account, but it is our choice as members how we behave.

3:00

You know, in my observation in the brief time I've been in this Assembly, it is up to the government side to set the tone for the House. You have a tremendously challenging job, Mr. Speaker, to decide when that tone gets too much. Our job on this side is to hold the government to account, and it's the government's job to respond

or not. There's a reason it's called "question period" and not "answer period," but it is ultimately up to the government side to set the tone.

Now, I will say that sometimes that tone gets a little bit too boisterous from this side, but that is us on this side using the limited tools that we have at our disposal. I have the benefit, perhaps, of being at the end of the House where I can't quite hear everything that goes on on that side. It just seems like a wall of noise at times. Perhaps it's the same experience on your side. There's a quid pro quo. There are two sides to this. I think that there are members who perhaps would find that their responses today, in particular, were a little bit too boisterous, but my urging to the government side is that it's up to you to set the tone in this.

Mr. Speaker, I don't envy your job here in having to sort all of this out, but we have a limited set of tools at our disposal to hold the government to account. We ask questions. It's up to the government to choose how you respond to those questions. Sometimes you can choose to ramp it up, and sometimes, I might suggest, it might not be a bad idea to ramp it down.

With that, I'll cede my time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Hon. members, first of all, I'd like to acknowledge and appreciate the apology that the Government House Leader made and also acknowledge that, some might say fortunately or unfortunately, the responsibility for that rests with the Speaker, which you all elected. Thank you for that comment. I also appreciate, however, that these are my observations. I've mentioned them on a couple of occasions.

With respect to the third party and to the leader of the fourth party, the comments that I hear – and I do not hear them all, but I can tell you that the volume has largely been, in my experience, particularly today with respect to the Official Opposition – and I'd respectfully ask that the Opposition House Leader discuss that with his caucus and attempt to reduce the volume that's in the meeting. What I do see is that I have difficulty hearing the response to the questions that the opposition asks, so I'd appreciate your toning it down.

To the government side, to the point that's been made by several leaders, my job is to ensure that the opposition has ample time. They have limited tools, so you must appreciate that that balance is necessarily governed by the Speaker, and the tone – more the volume than the tone. There have been occasions at times when comments have been made which are inappropriate, but the larger situation that I'm experiencing is the volume, and I would respectfully ask – and I will be addressing it more closely in the future – to please keep your volume down.

I note that the Speaker will be recording that the point of order is well taken. I will be using that as a guiding principle for both sides as we move forward.

I understand that there is another point of order. Is that correct, hon. member?

Point of Order Parliamentary Language

Mr. Cooper: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I guess I hesitate to rise given some of the comments, but we just can't ever get to a place in this House where any member of the Assembly rises and calls anyone a goon or a gangster. While those two words might not be unparliamentary in the definition of words that are unparliamentary or not, certainly under 23(j) they clearly created disorder today. While the apology wasn't specific to the words, I'd ask for a full and complete withdrawal of those statements and will endeavour to keep the decorum much more becoming of all members.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Well, if it wasn't clear for the hon. Opposition House Leader, I will make it clear. If the words "goon" and "gangster" are not unparliamentary, they should be. I in an unqualified way withdraw them and apologize to you, Mr. Speaker, for rising in my place when I should not have. To the hon. members opposite, I withdraw those words and sincerely apologize to them and to the entire House.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. House leader. The point is well taken. I have checked at some length the words, and I can tell you the list is quite lengthy respecting the words that are unparliamentary. Thus, the apology is accepted today.

I have a ruling, so we close the matter. I would appreciate that that's dealt with on both sides.

Official Opposition leader, you have a resolution, I believe.

Request for Emergency Debate

Provincial Economic Situation

Mr. Jean: I do, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to move pursuant to Standing Order 30(2):

Be it resolved that the ordinary business of the Legislative Assembly be adjourned to discuss a matter of urgent public importance; namely, the devastating human, health, and social cost of the economic downturn, the resulting employment losses, and the bleak fiscal picture many Albertans are facing.

Mr. Speaker, I've requested time in the Assembly to bring this matter forward under Standing Order 30 because the impact of an underperforming economy and the resulting job losses across this province have become a matter of urgent public importance.

Over the last few months we have actually seen and talked about a number of statistics used to measure the performance of Alberta's economy. Alberta's real GDP fell 1.2 per cent in 2015. Unemployment has risen above 7 per cent, where it's expected to stay for all of 2016, even higher. For the first time in over 25 years Alberta's unemployment rate will surpass the national average. That's the first time in 25 years, certainly a matter that, on its face, looks to be of public importance. Today we watch as world oil prices drop to \$37 a barrel, and major job creators like Husky just announced plans to pull capital out of Alberta. In November alone, Mr. Speaker, 15,000 jobs were lost in our great province, 15,000 jobs of Albertans. That's 500 jobs per day lost in Alberta. The numbers are absolutely staggering, and we have seen absolutely nothing relating to concrete steps taken to do anything about it.

The urgency of this debate does not come from those statistics alone, Mr. Speaker. The urgency of the debate comes from the very recently revealed numbers that provide a glimpse into the human, health, and social costs of the downturn, which are staggering and will continue to be if nothing is done. The number of Albertans filing for bankruptcy has actually skyrocketed. The number of Albertans who have had their homes foreclosed is trending upwards as well – I saw first-hand in the '90s what bad government policy can do – and record numbers of foreclosures in my hometown of Fort McMurray. In fact, when speaking to a local real estate agent just a number of weeks ago, he indicated to me that more keys were given back to the banks in the previous four months than in the 25 years before as he worked as a real estate agent. That is very troubling.

Most concerning, at the heart of this matter is yesterday's report from the province's Chief Medical Examiner. It is very worrying, Mr. Speaker. The Chief Medical Examiner brought forward . . .

The Speaker: Hon. Member, Standing Order 30(2) says "briefly," so I would urge you to get to the point.

Mr. Jean: Yes, Mr. Speaker, indeed, as precedent sets about seven to eight minutes for this, I believe.

The medical examiner shows that the number of Albertans who have tragically ended their life has increased by 30 per cent this year. That's correct: 30 per cent. In the first six months of 2015, Mr. Speaker, 327 Albertans took their own life. At that rate over 650 Albertans will commit suicide by the end of this year.

3:10

Now, nobody should be so crass as to suggest this is the fault of any policy or any initiative of this Legislature or this government. We are not suggesting that at all, Mr. Speaker. That needs to be absolutely crystal clear. The fact is that many Albertans currently face life's greatest struggle because they are out of work and out of hope, and we want to give them some hope. It's absolutely heartbreaking. A counsellor from Calgary's Distress Centre said yesterday, and I quote: for me it says something, really, about the horrible human impact of what's happening in the economy, with the recession and the real, felt effect, the real suffering and the real struggle that people are experiencing. End quote. Demand for counselling service has actually increased by 80 per cent, Mr. Speaker. That number tells me that Albertans are looking for help. They're looking for hope, and they're in desperate need of hope. They're looking for someone to tell them that while things are tough right now, somebody has their back, somebody understands their plight, and somebody is working to get things back on track.

I'm calling for the debate of this important matter of urgent public importance because if we do not speak about it today, Mr. Speaker, we will not have another opportunity for at least two months to debate this issue in this House. At the current rate . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. I'm deciding on brevity.

I recognize the member of the third party.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me say at the outset that I think our party talks about the health and social costs and jobs every single day in this House, but that's not to diminish the importance of it. I will say that the motion of the Leader of the Official Opposition is made all the more urgent today by the government's notice of their intention to put time allocation on and to shorten the amount of time that we will have in this House to talk about the urgent issues that matter to Alberta.

This is an important issue. It can in no way be diminished. The greatest dignity that human beings have is the dignity of having a job. Mr. Speaker, I don't think it's a matter of debate. I don't think anybody on any side of this House will argue the fact that there's somewhere in the neighbourhood of a hundred thousand Albertans who have lost their jobs in recent months. If that's not an emergency, I don't know what is. I think it's probably worth talking about what the Official Opposition has in their motion because the social costs – and I think it would be interesting and important to hear the government talk about the costs to their social programs based on the unemployment, the lack of revenue affecting the government, the human costs in all these things.

I will say in closing that I think it's just slightly ironic that 86 people whose wages are guaranteed for the next three and a half years are going to debate this, but because we do work for the other 4.4 million Albertans, I think it's worth doing. I've certainly heard from my constituents that it's important. When you consider that a town the size of Chestermere, Cochrane, or Camrose, 100 per cent unemployed in the last month based on the 15,000 number we

heard, if that's not worthy of having a serious discussion in this House, perhaps we're in the wrong business.

The Speaker: The leader of the fourth party.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The question is whether or not Alberta is in crisis, whether that merits an emergency debate in this Chamber. Whenever a question like this arises, I reflect on what I've heard from my constituents and from those people all over the province of Alberta, those who have lost their jobs, those who know people who have lost their jobs or fear losing their jobs or have taken a pay cut or have taken a reduction of hours, and when they do find themselves out of a job, they have very limited prospects of finding another job. If you ask those folks, they will tell you that there is, in fact, an emergency and a crisis in this province. It goes beyond the direct jobs in oil and gas extraction, of which there are very many although fewer as time goes on. There are many companies that don't count in the statistics about oil and gas extraction, and I think it's important to remember those.

There is a lot of doubt in the province, Mr. Speaker, and a lot of concern, and it goes beyond just simply the energy sector. Confidence in the small-business sector is incredibly low. You know, when I think about what is going on in this province, I reflect on a story that I heard from one of my constituents. He was a fairly senior manager at an energy company. They were going through a round of layoffs. Instead of firing two people in his organization, he chose to resign his position himself to save two families their mortgage payments and their jobs. That is the kind of thing that goes on every day in this province: the number of companies that have taken a 5 per cent or 10 per cent or 15 per cent wage cut and that in the new year will be taking another wage cut just so the people in that company can continue to pay the mortgage, can continue to pay the bills, continue to put food on the tables for their families. Yet still they live in fear that they will lose their jobs.

Now, I know the NDP doesn't control the price of oil. I'm sure you wish you did, but you don't. But what you do control is how you react to that, what the government does in response to externalities. The first thing you can do is advocate for Alberta industry. I'd like to see much more of that. Use that strong climate announcement of yours to aggressively advocate.

The Speaker: Hon. member, brevity. Brevity, please.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. All right. I will close, then. Let me say this. We deserve to have a healthy, fulsome debate in this House. We can talk and collaborate together and come up with ideas that will better the lives of Albertans, and from that healthy debate comes good policy. When my team and I consider an issue, we do a little exercise. The first thing we ask is: what is the problem that we're trying to solve? And then: what's best for Alberta? What's best for Alberta here is evident. Albertans need to know and deserve to know that we in this House are working together to come up with solutions that will address the challenges they face every single day. I think a debate of this kind will do exactly that.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Alberta's standing orders state that a motion brought under Standing Order 30 must meet a number of conditions, including that it "must relate to a genuine emergency, calling for immediate and urgent consideration." That is Standing Order 30(7)(a). *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* provides further instruction on the

appropriate use of these debates as well as examples of topics that meet the test.

An emergency debate should be on a topic "that is immediately relevant and of attention and concern throughout the nation". Thus, matters of chronic or continuing concern, such as economic conditions, unemployment rates and constitutional matters, have tended to be set aside whereas topics deemed to require urgent consideration have included work stoppages and strikes, natural disasters, and international crises and events.

That is at page 690 in *O'Brien and Bosc. Beauchesne's* similarly states that the item "must be so pressing that the public interest will suffer if it is not given immediate attention."

Mr. Speaker, there's no question – there's no question – that the economic situation facing Alberta is very, very serious and that the impact on families and individuals throughout the province is equally serious. There's absolutely no question of that. This government is very much aware of that and is taking what actions it deems appropriate in order to counteract that.

What is not an emergency debate? Well, the procedural guides as well as Speakers' rulings in the Assembly can give us guidance on what is not a valid topic for an emergency debate. Critically, those are meant to deal with items for which there are not other avenues of debate. *Beauchesne's* states, one, that such a debate

must deal with a matter within the administrative competence of the Government and there must be no other reasonable opportunity for debate.

That's citation 387.

It also states:

Emergency debate provisions cannot be used to debate "items which, in a regular legislative program of the House of Commons and regular legislative consideration, can come before the House by way of amendments to existing statutes, or in any case will come before it in other ways."

That's at page 694. In other words, if there are other avenues in which to debate this matter, it should not be brought forward under an SO 30.

Mr. Speaker Zwodzesky ruled:

Urgency deals with whether or not there are other opportunities available to raise the matter. Now, I want to clarify for you that there are several vehicles available to you to do a variety of things. One of them is question period, where a well-crafted question that meets the rules and proprieties of this House and of Houses across the world that are part of the Commonwealth parliamentary system – that exists there as one of those vehicles.

He went on to say:

Secondly, a carefully crafted motion for return might accomplish something very similar, or a carefully worded written question might accomplish something similar. There is room for some debate within some of these vehicles.

That's from November 28, 2012.

I should note, Mr. Speaker, that there are ample . . .

The Speaker: Government House Leader, brevity, please.

3:20

Mr. Mason: Yes. Well, I need to quote my authorities, but I will try to do that quickly.

There are ample opportunities for this to be debated in the House, and this is the question. It's not the importance of it. It's critically important. But, Mr. Speaker, this has been coming for a long time. We knew before the election, in fact, that oil prices were collapsing, and we knew the consequences of that. There's been a tremendous amount of debate on the budget, on the capital plan. For example, we were trying to count the number of questions dealt with in this House on this matter. There are too many. Between October 26 and 29, the four days following the budget, there were 75 questions on

this point precisely in this Chamber within four days. I'd argue that there's ample opportunity for the House to debate this matter and that it has, and it will continue to.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Hon. members, the chair is prepared to rule on whether the request for leave for this motion to proceed is in order under Standing Order 30.

The Leader of the Official Opposition has met the requirement for providing at least two hours' notice to the Speaker's office by providing the required notice at 11:08 this morning, so that condition has been met.

The motion reads as follows:

Pursuant to Standing Order 30 be it resolved that the ordinary business of the Legislative Assembly be adjourned to discuss a matter of urgent public importance; namely, the devastating human, health, and social costs of the economic downturn, the resulting employment losses, and the bleak fiscal picture many Albertans are facing.

The relevant parliamentary authorities on this subject matter are pages 689 to 696 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, and *Beauchesne's*, paragraphs 387 to 390.

Hon. members, I believe that all members of this Assembly are acutely aware of the severe economic circumstances facing Alberta today. While this in no way ought to detract from the seriousness of the effects of this economic downturn on many of our constituents, I'm unable to find that the request by the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition meets the criteria to proceed to an emergency debate today. Standing Order 30(7) provides that "the matter proposed for discussion must relate to a genuine emergency, calling for immediate and urgent consideration." As is noted in paragraph 390 of *Beauchesne's*, sixth edition:

"Urgency" within this rule does not apply to the matter itself, but means "urgency of debate", when the ordinary opportunities provided by the rules of the House do not permit the subject to be brought on early enough and the public interest demands that discussion take place immediately.

At page 690 of *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, the authors note:

Matters of chronic or continuing concern, such as economic conditions, unemployment rates and constitutional matters, have tended to be set aside whereas topics deemed to require urgent consideration have included work stoppages and strikes, natural disasters, and international crises and events.

As all members know, the current economic situation in Alberta has been the subject of numerous debates in this Assembly thus far this session, including a debate on the Speech from the Throne, the Budget Address, the main estimates consideration, and, most recently, Bill 4. Accordingly, the chair does not find the request for leave in order, and the question will not be put.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 6

Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act

[Debate adjourned December 8: Mr. Jean speaking]

The Speaker: The Leader of the Official Opposition.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to talk some more about Bill 6. I never got through more than a couple of tabs, and it's a great opportunity to stand up today and talk about businesses.

If we had the chance to send this particular motion to committee, as we've asked for in this referral motion, we'd probably find out, you know, that there have been a hundred thousand jobs lost, and we'd probably find that tens of thousands of families are suffering through some of the most bleak and dark times that they will ever face in their lifetimes. In fact, we may even find, Mr. Speaker, evidence that would suggest that Edmonton's Food Bank last month counted 18,500 recipients of food hampers. That's actually up 20 per cent. That's what you find when you send things to committee and have the opportunity to talk about it, the same as Bill 6. You'd find out, for instance, that the Christmas Bureau provides holiday meals and Christmas gifts for at-risk teenagers and children, and they expect to see a 12 per cent increase this year because of the economic downturn, yet they're struggling to raise money. In fact, we'd find in this situation that they've only reached 20 per cent of their fundraising goal for the year.

Now, Mr. Speaker, those are the types of things that, obviously, like Bill 6, we'd find out if we actually sent Bill 6 to committee and listened to farmers and ranchers and listened to and gave them an opportunity to express their dissatisfaction with this bill. We'd probably hear some other things at that, including that there have been some significant costs – human, health, and social costs – as a result of the economic condition that we're currently in but also as a result of the government's action or inaction, as the case may be. We've seen a government that has taken absolutely no steps other than some draconian legislative initiatives that don't listen to farmers and ranchers, that they bring forward without any opportunity for any input from the people that this bill actually affects.

They've suggested, Mr. Speaker, a number of times that this province hasn't had this legislation for 95 years, yet we know clearly that Alberta has the safest farm environment in Canada or one of them, for sure. It does so as a result of consulting with farmers and ranchers to find out the education needs, to find out the futures that they want for themselves and their children and their way of life.

Mr. Speaker, you might be surprised – and I know some people would be surprised – that farming and ranching are complex. They deal with a variety of issues, and a variety of skills is necessary as a farmer and rancher, whether it be as a mechanic or whether it be as somebody taking care of livestock or growing things. They are people that have to be multitalented.

You might also be surprised to find out some of the conditions that are for WCB and for portions of WCB exemptions. In particular, there are some organizations and job categories that have exemptions. It sounds like a big deal when the opposition talks about exempting farmers and removing that opportunity to exempt farmers from WCB, but they say that farm workers need protection. We know clearly that they already get protection through their own forms of insurance, and nobody cares more for their family and the people that work there than they do themselves.

If you look at the facts, Mr. Speaker, if you look at the 19 farm- and ranch-related job exemptions, well, you might not realize, if WCB exemptions are gone, what will take place. I don't know if you know this. You see, after these 19 agriculture-related jobs are removed, you still have 180 different jobs that are exempt from WCB, as farmers and ranchers were before this piece of legislation, Bill 6, came in.

I have to tell you some of them, Mr. Speaker. In fact, believe it or not, circuses – circuses – are exempt from WCB. That's right, much like this place from time to time. Circuses and all forms of entertainment are excluded from WCB. In fact, you're going to find this surprising – and I'd like all members of the opposite side, of the government, to hear this – and that is that the Alberta Federation of Labour is exempt. They're exempt. They're exempt from WCB.

Isn't that something? They're all, "Rah-rah-rah, let's cover the farmers," but they're not covered. Isn't that ironic? Yet they're the only ones the government consulted with, the Alberta Federation of Labour and unions, other unions. They're exempt. Isn't that ironic?

Without delay, let me tell you a few things, and I've only got 170 different ones to read. I know you're probably going to cut me off, Mr. Speaker, because I do like to talk about Bill 6 a lot, and I'm looking forward to my, I think, three or four other opportunities to talk on Bill 6 for 90 minutes each. Accounting, auditing, book-keeping, or income tax services: they're exempt. Actuarial services are exempt. Advertising agencies: does that mean people that actually have to go up high and hang big billboards are exempt from WCB? Addressing and mailing services: that means people that operate equipment, folders, collators are exempt from WCB. Isn't the government worried about them? Are they not worried about people that provide advertising display services or advertising distribution services? They're exempt. What about the Agriculture Financial Services Corporation? They're actually exempt from WCB, too, Mr. Speaker. So it's not unusual that farmers were exempt from WCB and that ranchers were exempt.

3:30

In fact, I'm only at number 6 on a list of 170 exemptions. I haven't even started. Yet we have the government side that says: no; we have to make sure that farmers are covered by WCB.

Mr. Speaker, we have, wow, a travelling amusement fair. They're not covered by WCB. Now, these are people, I would imagine, that do circus tricks and things like that. Aren't we worried about those people that are doing circus tricks being covered by WCB?

How about animal grooming or boarding or training establishments for animals, Mr. Speaker? They're exempt. Now, why would they be exempt and farmers not exempt? They're dealing with animals, they're dealing with stock, yet they're exempt.

Apartment building or housing rental agencies: they're exempt from WCB. Appraising services: exempt. You're not going to believe it, Mr. Speaker, but even architectural services are exempt.

Art restoration services, that use those nasty chemicals to refine equipment and furniture: they're exempt from WCB, with all those nasty fumes and chemicals. Even, Mr. Speaker, number 20, assaying services. Now, that seems kind of weird.

Artifacts, historical documents, or art exhibits, assembling or displaying those things, all of those art exhibits: they're exempt. A big statue falling on somebody's head: I can see the WCB wanting to run in there and cover them for sure, but they're not because they're exempt. Under this government's legislation those people are all exempt, and I'm only at number 20 out of 170.

Let's talk about the other positions that are exempt. I'm looking for some good ones, Mr. Speaker. Oh, look at that one. The Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission: they're exempt. The Alberta Mental Health Board: they're exempt.

And, best of all – I like this one – the Workers' Compensation Board: they're exempt from themselves. How about that? Workers' comp is exempt from workers' comp. How do you like that? So not just the union buddies but also the workers' comp buddies. Interesting. That's an interesting one. Mr. Speaker, I'm at number 23.

Auto racing. Now, auto racers in Alberta can drive a car around a track; they don't have WCB. That sounds like a pretty dangerous job compared to farming on a combine.

Provision of babysitting services: no WCB. Maybe that's next. Maybe that's the NDP plan. We're going to have babysitters unionized right across the province and join the WCB. They're going to force that on them next. Now, that's only number 25, Mr. Speaker. I have another 152 to go.

Wow. A band or an orchestra: they're exempt from WCB.

Even operation of baths, including steam, Turkish, and sauna baths: they're exempt, Mr. Speaker. I can't imagine any place more dangerous, a slip-and-fall accident waiting to happen, than a public bath, and they're exempt from WCB. Is the NDP government not worried about covering those people, protecting those people? They're certainly interfering in farmers' and ranchers' lives.

A baseball club, Mr. Speaker, the operation of a baseball club: now, that's one that's exempt. Why doesn't the NDP look at making the WCB cover them? Even the billiard parlour: you know, they don't have to worry about WCB. A bonding company or a booking agency doesn't have to.

Mr. Speaker, I'm worried. I am worried. Number 35 is a bowling alley. That's a WCB accident waiting to happen. Now, why are they exempt and farmers aren't?

Buying and selling livestock. Just the farmers and ranchers that operate have to be covered, but if you buy and sell livestock, you don't have to. Now, I don't understand the difference, and I don't see anybody on the other side standing up to talk about the difference.

I challenge the Premier. I haven't seen the Premier talk once on this bill. Talk to Albertans. What's going on, Madam Premier? Why are you not telling Albertans what's going on? How can you justify a bill where you're not even prepared to stand up and talk about all the great things that you've done? In fact, Mr. Speaker, if she would have talked the first time that it was announced, she could then talk about a totally different message after the amendments. Of course, we all know that the bill was totally transformed in a matter of two or three days. Why? Because the bill wasn't right. News flash: the bill is still not right.

Kill Bill 6, Mr. Speaker. Go back to the people. Listen to farmers and ranchers. Send it to committee. Follow through with this referral motion. I say that especially to the members in the back. I think that they should look at this list that we've put in, and I'd be happy to table it. Mr. Speaker, I'm sure that you'd like that so that you can go over it later.

Computer processing services. Competitive sports of all descriptions: no WCB for any competitive sport of all descriptions. That sounds like an accident waiting. Community recreation centre: I like that one, too; no WCB necessary if you have a community recreation centre.

If you carry on business as a commissioned livestock buying house, that's another place that you don't need it. Yet farmers and ranchers need WCB even though they have the safest record in Canada, and they've had that good record for many, many years. It shows that Albertans already know what they're doing. The farmers and ranchers do know what they're doing. It's this government that doesn't.

Now, let's look at this. Foreign embassies, consulates: they don't need WCB. Why do farmers and ranchers need it even if the people that come from outside of this country don't need it if they work here and do things? It seems odd, Mr. Speaker.

Consulting services other than consulting by a professional engineer as defined in the engineering and geoscience profession: they don't need WCB either. They've been exempted by this government, yet the government wants to cover farmers and ranchers.

Counselling service: they don't need it. A convention bureau doesn't need it. A credit union doesn't need it.

A curling rink doesn't need it, another accident waiting to happen. Can you believe that a curling rink doesn't have to have WCB? They're exempt from it. Farmers and ranchers: they have to have it, but a curling rink doesn't.

Even dance studios – and we've seen a lot of dancing lately from the other side – don't need it. They're exempt as well from WCB. I see the look of surprise on your face. I'm not surprised.

Demonstration services: well, I guess the NDP aren't required. Designing services or anybody that provides domestic help: they don't need WCB. Drafting services don't need WCB.

An employment agency, even an escort agency, doesn't need WCB. They're prepared to exempt escort agencies but not farmers and ranchers. If you expedite goods and materials, you don't need WCB because you're exempt under this government, but farmers and ranchers need it.

Well, let's see. Extraprovincial or foreign-based charter flights: they don't need WCB, Mr. Speaker, on a plane. Those people operating on a plane are exempted, yet farmers and ranchers, that have been doing it for years and years, need WCB.

Wow. A fire protection association: they don't need it. A football club doesn't need WCB. They've been exempted as well. Even fraternities are exempted.

Geological services are exempted. Geophysical services are exempted. A golf course is exempted. Now, it seems a very strange situation when a golf course is exempted, even a miniature golf course. Can you imagine, Mr. Speaker? A golf driving range: the way I golf, they need WCB there for sure. A golf school doesn't need it. When you bring in students and you have all these students around with all these clubs, you don't need WCB. You've been exempted. But farmers and ranchers are mandatorily required to have WCB even though we've heard evidence that they have the best record in Canada.

A gun club, Mr. Speaker: the operation of a gun club doesn't need WCB. Now, I'm surprised that they didn't see gun club at number 81. Maybe they passed it off. Maybe they're starting in the 50s and working their way up or down. But a gun club is exempted from WCB. Farmers and ranchers have to have WCB.

A health studio – I'm missing some. I missed hair removal, Mr. Speaker. I don't need that yet. Hockey clubs: they don't need WCB. They've exempted hockey clubs. They're okay with that. Holding companies. Hostess services.

Ice-skating rink: can you imagine a place waiting for an accident more than an ice-skating rink? Now, why would an ice-skating rink have to be excluded from WCB, not have to have WCB coverage, and farming and ranching does have to have WCB coverage? Even a family farm, a mom-and-pop operation, has to have it, or else they don't get any vacations. They don't have any opportunity to do anything except have WCB coverage and be taxed, not only a carbon tax of a thousand dollars per household but more expenses for WCB.

Any industry carried on by any band on any reserve or any corporation doesn't have to have WCB if they're operating as a band.

An information bureau: no WCB required. An inspection bureau or service other than for testing or inspection of pipe: no WCB required, Mr. Speaker, on any of those inspection services.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Official Opposition leader.

Are there any questions for the member under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for St. Albert.

3:40

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. More of a statement/question. I'm guessing you didn't read through the entire CBC article. The top sentences actually said about the suicide rates that it's too early to say if there's a correlation between what is happening now and the rates of suicide. I find it incredibly offensive that this is just one more little trick in the game that you're playing. Let me tell you

why that is. There are 500 Albertans that die by suicide ... [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. member, do you have a question?

Ms Renaud: Yes, I do. I do. I will ask a relevant question.

When my brother took his life because of mental illness, I'm guaranteeing you it wasn't because of the economy. Explain to me how you know better than all of us that suicide is increasing because of the economy.

Mr. Hanson: Point of order.

Point of Order Relevance

The Speaker: The point of order is noted. Hon. member, do you have the point of order you'd like to speak to?

Mr. Hanson: Yeah. If you please, Mr. Speaker, under 23 ...

The Speaker: Well, I'll tell you what. I think the point may well be in terms of moving the discussion ahead. I think the relevance principle was missed in this question.

Hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills, do you have another under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Hanson: No. I'll withdraw the point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Withdrawn. Thank you.

Debate Continued

The Speaker: I saw you standing. You're going to respond to the question?

Mr. Jean: Yes. I'd be happy to respond to the question. I understand. I have had that same situation in my family, and my heart goes out to you. It really, truly does. It's something that no family should have to wrestle with, the loss of a family member. That's why I think it's so important to do exactly what I did in relation to this, Mr. Speaker. I looked to the experts. I looked at research. I made sure we researched the issues properly and saw that there was a direct correlation relating to the economy.

Mr. Speaker, that's exactly what we should do here. We should refer this motion, Bill 6, as I've asked, to the committee so that we can listen to experts, farmers and ranchers and the other experts, the eight agricultural industries that say: "This is the wrong bill. The bill should be killed." I would listen to experts, just like I would listen to experts here, because experts are the ones that would be able to give us that testimony that would be backed up by facts.

That's why I'm suggesting to this government: "Stop Bill 6. Don't go any further." We heard it clearly the first time, when you got it wrong, and then three days later, when you tried to get it right, you still got it wrong. We know it's wrong, Mr. Speaker. We know they keep getting it wrong. Stop getting it wrong. Just stop Bill 6. Stop killing the farms and ranches of Alberta, and make sure that we have an opportunity to have a vibrant economy and economic conditions in farming and ranching that are the envy of the world. That's how you diversify an economy: by keeping it strong, by not putting roadblocks in front of it, by not making it so difficult to farm that nobody wants to farm anymore, and, most importantly, by listening to the farmers and ranchers that built this country and that continue to build it every single day.

Mr. Speaker, it's not about what I think. It's not about what anybody else over there thinks, not even the Premier. It's about

what Albertans want and what's best for Albertans long term. Nobody is ever going to tell me that the best thing for Albertans is to tell them what they don't want to hear or to do what they don't want to happen. What we are here for is to do what they ask us to do, and right now they're asking this government to kill Bill 6 and to take six months to a year to talk to farmers, to listen to farmers, and to listen to experts. That's what the Wildrose is here to do, to make sure the government listens, because they clearly don't.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Westhead: Yes, under 29(2)(a), Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much to the Leader of the Official Opposition. He talked about looking at the research. You know what? I did that, too, and I mentioned that in my member's statement earlier today. You know, as a registered nurse we actually take the time to go through the research, look at the academic literature, and find out the truth. I did just that. Actually, when I read the open letter that the hon. opposition leader mentioned, he talked about education being sufficient to change behaviour. My question to the hon. leader would be: did he read any research to inform the statement he made in the open letter? Especially considering that there's a lot of contradictory evidence if you look at the academic literature on injury prevention techniques, Mr. Speaker, my question to him would be: can you tell us what research you looked at? I'd like for you to table those reports so that I could have look, too.

Mr. Jean: You know, Mr. Speaker, it goes on and on. Can you believe that the operation of a mobile museum doesn't have to have WCB? It's exempted. A modelling agency is also exempted. In fact, this government has a ton of exemptions, 170. It goes on page after page, and I'd be happy to table these organizations that are exempt.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.
Oh, pardon me.

The Speaker: I'm sorry. I'm leaving the chair. Proceed.

[Mr. Feehan in the chair]

Mr. Clark: Thank you, sir. I'm going to take the opportunity here in my time to hopefully change the tone a little bit. What I want to talk about is the purpose of consultation, the form that it may take, and where this particular government has succeeded with some of the consultations that they've undertaken. We've used this word "consultation" in relation to Bill 6 over and over and over again, so many times, in fact, that it may almost have lost some of its meaning. What does it mean to consult?

What I see when I see, I think, a successful consultation – again, we can quarrel with the outcomes of the climate consultation, whether members of this House like the carbon tax, don't like the carbon tax, like the way it's been implemented, don't like the way it's been implemented, but I don't think we can quarrel with the fact that the consultation was comprehensive and that it happened before rules were made. You went around the province and struck an expert committee. You included Albertans. You asked their opinion in many different forms. You asked their opinion in person. You asked their opinion online. You solicited e-mail responses, written letters. You had experts weigh in from industry, from the environmental movement, and you came up with a work product where you cannot deny that the process that was used was a valid process.

Now, the experts in agriculture and ranching and farming have not been asked about Bill 6 and about these sorts of changes.

This government has done the same thing on royalties, and I certainly hope the outcome for that is a positive one. I do have my doubts and my worries, but I sincerely hope that it's a positive outcome.

You've done the same thing on mental health, a vital topic that has come up in this House today, something that's close to my heart, that I know is close to the hearts of the government side, and that I know is close to the hearts of members on this side. I know it's close to the hearts of Albertans. You have an expert, the Member for Calgary-Mountain View. The hon. minister of Municipal Affairs and of Service Alberta is involved. Other members of various communities have gone around Alberta and consulted and have asked for the input of Albertans, have asked for the input of experts. That report is forthcoming in the next couple of weeks, and I'm sure it will be a worthwhile exercise. It will have tremendous information that is actionable, that this province can do something about, and with which we can start to address some of the challenges that we have in this province around mental health. It's important.

This government is also consulting on payday lending. There's currently a survey up around payday lending. That's an important topic as we think about poverty in this province and cycles of poverty and whether Albertans get trapped by unreasonably high rates of interest charged by payday lenders. That doesn't feel right to me. I know the Minister of Finance has done a tremendous amount of work, before he was elected to this House, on that topic. I know that many members on that side have done a tremendous amount of work on that topic, but you've consulted and are continuing to consult on payday lending.

But you haven't consulted on Bill 6, so that's why I rise to speak in favour of this amendment that we send it to committee. When we consult, what might we learn? Well, we might learn that the amendments that we anticipate once this bill finally, eventually, gets to committee, in fact, don't go far enough, that the rules that are proposed to protect paid farm workers may actually not go far enough.

I've gone and looked at what other provinces do in this country, what our neighbours to the east and to the west and in Manitoba do. The *Western Producer* has a very good article on, I believe, December 4. Perhaps I'll table that tomorrow for the records of the House.

3:50

I just want to read out some of the standards that are in place in British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. There are some interesting ideas here that we may be able to adopt with a made-in-Alberta solution. Unless we properly consult and actually ask people in farming and ranching communities, we won't know what people in farming and ranching communities want. If we pass legislation first and then seek to consult, I think what we'll find is that the response to that will be, "Well, you've already decided what you're going to do. Why are you asking me now?"

Consulting after the fact isn't consulting; it's telling. That's the problem here. That's why we have 1,500 people on the steps of the Legislature. That's why there are people in the galleries today. That's why my office in inner-city Calgary has received dozens and dozens and dozens of e-mails and letters and phone calls on Bill 6. You've made a mess of it, my friends. You've made a mess of it, unfortunately, but you have a way out. You can pause the bill, and we can properly consult.

Let's talk about occupational health and safety standards in the province of British Columbia.

Every workplace that employs workers must have a health and safety program, including farms.

However, only employers that have twenty or more employees and have a workplace with moderate to high risk . . . must develop and maintain an occupational health and safety program.

That's interesting.

In Saskatchewan:

Regulations apply to all workplaces, including farms. The act places responsibility for health and safety on everyone who works at the workplace, including owners, workers, self-employed people, contractors and suppliers.

The level of responsibility for each of these is based on authority and control. An employer has the most responsibility to ensure health and safety standards are met . . .

A self-employed person, such as a farmer, who does not employ others, has the same responsibility under the act as both an employer and worker combined.

That's interesting.

In Manitoba:

The act governs the relationship between employers and employees with regard to workplace safety and applies to all workplaces, including farms.

Every employer must ensure the safety, health and welfare of all their workers. The act gives direction on how farmers should protect those who work on a farm as well as how workers are required to protect themselves and others.

Let's talk about workers' compensation. Let's talk about British Columbia's act.

[It] applies to all employers and workers who are engaged in paid work, although it does allow for some exemptions.

Exemptions are not based on industry . . . but rather duration of employment and if the employment is taking place at a private residence.

So for example:

Exemptions are if a person works an average of less than eight hours a week and a person is employed for a specific job for a temporary period of less than 24 hours.

That's interesting. Some of those exemptions we may want to adopt in Alberta.

All paid workers [in B.C.], and the employers of those workers on all commercial farming operations, regardless of size, are included under WCB legislation. Unpaid workers, such as children and family members performing chores or assisting in seasonal activities, are not included under the legislation [in B.C.].

In Saskatchewan:

Like Alberta, the WCB manages a compensation system for workplace injuries on behalf of workers and employers. There are exemptions for certain areas, including dairy, demonstrating and exhibiting, feedlots, grazing co-ops, land clearing, fur farms, livestock brokers, mobile farm feed services or portable seed cleaning plants, pig farms, poultry farms, trapping and voluntary workers.

Voluntary workers perhaps like your neighbour coming to help.

In Manitoba:

The act applies to all employers . . . in all industries. It does exempt farmers and family members of farmers from WCB regulations . . .

Farmers [in Manitoba] can voluntarily apply for coverage for themselves and their family members.

Labour standards in B.C.:

A farm worker is anyone employed in farming, ranching, orchards and agricultural operations who grows or raises crops or livestock, clears land, operates farm machinery or other equipment, sells any products from a farm or washes, cleans, sorts, grades or packs a product from harvest.

Farm workers are covered by most sections of the act except minimum wage, paid wages, deduction of wages and statutory holidays.

Interesting. From British Columbia:

Farm workers are not entitled to overtime, but a farm worker must not work excessive hours detrimental to their health.

That's a pretty broad definition.

Saskatchewan:

The legislation outlines the relationship between employer and employee, including application of minimum wages, holidays and maternity leave.

The act does not apply to employees in farming, ranching or market gardening, but it does apply to those in [some other areas like] egg hatcheries, greenhouses, nurseries, bush clearing, feedlots, confined feeding operations and commercial hog operations.

I could go on, but I think you get the point. I can keep going.

I will table that article. I think it's actually very instructive and very interesting. There are some very interesting aspects of laws that apply in other provinces, our prairie province neighbours in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, our neighbours to the west in British Columbia, that I think we would perhaps welcome in this province as a way of protecting those on farms, both paid workers and perhaps family as well. What matters is keeping people safe. We get to that point by asking the question of the people who are impacted by the changes, just like we've done with climate and royalties and mental health and payday lending. We haven't. The government has not asked those questions in a way that is authentic, where Albertans both rural and urban feel that you've done your homework, that you intend to actually genuinely consult.

I've got to say, my friends, that the risk of invoking time allocation to shut down debate on this discussion doesn't help. It doesn't help in the slightest. It creates headlines that you don't want. It creates a very easy narrative. What I would ask is that you take the time to get it right, take the time to make sure that what we come up with actually protects paid farm workers, gives them the protections they need.

We talk about timelines here. Well, what can we do in the interim? Does that mean that we sit around and we do nothing for six months or for a year? What it means is that we, you the government work with ag societies. There's already a lot of tremendous work that goes on in this province, driven by ag societies, driven by farm families, that helps address issues around farm safety. You can put some resources into that as the government today to help improve farm safety all around the province.

This amendment, by sending this to committee, doesn't mean that you do nothing. It doesn't mean you have to abandon your principles. It doesn't mean you have to abandon support for farm workers or the desire to keep people safe. You can help promote farm safety by working actively with ag societies all around the province, by providing some resources to them. That can happen right now, today. It should be happening right now, today, from this government. Ag societies all around the province already do a tremendous amount of work on farm safety. It's a topic that I know is top of mind for farmers because – trust me – no one wants themselves to be injured, no one wants their family to be injured, no one wants their neighbour to be injured, and no one wants a paid worker to be injured. No one – no one – wants that.

I know that my friends on the opposition side here have taken some heat from the government, perhaps, with their motives. No one on this side, I promise you, wants to see anyone hurt. I know that my friends in the government have taken a lot of heat, from myself included, for the process. I think we all agree that the process hasn't been ideal, but no one, certainly, at least, not me – I guess I can't speak for absolutely everyone. I don't question your motives.

I don't. I really don't. I genuinely believe that every single person on that side wants people to be safe, and I genuinely believe that you feel you're doing this for the right reasons, consistent with your principles, the reasons that you were elected to this House, the reasons you chose to go into public service in the first place, relating back to work that you probably did in your communities before you even became elected. I know that you're doing this from a good place. I genuinely believe that.

4:00

Unfortunately, the way that you've gone about this means that the outcome isn't going to be what you want. You had to amend this bill dramatically. The amendment is longer than the bill itself. The protections that will actually be offered up as a result of these amendments, actually, are relatively thin. You could have gone further. Had you consulted properly, had the process that you followed been an open and comprehensive and fulsome process, I think you'd find in the course of three months, six months down the road that we'd have far greater protection for farm workers in this province and you would have the buy-in of the vast majority of farmers and ranchers in Alberta. The outcomes would have been much better.

So you have an opportunity. You have an opportunity to make it right. You have an opportunity by supporting this amendment, sending it to committee, initiating a proper consultation process that starts by asking questions. What problem are we trying to solve? What's the nature of that problem? What's already in place? How do people around this province want to address that problem? Once you've got to that point, come back to the Legislative Assembly with a comprehensive bill that is detailed, that spells out exactly what the parameters are for farm safety legislation and occupational health and safety, in the labour code, the Employment Standards Code, in WCB. In doing that, we'll find, I think, a lot more success.

Why is it that a city MLA is standing up and talking about farm issues? It's about the way that you go about coming up with an answer. It is in response to what I am hearing from my constituents.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

I recognize the Member for Lethbridge-East on 29(2)(a).

Ms Fitzpatrick: Yes. Mr. Speaker, I will ask a question, but before I do, I'd like to make some comments that are pertinent to my question. Yesterday in the House Bill 204 was passed unanimously. I'd like you to keep that in mind as I continue with my comments.

The first comment is that I am hearing over and over again in this House that we must develop the regulations first. I did a little checking since I have, actually, considerable experience in this area. I worked in the federal public service for over 32 years, and about 10 of those years I spent developing policy, bills, and regulations.

Always – always – the bill is done first. Now, while that bill is developing, certainly there's consideration in terms of what the regulations might be, but the bill is developed first. I will say . . .

The Acting Speaker: Excuse me. Member, can I ask you to proceed to your question, please.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Okay. I can't make any further comments on it?

The Acting Speaker: I'd like you to proceed to a question, please.

Ms Fitzpatrick: Okay. I am getting there, and I just want to give an example before I continue. Bill C-4, which was an omnibus budget bill, was passed by the federal government. I worked for the

federal government; that's why I'm fairly conversant in this area. The federal government refused to provide any details. There were no regulations done when that was passed. What they said was that after it received royal assent, the details would be provided.

A similar situation is happening here. I would suspect that some of the members on the other side of the House may have forgotten that this process was followed in almost every piece of legislation that was ever done here. In fact, Bill 204: there were no regulations attached to that yesterday. They will be developed in the next eight months.

I attended a meeting in Lethbridge. Eight hundred people attended, and a number of those who attended also identified that they attended most of the other previous meetings. They provided their input.

Point of Order

Question-and-comment Period

Mr. Stier: I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker. We've heard quite a bit. Is there a question coming from this person?

The Acting Speaker: I recognize the Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With regard to the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod and his point of order, 29(2)(a) says:

Subject to clause (b), following each speech on the items in debate referred to in suborder (1), a period not exceeding 5 minutes shall be made available, if required, to allow Members to ask questions and comment briefly on matters relevant to the speech and to allow responses to each Member's questions and comments.

It has always been the practice of this House that a question is not required, but a comment may be substituted or both together. One or the other or both are permitted under the rule.

The Acting Speaker: I recognize the leader of the third party.

Mr. McIver: I'll be brief. What he said.

The Acting Speaker: I think that we should take a moment to address this question before we move on. As the Government House Leader clearly said, the matter at hand is that

a period not exceeding 5 minutes shall be made available, if required, to allow Members to ask questions and comment briefly on matters relevant to the speech and to allow responses to each Member's questions and comments.

It would seem to me that that indicates there is some limitation on the speaker to come to a question at some point because it does indicate that it does allow responses to those questions, and if you use a hundred per cent of the time, it would not allow for that response. However, it does not specify a specific amount of time, so I would ask all members that they try to strike some form of balance, and if it continues to be an issue, we will define "briefly" in the next little while as necessary, and I will seek precedent. I understand from the two comments made that the practice in the past has been that there has not been a limit. I will reserve ultimate judgment until tomorrow, but I felt that it was important to have said these things.

I also want to comment to members on both sides that it really is not your judgment to be deciding when the question is to be called. It is my judgment, and I will continue to reserve that authority.

Thank you.

Can you please proceed.

Debate Continued

Ms Fitzpatrick: As I was saying, with those 800 people who were at that meeting, excluding the people at the back who were calling the two ministers names, there were some very productive comments provided by some of those participants at that meeting. In fact, at the end of the meeting I spent close to an hour talking to about 40 people who provided comments to me, and those comments I brought forward to our caucus.

Now, back to the devil is in the details. I appreciate that the member indicated that it would be a good idea to go to committee, and perhaps when the formal consultation on the regulations occurs, then that will happen. But the actuality is that the bill gets done. You can't develop regulations without a bill.

Now my question to the member: were you aware that, in fact, a member of the Official Opposition actually voted to support not providing any details on Bill C-4?

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I guess I'm not up to speed on every single vote that may have happened in Ottawa. I would hope, though, that the member is not holding up the Harper government's omnibus bills as a model to be followed by this House. I would certainly hope not. I would also note that all federal bills, as I understand it, do go to a committee phase, which is also important.

You know, you mentioned the productive comments that came out of the Lethbridge consultation, and I know that there have been productive comments coming out of all the consultations, some noisier than others. I think that that's exactly what needed to happen before legislation was presented.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I recognize the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

4:10

Mr. MacIntyre: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in support of sending this poorly drafted bill to committee. From the moment that this bill was introduced, it became apparent to all the farmers in this province that this government made the ridiculous presumption that a handful of nonfarmers, a handful of politicians and bureaucrats, know more about farming and farm safety than the 43,000 farm families in this province, and that's simply not the case. I am quite certain there are 16-year-old children that have been raised on farms that have forgotten more than the politicians and bureaucrats will ever know.

Furthermore, to address the statement made earlier by another hon. member about lengthy litigations being one of the reasons why we need to foist WCB on our farmers, I think we could not find an insurance company more embroiled in litigation over their deplorable treatment of injured Albertans than the Alberta WCB. As the hon. Premier herself has previously noted, the place is a miserable mess, yet suddenly, now that the NDP are in power, that story has changed. Not one attempt to fix the WCB has been made by this government, and now suddenly it's okay. It's okay to subject an entire sector of our economy, farmers, to this problematic WCB insurance regime and in very great haste.

Although members opposite won't know this, there are insurance providers that some farmers use that provide better coverage at a lower cost without the red tape or the delays common at WCB. But under this legislation farmers are not given that choice.

Frankly, Mr. Speaker, if this bill was really about farm safety, if that was the true intent of the bill, if this government was really interested in transparency and accountability, they would not presume to know more than the thousands of farmers who live the farm life each and every day and understand the risks each and

every day, but that's not what has happened. A small group of bureaucrats and politicians think they know better and cobble together a bill that is so flawed that this government had to hastily drop six pages of amendments to try to quell the very loud protest coming from Alberta farmers in justifiably protesting this bill.

Furthermore, when it comes to the lack of consultation, I was amused to see a report that even the minister of agriculture said that he had no input into this bill – and he's the minister of agriculture – and that he had, according to the report, quote, no authority to change it. I would question: well, then, what on earth was he elected to do?

This government is demonstrating a very clear and imminent threat, to coin a phrase from a former president of the United States. We have this weapon of mass destruction that's descending upon our farmers known as WCB and OH and S, and they were never asked if that's what they wanted to have happen to them. So we have this threat. The other threat, of course, is that this government is consistently ramming legislation through here without appropriate consultation, without giving heed to the experts, many of whom are up there in the gallery today, and they are not having their voice.

If this bill, however, was to go to committee, then we could invite the experts, the farmers themselves, to come in and one by one advise this Legislature on the very best measures for farm safety.

Mr. Cyr: Do they want to hear what they have to say?

Mr. MacIntyre: Good question. Do they actually want to hear what the farmers have to say? We keep hearing that they're hearing, but all I've been hearing from farmers is, "Kill Bill 6," and somehow it still manages to be alive today. I'm not sure why. Perhaps some more phone calls need to be made to the various NDP MLAs that have farms in their ridings.

For example, the minister of agriculture himself, the Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, has 1,230 farms in his riding, and he can be reached at 780.786.1997. We also have the Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater. They have 1,159 farms and ranches in that riding. If the folks at home are watching, they can call 780.675.3232 in Athabasca and voice their concern. You know, if the government won't send this to committee and invite testimony from farmers, maybe the testimony needs to come by phone messages to these numbers. Even the Member for West Yellowhead has 695 farms in his riding. There is no office in Edson, but you can reach him by phone at 780.865.9796 in Hinton.

I'm really quite appalled at the NDP's decision to draft this bill without first entering into significant and meaningful consultation with rural Alberta as to how this thing happened. Albertans are being represented by a government that has too quickly forgotten that good governance requires a commitment to the best interests of Albertans, not a commitment to pushing through rapid-fire atrocious legislation too quickly to check with those that would be most affected, and we know that that's precisely what happened. It was pushed through too quickly. No proper checking, no due diligence was done. We know that is the case because we just had an amendment dropped, six pages long, trying to correct a series of mistakes. If that isn't evidence enough that a bill needs to go to committee, I'm not sure what is.

We have a lot of talk from this NDP government on their commitment to proper legislation. Well, let's have a couple of examples. The Minister of Energy, speaking about the royalty review, told the House on June 17:

As with all the projects, we are consulting with industry as we move forward and looking at the pros and cons of all of that.

Again, we're in constant consultation with industry to look at those projects that will bring value and jobs to Alberta.

The Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour, speaking about the minimum wage hike, told the House on June 18:

The Premier and I met last week with industry leaders, with labour, and with advocacy groups to hear their input on this, and we're going ahead with those consultations.

Here we have consultations, but when it came to the farmers, no, no. In a backroom some bureaucrats and politicians whipped together a bill on the back of a napkin, it looked like, to jam it through the House. Somehow farmers don't qualify for this level of consultation.

Here we are, and now we've got massive protest after massive protest because this government's definition of consultation for farmers is substantially different than for everyone else. That's unacceptable. Instead of consultation meetings and information sessions, it's a come-and-be-told session. That is not consultation. Consultation, as was defined earlier by the hon. member, is to come, listen, learn. The process should have been that, first and foremost. Consultation is not just a buzzword that you throw around.

The farmers have said that they feel like this government does not care about rural Albertans enough to deem them worthy of proper consultation before drafting a bill, and we have a Premier that appears to be more focused on foreign affairs than listening to people who are trying to convince her that this bill needs to die.

There are some facts here about this. Fact 1, there are more small family farms in Alberta than in any other province.

Fact 2, 45 days to consult and pass a law is insufficient for any law. This is a huge industry with many stakeholders, and the thing that ought to stand out uppermost in the minds of everyone in this House and all Albertans, really, is that every farm is unique. They are complex systems, and they are not considered by the family farmers to be a job. It's their life, and this legislation is imposing on a life and a quality of life.

Fact 3, in this government's addresses on Bill 6 it has continually glossed over the fact that B.C. recognizes the unique position of family farms and provides them with special recognition under their laws because that government recognizes the uniqueness and the complexity of farms. We heard the hon. member earlier talking at length about British Columbia and their laws.

4:20

If this went to committee, we could take a good long look at what British Columbia has done and go through that, and we just might find a lot of very good concepts that could be incorporated into this bill. By not going to committee, we are robbed of that opportunity and the farmers themselves are robbed of the opportunity to look at British Columbia's legislation and say: "Wow. That's really good. We like it. We think that's what we should have here in this province." But we will never have that discussion because this government seems to be determined not to send this bill to committee and, instead, just ram it on through this House for who knows what reason.

Fact 4, this ill-conceived plan is going to directly impact the lives of some 43,000 farms in this province, people who make their livelihood and who have their life on that farm. And they just could not be bothered to consult. It's just shameful.

Because I represent Innisfail-Sylvan Lake, I have a very large demographic that are farmers, and they are furious. My constituency office is just absolutely overrun with phone calls, e-mails, letters. They're furious because they feel like this government did not consult them, and now this government is turning a deaf ear to their cries. It's one thing not to consult them at the front end of this bill, but now the farmers are rallying right across this province,

thousands of them, and they're all with one voice saying the same thing: stop; slow down; kill the bill; send it to committee. And now, having not been consulted on the front side of this bill, they feel like they're being ignored in the midst here. It's going to be an interesting next election. I think the orange crush might get crushed by a farmer's boot.

Earlier this week I received a letter from a cattle rancher, and I'm just going to quote a little bit from that letter if you don't mind. She works on a cattle ranch, and she and her husband apparently own this. She says:

My husband is a second generation rancher. We ranch with his parents. We also have two young [children]; aged two and one. We are a family owned and operated ranch.

She says:

I am opposed to Bill 6. I feel it affects a way of life . . . Also, if any changes are to be done, they must be done with as much feedback from fellow producers as possible. Not just big [corporations], but the family farms as well.

Mr. Speaker, this NDP government's inability to recognize the significance of what the writer of this letter and so many other letters just like this are telling us is exactly why we should not be legislating in such a rush on this matter.

This lady goes on to say:

Farming and ranching is a way of life. It is not a job, it is a lifestyle. We live what we do every day, it is our home. On the family farm it is impossible to draw the line between our home and the barn

and determine where home ends and work begins. We can't draw a line between our garden and the corrals because to us

it is all our home.

The whole thing is home. The gardens, the corrals, the barn: it's all home.

We don't wake up every day and head out to work. We wake up every day to live our life.

Here's the concept that the other side just doesn't seem to grasp about farming. They don't drive into their farmyard and say: oh, I'm at work now. No, they say: we've come home. It's just ludicrous. And now this government wants to legislate home. That's why these farmers are so upset. That's why they're here. We have a government that's trying to legislate and regulate home. It's crazy. You can't legislate and regulate home. Go ahead, send OH and S out to draw a line between the home and barn and say: okay; well, this side is work, and this side is home. Is that ridiculous or what? Is that ridiculous or what?

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Just before we go to 29(2)(a), I'd like to remind members not to communicate with the people in the galleries.

Anybody who'd like to speak to 29(2)(a)? Proceed.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to ask the member a question. But, first, I'd like to thank him for his presentation through you, Mr. Speaker. I enjoyed it.

The Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake is my neighbour, one of the many neighbouring MLAs I have surrounding my riding. The other day he took the time to travel down to Sundre to participate at a town hall with me before we came back up here on Sunday, and I do appreciate his time for that. I think he would agree with me that one of the things that stood out as we met with farmers and ranchers on Sunday night was trust. This government has broken trust with farmers and ranchers, which is one of the reasons why we probably need to send this to committee, just to get that trust back.

The question, of course, is: how did the government break that trust? Well, let me be clear, Mr. Speaker. The government released documents that they now say they didn't mean to release or that

somebody accidentally released. I don't know. They can't seem to come up with an explanation on why they did that. But here's one of the things, just one of the things: does the legislation include unpaid workers such as neighbours who help during busy times? Do you know what the answer was? Under the proposed legislation the OH and S Act and regulations would apply when an employer engages the services of a worker regardless of whether or not the worker is paid – for example, neighbours who volunteer to help – and regardless of the worker's age.

Now, I can tell you that farmers and ranchers will be very clear – and I live in a farming and ranching community – that neighbours help neighbours. That's pretty important for our lifestyle. It's pretty important for our operations. So they see a document like that on a website, and now the government says: oh, we didn't mean to do that. And we think that they now trust this government, going forward, to write regulations over the next 18 months that they're not a part of? I know that the Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake will agree with me that that was a big concern.

The second thing – and I'd like to hear his comments on both of these – is that the Premier of Alberta, Mr. Speaker, has stood up in this House repeatedly saying that she is trying to right a great wrong, saying that farmers and ranchers for almost a hundred years have been forcing people to do unsafe work, have been forcing people to do things that they don't want to do, which hurt and kill them. That is outrageous. Farmers and ranchers from my community are some of the best neighbours I have. I'm proud to call them my friends. I'm proud to call them my neighbours.

So I'd like to know, through you, Mr. Speaker, to the member, how the member thinks that this government can get trust back when she would speak about farmers and ranchers like that.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you for the question, hon. member. Well, you know, there is a simple solution to getting trust back. I'm sure that each and every one of us in this House have done things in our past, maybe not even that far back, where we have inadvertently caused someone harm, someone who trusted us. The thing to do, of course, is to genuinely apologize for that breach of trust and also to take those steps necessary to start earning that trust back.

In relation to the town hall meeting that the hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre is talking about, the farmers that we met with one-on-one after the meeting was sort of dispersing repeatedly said the same thing over and over and over again, Mr. Speaker. They said – and I'll try to paraphrase – that the government is ramming this bill through and then telling us, "Trust us; we'll get the regs right," when, in fact, the trust has already been broken. To go now to those farmers and say: "Yeah, we blew it. Here are six pages of amendments. We didn't consult with you when we drew this thing up first. But, yeah, just trust us. We'll get the rest of it right." That's not going to happen. That trust is gone.

If this government wants to get the trust back, there are a couple of things that need to happen. First of all, they need to apologize to the farming community across this province for some of the insinuations that somehow farms in this province are horribly unsafe places and that somehow children are being forced to do unsafe things and workers are being forced to do unsafe things. Nothing could be further from the truth. Not at all.

I am a former farm boy and a paid farm worker, and nobody could tell me to do something unsafe. I'm a free man in a free nation. I'm not a slave to anyone, and neither is anyone else in this country. There is nobody in this country that can force someone to do something unsafe.

4:30

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

I call upon the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti next.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to speak to this amendment. I support the amendment, you know, a referral motion to send it to committee to do further consultations with the farmers across this province. I encourage the government to take the time to get it right and to talk to the experts. I won't point to the members in the audience because I've been asked not to do that, but I'll speak for all farmers across all Alberta, not just the ones here today. All farmers should be consulted on this important piece of legislation. The government has said that they could take up to two years to consult on the regulations, and that's fine. But why won't they take even six months to consult on the legislation? That's the question I have for them. You know, there are two pieces. There's regulation and legislation, but they should consult on the legislation as well before they bring it forward.

Mr. Speaker, I support farm safety. Farm safety is important, and I think all farmers support farm safety and protection for farm workers. I don't think there's one farmer in Alberta that doesn't think safety is important, especially for the protection of their farm workers. I don't think it just has to be WCB. You know, even the Premier herself says that WCB isn't the greatest program and that there are lots of flaws with it, so why force farmers to have WCB and not good private insurance? There's lots of good private insurance out there, and most farmers have that. Actually, private insurance goes further than WCB. It protects them 24/7 whereas WCB only protects them when they're on the job. One accident is too many. We don't want to have any accidents on the farm, but when you do, it's good to have an insurance program to cover it.

You know, the amendments haven't been brought forward yet, but everybody has been talking about them. The amendments that were presented yesterday by the government say that it's only going to affect paid employees, and then we saw last night the unions and everybody talking about I think it was 112 pairs of gloves. The members across can correct me if I'm wrong because I'm taking information that I've heard from across there: 112 pairs of gloves. What I've heard is that out of all the farm accidents, only 9 per cent are paid farm workers. The rest are the owners, the relatives, the neighbours, and the people that visit. So when you're talking about 112 pairs of gloves, you're really only talking about 9 per cent of 112 pairs of gloves, Mr. Speaker.

Plus, out of that 9 per cent, you know, the government assumes that no farms have any insurance. Well, I've heard that anywhere from 80 to 90 to 96 per cent of farms today already have insurance. Now, I would hope that the government would have done that research before to come up with a clearer number. I've heard up to 90 per cent, and it could be higher. Nine per cent of 112 brings you down to – I don't know – somewhere around 11, but 90 per cent of them are already covered, so with all this legislation they're bringing forward about protecting farm workers, you're talking about one or two people since 1997. Well, we lose one every day to fentanyl. I'm not playing that down, Mr. Speaker. As I said, one life is too many. But I think they're not playing with all the facts over there. I don't think everybody understands exactly the true facts of what they're talking about. Farms are safe, they have good insurance programs, and farmers care about their workers. Somehow this government doesn't think that the farmers do care about the safety of their employees, but believe me, I know they do.

You know, this government just kind of assumes that no farms have any safety programs: no insurance or safety or WCB. The numbers they use talk like no farms have any coverage at all when

we all know that that's just not true. I think farmers really do care more about the safety of their farm and their workers than the members sitting opposite do. I don't say that they don't care, but I'll guarantee you that farmers care about somebody getting hurt on their farm more so than somebody sitting in this House does. I can tell you that.

You know, we can always improve. I'm not saying that we can't. I'm not against bringing in some legislation, but have a minimum amount of insurance that farmers have to have for coverage. Don't specify WCB; just say that you have to have a certain level of coverage. I'm not against OH and S coming in and inspecting a farm if a fatality has happened or something has happened on that farm. You know, if you inspect it and figure out what went wrong, they can use that information to get it out to the other farmers and maybe prevent it from happening somewhere else. We've heard it lots in this House that education does more than legislation for saving lives on the farm. A piece of paper with legislation probably isn't going to save one life, but if you can go in and figure out what went wrong, tell everybody about it, educate people, that could save some lives. It's real, Mr. Speaker.

I mean, I could go on and read all kinds of e-mails and letters that I've gotten and repeat everything that's been said in this House. I think there's lots of good stuff that's been said, but I'm not going to repeat it, and I'm not going to read all the letters I've gotten. I've gotten lots of them, believe me. I'm just going to sit down. Those are the points I wanted to get made.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
You wish to speak under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Nixon: I do, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Please proceed, hon. member.

Mr. Nixon: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Again, through you, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank the hon. member for the presentation. I was listening intently and certainly found some wisdom in it. I know the member has been a member of this Assembly for a long time, certainly more than the class of 2015, which makes up the bulk of the members right now. I was wondering if he could just comment on the size of the protest, on the size and the volume of the e-mails and the phone calls that he is getting on this issue, and on how that compares to his experience with other issues in his time as an MLA.

Then I wonder if he could advise the House a little bit on his thoughts on the complaints that we are getting from constituencies that are adjacent to our ridings. In my case I have a rather large riding, as you know, about 25,000 square kilometres. It borders my friend from Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills' riding on the western side as well as a member's riding from across the way, Banff-Cochrane. It's ranching communities all through there. As you know, just because there are riding lines – they don't quite line up. Counties are on this side and that side, and neighbours are on this side and that side, so the communities overlap our ridings. I'm having ranchers coming into my office in Sundre almost every day saying: "I cannot get help from my MLA in Banff-Cochrane. I cannot get help. I cannot get an answer."

Now, Mr. Speaker, I sympathize. My office has gotten over a thousand phone calls on this in the last week, but we are responding to them. I held a town hall when I was back shortly for the weekend to see my family. I'll have a town hall when I come back next weekend. Even if the government tries to limit debate on this bill, I will still continue to hold town halls in my constituency across the riding.

I'd like the hon. member to just comment on the sheer size of this and how big a deal this is, for some of these rookie MLAs to understand that, as well as his thoughts on constituents having to go to other MLAs to be able to get representation in this Assembly.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Would you wish to respond, hon. member? Please proceed.

Mr. Drysdale: I thank the member for the question. I don't always consider myself an old-timer, but when I look around here, I'm getting up there, and I'm hating to admit it. I don't think I've been in this House that long, Mr. Speaker. I was first elected in '08, and now, actually, I am one of the longest serving members here. There are a couple that have been here longer than me but not that many. When I came, there were members that had been here 30 years and 20 years, so I don't feel like it's been that long. It's only been eight years, but I'm actually one of the longest serving ones now, believe it or not.

You know, in that time, as the member asked, I haven't seen this kind of demonstration and outcry from the public. This is the biggest I've seen. I have to admit that in my years of being around, I've never participated in a rally before in my life, and I've now participated in three or so in the last week. We know that something is going wrong, Mr. Speaker, because I'm not one to take that lightly. So it is unusual. It has definitely caused an uproar.

The other question the member asked, you know, was on the representation. For me, I'm the only PC MLA in northwestern Alberta. The ones farther north are ND, so of course I get calls from Manning, Grimshaw, Peace River, Fort Vermilion, which is like 300 kilometres from me. They have nobody else that will listen to them on these concerns.

So he's right. It's widespread, and I get calls from lots of people outside of my constituency. You know, I mostly work on behalf of my constituency, but I'll listen to any farmer and bring their concerns and thoughts forward on this issue. It's just too bad that it's come down to this, and now we've got time allocation coming in. I guess this government is going to ram it through, like it has been said. We'll all do our best to speak for the farmers in Alberta, and we'll continue to do that even after this is rammed through, Mr. Speaker.

4:40

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.
You wish to respond under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Strankman: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker: Please proceed.

Mr. Strankman: I'd also like to speak to the member. The Member for Calgary-Elbow made some mention of a farm magazine, the *Western Producer*, that gives some options that other provinces have. I was wondering if the member could respond about the possibility of appeals to regulations coming forward. With his experience in the Legislature . . .

The Acting Speaker: I'm sorry, hon. member, but our time is up.
Now, anyone else wishing to respond? I will recognize the Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak to the referral motion. You know, this referral motion is about trying to get it right. Bill 6 and the amendments that we hear are coming to Bill 6 appear to fall far short of what farmers are asking for and that ranchers are asking for. It speaks to the need for consultation, and I believe that

this referral motion would grant that by sending it to committee, so I speak in favour of the referral motion.

Farmers and ranchers have rightly been wary of the suggested changes of this bill, that don't really take into account the complexities and the distinctive intricacies of family farm life. Many of my colleagues have discussed and talked about, you know, the difficulty that happens between trying to figure out where farm and work life begin and where home and family life begin and how that's very difficult to decide and how different farms bring in different complexities. It's very different being a grain farmer versus a cattle farmer versus a dairy farmer.

You know, these complexities, I believe, are understood by the farmers in our province. They understand that this bill, Bill 6, even with its amendments, is onerous and often misguided. Sometimes their livelihoods are even threatened. To highlight this, I know that like many of the other MLAs in this Legislature, we've received immense amounts of e-mail and letters and feedback from our constituents. I would like to take the time to perhaps read some of the more eloquent e-mails that I've received, because I believe that the House and this Legislature need to know how our farm families are feeling about this piece of legislation.

If we are the representatives of the people of Alberta in this Legislature, as we are, then I would pray that we'd actually listen to these people. I've said many times to the people in my constituency: "I'm your mouthpiece. I take your ideas, I take your values, I take your beliefs, and I place them into this Legislature. I'm your representative." So when we can bring the people – this is actually their Legislature. It's not yours, and it's not mine. It's the people of Alberta's. When we bring their ideas, when we bring their comments into this Legislature, I think it's important that we actually listen to them. You know, I would ask you to listen carefully, and I would ask you to give these words careful consideration when we debate the merits of this bill.

I have one constituent that writes, I believe, very heartfully:

Tonight I feel sick inside as I comb over the list of changes the Alberta government has in store for our family farm. I dread what will happen to our life and our livelihood when the government imposes itself on our family.

Our little unit consists of my 82 year old father, my 79 year old mother, my husband and myself. We have a seven year old daughter who loves all our animals, especially our cows. She watches and participates in every facet of our farm life. This is the only life she has known, and she emphatically states it's the only thing she ever wants.

Now, I don't know if you've ever had a seven-year-old little daughter, but I can just hear that seven-year-old little daughter because I used to have a seven-year-old little daughter, and I can understand what she sounds like. I think that sometimes maybe we'd be a little further ahead if we would refer this to the committee so that they could hear little seven-year-old girls speak or the farm families speak directly to this.

She loves checking cows on the pastures, watching and helping during calving, raising chickens and bunnies, riding her pony, and joining us for haying. That's all going to change and the life we have will never be the same. It breaks my heart to tell her the government doesn't trust her family to keep her safe. She won't understand how a stranger will be able to come on our farm and change our lives. I can't even begin to explain ... how the changes will likely mean we will have to quit.

Tell me that a committee doesn't need to hear this.

Am I emotional? No doubt. Losing my freedom and the work I love is painful. Am I over reacting or uninformed? Absolutely not. As the saying goes, this is not my first rodeo.

My husband and my father have both managed oilfield operations. I was a television journalist for the CBC. My mom

was a tax consultant. We know a great deal about OH&S, WCB, Labour Relations and Employment Standards. We know these rules and laws have no place on our family farm. These are great rules for corporate farms and larger family farms who have paid employees [on staff]. [These rules] won't work here, and are frankly an insult to us and our way of life.

By placing our small family farm under the same rules as big feedlots, commercial grain farms and other big corporate outfits, the Alberta government has shown it doesn't understand or respect, how we live, what we need and who we are.

You see, Mr. Speaker, we need to ask the farmers what they want. In a democracy it ultimately comes down to that. The people are supposed to rule. We need to ask them what they want. We need to address their concerns in this bill. With anything less, I believe, we're not living up to our responsibility as legislators.

This farmer asks:

How will Bill 6 cover these scenarios?

These would be great questions for a committee that we refer this to.

If I bring a calf into the house to warm up after its mother has dumped it in a snow bank, will my home become the workplace, subject to unannounced inspections?

I maintain and run older machinery to avoid debt. Will I be forced to buy new?

How many safety meetings should I hold? Do I need a Job Hazard Assessment for each task? Will I have to write a Job Safety Awareness Book? Where will I keep all the documentation stored for the seven years required by law?

When the OHS inspector shows up on my property what type of biosecurity measures will he take? What is my course of action if he causes a disease outbreak or infection?

4:50

These are good questions, and they're questions that a committee needs to hear, that they need to consider, that they need to discuss. We need clarity on this for our farm families. While most of my family are farmers, I've never been a farmer myself. While I've been around farms and I've been around cattle, I don't stand here trying to say that I'm an expert on OH and S or WCB and how they apply to farm families, but this committee needs to hear these questions. This is a wise referral.

You know, I guess it's up to the government, and ultimately, I guess, it's probably up to the backbench of the government. One of the things that I'm beginning to learn as an MLA is that, at least in my party, when we make a decision about where we're going to go, it actually is a caucus decision. When my leader or when my leadership team comes to us and says that we need to consider a particular course of action, we actually have the conversations. I've heard my leader say: "Listen, this is a team thing. We go down this path only if we have the consent of the caucus." We actually do have and you folks over in the government benches do have significant power to impact and to intervene on this piece of legislation.

This constituent asks another set of questions.

If a normally gentle cow has a fit of bovine rage because she is having trouble calving, and [somehow] someone gets hurt, will a stop work order be issued? What happens to the cow? Is she left to suffer and perhaps die because no one is allowed to complete the necessary work?

If a neighbour needs my help, and he has no WCB coverage for me, do I stop being his helpful neighbour?

Now, maybe we've started to address some of that.

If I see animals loose on a roadway should I just leave them to cause a wreck and get killed, or kill a driver? I may not know who owns the animals. I've always helped in the past for the safety of all. Once the animals are contained I search for the

owners, but with the new rules, I could be causing untold problems for a fellow farmer just because I was trying to keep everyone safe.

I know this happened to me just coming to the Leg. here just about a month ago. Driving down the road, I saw three horses running down the ditch in the highway. Knowing that they can spook and jump out in front, you know, you slow down, and eventually you push them off into a fence that's broken down, into a field. Then you go up to the farmhouse, and you see if they're their horses: no, no, no; that's the neighbours down the road. They know who they belong to, found out from one of the kids from my basketball team. You know what? You do those things because that's the way agricultural life works in Alberta.

Will my child be allowed to help calm a frightened calf, watch a birth, help with paperwork, join a cattle drive? Will she be allowed to handle a 4-H steer?

The scenarios may seem outrageous, but Bill 6 creates more problems than solutions for the small family farm. It horrifies me to think a government bureaucrat could come onto my farm, [into] my home, and into my life and change everything.

I hope we're listening, and if we're not, I hope we have enough care about these kinds of scenarios that we're at least willing to put this before a committee that can listen.

There is nothing worse than giving too much power to an individual. While I have met government workers who tried to be helpful and were genuine in their concern, I have seen others who have too much power and wield it maliciously. This bill will put my family at the mercy of a government bureaucrat. If passed, a wonderful rural way of life will be gone. [That] is heartbreaking.

That's just one letter. I thought it was one of the most eloquent, and I think it speaks to this whole issue of: how do you divide this issue between a workplace and a home? How do you do that? Where do you draw the lines?

Mr. Speaker, I think we can see that these are not the words of some robber baron who wants to take advantage of their workers. These are not the words of a parent who does not care about the safety of their children. This is not a selfish entrepreneur that cares more about profit than workers' safety or their neighbours. This is a typical Albertan farmer, who does not want the onerous regulations that will be placed upon their livelihood and their way of life. These are real issues that she's bringing up, and they need further discussion at the committee level. I don't see why it's difficult to see that.

Perhaps this Legislature and this government need to recognize that maybe some of the answers, rather than being found in onerous legislation, really are found in education. You guys know enough about me now to know of my history as an educator. One of the things that I loved about this next one, that I want to share with you, is the whole tack that she takes towards education and how this could be used to address this issue. "I had offered all my curriculum-friendly materials to [Alberta] Education free of charge."

The Acting Speaker: Thank you.

Under 29(2)(a) I recognize the Member for Calgary-Klein.

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do find it distressing that the hon. member continues talking about these outrageous scenarios, that we've explained already, but I will ask a question. You know, we brought this bill forward because of lobbying that has come to us, over years and years, from farm workers and families that have been impacted by injuries and from farm groups. That's how this came to be and why we brought it forward. We thought it was important. My question is: of all the people that come to your office, there must have been some people who want this bill,

so how have you talked to them about it? What have you said to those who want to see this bill in place?

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the hon. member: I can honestly say that I have not had one conversation in my office with a farmer or with a rancher that has supported this bill, okay? I mean, I believe you when you say that there are people that have come to you requesting this, okay? I do believe that they have, but at the same time I think that an honest, open discussion on this issue would also recognize the many, many, many, many people that have been coming forward saying that they've got serious problems with this.

Thank you.

The Acting Speaker: I recognize the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and through you to the member: thanks for his presentation. This matters. Sometimes it's trivialized as we debate it, and we can be a long way from home in this place, but this matters to people. When I was back home – I know the member will have seen the same when he was back home – there were grown-ups with tears in their eyes as they talked about this. Today in our gallery there were people with tears in their eyes. This morning we watched the Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock give a great speech about why this matters to him. He raised his five kids on a farm. He's a farmer. This matters. This matters. This is important.

People should be given the opportunity to speak to it. I know that the member believes that they should be given an opportunity to discuss something that matters so much to them, to participate in something that – it shouldn't be trivialized. Nobody has said that they don't want to do safety. I haven't talked to one farmer or rancher who has said: hey, we don't want to do anything to improve things. But every farmer or rancher says that they want to participate, and I know the member has heard the same thing. I know from my office that I haven't gotten one e-mail yet that was for this bill.

5:00

The question that I have is – and I was proud today to sit in this Assembly as the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition stood up in this Chamber and talked for about an hour and a half. An hour and a half he stood in this Chamber. He used all the time that he could to defend the constituents, to defend the farmers and ranchers across this province, and I still, Mr. Speaker, have not seen the Premier stand up in this House and do any speech. The Premier has not stood up. Her members are not standing up. We're giving you lists all the time. They're not standing up. They're asking questions, but they're not standing up and explaining what they want to do, as you know. The Premier of Alberta, who is forcing this on farmers and ranchers, has not stood up in this Assembly, but the Leader of the Opposition has, for an hour and a half.

I want to know what the member thinks about that as far as leadership and what a shame that is on this Premier for not standing up and communicating to farmers and ranchers across this province and not standing up for Albertans, because, Mr. Speaker, that is her job.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. You know, there are times in life when you get the chance to listen to somebody articulate and for somebody to speak to an issue with passion and with veracity and with understanding, and I can tell you that today I was never prouder of the leader of my party

than when he stood up and spoke for an hour and a half, so articulately explaining the issues in and surrounding this issue.

The chance that we have, the most important thing that we can do in this Legislature as MLAs, as elected members, is to represent the wishes of our constituents, so I do not understand how we cannot do that here. I'm so proud of my leader and of the people on this side of the House that I've heard speak against this bill because they have spoken what the people are telling them. You maybe don't have to agree with what the people are saying, but they are saying it, and they are saying it loud and clear. As representatives we have only one other . . .

The Acting Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Would anyone else like to speak? I recognize the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I come from an urban riding, Calgary-Fish Creek. Many may not know, but Bow Valley Ranche, in Calgary-Fish Creek, is one of the original hearts of Alberta's ranching community and farming community. I'd like to think that all Albertans have deep roots in the agricultural and farming and ranching spirit, which is really the pioneer spirit, which has built our province. I think we should all be proud of that, and I think it's something that is embedded in Albertans' DNA. Again, I think we're all proud of that.

Farmers and ranchers were the original innovators, I believe, in our community. They were problem solvers. A can-do attitude came from them, indomitable stubbornness that actually got us to where we are in the face of a lot of challenges. Prairie work ethic: I think that term came from the farmers and ranchers of not only our province but across the prairies. They've overcome hardship and drought and other natural disasters, freezing in the middle of winter when they didn't have power, cutting the logs they needed to stay warm, and harbouring the animals and the grains and the implements and the supplies they needed to survive hard winters. But, Mr. Speaker, they're having a hard time surviving this NDP government.

Self-reliance is something that they pride themselves on, and that self-reliance is part of the problem that we're seeing here today. That self-reliance is one which is a fierce sense of family spirit and a sense of community but also a deep sense of family and safety for those families that, quite frankly, is probably the greatest source of safety we will find: in the warm hearth of their families, the love that they have for each other, and the fact that they want them all to come home safely at the end of the day. Many of them cross acres and acres, hundreds of acres during those days, watching cattle, raising crops, and other things.

I like to think of the image of barn raising. You know, barns were not raised in this country, in this province, across the prairies by architects and engineers. They weren't raised by cranes. They weren't raised by unionized labourers. There weren't catering services there, and certainly there were no safety officers watching out for them. They watched out for themselves and each other. Yet it all got done safely and with each person watching out for the man, woman, or child beside them. I think we should all be proud of that. In fact, probably the safety that we have in the workplace comes from that sense of independence and innovation and caring that came from the farms of Alberta and made its way into the workplace, not the other way around.

You know, I grew up as city boy in Calgary, but I became friends with some of the largest ranchers in southern Alberta, and they invited me down to their farms and their ranches. We had an opportunity for me to learn. I'm very proud that when I was 14, I spent the summer working on a farm. I can tell you that I never

worked harder in my life. I was never more well fed in my life. It was probably one of the most memorable occasions of my life, and I sure slept well at the end of the night, I'll tell you, for the short nights.

And I was safe. You know what? I was 14, but there were 18-year-olds and 19-year-olds and 22-year-olds and 30-year-olds and 50-year-olds, and they were all watching out for me, and when I was in the way of a piece of machinery, they pulled me aside. They wanted me to work hard. They gave me a baling hook and said: kid, you're going to get some muscles here, and away you're going to go. But there was always somebody watching out for me. Now, I had to fight for food at the table at the end of the day, but they were always watching out for me.

Those families of southern Alberta that I've gotten to know, again, some of those large ranches: those are the pioneers and the spirit, those are the people that founded the Calgary Stampede, the Big Four. Those ranchers have sustained themselves. Mr. Speaker, sustainability is what we're talking about here. That sustainability now has gone on for over a hundred years amongst not only the large ranches but the small family ranches of this province.

Sustainability is something we could learn about in this House because that sustainability is under attack. Quite frankly, the sustainability of our family farms and ranches is under attack, but it doesn't have to be that way. We could do the right thing in this House, members on all sides here, and truly consult, not by going back and scrambling and trying to find a way to backfill a lack of consultation, a lack of information, a lack of talking to the neighbouring provinces, who could probably tell us what they've done right and maybe what they've done wrong and what we could do better.

We have an opportunity to be the best in Canada here, which we're used to being. This is a province of leaders, this is a province of innovators, and this is a province where, I think, we like to think that we do things on a best-practices basis. Here is an opportunity, Mr. Speaker, to do just that. I would suggest that this is an opportunity that should be seized by this Legislature on behalf of Albertans and rural Albertans and farmers and ranchers across this province. We have the opportunity to do that here today.

[The Speaker in the chair]

You know, the very fabric of Alberta's family farms is really, again, under attack here; hence, a way of life and sustainability not only could be but is likely to be seriously undermined unless we change course here today and tomorrow.

To really end my comments here, again I'm pleading to the government, with the support of the House. We all, I think, as has been mentioned by many of the members here, do indeed believe that the government has the best of intentions, is doing it with the clear conscience that they have done the right thing. But I'm here to tell you that we've had not only 15 or 100 or 2,000 farmers and ranchers on our doorstep here but also across Alberta, in arenas and fields across this province, telling us and asking us to get it right. I think this is an opportunity that needs to be taken, Mr. Speaker. Let's consult before we ram this through. Let's consult Albertans, let's consult our neighbours, and let's do what's right for this province.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Questions under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler .

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes. To the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek: as a city boy and seeing the

outpouring of reaction to this, could you give your more personal relationship and that from your friends and neighbours in your constituency?

5:10

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Gottfried: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for his question. Indeed, I've been flooded with hundreds of e-mails and phone calls, which was surprising, quite frankly, but I've heard that from some of our other urban members as well. You know, we all would like to think that there is maybe an urban versus rural issue here, but there's not.

You know what I'm hearing? I'm hearing about the 70-year-old who's had a successful corporate career, who grew up on the farm. They still have those values. That prairie work ethic, that pioneer spirit actually helped them. There's a great book called *Cowboy Ethics*, which everybody in this House should read, that is being used on Wall Street to teach people about ethics, to teach people about values, to teach people about doing the right thing, to teach people about hard work, not easy money. Those are the things that I'm hearing.

Quite frankly, it is encouraging, you know, to hear people tell their stories of having grown up in an agricultural community or on a farm family. Again, it's the story of Alberta. They're not from Alberta. They're from Saskatchewan, they're from Manitoba, they're from B.C., they're from Ontario, and they're from the Maritimes. They came to this province because of the Alberta advantage, which was alive and well not just in the corporate boardrooms of this province, not just in the small businesses, not just in the corporations but in the hearts of all Albertans that were working there and in the farms and ranches of this community.

Mr. Speaker, this is not just a rural issue. This is an urban issue. This is something in the DNA of all Albertans. I think what we're finding out now is that those people who grew up on the farms are now sharing those stories with their children and their grandchildren to make sure that that is not lost, that pioneer spirit that is the heart, the lifeblood, and the livelihood here in this province, that drives us all to have that entrepreneurial – and I like to use the term “agri-preneur.” The agricultural entrepreneurs were our first entrepreneurs in this province. They got things done. They were faced with problems, and they found ways to innovate and get around them.

Many of those people became successful in many other walks of life, and we see that today with our farmers and ranchers across this community. They're not just farmers and ranchers. They're engineers. They're doctors. They're veterinarians. They're scientists of many different sorts. They've got MBAs. They're tax accountants. Many of them have those other careers, that they juggle, but the only way they can do that is through the strength of their families.

Again, I thank the member for his question and an opportunity to speak a little bit about something that's a little deeper in our society, I think, than just an urban issue.

The Speaker: Under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Hanson: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Please proceed.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just a question for the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. Being a city boy, even you should be able to answer this one. Going back to our leader's debate there, for an hour and a half he mentioned all of the other industries that

are exempt from this legislation. One of them was accounting. Now, this is a hypothetical question, but it did come from a document off the WCB website. It was trying to compare what would be considered a farm accident and a nonfarm accident. It referred to a woman doing her farm books in her farm office, and it said that if she dropped her stapler and broke her toe, that would be considered a farm accident. Now, this document says that accountants are exempt from this legislation but apparently not farm accountants. If the same woman goes into the kitchen to get a cup of coffee while she's working on her books and knocks a toaster off the counter and breaks her toe, that's not a farm accident.

This is very, very confusing legislation, to say the least. Could you just give us an idea of what your thoughts are? How bad is this, and how onerous is this legislation going to be to implement?

Mr. Gottfried: Mr. Speaker, thank you to the member for his question. Again, I think that it's indicative of the confusion that we're all facing here. The people we're hearing from who live on the farms and ranches of Alberta are confused and worried, but Albertans across the country . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Hon. members, before we proceed, my apologies to the Member for Livingstone-Macleod. He had made a request earlier in the day for unanimous consent to introduce a visitor. With the indulgence of the House I would ask if you're prepared to allow the member to make that introduction.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Stier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do appreciate you bringing this back to light here today. There is a large group that have been here for some time, and today I announced their names. They're from the Nanton-High River-Cayley-Longview-Claresholm region. I recognize a lot of the names, and I'm so pleased to see them here. But in the lengthy list that I had today, apparently one of the names was missing, so I would now like to mention another name to you and through you and the members of this Assembly. I'm not sure if she's still here. I'm getting a shake of the head up there; I guess she's not. I'd just like to read into the record that Amy Davidson was here today as well. I think that all these people deserve a big thank you from all of us for sitting here throughout and contributing as much as you do because it sure helps on this side to know that we've got people that are working as a team with us against this situation with Bill 6.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. My apologies for the oversight.

The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Government Bills and Orders

Second Reading

Bill 6

Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act

(continued)

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and speak on the amendment to refer Bill 6 to committee. I would like to outline why the need is so great that we refer this to committee. I

recently hosted a town hall, just last Friday, for my constituents in Bonnyville-Cold Lake. The reason I hosted this town hall was to hear from my constituents what their thoughts are on Bill 6 and maybe to bring some of the questions that they may have to this Legislature. Now, because of the short time frame that this bill has been in the House, I didn't get to give a lot of notice to my local community. It would have been nice to give, say, two or three weeks to get it in the papers, maybe some news radio. Maybe more folks . . .

Mrs. Pitt: Make a song.

Mr. Cyr: Yeah. Make a song. Thank you.

Mrs. Pitt: Or a parade.

Mr. Cyr: Well, a parade might be going a little too far.

But I had 36 hours' notice, and in that 36 hours I had 140 farmers come out. That's a lot of farmers to decide to call. I started off the night to them, and I said: here's Bill 6. You know, the thing with our farmers and our ranchers is that they already knew exactly what was in Bill 6. They had already read and understood what was in Bill 6. So they just wanted clarification. I said: "Okay. Well, I will give you the information that I have," and they continued to pull out the literature that was posted on the government website. One of my constituents actually said, "Which version are you working with?" I said, "Well, what I know now is that there are no versions on here, but I'll go through the one that I do have."

I would like to say that some of my constituents were saying: "We've been trying to get hold of the government. We've been trying to get hold of the agriculture minister. We've been trying to get hold of the Premier." Some were even going far enough to reach out and talk with some of the other MLAs, my colleagues as well as NDP. They just want answers. They have questions, and they're not getting replies. Right now what we're seeing is that apparently the information to contact the different ministers and the Premier has been taken down from the website. Now, I did a favour for the NDP. I'm trying to help.

5:20

Mr. Ceci: You're here to help.

Mr. Cyr: I am here to help. Thank you, Finance minister.

I was wonderful, and I gave them the wonderful e-mail addresses for the Premier and the agriculture minister. Yes. They can thank me. I definitely was helping out so that my constituents could actually reach out to these ministers and the Premier.

Now, I will say that several had deep concerns with the fact that they didn't try just once to contact these different MLAs and the Premier and ministers; they tried several times, dozens of times, trying to get hold of them. Some waited 20 minutes, half an hour on hold to get through, and when they finally got through to some of these phone lines, their name and phone number was taken down, and then they were told: thank you. That's what they got to do. Now, this is shameful. This is very shameful. The fact is that we have a serious disconnect between Albertans and our government. That's concerning. That is deeply troubling, that Albertans can't get to MLAs that are in the government. Apparently, the only MLAs that are responding are opposition MLAs. This is a deep concern.

Now, whether it's a lack of insight from the government or just plain incompetence, I can't say. But I can say that a lot of my constituents are definitely questioning: how do we trust a government that is bringing out a bill and that hasn't consulted us? These farms are going through a trying time right now because many of them, in my riding especially, have oil and gas industry to be able

to offset their farming income. As I've stood up in the House – I don't know – three or four times, I have gone to the jobs minister and asked: what are we doing about Bonnyville-Cold Lake? We're losing jobs. It's crazy. We've got crazy amounts of empty houses. We have incredible – incredible – need on our charities right now, that are depending on the generosity of their fellow constituents.

Now, I will say that to arbitrarily apply regulations and standards but not actually consult is still a bit of an insult. I would like to read into the record some of the questions so that the government could actually hear some of the concerns that are coming out from across Alberta. I'm sure that it's not just my constituents that are asking these questions. I am sure that these questions are coming from almost every farmer. The first question is: if the NDP are determined to pass this during this session, who are they consulting in order to write up the regulations, and who is all participating in this process? This cannot just be producer groups as some only represent their paid members. That's question 1.

Question 2. Farmers and ranchers do not want to talk to the NDP about safety and have asked for the bill to be killed so that they can be given the opportunity to actually consult with them or go into dialogue with them about what is happening and what the NDP's concerns are. What are they trying to achieve? Every one of these farmers and ranchers are safe. I reinforce that: they are safe. It comes down to education, not legislation.

Now, the majority of farmers – here's question 3 – and ranchers are okay with them bringing forward an insurance. However, they just want to have the option to use private insurance over WCB. Most already have private insurance for their employees. If the government's real care is for the workers, why are they not happy with this type of compromise?

Question 4: how would you define a family farm? Some family farms are run by just families. That's not a bad question.

Question 5: you say that all information prior to the consultation has been electronically available; what about the basic right to know what's going on for those older operators or those who do not have computers or for areas that do not have high-speed Internet service?

Question 6. One farmer said that this is the most intrusive agricultural legislation he's seen in his lifetime. Why would the NDP bring forward this type of legislation without even talking to them first?

Question 7: are you using the legislation as a smokescreen to divert our attention away from other legislation that you are introducing, and do you think you are diverting our attention away from increasing taxes and the debt bill and the carbon tax right now? That's a fair point. Picking a fight with the farmers right when you're introducing a carbon tax, or what I would say is a hidden PST – it's unfortunate that you would choose this route if this is where the government is going.

Question 8. Hutterites are saying that they feel singled out by the proposed changes and do not want their names to be used if you do not use others. They felt discriminated against. Hutterites have not asked for specific exemptions and said that the agriculture minister's flip-flop on this issue has created concern, just like these proposed new amendments.

Question 9: what are all the fines that OH and S can lay on farmers, and what type of control will they be allowed to exert? This is a good question. Again, there were questions and answers that were put out, and they were very clear. Alberta government put out questions and answers that were very clear on this but withdrew it and said: we're going to fix it; it's the bureaucrats' misunderstanding.

Question 10. They would like the government to look at statistics that say that Alberta has the lowest amount of farm deaths per capita in all of Canada. This is without legislation.

Question 11: will the government please represent all Albertans, not just a few opportunists?

Question 12. We don't appreciate the quote from a newly elected NDP MLA who said: four years to correct 40 years of conservative government. Is this an appropriate comment?

Question 13. Please tell us where the critics are coming from. Who did you consult?

Question 14: can the government please make public all consultations they have had, with who and when? Who are the stakeholders? Now, we just saw an e-mail going out inviting some of the major stakeholders. Apparently, that is a bit of a shock because they already know exactly what they're going to do with this bill.

5:30

Question 15: what will happen to the farms that have been in the same family for generations that cannot keep up with the changes?

Question 16: why are you spending taxpayers' money to buy radio time to promote this bill and the carbon tax bill?

Question 17: how can you not see that this is not democratic; this is not Alberta?

Question 18: there are so many unanswered questions; why don't you take the time to explain it and write up properly laid-out legislation so farmers can trust you completely? Well, we got the answer for that today with these wonderful motions that have gone through giving us an hour tomorrow. That's most unfortunate.

Question 19: 2012 was the last farm safety review, and the panel's recommendation afterwards was that there was no consensus on legislation and that education is needed. They say that the Premier . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Banff-Cochrane, questions under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Under 29(2)(a) I thank the member for sharing the concerns that he's heard from his constituents and also for his offer to help. I think his offer to help is genuine because he's an honourable member. I know he's a hard-working guy. You know, they've said, "We're here to help," many, many times. Sometimes if you say it enough, maybe it comes true.

I guess my question is that we all need to work together. We all need to work together on this very important issue of safety. We all agree that farmers are very, very safe people. There's no question there. We all agree with that. You know, there's a WCB process actually called partners in injury reduction, so I'd like to think of all of us here as partners in injury reduction, too. You know, that program in WCB is actually a way for employers to get discounts on their premiums as an incentive. If they have a safe workplace, they actually get a discount. We can all be partners in injury reduction, too.

There's been a lot of miscommunication. We've made that clear. The Premier has taken responsibility. As a member of this caucus I take personal responsibility for that miscommunication, too. But because there's been that miscommunication, we've issued clarifications and amendments and tabled the amendments here in the House. We've had press conferences, extensive communication about how we made a mistake. We also put forward some amendments to clarify that.

What I would like to know from the member is that when these people contact his office with very legitimate questions and concerns – if new legislation was going to come into my workplace, I'd have a lot of questions, too, and well they should. What I'd like to know is: when you've had these people come into your office, given the fact that we have clarified information, given the fact that we have retracted the WCB and OH and S communication that was

incorrect – we retracted that – what have you done in your office to help these people, to quell their fears? I mean, they've got some legitimate fears, and we've heard a lot from the opposite side about all the preposterous things that exist out there, and a lot of them are preposterous because they're just simply not true. The member is nodding his head; he agrees that they're not true. So what has your office done to calm the fears of those people that come into your office that say: what's going to happen here? Have you shared the amendment? We've defined family farms, and "family" is actually defined very clearly.

Some Hon. Members: What amendment?

Mr. Westhead: The amendment's been tabled, and you all know exactly what I'm talking about.

The Speaker: Hon. member, are there any other questions that you have?

Hon. member, could you respond to the question that was asked?

Mr. Westhead: Mr. Speaker, I'm not done.

We've defined . . .

The Speaker: I heard a question. Please be seated.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you. First things first, the answer that I give is: kill Bill 6. That needs to be it. It's absolutely the answer, but if the NDP is not willing to kill Bill 6 – and that is where they're going with this; they're not looking to kill Bill 6. What they are saying is that we're going to limit what the opposition can do to discuss this bill. The answer that I was saying was that at least the NDP could make a compromise with the Wildrose or the third party or fourth party and send it to a standing committee. This is what they're for. They're refusing to go through with this. They're pushing this through. There's no good reason to push it through in these last few minutes. The fact is that this amendment, that has been tabled, just hit our hands yesterday, and we're still going through it just like all of the farmers. We have some good indications that there are flaws in it, and our leader spent 90 minutes explaining exactly what some of these flaws are. Some of them, in fact, are that some of the . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand today to support sending Bill 6 to committee. I was elected to represent the people of Grande Prairie-Smoky. Each of us here in this House was elected to represent a different constituency so that all Albertans are represented here. Now, when I think about that responsibility, I'm extremely humbled to be in this position, where I am here to represent the people of my constituency. When the people in my constituency come to me with concerns, I have to respect those concerns. When Bill 6 came forward, the number of people that started e-mailing, calling, texting, all these different forms of communication, all against Bill 6: I have to respect that. I have to represent those people. It's my job and the job of each person in this House to represent the people in their constituency.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I believe in safety. Every single person that expressed concerns over Bill 6 has expressed to me the same thing, that they believe in safety, too. They don't want a life lost. They don't want a limb lost. They don't want to have any harm done at all because any of those things that happen on a farm happen to people that they're concerned about: their family members, their friends, their employees. To suggest that the members on this side of the House or any farmers in Alberta are not concerned about

safety is insulting. But Bill 6 is about much more than farm safety. It's disingenuous for the government to suggest it isn't or to suggest that opponents of the bill don't care about safety.

Mr. Speaker, I'm still receiving e-mails and calls and texts, lots of them, and these communications, again, are unanimous. Each person speaks with passion, with intelligence, with respect, and they call for withdrawing Bill 6. "Kill Bill 6" is quite often the phrase they use. We hear it on the steps of the Legislature multiple times from thousands of Albertans driving hours to be here to express their concerns with Bill 6. We hear it in the town halls over and over and over again, people expressing the same thing: kill Bill 6; send it to committee; consult with us.

Now, when Bill 6 came forward, it didn't have a lot of words in it. It basically was fairly simple. It removed the farm exemption from employment standards, labour relations, occupational health and safety, and workers' compensation. But, Mr. Speaker, just on a quick Internet search, when I looked at some of the codes and regulations and acts that are involved with those four different organizations, I came up with over a thousand pages that people will have to live by.

5:40

Now, I can't imagine, Mr. Speaker, being in a position where all of a sudden on a certain date I'm going to be responsible to live up to a thousand pages of regulations in different kinds of acts and stuff like that. There could even be more, but that's what I found on a quick look. It's very understandable that people are upset, that they're worried, that they're concerned.

Now, I understand that the ministers' offices and the Premier's office are getting a lot of calls, a lot of e-mails, and I understand that it's hard to handle that kind of volume of communication. Obviously, this kind of outcry, Mr. Speaker – the rallies on the steps, the town halls, the e-mails, phone calls, texts, all those different things that are going on – should be some indication that something is wrong, but sadly, of course, we have the Premier and this government doubling down and tripling down, and now they're going to force this bill to pass.

Unfortunately, the members opposite that represent rural ridings have not represented their constituents. This is sad for democracy. But there's still time; this bill hasn't passed yet. I guess I become a little concerned when I see them jumping up to ask questions under 29(2)(a) just so they can take a couple of cheap shots followed by maybe a question to those of us that are speaking to this bill. I have yet to see one of them stand up and take the 15 minutes that's allotted to them to speak to the bill and represent their constituents.

Mr. Speaker, I've got constituents that have expressed concerns to the point where they're wondering whether they're going to continue farming. I find that alarming. I find that upsetting. I can't imagine people sitting at the kitchen table and, because of Bill 6, having to make a life decision: am I going to continue with the career I've chosen, that I've done my whole life? I can't imagine having that kind of stress and that kind of worry.

Mr. Speaker, most farmers already cover their regular workers with WCB or equivalent. In fact, quite often I've heard that they have something better than WCB, but under Bill 6 they won't have a choice. They will have to give up better insurance and be forced to take substandard insurance.

Now, we've all heard the quotes of the Premier in the past and her concerns with WCB, many quotes over and over again about a broken, miserly system. She spoke at protests in front of the WCB building, but for some reason she feels that WCB is perfect for farmers. She's willing to force them to sign on to something that she didn't even support herself. Now, has she fixed the WCB? Has there been any attempt by this government to do anything for the

WCB to correct some of the problems it may have? Nothing. They've had all this time, and they've done nothing.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this government doesn't even know what their rules are. They want a blank cheque. They want to fill in the details later. They want us MLAs in this Legislature to pass Bill 6 without knowing what it'll end up like. How can we in good conscience pass something when we don't know what it is? How can we expect the people of Alberta to sit here and accept something when they don't know what it's going to be?

Now, we've already learned today that the amendments that they've brought forward contain more pages than the original bill and that the majority of the amendments can be changed by cabinet at any time. They don't have to go back to the people. They don't have to come back to the Legislature. They can just do it any time. I think that alarms farmers.

We hear about the misinformation regarding this bill. Though there may be some misinformation, the truth is spelled out in black and white, and that's scary enough. Farmers are resourceful, intelligent, and willing to work with government regarding any concerns they have. But in order to do that, you have to consult with them. You have to sit down with them. You have to talk to them. And you have to do that before you bring the bill into the Legislature.

Now, at some of the first meetings they had technical experts. They were willing to give expert advice on the regulations. They had them there at the Grande Prairie meeting. The information that they provided contradicts what the government said the intention was. What information was given to these technical experts that were there to give information? Who gave them that information to go to the meetings with?

Now, we've heard the Premier say that she wants to give farmers the right to say no. She wants them to have the right to say no to dangerous work or any number of things that they think this bill is going to correct. But if she truly believes and this government truly believes that they want to give farmers the right to say no, then they should listen to them because that's what they're saying. They're saying no over and over and over again. Can't this government listen to the farmers? They say that this is about giving farmers the right to say no. That's what they're saying.

The NDP MLAs should have the right to say no, too. They should have the right to say no to Bill 6. That's what democracy is about. So when this comes up to a vote, they have the right to say no. I don't know that the NDP MLAs understand how much power they have. They could stop this. The ones that have farmers in their constituencies, particularly them: they could say no. They could stop this bill. They have that power. They could correct this problem.

An Hon. Member: People will be watching how they vote.

Mr. Loewen: People will be watching how they vote. They will.

Now, I had two meetings this past weekend. I'm a busy person, too, Mr. Speaker. I have a family at home. I spend my week here, I go back to my family, but I had people calling me, concerned about Bill 6, people from other constituencies. So with short notice I planned two town halls with the help of the constituents there. One was planned with 24 hours' notice. One was planned with 10 hours' notice. I just want to read through some of the questions and comments that I took because I had somebody taking notes at the meeting because that's what it's about. It's about listening. These are just some of the random comments and questions.

5:50

This is from the Peace River meeting. There are more accidents on the highway than farms, 11 farm accidents. Did they have

anything to do with farming? What is the hurry to put Bill 6 through? Why didn't their MLA come to the meeting tonight? No response from their MLA. Doesn't answer calls, et cetera. Boards and commissions were asked to consult with government, but they didn't get any information. Do petitions help? Is there a format for petitions? Retractions? The Hutterian brotherhood are exempt. Hiring for one day: do we need WCB? OH and S will be forced on us. Concerns about fuel tanks, paint cans, oil, and trucks, et cetera. OH and S. Criminally responsible if someone is hurt. Very serious. Need safety committees, says OH and S in manual. Can Bill 6 be repealed with change of government? Exemption if owner-operator? Will make sure I never hire anyone. Hunters on land will have to be safety trained or WCB? Best timing for this bill . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any questions under 29(2)(a)? Rocky View-Rimbey.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. It's a long one. I know it's always tough to get it into the speech when I do it myself, so I sympathize.

I do have a question for the member, but through you, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank him for his statement. I found it very informative. During question period today there was an exchange with the Municipal Affairs minister, and as she was answering a question about Bill 6, she said, and I quote: this is only the beginning. This is only the beginning. So we're debating right now whether we should be sending this bill to committee and whether we should be consulting with farmers, and essentially what the government members continue to tell us is: "It's okay. Give us a blank cheque. We'll regulate afterwards. We'll fix everything with farmers afterwards. It's going to be okay. Just trust us." That's what they're asking. They're asking us as elected representatives who represent a lot of farmers: just trust us. It's okay that there are thousands of people calling their office. Just trust us. There are thousands of people on the stairs of the Legislature, protesting. Just trust us. Then she says that this is only the beginning. What is the next step?

Now, she was referring – and I'll get to the question here shortly – to Bill 6 as she makes regulations. She's saying that the regulations she's just making are only the beginning. Now, this is a government who released this on their website. [interjection] I thank the hon. Finance minister for his opinion, through you, Mr. Speaker. Maybe he'll get up shortly and give a speech on why he supports this bill.

The Speaker: He gets the opportunity if you'd ask the question.

Mr. Nixon: Absolutely. I'm making brief comments first, Mr. Speaker, as 29(2)(a) says.

Would children be covered? Would regulations set a minimum age to work on a farm or ranch? These are the government's documents. The government is committed to meeting international standards and ensuring young workers are protected. Under the proposed legislation workers regardless of age would be covered by OH and S. This would include the children of farmers and ranchers who are helping out on the commercial operations of the farm.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this document was released – let's be very clear – by the government with the bill. Now the government is saying that they're miraculously trying to change regulations to deal with this. That's what they're saying, and they're saying: "Just trust us. Just trust us. Don't worry. Tell your constituents that it's going to be okay." Then the minister says that this is only the beginning.

Mr. Speaker, the question for the member – and it's a brief comment – is very clear. Will his constituents, will the farmers that are in the gallery today, will my constituents be expected to

continue to trust a minister that says that this is just the beginning, a minister that has already tried to change the way of life on farms? How can that be? To the member, through you: how can we be expected to trust this government?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: I'd like to thank the member for the question. Of course, it's very hard to have trust in a group of people that have decided just one day to drop something like this, this kind of regulatory burden, on farmers in Alberta and then say that they've consulted. Now, of course, what they've done is that they've come up with some amendments that they plan on ramming through, probably tomorrow because they brought forward something on the agenda to shorten debate. Mr. Speaker, we have an amendment. I haven't had time to go to my constituents and ask them what they think of these amendments. So here we are in the same situation, no consultation.

We ask about trust. We have government members running around saying, "Well, that isn't what we meant" even though that's what was said and that's what was in writing. Then they come along and say, "Yeah, trust us," and they drop these in our lap and say: this was our plan all along. Obviously, it wasn't. It's very disingenuous to suggest that it was.

Again, no consultation. This government seems to have a different definition of the word "consultation" than I would have. Now, I gave the definition of consultation the other day in my member's statement. "Consultation is defined as the action or process of formally consulting or discussing, a conference in which advice is given or views are exchanged." Does that represent what's happened here? I don't think so.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

The Speaker: No.

Mr. Orr: Okay. Fine. I thought that's where we were, so I'm fine.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's an honour to rise and speak to this amendment. I will say that I appreciate the tone that has come about this afternoon because I think it truly does demonstrate the seriousness of what we're dealing with here. This isn't just about people who are upset and ranting and raving. This is a bill that truly does need to be sent to committee for further study and for further consideration, and it is extremely important.

In many ways Alberta has become a distinct jurisdiction in our nation because we actually rarely use committees in our House here. It's a parliamentary tool for the benefit of study and examination, but it's become an unfortunate trend that we rarely use it. Committees really do allow for greater clarity, insight from stakeholders. They allow for experts within the field of knowledge to share their knowledge. But we're not using them. I doubt that it's possible for even all of us combined to be truly absolute experts on all matters. That's why it's of utmost necessity, actually, that this bill does get put to committee. Therefore, I support the amendment.

The government is proposing this legislation, yet it has very little experience in the industry that they're trying to change, certainly, at least, not experts. So I think it's critical that we go to committee. The government doesn't have a single career farmer among them, yet they feel they have the expertise to impose wide-sweeping, history-changing legislation without any other members having professional agricultural experience, and, worse than that, they haven't reached out to industry stakeholders. Today only they sent an e-mail inviting a telephone conference with some of those

stakeholders, yet we've also had today closure invoked on the bill. There is going to be no conversation on this. They're essentially telling Albertans that they're listening to their concerns, but there's been very little real consultation actually hearing them. You know, when you have to keep telling somebody that you're doing it, generally it's an indication that they don't realize . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, it is 6 p.m., and I wish to announce that the Assembly stands adjourned till 7:30 p.m.

[The Assembly adjourned at 6 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Tuesday evening, December 8, 2015

Day 30

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta The 29th Legislature

First Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Tuesday, December 8, 2015

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Please be seated.

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 8 Public Education Collective Bargaining Act

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to speak this evening on Bill 8, the Public Education Collective Bargaining Act. Again, this will establish a fair and effective bargaining process, I believe, which will allow all parties to proceed in negotiating in good faith and keep close hands on the purse strings. It institutes a two-table structure, that allows local issues to remain local and provides a provincial bargaining table as well to address issues that affect teachers and school boards. I believe that this bill provides a stronger voice for school boards and a more formal role in all parts of the process and an opportunity to provide direct input into issues that affect all of them.

Since this bill was introduced, I've been working with school boards, education partner groups, and others, and certainly it's important to understand that this bill is all about how we bargain, not what we're bargaining on. Still, we know that boards have expressed concerns, and certainly I wanted to work with those as well. It's part of an organic, natural process by which we make strong legislation. It's my intention to move an amendment. I think that it goes a long way to address some of those concerns, and we certainly value all of the input that we've had. I believe that Bill 8 is a positive step forward, and I encourage all members in this House to vote in favour of it. You have to see the amendment, though, of course, first.

The model will allow school boards, government, and teachers to have input on which items should be bargained centrally and bargained locally. Of course, Madam Chair, we have to be mindful of cost, so that's why it's so pivotal to give government a role at the central table in bargaining with the teachers, okay? It's part of a realistic plan, I believe, to manage spending, and I want to assure all partners and reconfirm our commitment here that we will work together with school boards and the ATA and the general public to develop a fair negotiating system that develops regulations and policies that Bill 8 enables. We want to continue to do our best and put Alberta students and their families at the forefront.

So, Madam Chair, in the spirit of that, I have an amendment that I would like to distribute, please, and I have the appropriate number of copies here for you with the original on the top. Do you want me wait for distribution?

The Chair: Until at least I get the amendment.

Mr. Eggen: Okay.

The Chair: This will be known as amendment A1.
Go ahead, hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Okay. Thanks, Madam Chair. The amendment is being distributed now. The amendment would strike out section 8 of the bill as tabled and amend the language in sections 1, 11, 12, 14, and 20 to reflect this removal. This move, Madam Chair, comes from direct feedback provided by school boards after the bill was introduced. I had held three consultations with school boards to gather feedback, and I definitely saw that there was consensus to remove this section.

If people would be so kind as to approve this tonight, I will accelerate the establishment of the teachers' employer bargaining association so that it is able to negotiate with the Alberta Teachers' Association on which matters will be bargained centrally and which will be bargained locally. The original version of this bill proposed that government would negotiate with the ATA on these matters, and I was doing that to have haste and speed. It was a matter of speed, but we found that we could in fact gather together the TEBA and the necessary components so that we could do it as I'm describing here in this amendment.

Since gathering feedback, my ministry has worked with Alberta Education officials on a process that would allow the acceleration of TEBA. The TEBA, of course, is made up of school board and government representatives. I want to make this abundantly clear, that school boards will have their say on which matters will go to central and which will go to local tables. We heard the school boards loud and clear, and we're continuing to listen, and we will be convening further conversations in the new year around this process. Indeed, Madam Chair, I'm sure we'll spend a great deal of time together after this new year.

Still, it should be also stated that the government as the funder of education will be at the bargaining table with teachers as well. This is a historic change, and I think it's very, very, very important. This will put us in a much better position to meet our fiscal obligations and bargain in a manner that is fair, stable, and responsible.

I also want to make a change that will clarify the bridging provision in section 14. This is a technical change, and it does not represent any shift in policy. The change is being done to clarify how bridging, which is a process that occurs during the collective bargaining process, occurs in a two-table bargaining structure. Section 14 of this act clarifies that the existing collective agreement is in effect until a new collective agreement is concluded; in other words, it is bridged because either the teachers' employer bargaining association or the ATA have given the other a notice to commence bargaining for central terms. This amendment is necessary because of sections 73 to 75 of the Labour Relations Code, which provide that a strike or lockout may only occur when "no collective agreement is in force, other than as a result of section 130." So these collective agreements will be in force not as a result of section 130 of the Labour Relations Code but as a result of section 14 of the Public Education Collective Bargaining Act, should it be passed by this Assembly. I would ask for support from the House on this change as well.

Madam Chair, let me close by stating once more that our government is very aware of the valuable role that teachers play in shaping the lives of Albertans. By working collaboratively, we can keep our focus on what matters most – that is, to provide our students with a world-class education, that they deserve, and one that they have enjoyed here in this province for a long time and will continue to do so in the future – and we can have an agreement that is affordable and sets a proper precedent for fiscal responsibility.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Any comments regarding this amendment? The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the minister for bringing this forward. It certainly addresses a lot of the comments and feedback that I've heard from school boards from around the province, so I do commend you for both engaging with them in the consultation as well as hearing what they had to say.

You know, in any matter dealing with education, my number one question and concern is always: is it good for students? So as we get into the bargaining process, that's always got to be top of mind. School boards, of course, have a big role to play in determining classroom conditions, so it will be very interesting to see how that process plays itself out in terms of what the two-table bargaining looks like.

I have a couple of questions for the minister. I'd be very interested to know what exactly falls in which table and how that will be communicated to Albertans: to this House and through us to Albertans, or just directly from your office. I'm interested in that.

The Alberta School Boards Association uses what they call a 60 per cent supermajority. Any policy resolution must pass by a vote of 60 per cent of the board members present representing at least 60 per cent of the students in Alberta. It doesn't say so in the bill, but I'm curious if that's something that you would anticipate TEBA adopting as well.

7:40

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Member, for the questions. Madam Chair, in regard to communicating the composition of our deliberations, I believe it will be an ongoing process. We will be entering the negotiation, using TEBA and with the other side of the table being the Alberta Teachers' Association, as a full negotiation, as you would be negotiating a contract with provisions for arbitration as well. You know, as they come to those points of agreement – right? – that are mutually agreed upon on a legal basis, then we will communicate those. It all has to happen in an accelerated sort of way. Because, of course, I'm making this amendment change, we're pushing ahead some of the other timelines for the commencement of collective bargaining. I should expect that it should be fairly early in the new year.

Part of the legislation is that it creates an assembly council of the 61 school boards, that will vote and choose their representatives. How that is deliberated on I will get to you, how that voting process will go. I think that they will use probably a system that they have used. I'm not sure. I think that they might use a two-thirds majority in ASBA. That seems to ring a bell, but certainly I will check on that for you.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-North West.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would concur with my colleague from Calgary-Elbow. Certainly, I've been getting a lot of feedback and a lot of concerns from some folks who really were concerned about: how do we clarify the process of negotiations? I think that the concern that I heard from a lot of stakeholders was, you know: what is the role that the ATA plays in future negotiations both at the local level and at the central level? We felt that this should be established in the legislation, so the idea that TEBA is there right from the start is, I think, going to be comforting to a lot of the folks who have been contacting me.

You know, we believe that the teaching profession in Alberta is unique in that the ATA is an advocacy group. The union is the same group that's ultimately responsible for regulating the teaching profession. Most other professions have a role split between two different organizations. Certainly, some of the folks we talked to said that they believe that the ATA's focus and role during these

negotiations should be as an advocate for teachers both at the central and local negotiation level. We do believe that the actual piece around dealing with the professional regulation of the teaching profession should be the purview of the government. We're certainly as well looking forward to see what lands at which table because that certainly is still a concern for my stakeholders, but this amendment, actually, I think, they will be pleased with, so thank you for that.

Mr. Eggen: Madam Chair, I appreciate the member's comments. You know, ultimately, we're trying to make something that is going to not just kind of preserve our education system but strengthen it. I think this is something that the idea's time has come. I won't say that it's overdue because that always has that negative implication to it. Rather, we found that the time is right to do this. Let's put it that way. It's a great way for us to make sure that we're watching the public dollar as well very carefully. We always have to do that but now more than ever. This is the first set of public servants that are coming up for contract, so the stakes are even higher.

Your comments on – it's interesting because when we deal with the ATA, it is quite unique because it is their regulatory body as well. That's a conversation for another day. Over time, I think, if we look across the country, we've enjoyed a fairly stable landscape for teacher-government relations, and this, I think, will help to strengthen that.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Madam Chair. I just wanted to come back to that point of exactly how TEBA establishes itself. I understand that there would be one representative selected from each school board and that TEBA will decide, but based on my reading of section 16, establishing TEBA, it appears that it is up to TEBA to determine how it will govern itself. I'd like the minister just to correct me if I'm wrong about that and just perhaps provide a little insight from the minister's perspective about his ability or perhaps even desire to control the terms of reference for TEBA as it establishes that for itself.

Again, my understanding of ASBA is that how it governs itself is a 60-60 supermajority. A vote must be 60 per cent of the voting members present, assuming a quorum, obviously, and those 60 per cent of members must also represent 60 per cent of students in Alberta, so it's not a simple two-thirds majority. What I'm really driving at, so I can be as clear as I can, is that we have a small number of large boards, which your colleague to your left, I'm sure, understands intimately, that represent, if not the majority of students, probably the majority of students. Four large urban boards represent – I don't know the numbers – a majority of the students of Alberta. That's four votes. You could have a 57 to 4 kind of scenario. I don't think that's going to be the case, but I guess I'd appreciate the minister's comments and thoughts on how those sorts of issues may be addressed in TEBA. Have you given some consideration to that and just any comments on that particular dynamic?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, of course, I have, and this representative assembly needs to determine that together with myself. We'll look for a collaborative way by which that can be determined. You know, we're going to start those conversations straightaway. I mean, we want to be in the spirit of how I've tried to compose this so far. The co-operation that I've seen, the level of engagement – let's put it that way – would suggest that we will come to an amicable result for that conversation, yeah.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, ma'am. I guess I rise to speak to the amendment on Bill 8. I want to thank the minister for his hard work on this. I believe that as a caucus we have qualified support or, I guess I would suggest, on the amendment support with some concerns. What I would like to be able to do is just give some background to how we're thinking with regard to this amendment and then build into some of the concerns that we may have for the minister.

I think we all realize here that the history of collective bargaining has been one that's been local, and it's been one that the school boards and ASBA and PSBAA and many of the major stakeholders have obviously supported for a great deal of time over the years. I guess I would suggest that this new model of bargaining is a significant departure from what we have done in the past. Each school board would enter into bargaining with their local ATA, and they would come up with a locally bargained agreement. I can see and I think we appreciate that this new model, this two-tiered model of bargaining, has tried to find a balance, I would argue, between local bargaining and the desire for a little more control provincially.

We know that under the old bargaining model each school division could have a unique agreement, that was unique to their school board, to their school division, and they could have unique agreements with regard to wages, with regard to benefits, with regard to local issues, days that they would be teaching, all sorts of local issues that would surround the local bargaining process. You know, that, obviously, was changed significantly by the Klein era, when they took away the municipal property tax rates. In order to pay for the negotiated settlements, it became a difficult thing to fund the other costs with regard to education.

7:50

Of course, one of the problems they dealt with back then – the reasons that Premier Klein decided to intervene were, as we've said before, two major reasons. One was that there's an inequitable funding arrangement, where local levies, wealthier school boards would settle earlier and would be able to have a collective bargaining agreement that would be by some people considered maybe too generous and the poorer school divisions could find themselves in a bind. They had an inequity in the process, where they could not requisition the same level of property taxes and found themselves having to try to keep up with the wealthier school boards, creating an inequity in the funding and an inequity that was often difficult for them to overcome, probably rightfully so.

I think all of the school boards across this province agreed at that point in time that it was a good thing to try and find a way around that inequity. So the government, when it took away the right to requisition the property tax levy, pooled that money and then gave it back to the school boards in a per-student funding formula. Now, it's become a little more complex than that over the years, with special funding for special issues, but I think that all would come to an agreement and I believe even, you know, the hon. minister would agree that it was a more equitable distribution and that when we look at this amendment and this new bargaining formula, it too allows for that equitable distribution to continue and to be maintained.

Of course, the problem that the government had when they set their budgets was that often, by setting a budget and by deciding what the percentage of the increase was going to be for education in a budget, they were already setting the increase for the teachers and the local bargaining agents and the local school boards. So teachers' salaries had essentially already been decided, and it threw into question the whole bargaining process. How fair is it to the teachers, how fair is it to the school boards when the government sets that percentage and then they have to go through a process of

negotiations that really doesn't reflect real, fair, and honest negotiation? Sometimes that meant that if they did try to negotiate in good faith, the settlements could sometimes be greater than the funding which the government was providing. So, then, how do school boards deal with that if the government isn't going to step forward and fund above what they've set in their budget for that negotiated local settlement?

There were some problems, and I think the minister, with this bill and with this amendment, has understood that there were some problems there. We are happy, I guess – I'm not sure that "happy" is the word. But we're willing to consider this two-tiered negotiated model with the amendment that has come forward.

I guess we see that teachers and the ATA along with school boards often weren't particularly happy with the model that they've been stuck with over the last number of years. We know that the last several settlements over the number of probably – what? – 10 or 12 years have been the result of a central table, if you want to use it that way, where the provincial government has gone to the table and has negotiated with the ATA to find a sometimes mandated agreement with regard to the collective bargaining process and where local bargaining, some would argue, Madam Chair, has broken down.

When we take a look at this two-tiered model and we take a look at the amendments that have been made here tonight, we can see that this goes, at least in some ways, part of the way towards addressing some of the issues that happened as a result of the local bargaining model, with the breakdown in the bargaining process. It's because of that history that, I think, we as the Wildrose Party understand the desire of the minister to address this bargaining model and to bring forth perhaps, as he has, a new bargaining model.

I think it's important that as we look at this amendment, Madam Chair, we look at what Bill 8 actually does, and then we can understand and perhaps take a little bit of look at the amendments and some of the responses to the bill and the amendment. Bill 8 formalizes a province-wide, if I understand it correctly – and maybe the minister can correct me on this. If I have misunderstood this, it's not because I'm trying to. It's just because, you know, sometimes – we're looking at this – it can be complicated. Bill 8 formalizes a province-wide, two-table bargaining model. We got that right. Okay. There will be a local and there will be a provincial table.

When we look at the provincial table, it addresses the broad issues that are common to all of the school divisions, at least in theory. When we take a look at teaching and at education across this province – I've often said that it really didn't matter where I taught in this province; kids are kids are kids. It didn't matter whether I was in my classroom in Drayton Valley or whether I was at McNally in Edmonton or whether I was at Western in Calgary. It didn't matter where I was. There's a pretty standard thing with being a teacher. You love kids, and you enjoy being with kids. When I look at the issues in education, I think the minister and this bill and the amendments, Madam Chair, do recognize that there are some broad issues.

Now, it does bring up a question, though, and maybe at some point in time the minister can address some of these questions. I've heard school boards talk about the fact that because issues tend to be so common from school board to school board to school board as much as they're all very diverse schools and school divisions – how much difference is there going to be on some of these? Most issues are common issues. How much room will that leave for the local table if most of the issues that are common across this province are shared by so many different school boards?

The intent of the provincial table is to not only address those concerns, those issues that are common to all school boards, but of course it's to ensure consistency across this province with respect to the big-picture issues, as the minister has talked about earlier, things like school fees. You know, you're working through a review process, I believe, Mr. Minister, and trying to look at: what are the commonalities across the school boards when it comes to school fees, and can we bring some decisions and some finality to that issue of school fees? I think that's the kind of thing that maybe you're going to be looking at with this process, and maybe you can comment on that at some point in time. So the intent of having a provincial table is to ensure consistency across the province with respect to some of these big-picture items.

I believe that I can actually talk as many times as I want to this, so maybe what I will do is that I'll stop right now, and maybe the minister can address that issue right there and then we can . . . [interjection] Well, with regard to this I'm asking you to talk about the big-picture items, the common items that will be dealt with at a provincial level, and whether or not that's going to leave any room for, you know, local bargaining on those kinds of issues. Then maybe we can resume our conversation.

Thanks.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thanks, Madam Chair, and those are very good questions and a very succinct assessment, I believe, of the history of bargaining here in the province in the last 30 years or so as well as a synopsis of what I'm trying to achieve. Certainly, in my technical briefing people said that you caught on very quickly and you certainly got the right idea straightaway, so that's great. Yeah. I mean, it's important for us, when we establish TEBA, to have everybody there to have those discussions, right? So it's very important for me not to predetermine those things as well because I don't want to give an undue influence.

8:00

You know, just brainstorming on local issues: that can be quite significant, really. Transportation jumps out straightaway – right? – because, of course, of the geographic differences that different boards have to deal with. I mean, you have school boards in this province that are the size of a small European country, you know, and put in hundreds of thousands of kilometres of busing every day, even.

Another one is substitute pay, which, again, is quite a geographic variation, I believe. For substitutes to be covering places like Oyen and so forth, it's, again, many, many kilometres of driving. I know that there are northern allowances in different areas or extra pay for certain districts where they go. I think some places supply housing or housing subsidies in various ways.

An interesting regional variation is around instructional days. We mandate the number of minutes for a school year, but people will again insert different days based on perhaps regional holidays or religious holidays and so forth. Professional development days, you know, come into play as well. But I really don't want to predetermine how those discussions go. I think the very sort of elegant way by which we've amended this bill allows for all of those discussions to take place amongst the people that it affects the most – right? – which is the school boards, the teachers, and then, of course, the funder, which is my department.

I guess that's the direction that I'm heading in, and I think we've created an organic circumstance by which to somehow jump over some of those historic problems that you described before, where we did have, previous to maybe Klein, maybe 17 or even 18 years ago, some local bargaining, but then you had the sort of interference or insertion of the funder, not in a systematic way but just in sort of

an incidental way, that sometimes got in the way of good, rational bargaining.

I mean, we know that we have excellent teachers in this province and an excellent school system. It's renowned around the world, but because of that lack of a systematic sort of approach to bargaining, sometimes our wages got out of control as well and exceeded the ability of the government to pay for those said wages. That's part of the reason that I'm trying to do this here today.

Thank you.

The Chair: Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Mr. Minister. You started to talk a little bit about that provincial table now and the salary side of things, so maybe we can spend a little bit of time sort of working our way into that and perhaps some of the concerns that we've got there. We know that the intent of the provincial table is to deal with salary. Bill 8 establishes this employer bargaining association, that you're calling the teachers' employer bargaining association, or TEBA. From what I understand, it's a statutory corporation.

Mr. Eggen: Yes.

Mr. Smith: Okay. That means that it's formed by the government for really just one purpose, and that's to engage in contract negotiations for the school boards whenever the term of a collective agreement is coming to an end. Correct? This is not something that's going to be meeting, you know, necessarily every year even. It could be the term of the collective agreement if we understand each other correctly. Correct?

Mr. Eggen: Absolutely.

Mr. Smith: Okay. Now, we know that membership in TEBA is mandatory for all school boards. If I understand things correctly, each school board will send a representative to an assembly that would then choose a directorate, that we would call TEBA. Is that correct?

Mr. Eggen: Yes, sir. Yes, that's correct.

Mr. Smith: I thought so. So Bill 8 isn't really prescriptive; it simply establishes this two-table bargaining system. It's the how of this. Correct?

Mr. Eggen: Yes.

Mr. Smith: It's how the process will work, but it does not establish the actual issues that will be negotiated at the table. That's going to be something that will be negotiated between the ATA and TEBA. They will decide what matters will be bargained at a central table while some issues or some matters will be bargained at the local table. The general criteria, that you've got in the bill here, to be used to decide which issue is central and which issue is local will consider the following: does the matter result in a reasonably significant expense? That's where this provincial table with the salaries would be a part of it, right?

Maybe you could explain for this side of the House and for this party a little bit about how you define "reasonably significant impact." How does that work out as you're going to be negotiating between the ATA and the government and TEBA?

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Thank you. The ATA and then the government and the school boards. TEBA is the government and the school boards now, right?

Mr. Smith: Yeah.

Mr. Eggen: I've been reflecting on this. Again, you know, we've created a place in which this can happen. I know that another concern or area of concern that boards brought up to me last week, when we were meeting, on three different occasions was that in section 10 of the bill there is an area that talks about what's significant or what's not significant and so forth. But the current language doesn't restrict the ATA and TEBA from agreeing on matters to remain local items if all parties are in agreement that a specific matter could be best handled locally, and, vice versa, the agreement or the discussion to determine what goes to that big table or the central table is worked out in the same manner, too.

I wouldn't presuppose what that central table would be discussing, but the obvious ones, I think, of course, are wages and other items that cost a great deal of money, right? But it doesn't preclude the other local tables from talking about some money issues as well. I mean, we use a granting system for things such as transportation and so forth. Because of the first amendment I made, creating that place for people to sort out the issues of the main table and the other table, I believe that solves all the other problems.

Thank you.

The Chair: Go ahead, hon. member, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-North West.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Chair. We've established, then, that there's this TEBA and that TEBA is made up of both the government and the representatives of the school boards and that this TEBA and the ATA are going to meet. They're going to debate. Now, the amendment speaks to the fact that TEBA is going to include, unlike the original bill – the school boards are going to be a part of that negotiation from the very beginning, and that's what the first amendment does?

Mr. Eggen: Yeah.

Mr. Smith: Okay. So if the government and the ATA cannot agree on which matters will be discussed – in the original bill it says that it goes to an arbitration board if you cannot agree on what is a central matter versus what is a local matter and that if, again, either of the two parties have significant disagreements over the arbitrated settlement, they then would have access to the courts. Am I correct in understanding that?

Mr. Eggen: Well, arbitration will sort it out, yeah. I mean, they make the decision, and that's it. It is a court.

Mr. Smith: Okay. I want to just change the discussion here and just go into a little bit of a different track. We know that as we were making our way towards this bill and as we were making our way towards this amendment, one of the concerns that was expressed was the timeline, and perhaps with that shortened timeline for this there was maybe a little lack of consultation, Madam Chair. You know, we were looking at this with support but with some concerns. One of the concerns that we would have both for the bill as well as for the amendment would be that this government had significant time, six months, to put this legislation together and to work with stakeholders to ensure that it reflects a reasonable approach to bargaining.

8:10

But now, with less than a week to go in the session and maybe even considerably less since the government has decided to use a piece of legislation that will shorten things, we're maybe wondering if there has been adequate time for the boards to work with the

teachers or with their administrators to determine the impact of this legislation on their school district and on their classrooms and whether they've had the time to get the information back to their school boards and then eventually back to the government to ensure that the consultation process results in informed legislation.

Indeed, many of the boards that we've been in conversation with and many of the major stakeholders like the ASBA have expressed some concerns about the timeline that has been placed on, first, the bill and even this amendment process.

I'd like to quote a letter prepared by the Golden Hills school division, where they prepared an analysis of the bill, and they were very concerned.

We believe that it is unreasonable and disrespectful of locally elected school boards, for the Minister and the Government to rush to pass this legislation. A reasonable amount of time must be allowed for us to review it, and then to provide the opportunity for us to be engaged in meaningful consultation with the government on what we believe is best for our students.

One of the things I liked about the Golden Hills response to the timeline for both the bill and the amendment was the analysis that they put together. I want to just read a bit of this.

The legislation designates . . . the Government and the ATA as the negotiators for the first precedent setting list of "matters that are central matters and what matters are local matters for the purpose of collective bargaining" thus setting the precedent for all negotiations of agreements to follow. In the future it will be very difficult to move anything back to being a matter of local bargaining.

It gets tougher if not impossible to make a change, when the proscribed criteria the Act specifies . . . "a matter is a central matter if either . . .

- (a) the matter could result in a reasonably significant impact on expenditures for *one* or more employers; [or]
- (b) the matter involves issues common to most of the parties to the collective agreements that can be addressed in central bargaining more appropriately than in local bargaining."

The Chair: Hon. member, if I can just interrupt you for a moment, could we maybe keep this strictly to the amendment? That sounds like that's more directed to the bill in general.

Mr. Smith: As a matter of fact, Madam Chair, what I was going to suggest was that in here they say that if the hurdle is reasonably significant, it's hard to see how anything meaningful gets to be local.

Well, what I was going to point out was that, I think, actually, Minister, we can see, at least as part of the consultation, that this has been addressed by the amendment – correct? – and that there are some concerns which the school boards have brought forward but which the minister seems to have addressed at least to some degree, maybe not completely but to some degree, with this amendment. Okay? But there are other concerns, we believe, that have been brought to the minister that maybe haven't been brought up in this amendment and that maybe the minister should continue.

You know, if we take a look at St. Thomas Aquinas school division, they bring up a number of concerns, one of them being a continual erosion of the rights and responsibilities of school boards. In the absence of local autonomy, we may see rural education taking a hit as labour solutions that work in the city don't always fit in rural communities. Additionally, should a provincial model be initiated, it was our board's position during the preliminary consultations that the ASBA should be the body that represents our boards as [the] EBA.

I guess I'd ask the minister this question. Do you believe, Minister, that your amendment addresses this concern of St. Thomas Aquinas? Does this amendment address what they see as a continual erosion of rights and responsibilities of school boards?

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead, hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Sure. Thank you for that. Yes, I'm aware of Golden Hills' concerns, and certainly I think that we are on the path to addressing them. When you establish those first decisions that the TEBA board will do, which includes school boards, about local bargaining and central bargaining, yes, it certainly will sort of plant the course in place, but because the school boards are there, I think it sets precedents for negotiating those changes over time as well. I think we've democratized it sufficiently. I mean, yes, the first time you do establish it, it's like putting, you know, flood controls around a river. It's less likely to flow in any other way after that, right? Certainly, by having the boards there to set those parameters in place, it will probably go a long way to goodwill in case there is a big change that requires something to move to the local table.

In regard to St. Thomas Aquinas, it's part of STAR Catholic, I think. Is it? Yeah. Again, it's a fair play descriptor about different local issues, but there are discrepancies between how much teachers are paid in different places. We're not going to be changing that, but we're standardizing the movement on the grid. However that might go, we don't know. I mean, ultimately, we're the funder, right? So if STAR Catholic, you know, says that they can't afford it – well, we're the ones that are distributing those funds. It's not like they're raising those funds anyway.

There is a lot of interesting history. You're working through lots of dynamics of change, of political dialogue over a long period of time. I mean, a lot of school boards are feeling like they haven't been empowered since they lost their power to tax, right? You're working through those historical things as well. What I've done from the beginning, and I think I've reflected it here again today – it wasn't easy, let me tell you, to get this done – is: judge us on our actions, not our words. Everybody likes to say, "Oh, I respect school boards," but if every time they're losing incrementally their power to make local decisions that they are elected to do, then that's no good, right? Here I think I've actually re-established at least that course by which they do have that level of power to make significant decisions for the jurisdictions to which they're responsible. I firmly believe that.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Calgary-North West.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Madam Chair. I was only rising to refer to Standing Order 20(2), just with a reminder that we can get through this a little quicker if we stick to the argument on the amendment and deal with the main bill at an opportunity when we have time to speak to the main bill.

Thank you.

The Chair: Actually, first, I will recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Shaw, followed by Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise this evening in support of this amendment. I believe that school boards play a critical role in ensuring the stability and success of our educational system. I also know that they exist to represent their local communities first and foremost. It is quite common that matters that are important for public and Catholic school boards in my home city of Calgary can vary greatly compared to those in areas like Rocky View or

Edmonton as well. That is why I believe firmly that having school boards negotiate on the local level, if you will, certainly is of central importance here. They should also have the ability for input on these matters that are important for them, too. This amendment will solidify the role of school boards in determining what is bargained centrally and locally.

Last week, I had the opportunity to attend two consultations with school boards. These were attended by 59 of the 61 school boards in Alberta. I heard concerns about section 8 of the bill, which would have kept them out of the deliberations on the matters while the teachers' employer bargaining association is established. By expediting the establishment of TEBA, we are signalling to the boards that we respect their role and value their input as well. We will also continue to discuss with our partner organizations as we move forward to draft regulation after this bill has passed. This bill marks the start of a path forward towards a better bargaining process. It will also restore trust, that was eroded during legislated settlements and labour strife in the past.

8:20

I'm encouraged by this amendment. It shows that, yes, we are listening to our partners in education. I want to thank all the board members for their feedback and advice. The consultation meetings that I attended were very constructive, and I really, truly want to thank them for their feedback as well. We all care about the quality of public education that our children receive. It is of the utmost importance that we collectively do the right thing for them as well, too.

That is why I support this amendment and Bill 8 as a whole, and I encourage this House to do the same as well.

The Chair: Edmonton-South West.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm also going to be rising today in support of this amendment because I see in my own riding every day that we have school boards and we have students and we have schools that really do show how a strong education system is going to build a better Alberta. I also attended a consultation with boards last week on Bill 8. I heard their concerns as well on things like section 8. I've spoken with numerous trustees. I've spoken with numerous teachers.

I believe in what the minister has tabled in this amendment. I believe that what the minister has created is a very effective way to balance that need to recognize that there are multiple stakeholders at this table, that there are multiple stakeholders that need to be making decisions centrally and locally. It's critical that while these bargaining processes continue and these negotiations go on, we establish a stable system for our students and, as members opposite have mentioned, that we look and say: is this what is best for the students?

I think that this amendment strikes that balance so that all the stakeholders – the school boards, the teachers, and us as the funders in the government – can say: look, we're going to be able to decide what goes to each table in a fair way so that those local issues are going to be discussed and those central issues are going to be discussed, and everybody can agree on these so that we can get back to doing what we want to do, which is to provide a quality education program for our students.

Further to that, I think it's very important that we as the government are at the central table as the funder to bargain with the teachers and to bargain with the boards because it is really important that we can meet our fiscal obligations as a province and that we can work towards that balanced budget. With us being there as the funders, with this amendment, with those school boards, it is

going to create that structure and is going to create that ability for us to work with all these stakeholders to say: how are we going to get to that end goal? I believe that in the spirit of collaboration with school boards and teachers, this amendment is going to be a major move towards involving all of these parties.

We're not talking about discussing the "what" of what is going to be at each table but, I think, the how. This amendment solidifies the how, solidifies that everybody is important in that how. Moving that TEBA process up and expediting that system creates a strong system that will allow everyone to be happy and everybody to be involved at the level they necessitate.

I really do pledge my support for this amendment. I pledge my support for Bill 8, and I encourage all my colleagues, from both sides of the aisle, to support this amendment.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Further speakers to the amendment? Sherwood Park.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise this evening in support of this amendment. As I said previously in the debate on Bill 8 when I offered my support for Bill 8, I believe it is imperative to respect the roles and responsibilities of school boards. They play such an important and key role in our education system. I meet regularly with the school boards in Sherwood Park and wanted to take the opportunity tonight to thank Justine Wright, the chair of the Elk Island Catholic board, and Trina Boymook, the chair of the Elk Island public board, for their really helpful feedback on this bill.

Like some of my fellow MLAs, I too attended some of the consultations with boards on Bill 8. I appreciated at those consultations the real thoughtful feedback from the boards and their willingness to make this bill work for them, especially for the benefit of the students in their schools. The message in those discussions was very clear. School boards want to be involved in the bargaining process immediately, and I agree that they should be.

I particularly appreciate the Minister of Education's introduction of this amendment. By removing a section of the legislation and accelerating the establishment of the teachers' employer bargaining association, known as TEBA, we are going to ensure that boards are involved right from the beginning.

I believe in a stable and effective bargaining process, and I'm fully behind Bill 8, which I think will improve on past struggles in this regard. It is critical that all parties be involved in the bargaining process and that all come away from the process feeling like their voices have been heard.

I support the amendment, and I will be supporting Bill 8 as a whole. Thank you.

The Chair: Any further speakers to amendment A1?

Seeing none, we'll call the vote.

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Chair: We're back on the bill. Are there any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Calgary-North West.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Madam Chair. We did want to recognize, of course, as we knew in the past with our government, that there were issues with the current methods of handling collective negotiations with our teachers. Our former government was actually working on a policy that addressed these issues, and it's similar to what we are talking about here today. The major difference is that we believe that what's debated at each table needs to be financially owned by the table that makes the decisions. What we heard in our consultations – and we talked to a lot of boards, as

our colleagues did, and I know that you and your colleagues did as well – was that there was significant concern about the vagueness of who is responsible for addressing the ultimate cost of the negotiations. I know that we've touched on that at various points.

There were concerns about the vagueness in this legislation, which commits to negotiating what will be negotiated in the future. Their concerns were about what the legislation means for school boards, for teachers, for future negotiations. Numerous school boards and associations did ask for time to review the legislation, and they had some suggestions for changes that they believed would enhance the legislation.

They were also concerned about how the legislation would affect the school board's ability to cope with a growing population and the potential for the government to put regulations in place that would be expensive, with those costs being downgraded onto local school boards. I see you nodding, Minister of Education, so you've clearly heard that feedback as well.

At this point I would like to introduce an amendment that clearly specifies that when the two tables deal with different items, no one other table should be responsible for covering the costs of a negotiation that they weren't part of. I know that my colleague in the Wildrose had touched on the idea that there were some school boards that saw the price was pretty high on some of the things, and maybe they didn't have that money in some of the boards whereas they did in some of the other boards.

I've got an amendment. Right now I'm going to allow a moment for it to be distributed, and then I'll keep on with my points.

Thank you.

The Chair: This is the original, right?

Ms Jansen: The original is on its way.

The Chair: Perfect. Thank you.

8:30

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Madam Chair. This specifically deals with 12.1. I move that Bill 8, Public Education Collective Bargaining Act, be amended by adding the following after section 12:

Central terms requiring an increase in funding

12.1 If the central terms to which TEBA purports to agree will require an increase in expenditure by one or more employers, TEBA shall, prior to agreeing to the central terms, take steps to obtain assurances that the necessary increases in funding will be made available to those employers for the years to which the collective agreement relates.

This amendment to the legislation is really meant to clarify the process of negotiations that are right now broadly outlined in the legislation. It reflects the concerns, as I said, from stakeholders and constituents and provides what we think is a solid solution. It simply clarifies that each bargaining table will be responsible for funding the agreements to cover any increase in expenditures. It really makes sure that the funding is in place before anyone enters into a final agreement from a central-level negotiation.

This legislation fundamentally transforms the role of school boards – we know that – and the relationship they have with the government and the ATA. The amendment makes sure that they don't have to worry about funding commitments made during other parties' negotiations. It allows for more open negotiations and a better, more stable final agreement.

It also encourages all levels of government to make sure that they're making the agreements that benefit the provincial government, the local school boards, the teachers, the parents, and it means that multiyear deals, I think, will be a little bit easier to reach.

The amendment doesn't constrain the government's or TEBA's or school boards' ability to act during negotiations anyway and provides a little bit of peace of mind, certainly to the parents I spoke with, who were a little concerned about agreements being negotiated at one table that perhaps, you know, a board may be constrained to provide the funds for.

With that, I'll allow for comments now. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you very much for the amendment. I think this is a clever analysis of what can happen. Always when you're building these things, you have to think of different scenarios and which direction things can possibly go. Sometimes south: they can go in that direction, too.

You know, let's remind ourselves that the government is the funder, and we fund both tables based on enrolment and based on our capacity to do so. As we determine what is being negotiated at the central table and the local table, so too will we apportion the funding that would be appropriate for those two responsibilities. It precludes the capacity for any local table to exceed the funding that they have available to them. They can't promise things at their local table that they don't have money for, basically. I feel comfortable that based on the funding formula that we use, we should be okay.

Respectfully and with an appreciation of the insight that this amendment does reflect, I don't think we need it.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, and I thank my colleague for bringing this forward. I think it's, obviously, a fiscally responsible amendment to make. I would say, Madam Chair, that if the members of the House were to look at the amendment and remove the words "TEBA" and "employers" and insert any other two names – husband and wife, Martha and Henry, Dick and Jane, mom and dad – then what it says is that if one takes the other one's credit card and buys something, then they have to pay them back for what they spent, or don't spend it. Although it's a little more sophisticated when you include "employers" and "TEBA," the principle remains the same. It says that you don't spend it unless you can afford to pay for it.

I don't know how I could possibly vote against something as common sense and responsible as that, and I hope the other members of the House can see just how basically reasonable this is. I hope that members of the House will agree to support it.

Thanks.

The Chair: Any further speakers to the amendment? The hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Madam Chair. You know, I guess I would like to hear from the minister on what his hesitation is. If he feels that the legislation already encompasses these important points, I guess I would ask: what is the hesitation in including it? My British wife has a term: belt and braces. Why not have both? I wonder in this case what the downside might be in accepting an amendment such as this, which just ensures that what has been told to us by the minister is to be the intent is in fact codified in the act itself. I do think that is important. It's an important principle that we're talking about here as well.

I certainly support it and would just be curious if the minister could be persuaded, perhaps, to change his mind.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah. I mean, certainly, it's important, to just revert to the first principles here, that Bill 8 as amended is the how we build the structure, and then the what, that we do negotiate on, will take place over these next few months, with the structure in place. I just don't want to presume any of the what in this bill because the spirit of bringing the school boards and the funder, which is the government, and the teachers into place to sort that out is the purity of the bill, that I want to remain intact.

Certainly, as I said before, as a general principle we fund enrolment, and as a general principle we fund, you know, each of the tables in accordance with our responsibilities to students and in accordance with our capacity to pay, too. Then based on those two things – I mean, again, respectfully, I certainly understand the member's intention here, but I would choose to not vote for it. People can choose how they like.

The Chair: I'll hear from the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka first, followed by Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll be brief. The largest school board in my riding, Wolf Creek, has not yet actually had opportunity to formally meet and form an official position, but the board chair has expressed, essentially, that they're in favour of government being at the table. Her concern with regard to the amendment would be that the school board would not be sort of saddled with the costs of all of this going forward. Obviously, there are concerns amongst the school boards about how the cost sharing takes place. I think it's an important consideration, and I'll just leave it at that.

Thank you.

Dr. Starke: Madam Chair, I'd just like to sort of follow up on some of the points that were made by the hon. members for Calgary-North West, Calgary-Elbow, Calgary-Hays, and as well now by the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka. This is a redefinition of the negotiation process for what is, you know, truly a critical negotiation, that, of course, being with the teachers of our province, that are charged with education of our students. It is one that is being slightly redefined although the idea of a two-table negotiation is not entirely unfamiliar. Accordingly, the school boards that I've spoken with, the various trustees and the boards, have expressed to me just a certain hesitation because this is somewhat of a new relationship. All this amendment tries to do is to provide those boards with some level of assurance so that they know that any additional costs that are negotiated at the central table, that will fall to them as the employers, will indeed be covered by the funding agent.

Now, the minister is quite correct. The minister is quite correct that the government is the funder and that the government will be responsible for it, but I think that, especially when we are embarking on somewhat uncharted territory and when there is a new negotiating relationship being put together, it is prudent for all the possible mechanisms to be put in place so that there is comfort. You know, just as an example, I do know that the notion of a comfort letter was an important aspect of what the ATA wished to have in past negotiations. This is not a comfort letter. This amendment is merely a clause that assures the school boards, who still have a certain degree of trepidation about this whole process, that the minister – and I have no doubt whatsoever that he will be true to his word. But this gives them comfort in that they know that within the scope of the legislation, this amendment gives the assurance that any funding that is required by a negotiation made at

the central table will also flow to the necessary employers that are affected by it.

8:40

I think this is an amendment that does not take away in any way from the legislation. I don't think it weakens the legislation. In fact, you know, I rather like the analogy used by the Member for Calgary-Elbow; that is, that it just provides some additional security for school boards, that are entering into this new relationship.

I would certainly encourage the minister to reconsider his stance on this. I don't believe that this is an amendment that in any way detracts from the intent of the bill or detracts from the negotiation process. I think that, in fact, it strengthens the level of assurance for all parties involved.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Chair and for the interesting debate around this amendment as proposed. I think that if I am to reflect on where I was a year ago, the thing that I really like about TEBA is that TEBA actually has the employer and the funder at the table. Of course, these are discussions that school boards as the employer and as partners at the table would be having with the funder. That's why they're both to be at the table as opposed to past negotiation cycles, where sometimes it was just boards and employees or just the funder and employees but not actually having both the board and the funder working in partnership.

I think that in terms of items that'll be negotiated at TEBA, that's to be discussed in consultation with the employers themselves. They'll actually be at the table, and if any monetary items were to come up, they absolutely have the right to raise those questions at the table through the processes that they'll be outlining through the what piece. And, of course, the funder is at the table to guarantee the how.

While I appreciate the intent of this, being similar to what we as employers as well asked for around a comfort letter, I'd say that being at the table is far more comforting than actually having to trust that something is going to happen and that your considerations will be taken after the fact. I think TEBA itself is the dialogue where the conversation happens and the assurances can be laid. I think that if things are negotiated at TEBA, obviously, with the funder at the table, the funder is going to be working to ensure that monetary implications will be addressed.

There might be monetary implications at some of the local table discussions, and I certainly don't think that we would want to put a requirement that those come back to the funder for sign-off on every ad hoc basis. I think this really creates a structure through the original motion where we have the right people at the table to discuss the significant monetary pieces that I think the intention of the motion refers to in a fluid way so that that can be established prior to the agreement being reached.

I would be inclined at this point to vote in opposition to the amendment. However, I want to honour that in times past something like this may have been helpful, under the former process, but I don't think it is necessary moving forward in what's being defined under TEBA.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any further comments to amendment A2? The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise in favour of the amendment as presented by the Member for Calgary-North West. I think it's a very reasonable amendment that provides some clarity to the school boards, that are presenting some concerns with some

of the lack of consultation that has come forward previously. Now this can give them a level of comfort that what does happen at TEBA will not inhibit their ability to actually do the things that they need to do.

I would encourage everyone to be in favour of this amendment.

The Chair: Any further comments to the amendment?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Chair: We're back on the bill. Are there any further comments? Go ahead, hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Perhaps I will just hand out the amendment. I'd like to present an amendment to the bill addressing section 16(5). I will allow this to make its rounds. It's a simple one. I propose to strike out section 16(5). I will hand those to you now, and I will just pause for a moment while those amendments are handed out.

The Chair: Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Subsection 16(5) reads as follows: "The Financial Administration Act, the Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act, the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act and the Auditor General Act do not apply to TEBA." I imagine that those of us in this House – I would hope that you all love governance as much as I do.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, yeah.

Mr. Clark: Oh, could we all agree? Could we all agree that we love governance . . .

An Hon. Member: Process.

Mr. Clark: . . . and we love process, we love oversight, and if we don't, well, I wonder what the heck we're all doing here. These four acts do precisely that. They provide governance, they provide oversight to bodies such as TEBA. I'm just going to take you very briefly through the provisions of each of those acts.

The Financial Administration Act governs how TEBA can operate. It cannot end operations without government control. It governs how provincial or Crown corporations can be dissolved, liquidated, wound up, et cetera. It places controls over spending in terms of debt provisions. It allows the government to regulate any fees that TEBA may charge. It may not be relevant, particularly in this case, but it allows a regular review of the business of TEBA.

The Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act provides for details of a specific governance framework and what is required of that governance framework; for example, "within 3 months of its establishment or continuation, have a Mandate and Roles Document that is jointly developed by the public agency and its responsible Minister." That includes a description of a long list of important things, which I know the minister has already discussed, his intention to have something along these lines from TEBA. Most importantly, that mandate and rules document must be made available to the public, which provides transparency and accountability.

This next one is, I think, perhaps my favourite amongst equals, but this is my favourite. It exempts the TEBA from the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act. Those of you who have been following along in the last number of weeks will recall that the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act up until yesterday was known as Bill 4. We passed Bill 4 yesterday, over some objection

from this side. We passed Bill 4, and that does things like placing spending controls on TEBA. There's been a lot of talk in this House about the wonderful aspects of that particular act. It also includes reporting requirements.

The Auditor General Act, of course, allows TEBA to be audited by the Auditor General or a proxy and provides audit reports on TEBA to government and, through government, to the people of Alberta.

I feel very strongly that this level of governance is absolutely appropriate for a public body like TEBA, that has an important role to play. I would be curious for the minister's thoughts on why TEBA, amongst all government agencies, somewhat uniquely should be excluded from these provisions and this governance oversight.

The Chair: Any further speakers to amendment A3? The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair. This came up under my scrutiny and, I believe, the Official Opposition Education critic's as well. We asked about this. I believe that it was, number one, that this is a representative assembly – that is, of school boards – so the structure of the TEBA doesn't align with the ABCs under this legislation. It's a negotiating body as well, so our legal staff had advised that this was a structure that doesn't use these other acts. Yes, it caught my eye straightaway, too, but because it is an assembly of school boards and, as such, a statutory corporation of a special nature, that is only designed for negotiating, that's why they put this in there. I've been told that it needs to be there. I appreciate the sharp eye of the Member for Calgary-Elbow to see that, but it wasn't like we're trying to skirt around the law in any way, shape, or form.

Thank you.

8:50

The Chair: Any further speakers to amendment A3? The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, and thank you to the hon. member for bringing this forward. I know that on this side of the House and in this party we also took a look at that, and we had some questions about it, as the minister has alluded to. In our conversations with Parliamentary Counsel they seem to believe that this was a reasonable part of the bill. We had some concerns. We wondered if maybe the Auditor General, more specifically, should be overseeing and have oversight over TEBA, and the Parliamentary Counsel came back to us, saying, "Well, you know, I suppose you could probably do it." But she believed that it was not necessarily something that would be a huge amount of value, adding it to the bill. I don't think it probably would hurt, but it was her opinion that that's what would have happened.

The Chair: Any further speakers to amendment A3?

If not, we'll call the vote.

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Chair: Back on the bill. Are there any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill?

Seeing none, I'll call the question on Bill 4. I'm sorry. Bill 8. I'm still in last-night zone. What can I say?

Mr. Smith: Can I rise and speak to the bill?

The Chair: Yes, if you still want to speak to Bill 8. We're back on the bill.

Mr. Smith: Back on the bill. Thank you, Madam Chair. I guess I really just have one question, and it's to deal with perhaps the flexibility that goes along with the bargaining process when it comes to salaries and to that provincial table, okay? You know, under local bargaining each school board had the authority to bargain locally and to negotiate salaries and benefits and a wide range of local issues like early retirement and teacher retention and incentives. All of those things were at the table locally, weren't they? In Bill 8 we know that teachers' salaries would probably, in all likelihood, be negotiated at the central table, but there's no indication as to how exactly that would work.

I guess this is my question. Maybe it's just my overactive imagination, but here's the question I've got for the minister. Once a wage or a percentage is agreed to in the central bargaining process, will there be room for local school boards then to negotiate with their local ATA over how those funds would be disbursed within the local collective agreement? For instance, will the local school boards be able to decide that one grid increment might only receive a 1 per cent increase while a fourth-year teacher on the grid might receive a 2 per cent increase as a retention bonus? Do you understand the question that I'm asking?

In the past couple of negotiated agreements, you know, there was a percentage agreed to, and it was just applied to everybody across the board, so if the teachers got a 2 per cent increase, they got a 2 per cent increase. I guess what I'm asking here is that if you bargained a 2 per cent increase or a 4 per cent increase, would you then be able to go back in local negotiations and say, "Well, we're going to give first-, second-, and third-year teachers 1 per cent, but we'll give 3 and 4 per cent to fourth- and fifth-year teachers"? Would you be able to work out locally bargained percentages, depending on the increment grid, and see if there's more local bargaining that way?

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Thank you so much for the question. Madam Chair, I mean, I can speculate on this, but I think that structurally everyone should know that these are part of the questions, what the TEBA group and the teachers will negotiate. This is the structure or the superstructure, so to speak, of how. For the purposes of, you know, today, if we can just certainly understand that we've created a representative body that includes the funder and includes the school boards, and then on the other side of the table are teachers. They will determine, through this how-system that we've built here together, really, collectively, how that will be employed to answer questions such as what the hon. member is asking here this evening.

You know, while change is often not easy and certainly we want to make sure that we are dealing with this in a democratic and a forthright manner, I believe that the progress that we've made over the six months since I started working on this has been considerable. I think it'll pay dividends for us to be able to negotiate within the parameters of what we can afford as a government and within the parameters of due process for fair bargaining for the excellent work that our teachers do here in the province of Alberta.

I certainly thank everyone for their contributions. You know, I found it to be an excellent learning process. We've just begun. All of those parties that we've started to work with we will spend a great deal of time with over the next few months to ensure that we come up with an equitable, affordable agreement that allows our school system to continue along the excellent path that it has done so over these past decades.

Thank you.

The Chair: You had further comments, hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Yes, please, if I may. Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd just like to speak in regard to Bill 8 and some of the concerns that a couple of my school boards have brought forward to me. I have four in my constituency. With the changes that the government has put forward with the amendment, I will support this bill, but I also have to be diligent in bringing the concerns of the school boards that I'm working with to the attention of the minister. The thing that was most concerning to the school boards was the lack of consultation, that they felt was done before the legislation was presented here in the House.

I'll read from the letter I received from the Sturgeon school division. It's dated December 1.

Dear Mr. Piquette and Mr. Horne . . .

The Chair: Hon. member, even when reading something, we do not use members' names, please.

Mr. van Dijken: Okay. I'm sorry. I'll retract that, then. Thank you.

To you, as MLAs for (part of) our school division area, and members of the government caucus, the Board of Trustees of Sturgeon School Division hereby requests that you have our concerns with the precipitous passing of Bill 8 – The Public Education Collective Bargaining Act – heard and responded to by our provincial government. We understand that this Act is about to go through third reading in the House and we strongly oppose this non-consultative approach to such an important piece of legislation. Please use all your voice and influence in government to have this reading postponed until there can be meaningful, informed consultation among school boards, Alberta Education and government.

Sturgeon School Division strongly endorses Local Bargaining as the only effective way for school boards to work with their teacher-employees to provide top quality cost-effective education to our students. However, if Local Bargaining is to be marginalized, as Bill 8 would have it, then it is necessary for us to more fully understand how this new bargaining model will impact education administration. This can only be accomplished by delaying the passage of this legislation until the governance and administrative processes can be satisfactorily clarified for the understanding of all concerned.

That's from the board chair, Tracy Nowak, of Sturgeon school division.

9:00

Then Pembina Hills regional division sent me a letter dated December 1. It's actually addressed to the Minister of Education. Some of the work that the minister has completed now with the school boards, Alberta school boards in particular, is not relevant in this letter.

On behalf of the Board of Trustees of Pembina Hills Public Schools I am writing to encourage you to allow time for school boards to provide input into Bill 8, the Public Education Collective Bargaining Act that passed first reading in the Alberta Legislature Thursday, November 26.

We understand that Bill 8 is scheduled to advance through the Legislature this week and could be passed into law by December 3rd, just one week after it was introduced. This does not provide Boards the chance to ask questions or provide feedback on the bill.

Of course, now they have had the opportunity to provide feedback, but these were some of the concerns previously.

Bill 8 is precedent-setting legislation that will affect school boards across the province. School boards were not provided with the opportunity to review this legislation prior to November 26.

As locally elected school boards representing our students and communities, boards need time to review the proposed legislation and provide recommendations on items needing clarification prior to it being passed into law. School Boards need an opportunity to meet with the Minister or Alberta Education staff to understand the proposed legislation and be able to ask questions about the process and engagement of boards.

Pembina Hills Public Schools respectfully requests that you do not pass Bill 8 before providing consultation with school boards on the components of the legislation and the role of boards in the decision making of negotiations. We will be in attendance at the Alberta School Boards Association meeting on December 4th and look forward to working together through the stages of the bargaining process.

With that, I also want to thank the minister for giving them the opportunity to consult at that time. I'm glad that we were able to continue on with our Legislature sitting in that it actually gave them the opportunity to provide that feedback before the bill was passed.

Like so many bills brought forth by the government, there have been many good intentions. Good intentions, however, do not necessarily make good legislation. I have received these letters from my local school boards outlining their concerns. I guess what I am trying to bring to light here, Madam Chair, is that we seem to have a pattern of behaviour here. I really want to encourage this government to proceed with thorough consultation previous to bills like this being presented here so that the stakeholders feel like their concerns have been heard and so they have a clearer understanding of what will be brought forward in this Legislature and so they can have a certain amount of comfort that what is being brought forward does not catch them off guard with regard to a full understanding of how it will affect them in the future.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Thank you, Madam Chair. I guess I'll start by just kind of breezing through a little bit of a letter here from one of the school boards in my constituency.

Since the release of this important legislation last Thursday by Minister Eggen, school boards have not had the opportunity to review and discuss the implications. Plans to do so had been made for this Friday, December 4, in Edmonton.

Certainly, there seems to be a difference between the input school boards indicated they provided Alberta Education and the comments the Minister is making suggesting this bill reflects the input and wishes of school boards – a product of having missed a step in the Minister's consultation process where input could have been validated with school boards and related decisions explained.

Madam Chair, it seems we're standing here again talking about lack of consultation. While Minister Eggen did engage in stakeholder consultations in the fall, there was no feedback provided to school boards with respect to the direction this legislation was taking. This sounds very similar to Bill 6, of course, where some of the stakeholder groups had discussions with government but no indication of what direction the government was going until, of course, the bill was slapped down here in the Legislature. That's when they finally knew what was actually going on.

Another concern that the school boards have is the lack of response time. Most stakeholders say that the time between tabling and the projected passing of Bill 8 is too fast, that there is not enough time for meaningful input or debate before the government intends to pass it. Again, it's the same thing as Bill 6. Of course, they've come up with some amendments now. They've dropped them on our tables, and now we don't have time to go back to the

school boards in our constituencies to find out what they really think of this. I'm madly trying to text people to find out, you know, what their opinion is of this, but of course there's no way to do proper consultation when you do business this way. Obviously, this has become a pattern, this lack of consultation and, of course, amendments. Every time they bring something forward, it ends up that the amendments seem to be more important than the bill itself. I think it's very unfortunate, Madam Chair, that this government feels like this is how they should be doing business.

Now, I just want to have maybe a couple of questions answered or cleared up here. The boards are clear that the only issues that should be decided at the provincial table should be salary and the length of the agreement. All other things should have been negotiated at the local level, with a predetermined dollar percentage amount to put limits on the asks. I guess I'd like to ask the minister to confirm if that's true or not.

I'd also like to ask the minister: since you've brought this amendment in, have you had an opportunity to consult with all 61 of the school boards? If so, what specifically has been the support level for this bill with the amendments that you've put forward? When I say "specifically," I would like to know if the smaller, more rural school boards have any more concerns than other school boards? Could you clear that up, Minister?

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you for your questions and concerns. I mean, certainly, it's important that you interact with the people that the legislation does affect. Certainly, we have done so, not just in the six months up to this point but even in the last six days. I think that with many of the concerns that the hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock had brought forward, if he was to note what those amendments were and how they are, if he was listening to me now, for example, he would know that, in fact, we did address those things.

Also, to the Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky: certainly, again, the idea of making sure that the TEBA is including the school boards and the funder and the government is very important. I think this is the principle that will move a lot of these other concerns forward, right? The determination of what is being negotiated will be at that grouping. They'll determine if it will be wages and other things like you mentioned as well. Those are all things that will take place with the framework that we have.

9:10

You know, it's interesting that your school board, actually, is right in my media release here tonight. They say:

This amendment shows the Minister is actively listening to school boards.

God bless them.

Local matters may be unique in some communities, and this amendment acknowledges the importance of managing those locally.

Yeah, I worked hard to try to work with different individuals. That was the chair for one of your districts.

Other endorsements, including the ASBA, which is the overriding body, acknowledge that this is something they can work with as well. So I did work hard.

It's very important in politics not to overreach generalizations. If you do so, then you compromise the message that you're trying to get across. I mean, this is always a lesson that I try to refer back to in my mind when I'm doing this, when I used to be in opposition, and I would advise the members opposite to do the same.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Yes. Minister, I appreciate that you have some information from one of the school boards in my area, but I actually have five in my constituency, so if you could maybe confirm which one you were quoting from there.

Also, I did ask the question: have you consulted with all 61 school divisions . . .

Mr. Eggen: Yes, I have.

Mr. Loewen: . . . and if so, what specifically is the support level for this bill with these amendments?

Mr. Eggen: VS, very strong. It's looking good.

Mr. Loewen: Sorry. I said specifically.

Mr. Eggen: Very strong. Yeah, it's good.

The Chair: Hon. members, while I've been allowing some of this back-and-forth dialogue, it's important to remember that for the purposes of the official record, *Hansard*, if we don't get the answer on record, sometimes it's problematic. If you're prepared to answer the question, hon. minister, we could get it on the record. Otherwise, we'll proceed.

Mr. Eggen: No.

The Chair: Any other members wishing to speak? Grande Prairie-Smoky.

Mr. Loewen: Yeah. I just want to make sure it's on the record that he's not willing to answer the question.

Thank you.

The Chair: Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I guess the most unfortunate part about this bill, Bill 8, is that we're still here talking about it at a quarter after 9 tonight. It's fairly obvious that with a little bit of consultation prior, this would be water under the bridge by now.

What I want to stand up and talk about is, basically, that I've got four school boards in my area: Lakeland Catholic, St. Paul educational region, East Central francophone, and Northern Lights school division. When I talked to them, they all kind of reiterated the same thing. It was like: we talked to them this fall, but we had no idea that this was coming through and that this was what it was going to be. I think a little bit of consultation prior to the bill going out would have probably eliminated the need for these amendments that have come forth. I think it's unfortunate, but maybe it's a lesson going forward, that we do need to negotiate a little bit more and keep people in the loop on exactly what's going on.

I did talk to at least one of my school boards tonight and ran over these amendments that came through. Unfortunately, they don't have a meeting until tomorrow. I said: well, unfortunately, the bill is going to be passed tonight. They were a little concerned about that still, that they weren't going to have a chance to sit down as a board and talk about it, because it's been one or two of them on a phone call and that kind of thing. That's the unfortunate part about it.

I hope that at the end of it they're all happy and that we don't cause some dissension among the school boards themselves. They are concerned still about what this TEBA board is going to look like and all that stuff. They still do have some concerns about that. I hope we get that right and make sure that we talk to all the school

boards involved and make sure you get their input on that. Hopefully, I don't get a whole bunch of phone calls asking about what I'm doing.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you. I appreciate those comments. You know, it's quite valid as we work through. You know, this is the first bill that I've ever passed in the Legislature. I've been here for a decade. I haven't passed it yet. But part of what I've learned over the years when debating and being in opposition is that the constructive engagement that we can generate on the floor here is quite good. We talk about committees and so forth. We're in a committee right now. This is a committee. I mean, I just wanted to try to use that as part of how we built this. Of course, you can't give the bill out before. It has to come here first, okay? That's another thing.

Ms Hoffman: Legally.

Mr. Eggen: Yeah, legally. I mean, you can kind of, you know, give them a wink to give them some idea of where it's going.

That's the way I kind of tried to play it. If I can make adjustments the next time I do this, then I will do so. It's all in good faith. I mean, this is a good way, members of the Legislature, for us to move forward in a more equitable way and a more fiscally responsible way to make labour contracts with the teachers. It's a big moment. I think it'll take us maybe a few days and weeks to figure out just how we've accomplished something here if we choose to vote for it.

Thank you.

The Chair: Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills. Go ahead.

Mr. Hanson: If I could, Madam Chair. Just to clarify, this is Committee of the Whole. It's just a step in the process. This is not a committee. This is not what we want for Bill 6.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Any other comments with respect to this bill? Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Madam Chair. I greatly appreciate your time in this. I'm going to put a more positive spin on this. I just really, really want to thank this NDP government for listening to the Wildrose on this. I mean, thank God for the Wildrose. Thank goodness for the opposition. We have to remember that if the NDP had had their way, this bill would have been rammed through last week. We had to get a little bit of time for there to be some consultation.

Up in Fort McMurray, as an example, Madam Chair, the school boards came back to us when we asked them for some information on this, and they did come back with some concerns. They came back with the fact that there was a lack of consultation, and this was something that was really province-wide. We have no doubt that the good minister had conversations with the school boards, but they weren't quite clear what these conversations were leading to. They lacked a lot of information. They didn't have enough time to look at the information, which was the second part of that, the time constraint. They were very concerned that the information was getting rushed through rather quickly, and they didn't have time to evaluate it.

Again, with these bills that can affect so many things, there has to be a certain level of consultation. It's about discussions, about

asking the right questions. Whether you're a school board trustee or a social worker or a geologist, you have to ask those right questions.

The last part that they were really concerned about was a lack of proper representation with a centralized board, Madam Chair. The school boards were concerned that they might be isolated from a lot of these talks. In Fort McMurray, as an example, we have some different parameters that we work around up there. They were concerned that they'd be overwhelmed by the larger school boards here in the cities. Fortunately, the good minister was good enough to recognize this and address this with the two levels of school boards, board representation, and it is a really great thing that they were finally listening to us. Even though they, you know, just finished their consultation this afternoon and spent the whole weekend, I'm sure, and the week discussing these things, it was only at our behest, and we really appreciate your listening to us. I'm so glad for this.

9:20

The two school boards have expressed their concerns about a lot of these issues, but they're a little bit happier. Again, a lot of the school boards have come back and said: you know, some more time would have been nice. At least they have more information now. There obviously were some heavy work sessions over these last few days. I'm sure that our good Minister of Education was working very hard to try to get a lot of clarity and to write that law, and we really appreciate that. That helps a little bit. So when you take the lessons from this bill and you try to carry those through your next bills, recognize that consultation is really an important issue when we're coming up with these laws because once these laws are built – someone else used the analogy about concrete. You can manipulate that concrete when it's still wet, but once it's cast in stone, once that bill is passed, it's very hard to change it. We have to chip away at it, and it's a much longer process.

Again, kudos to hon. Minister of Education for, you know, speeding it up. It was a fast process, but at least he did contact a lot of these schools boards and was able to provide some feedback. They also had a few more days to evaluate the information, and that's to be commended despite the fact that, you know, we had to provide you with that guidance, but that is good. There are many, many great things that the Wildrose can provide for this government if you just listen to us all the time. All the time. The hon. Minister of Finance agrees with this, and that's good to see.

So I just want to say on behalf of the Wildrose: thank you for listening. A lot of school boards do also appreciate this last-minute consultation enough that they're more comfortable with this bill. So thank you very much. Keep up the good work, and congratulations on your first bill.

The Chair: Are there any other questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? Are you ready for the question?

Hon. Members: Question.

[The remaining clauses of Bill 8 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Opposed? Carried.

Mr. Westhead: Madam Chair, I move that the committee rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Dr. Turner: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration certain bills. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 8. Madam Speaker, I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 8 Public Education Collective Bargaining Act

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Certainly, we've had very good debate around this, and what I truly enjoy is the sense of consensus on how we are arriving at a place where we should be as a governing body, as a legislative body to deal with collective bargaining for teachers. Certainly, this is just the beginning. As I said before, this is how it will take place, hopefully, if we manage to pass this. The what and the heavy work in the next few months are still to come.

However, I fully expect, Madam Speaker, that all parties recognize, first and foremost, the integrity and the strength of our education system across the province and will invest in the success of this collective bargaining process with the best interests of our students, of our parents, and the smooth functioning of our communities with which each of the schools is so deeply entwined.

I am both edified and thankful for all of the input that I've had over the last months and weeks and in the final few days as well, as we worked through the actual bill. It's a remarkable experience, and I believe that we can all perhaps learn from the spirit of co-operation that we've managed to hit on here. Maybe everybody just had a big dinner tonight, and they're not scrapping and fighting as much as usual. No. Seriously, it's a mechanism by which, you know, the Legislature can function. It's something that ultimately I'm very proud of, how this process can work here to make a better society for all.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North West.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the Education minister. I want to echo the sentiment that when we gather here and we have adult discussions without the yelling and without the heckling, we actually can get some pretty good work done. I think it's an excellent example of being able to sit down and discuss the merits of a piece of legislation and introduce amendments, and even though my amendment wasn't passed, the fact is that it was still a respectful discussion, and we had a chance to have that discussion.

I think that for those of us who have heard a lot from our school boards, we certainly all brought up those concerns. Going forward,

I still have those concerns. We all want to see a system of collective bargaining that works for everybody. I have lots and lots of teachers in my constituency, and they want to see a pain-free system. I don't know if we'll ever get to a pain-free system, but we want to get as close as possible to that. We also have lots of school board members and lots of parents who want to see us get to a place where we have that.

None of us benefits, especially those of us who are parents, when we're in a situation where we have labour disagreements. We want our teachers to be happy, and we want them to work in an environment where they are functioning at their optimum. We do that when we have labour agreements that are strong, when we have collective bargaining that doesn't have people leaving the table extremely upset. We also need to make sure that our school boards feel the same way.

I am cautiously hopeful going forward that this system is going to be an improvement. I look forward to being able to examine it from the other end once we've been through this process. Certainly, I would really just like to finish by saying that I would like to have more discussions like this in the House on a regular basis.

Thank you.

Mr. Clark: I, too, will echo the sentiment of the Member for Calgary-North West as well as the minister. It is quite remarkable what we can do in this House when we sit and listen to one another. It can be done. It's a good example to set. As I go through my briefing notes, that my very capable team has prepared for me, I reflect on some of the concerns that we had as we went through the bill as a team. The vast majority of those concerns have been addressed by the amendments to the bill, and the questions that we've had have been answered through debate, so I very much appreciate having gone through that process.

What's important in any collective bargaining process, especially for something as important as education, when we're talking about students and student outcomes, is that we have great teachers in the classrooms and that, of course, schools are not interrupted with any work disruption. Of course, as representatives here of all citizens, both students as well as taxpaying Albertans, we need to make sure we get a fair deal. In these difficult and challenging economic times that, I would hope, is going to be in the forefront for the TEBA group. We need to make sure that it's the right deal for teachers and, in particular, the right deal in challenging economic times for the budget as well.

9:30

So I look forward to paying close attention to this as it plays itself out. Let's hope – although I don't know how long this feeling of unanimity will last as we move on to debate a different bill later this evening, I live forever in hope that it is at least possible. We've shown it can be done.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, Standing Order 29(2)(a) does come into effect if anybody has any questions or comments for the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow. Go ahead, Sherwood Park.

Ms McKittrick: Madam Speaker, I am delighted that we are able to have a discussion on an issue as important as education. I was going to ask the hon. Member for Calgary-Elbow: why do you think when it comes to the matter of public education that we can have such a congenial time in this House? [interjection]

Mr. Clark: I won't repeat the comment from my Wildrose colleague over here.

You know, I think some issues are more controversial than others. I mean, I just think that's it. I think on this one there's broad agreement that everyone in the House is broadly trying to do the same thing.

In my comments earlier on Bill 6 I hoped to try to bridge some of that, but there's obviously a very fundamental disagreement and difference of opinion on that bill whereas on this one it appears there isn't. There has been an acknowledgement in this case that perhaps consultation wasn't done as fulsomely as it could have been although some fairly extensive consultation had taken place leading up to the introduction of the bill. Once the bill was introduced, there were questions asked by school boards in particular. Those questions were addressed by the minister, and I think that helped turn down the temperature and calm things down.

So perhaps there's a lesson there for the government in terms of how this has been approached. But I think, also, that we're all in this House in pretty broad agreement that we need to get to a negotiated settlement as quickly as possible to keep teachers in the classrooms.

Thanks for the question.

The Deputy Speaker: Any further comments under 29(2)(a)?

If not, I will recognize Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak to Bill 8, and I would say that I'm very happy, to a degree, with the process that has gone on throughout here. The Wildrose believes in local decision-making, that decisions are best made by those that are closest to the situation. Probably, as we started off this process, our position was pretty close to the idea of maintaining a local bargaining position with regard to negotiations because we do believe in local decision-making.

We were aware that the minister began this process of looking at a two-tiered bargaining system in the summer by discussing bargaining models with the various local school boards. I guess I would commend the minister for starting the process off by going to the major stakeholders and by asking them where they stood and what they were looking at when it came to bargaining and whether or not they should move to some other form of bargaining. That first step in consultation was probably a very wise thing to do by the minister, so it probably started well by meeting with all the school boards.

Consultation is effective if at the end of the day that consultation and the bill that comes out of that consultation reflect a consensus of what the people actually want. In this case, you know, consultation is effective if the bill that is passed or is discussed and debated in the House actually, at the end of the day, meets the needs of the major stakeholders in education, whether they be local school boards or the organizations like the ASBA and the PSBAA, if the consultation actually comes out with a bill that reflects the views, the values, and the decisions of the major stakeholders involved. I think that's a pretty important thing to remember about consultation, that at the end of the day it does need to, in a democracy, reflect what the major stakeholders would desire.

You know, part of the process that I know we went through as a party in the Wildrose was going back to those major stakeholders and asking them where they stood. What did they believe the bill did? Where did they stand on this issue? One of the things that became really obvious to us at the beginning of this part of the process was that the major stakeholders believed in local bargaining. We really wondered – and we said it at the beginning of this process – if Bill 8 would become a new Bill 6. Would it end up not listening to the needs of the major stakeholders? If it wasn't

going to listen to the stakeholders and if it wasn't going to be reflective of the needs of the people that are actually providing educational services in our province, that was going to be issue.

I guess what I would argue, then, is that the consultation started off well, but it appeared to us that it was starting to break down when the bill actually came out. When the bill was made public and the school boards and the major stakeholders first got a chance to take a look at this bill, two things began to be of concern to both the stakeholders and the Wildrose Party. One was the timeline for further feedback on this consultative process. Was there going to be time for the local school boards, for the major stakeholders, to be able to actually provide feedback on the bill that the minister had brought forward? You know, that's a major concern.

I think it's reflected – and I won't read the whole letter from, in this case, the CBE. We could have picked any one of a number of different school boards. They all reflected some of these early concerns with this process. I guess I can't refer to the member. I'm sorry, ma'am.

On Friday, ... [the] Minister of Education, provided Alberta School Boards with information about Bill 8, ...

This is dated December 1.

... the Public Education Collective Bargaining Act. We learned that many details are still to be addressed. There was no opportunity for trustees to ask questions during this conference call ...

So they were informed of the bill through a conference call but never got the opportunity to ask questions about the bill during that conference call, and that's a concern. It's a concern because: will the consultative process actually allow this bill to reflect the wishes of the boards and the major stakeholders?

We are concerned about the speed with which this legislation is moving and would appreciate the opportunity to work with government to learn more. In particular, we want to understand how a provincial-wide structure will benefit CBE students and their families. We also seek clarification on what items will be provincially negotiated and what will be left to local bargaining.

You see, when you have a consultation process, there are things and there are issues that have to be worked through, Madam Speaker, and they need time. While this got started off with time, talking with them over the summer, when the bill came out, there were some real concerns.

The CBE Board of Trustees continues to support a local bargaining model ...

So a two-tiered model was going to be a problem if there wasn't consultation and discussion about some of these issues. They were concerned that their "voice will be lost and the interests of Calgary students will be diminished.

We are concerned that erosion of local control will not be in the best interests of students, parents, and the community ...

There appears to be a difference between the input school boards provided to Alberta Education previously on this issue, and the comments the Minister has made in which he suggests the Bill reflects the input and wishes of school boards.

Some serious concerns, Madam Speaker, and that was on December 1.

9:40

I know that we as the Wildrose Party, believing in local decision-making, believing that bills need to reflect the wishes of the people, had some pretty serious concerns about Bill 8.

Now, we understand that there were further consultations that came forth. We understand that there were some more consultations beginning, I believe, on December 3, that, while short, did seem to address some of the major stakeholders' concerns with either the bill or with the government and how it was proceeding.

We have again – and we can table this later – a letter from the board of trustees for the Calgary board of education, received by the hon. Minister of Education on December 4. It says:

Thank you for the opportunity on December 3, 2015 to provide feedback to your staff on the government's proposed Bill 8 . . .

I think it was wise of the minister to go back to the school boards and to the major stakeholders and to ask for their concerns. This letter does go through the concerns with sections 8 and 9 in the bill.

In addition, the criteria for determining central matters in section 10 is too broad . . .

They start to list some of their concerns with the bill, but they end off with this comment.

Should Bill 8 be amended as we propose above, The Calgary Board of Education can support Bill 8, notwithstanding our consistent position that local school boards should retain exclusive responsibility for bargaining teacher collective agreements.

I think that when you have a consultation process that actually consults and actually listens to the major stakeholders and actually tries to reflect their concerns, you do get positive results in the end.

I believe the amendment that the hon. minister brought forward this evening – while it isn't probably everything that we as the Wildrose Party would prefer to have seen in the bill and while we would have preferred to have seen a few other things addressed and some movement in some other areas, we do see that by allowing the school boards to be a part of the first bargaining session as a part of TEBA, to be able to set the tone for what matters will be local and what matters will be provincial from the very beginning, this has taken a step towards providing a better bill. It has reflected some of the concerns that have been brought forward by some of the school boards and some of the major stakeholders, and I think it does show what successful consultation can start to look like.

Having said that, we would have preferred to have seen a more exhaustive consultative process, one with longer timelines, one that would have allowed school boards to have met, to have discussed, to have met again at their provincial level through the ASBA, that would have allowed the ASBA to have had a more confident process in moving forward and having discussions with the minister. So while we still have some concerns, I think we can say that this consultative process has been better than others that we may have argued about over the last week. I think we can say with confidence that there has been some movement on behalf of the government to listen to some of the stakeholders.

With those comments, while we may have as the Wildrose Party some concerns about some of the specific issues, we will be supporting this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: We have five minutes of questions or comments under 29(2)(a) should anyone wish to take advantage of that.

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

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'd like to read three short letters into the record to make a certain point, which may be obvious after the first sentence. The first is from the Calgary Catholic school district, who write:

The Board of Trustees of the Calgary Catholic School District would like to urge you to delay the third reading of Bill 8, the Public Education Collective Bargaining Act until such time as appropriate consultation may occur with key stakeholders, the publicly elected school boards of Alberta.

We, along with many boards in our province, have concerns about the consultation process and the extremely tight timelines associated with this legislation. Initial consultations occurred in September/October of 2015 to gather input from boards. It was

the understanding of our board that this information would be compiled and further consultation opportunities provided prior to the passing of any legislation. We invite the opportunity to dialogue more fully with you and your staff to understand the legislation, the role of school boards in the collective bargaining process and share our own concerns and interests.

We understand that the legislature continues to move forward with this Bill. We respectfully request that the third reading of this bill be paused to allow for more consultation and opportunities for feedback with Boards.

Madam Speaker, you might notice I did not interject with any editorial comment. I don't believe any was necessary. I believe this says it all. That's the perspective of one board.

Yet a second letter:

We are writing to you with respect to Bill 8, the Public Education Collective Bargaining Act that you presented for first reading in the Alberta Legislature Thursday, November 26th.

Bill 8 is [a] very significant [piece of] legislation that will dramatically affect the vast majority of school boards in this province.

We understand there is consideration for second and third reading to be completed and the passage of this legislation into law before the currently scheduled December 3rd end of this sitting of the legislature.

We have not seen this legislation prior to November 25th. It contains measures that we did not anticipate from the single consultation on potential bargaining frameworks that was facilitated by your staff.

We believe that, as locally elected school boards democratically chosen to represent our students, their families and our constituents, we should be given more than a few days to properly review the proposed legislation and to provide you with our recommendations on Bill 8 prior to it [becoming] passed into law.

We certainly recognize that there is a need for school boards to act quickly, and will undertake to do that, however, you will understand that attempting to do this hastily, before the close of this legislative sitting, will be a disservice to our students and severely compromise our ability to serve our electorate.

We, the undersigned publicly elected school boards respectfully request that you do not pass Bill 8 before you have met with us and listened to our concerns and heard our recommendations.

Madam Speaker, that from Golden Hills school division.

The last one, although I could do more, for tonight would be this, from the Calgary board of education, simply their last paragraph in a very short letter.

We would appreciate if you would add our name to the list of school boards that is requesting that the minister ensure that Bill 8 is not passed prior to consulting with school boards.

Now, the only thing I will share in terms of an expert is the summary from that letter.

No consultation with school boards with regards to the unintended consequences of this Bill.

No opportunity for school boards to be at the table on the initial bargaining framework. (Items for central vs local tables)

Erosion of present local bargaining opportunities and solutions based on the current language and criteria used in the Bill to identify local vs central bargaining items.

The criteria in Bill 8 used to identify central/local bargaining items as well as the arbitration process that ensured that all items will be at the central table.

And, finally:

We believe it is critical that we have the opportunity to work collaboratively with our local education team to develop the best plan in each of our different schools for our students. Bill 8 does not provide for that.

As such, Madam Speaker, the only way that I could vote for this bill would be if it were indeed to be put on pause and taken out for true consultation and collaboration with boards just like this, who are being very polite and very professional and very respectful in offering their advice to work together with this government. That's not happening right now, so I can't vote for this bill at this point in time.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, you will be tabling these letters tomorrow in the House?

Mr. Rodney: I'm very happy to. Thank you.

9:50

The Deputy Speaker: Wonderful.

Any further speakers to the bill in third reading?

Sorry. I forgot 29(2)(a). Any questions or comments? Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I want to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed for reading those letters. In fact, we share many of the same trustees. I think it's very important for us to remember those letters because most of them were drafted and submitted before we consulted with the school boards, and since then the tone of the conversation has changed immensely. We've seen a lot of positive support coming our way in regard to this. You know, I had a chance to, as I said, attend some of these consultation meetings, and the overall vibe that came from that was a very positive one leaving the room. The school boards felt like they were being heard. One of the main things that we were hearing as concerns was section 8, and because of that, we have seen an immediate shift in tone from a lot of the local boards throughout Alberta.

So it's very good to sort of see those reflections that the hon. member is bringing up because it kind of shows us where we've come from and where we are going, which is a collaborative direction with all of our school boards here, to work together. Ultimately, I need to thank all those school boards for working with us to really build this, the final product, to where it is today, too.

That being said, I just want to take this time to thank the hon. member for bringing those forward because I think it is important for us to see where we have come from and where we are going as well.

The Deputy Speaker: Calgary-Fish Creek.

Mr. Gotfried: Under 29(2)(a) as well. Thank you, Madam Speaker. I wanted to rise to make a few comments. I also received numerous letters from the Calgary board of education, very respectful letters but with some very specific concerns on clauses 8, 9, and 10.

In addition, I received a letter from the Clareview public school board outlining similar concerns with clauses 8 and 9. That, to me indicates, again, a concern with the consultation that has transpired to date, the short time, which is something that we have perhaps seen a bit too much of with respect to consultation, a monologue versus a dialogue. I think that there is an opportunity here to take a step back and to ensure that for the school boards that are being most deeply affected, their parents, their students, and their finances are being addressed.

I'd like to ask the member if there are any other threads or patterns within the communications he has received which would indicate specific concerns with certain clauses within this bill as well.

Thank you.

Mr. Rodney: Well, I'd certainly like to thank the hon. Member for Calgary-Fish Creek, my next-door neighbour in more than one sense of the word. The fact of the matter is that this is an alarming pattern that we're seeing. And, Madam Speaker, I recognize that we're not debating Bill 6 right now, but it is a similar theme, the lack of consultation. Those who are affected by both Bill 6 and Bill 8 are telling us that the bills are important, that they're ready, willing, and able to work with government on these issues that are pivotal to them as they provide service for all Albertans as we eat and all Albertans as we learn.

The fact of the matter is that any kind of heavy-handed approach from any government, no matter the political stripe, is fought vehemently by people who really believe in those that they are serving, again, whether it's those in the agricultural communities or the educational communities.

Honestly, sitting over here for the first time, it is absolutely boggling to me why a government in this position wouldn't take the opportunity to get this right. These are good people: our farmers, our educators, our students. They want to work with you. So why wouldn't you take the time to do that? You know, I've heard some language which is a little bit extreme when people say things like: you could go from zero to hero. I think that's a little extreme. And you don't do it for that reason; you do it because it's the right reason.

These people are asking me: what is the urgency that this needs to be done in the next couple of days? That's what they're asking. They're asking that about farming. They're asking: why is it that you would take 18 to 24 months for regulations, yet you have to steamroll legislation through in a matter of days? To them I submit, you know, respectfully through you, Madam Speaker, that it just doesn't make any kind of sense.

What we do in here should make sense. It should be common sense. Hon. member, through the chair, they're telling me that that is sadly lacking.

Thank you. That's all we have time for.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise today at third reading of Bill 8. We've heard some very good debate this evening. Much of it has been very respectful, and for that, I appreciate the tone of the debate in the House this evening. I think that what happens when stakeholders are treated with respect – even though at times during the process they didn't feel exactly consulted, if at the end they are granted that respect, it also quite easily translates into the House. And when that doesn't happen, I think it often translates into the House. We've seen that over the past couple of weeks around this Assembly.

I think that some very good work has happened here this evening. Certainly, my hon. colleague chatted about how we arrived here and the consultation that took place in the summer and then the breakdown in consultation and the speed at which Bill 8 was taking place and some significant concern and uprising, if you will, around a few sections of the legislation on behalf of school boards, some of the concerns around TEBA not being at the table in the early stages of negotiations. We saw the government and the minister, much to his credit, respond to some of that concern and criticism quite quickly, and as a result, some positive work got done here.

But I think that there are two challenges that we face. I know that hon. members across the road say: "December 31. We have to have this done by December 31. That's why we are proceeding at breakneck speed. We're up against this deadline." I appreciate that. But so far, in the seven months of this new government, at every

single turn the government has had a reason, an excuse to rush through legislation. While I don't expect this question to be answered – in many respects it's rhetorical – I wonder when that will stop, when the crisis of the day or issue of the day that is pressing will be such that the government can appropriately plan or whatever they need to do to make sure that we're not always up against some crisis looming, that they can use this excuse in the House that we have to do it, that we need to rush things through.

One thing that this government promised when they were campaigning – certainly, the four members of caucus that were part of the fourth party and sat on this side of the House at times talked a lot about their frustration around these very issues, that the government of the day was rushing through pieces of legislation, debating till all hours of the night so that they could get out at the end of a session. I seem to recall rising in this place not that very long ago proposing that that very thing might happen in this session. Sure enough, the things that I had said then are coming true today, for whatever reason, whether it's the impending deadline of the 31st or invoking closure on other pieces of legislation. The things that this government used to speak out against are now happening.

10:00

The government of the day likes to blame the third party for all sorts of things and how, after 44 years of terror and reign, they used to do this. But it took them a long time to get to this point, and here we are a mere seven months in and we're rushing through legislation.

While I appreciate the good work that's been done and many of the issues that have been addressed, the challenge is that 15 minutes ago we were in Committee of the Whole, where there were some significant changes that took place, and now we're in third reading, and this bill is very likely to pass in the next few minutes, perhaps an hour, perhaps two. I don't know how many more hon. members want to rise. But it being 10 o'clock, I felt it was inappropriate to send some text messages to the chair of, say, the Golden Hills school division, whom I have consulted at great length about this bill.

Mr. Price is a wonderful man doing a wonderful job for much of the constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, and he has provided a number of letters to the government. I would have loved to say: hey, this was the actual amendment that they proposed, and clearly on section 8 there is agreement. I have a letter that says: "with the [recommendations] to section 8 and deletions of Section 9 and 10" and a number of other issues. He goes on to say: I would love to have the opportunity to follow up and make sure that the consultation that took place after the encouragement from the Official Opposition, that the consultation that they had all had over the weekend is actually what's delivered here today.

But when we go through legislation at such a pace, passing Committee of the Whole and third reading in mere hours, that type of consultation and that type of feedback and checking in proves impossible. I just don't think that this is the type of change. Certainly, we saw this in the past, and many members of this Assembly expressed concern over this. I had the opportunity to read some of those concerns into the record last week. Now here we are today with similar sorts of challenges and concerns. It's clear that the Golden Hills school division had many concerns about the bill and still, in fact, may have some additional concerns. But this is the challenge when legislation is passed at breakneck speed. We've seen that, basically, at every turn.

In fact, Madam Speaker, with virtually every single piece of legislation that has come before this Assembly, the Official Opposition and, in fact, myself – I have a strong desire and commitment to seeing the Assembly work better and in a much

more respectful manner, as it has this evening – have recommended a motion that would send these pieces of legislation not to Committee of the Whole, as they were addressed and fixed today, but to legislative policy committees so that proper consultation and appropriate timelines for important legislation that sets out the future of our province can be done in a manner that doesn't put undue pressure on school boards to call special meetings, to rush to Edmonton over the weekend but to allow us thoughtful reflection.

We've seen that on many pieces of legislation, that this government has refused to send any piece of legislation to committee. Oh, my apologies. They did send one, one private member's bill that was introduced by the opposition, a very simple bill that had agreement amongst most members of this Assembly, not even a difficult bill that changes the framework of negotiations in our province. Well, I think we arrived at a pretty positive point but not even something as significant as that, with all due respect to my hon. colleague, who introduced an important piece of legislation that initially was killed. Every once in a while the government likes to take some advice from the opposition and recognize when they've made an error, stop, turn around, and in this case even reverse a decision of the Assembly, resurrect from the dead this particular bill, and then send that bill to committee, a bill that we basically had agreement on in the House. So this is my concern with the direction of the new government.

Every once in a while, though, the government decides: "You know, the opposition is not all that bad. They have a good idea once in a while." They've taken the opportunity, like after killing my hon. colleague's bill, of resurrecting it, 7.25 per cent pay raises, that sort of thing. Unfortunately, for whatever reason there are other pieces of legislation that are before this House that this government doesn't choose to offer the same respect as they did to school board trustees in their desire to come to a good solution.

It seems to me that in this case and in the case of other pieces of legislation that may be before the Assembly, they have this desire to consult some groups but not others. I think it's unbecoming of the government, I think it's unbecoming of the process, and I think it's awfully disappointing that virtually no pieces of legislation have been sent to committee for full, robust discussion, where members of the community, expert witnesses, stakeholders, other members could come before the committee and provide feedback. Then we wouldn't be where we are today – we're rushing, with people driving all across the province to provide feedback to the minister – because we could do that in a manner that's respectful of the Assembly, respectful of the people that the bill affects, and respectful of the process.

While I might wrap up my comments because I don't want my concern around the process to detract from the fact that I think the government arrived at a pretty reasonable solution for school boards, I might just add on behalf of the Golden Hills school division a small quote from a letter that they wrote on December 4, after all of the additional consultation took place.

With the recommended amendments to section 8 and deletions of Section 9 and 10, though Golden Hills' first choice remains local bargaining for all labor negotiation, at this stage of the legislative process we are prepared to support an amended Bill 8.

If I would have had the chance to circle around and go back to the school division to make sure that they got what they laid out in this letter, it would be much easier to support, knowing that the people whom this bill greatly affects also support where we ended up. What this bill does do is lay out . . .

10:10

The Deputy Speaker: Comments or questions under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: I was just enthralled with the conversation, Madam Speaker, and I was wondering if the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills could complete his statement.

Mr. Cooper: What this bill does do is that it lays out a framework for a very important negotiation for our province that is just around the corner, and it's my hope that under the new parameters TEBA and the ATA and the ministry and the minister's office will be able to get the best available deal for all parties concerned. I say that with all sincerity. It is important for the future of our province as many of these people are doing just that, investing in the future of our province.

My hon. colleague from just down the road has done an incredible job over a lifetime building the future of this province, which he continues to do today here in this House, so that the new framework can ensure the appropriate cost measures for the province and the public purse, so that local school boards will be able to negotiate in a manner that is reflective of the individual and unique needs of that school board.

I can tell you, Madam Speaker, that those needs are vast and varied, particularly in a constituency like Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, that has many very rural, very small schools that have to be very innovative to remain competitive. It's my hope that this framework will allow them to be able to continue under those parameters and negotiate a number of the things that are important to them on the local level and that TEBA and the ministry will be able to ensure that we have a fair deal not only for teachers but for the province in ensuring that under the current economic circumstances all factors are considered fully and fulsomely.

The Deputy Speaker: Still a couple of minutes remain under 29(2)(a) should anybody wish to take advantage.

Seeing none, are there any further speakers in third reading? The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'll be almost as brief as my colleague from the Official Opposition. You know, I've been listening here, and I will say that I agree with my colleague from Calgary-North West's comments that the tone of the conversation has been constructive, and I think that's good. That doesn't make the bill perfect, but in fairness I will give the minister credit for trying to cobble together some consultation at the last minute with the School Boards Association.

But there are a few things that are, for me at least, outstanding. One is, actually, the amendment that my colleague from Calgary-North West put forward. I thought that would have helped the bill, the principle that the party at the negotiation that triggers a financial obligation ought to be able to be responsible for the financial obligation that they trigger. To me, that was just full of too much common sense to ignore, and I'm just a little disappointed that it didn't carry because I thought – my compliments to my colleague – that that would have been good.

One of the other things that is troubling me, unfortunately, is the consultation. As much as I know that the minister tried to, though, in my humble opinion, too late in the day, cobble together some public consultation, he hasn't really gotten it done as evidenced by the letters read out by my colleague from Calgary-Lougheed today. I think that he's really presented to this House evidence that indicates that the job isn't done.

So, unfortunately, Madam Speaker, this is a continuation of an unfortunate pattern by the current government, that they keep bringing forward pieces of legislation – and, again, I'm not trying to be unfair. I'm sure that their intentions are good. But the fact is that they haven't talked in most cases to the people most affected

by the legislation that they're bringing forward. Consequently, they're in trouble all over the map with Albertans for not talking to them before they drag legislation into this House. It's an unfortunate, negative pattern that still exists. Clearly, based on the letters read out loud by my colleague from Calgary-Lougheed, such is the case on this bill.

So when I don't support it, I wanted members of the House to know why. I still think that there's some work to do, and I still think that there are some lessons for the government to learn about the fact that we all work for Albertans, and we need to talk to them before making them live under legislation that we pass in this House.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, any further speakers to the bill in third reading? Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd also just like to read a letter into the record if I may. This is from Rocky View schools. One thing that I'd like to say before I start is that – and this has been going on since this was brought up – I still have not received any new correspondence from any of my trustees or from my area that they've had any correspondence regarding this change. So it's a little confusing to understand whether or not people have been consulted correctly or not. This letter was based on potentially previous information, but as I can tell so far, there hasn't been any consultation with my group.

The board of trustees of Rocky View schools is respectfully adding its voice to the swell of protest from other school boards around the province, regarding the Government of Alberta's introduction of Bill 8.

Firstly, we are aghast at the speed at which this very important legislation – which will affect Alberta's students now and in the future – is being rushed through the legislative channels and into law. One week is hardly enough time for our democratic process to do its work. We are disappointed that the government is opposed to sending this legislation back to Committee. Now it is our turn to urge you to delay this bill.

Secondly, we are puzzled by the lack of open, two-way dialogue with school boards from a Government that promised to do business differently. Surely there was a time to draw school boards into the conversation in the two months before your staff's consultation with the school boards and tabling the legislation?

As publically-elected officials who represent the interests of students, parents and their local communities, we ask that you take the time to listen to our concerns and hear our recommendations. We understand there is a need to be nimble.

Again, we are urging you, as have our colleagues, to immediately press the pause button on Bill 8. Rocky View Schools will willingly participate in the ensuing dialogue, ensuring Bill 8 serves the interests of Alberta students long into the future.

So, Madam Speaker, this is ultimately the issue. It sounds like that some school boards have been contacted. It sounds like there has been some consultation, but I honestly say that right now, even still now, I'm trying to get hold of people to find out if they've been consulted with, and I can't get an answer. I'm having a difficult time trying to understand what's going on with this consultation. I have to mirror some of my colleagues' comments on the aspect of the lack of consultation again and that the pattern is there again. I really felt that it was important to read this into the record.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

10:20

The Deputy Speaker: And you will be tabling this, of course, tomorrow.

Mrs. Aheer: Yes.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Any questions or comments under 29(2)(a) for the hon. member? The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Thank you. To the hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View, who has just spoken, as it happens, one of your trustees is the president of the Alberta School Boards Association. She has said:

School boards needed a voice in this first round of negotiations, and I am pleased to see the Minister taking steps to ensure this happens . . . we would still like to see [some] other changes, we look forward to working with the government in an authentic partnership to strengthen the role of school boards

as we move forward. So, yeah, we got that.

I mean, you know, you have to look at the interaction between the idea – people knew we were going to some provincial level of negotiations – and the drafting of the bill and then the short strokes in the intervening seven or eight days that we've worked through. So I recognize the issue. Certainly, many of these letters that you're reading, if you check the date on them, they are – yeah. Anyway, that's one of your school board trustees, who happens to be the president of the ASBA as well.

Mrs. Aheer: Yes, I'm quite aware of the date. December 3 is on here.

I'd like to mention again that that's wonderful that the minister is aware of that information. I'm not sure when you received that information. Having said that, though, in here it is obvious that whatever consultation was done has been done in a very, very fast manner. Again, if I may repeat, that pattern is not positive nor is it conducive to appropriate consultation.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Eggen: Some people don't like the results as well, Madam Speaker. That's an issue. Yes, the December 31 deadline is very real, so certainly we worked through this process to ensure that we can have this sort of provincial bargaining take place. The subtext of some of these comments is that people don't want that to happen. If we miss that deadline, then we would go back to the unstable circumstances that we've had to deal with for the last three bargaining rounds, which did not produce necessarily the best results.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. leader, on 29(2)(a)?

Mr. McIver: No. Just – I'll be brief.

The Deputy Speaker: I've still got two more minutes on 29(2)(a).

Any further speakers to that piece? If not, then I will recognize the hon. leader.

Mr. McIver: I just – actually, 29(2)(a), Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Oh, sorry. My apologies, hon. leader; 29(2)(a) is fine.

Mr. McIver: You know what? Respectfully, Minister, I don't want to pick on you too much. However, you just talked about the December 31 – you can call it a deadline, but it's a point where you'd want to have this done. All I wanted to ask you is: don't you think this would have been a little easier had you not spent six months getting a budget ready and spent maybe three months getting a budget ready? Would this not have – again, I'm not trying . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, the intent of 29(2)(a) is a comment on the hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View rather than a totally different subject with the budget.

Mr. McIver: To the Member for Chestermere-Rocky View: do you not think this might have been a little easier on the minister had the minister actually brought this thing forward and the government had brought a budget forward with the House three months ago instead of one month ago as we had helpfully suggested? [interjection] The Premier talks about 44 years. There's a reason that the previous government was here for 44 years. I would suggest to you, Madam Speaker, that it's because while the previous government was very imperfect, they actually listened to Albertans. Albertans didn't actually elect them for 44 years; they elected them for four years about 13 times in a row probably because they were happy. [interjections] However, at the end they didn't, and there were lessons to be learned, and we're working hard to learn them.

The Deputy Speaker: Could we have some order, please?

You've got a few seconds, hon. member.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you. I would like to respond to that. You must be getting tired of looking over your shoulder in the rear-view mirror. I'm sure our new government will have that opportunity as well.

I'd like to just answer your question: yes. Time is of the essence, evidently, and I think that when we are looking at small time periods like this, it is very difficult to make legitimate decisions, legitimate choices, and they're being forced to make these much . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Any further speakers to the bill?

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I just feel that I've got to go on record as well. I've got letters from school boards that I could also read. But, again, they were dated, you know, back in November, November 30.

My concern is the four school boards that I represent. Yeah, we're voting on this bill and the amendment, and we've gone through two phases of this bill. I have had pretty much zero – I managed to sneak in one phone call with one trustee, so I can't say for certain whether I'm speaking for the four school boards in my riding or not, those being Lakeland Catholic, East Central francophone, Northern Lights school division, and St. Paul education regional division. It is with a bit of trepidation that I vote either way on this.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any comments or questions under 29(2)(a) for the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills?

Seeing none, any further speakers on the bill? The Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you. I actually need to speak up on behalf of the school boards that I have spoken with. I may or may not share an area with the hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View. The wording in the letter that I received from Rocky View schools just needs to be taken to heart in the consideration of this.

Firstly, we are aghast at the speed at which this very important legislation – which will affect Alberta students now and in the future – is being rushed through the legislative channels and into law.

I mean, pause. Jeez. There are so many questions here.

There's more to this letter.

Secondly, [they're] puzzled by the lack of open, two-way dialogue with school boards from a Government that promised to do business differently.

I hear that over and over again, guys. It's just something really to consider. You're really not doing this differently. "Backwards" is a good word.

Some of the questions that I had initially heard from the school boards, again, not in regard to the amendment necessarily but the bill itself. They are concerned that this is mandatory, that all school boards will have to join. There are concerns that the ATA and the government will be deciding first, and then the school boards will be told after, again, sort of a theme with this government. That's a very valid concern.

Just tonnes of questions. There's been, maybe, consultation before, but since this has come out, there's just been no dialogue afterwards. That's certainly something that I think would be easily rectified but not yet done. The consultation itself was only two hours with the school boards prior to this, of course, not after. There is a definite concern for local bargaining. There are so many individual needs for individual schools in many different areas.

I understand that the minister did describe that there is still going to be sort of a northern pay raise so that teachers in northern areas will have a higher compensation, I'm assuming. You're going to correct me if I'm wrong after this. I think that is a good thing because that is at least recognizing an individual need for different school boards.

I mean, government doesn't do anything very well, and this is one of those tools that seems like we're going to be going down that path. This isn't what the school boards that I've spoken with are for or against. They just – there's been no time. There's been no consultation. I think it would be okay to put this on hold. I understand there's an urgency for bargaining there in the spring, and I certainly won't pretend to be an expert in that area, but the experts that I have spoken with are: put it on hold. If you could bridge the gap here, take some time.

I won't be voting for this. Thank you.

10:30

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments for the hon. Member for Airdrie under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, any further speakers to the bill in third reading?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Deputy Speaker: We'll call the question, but first we'll have the hon. minister close debate.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to everyone for contributing to the debate this evening and in the last number of days and weeks. Certainly, we've worked hard to build a framework here that can move forward on how we choose to develop a collective agreement with teachers across the province. There's been a great deal of urgency in having this take place for many years, really. In the interim we've seen school boards doing some local bargaining and then the provincial government intervening, sometimes in very sort of awkward ways, which ended up distorting the collective bargaining process and distorting the capacity for the government to pay for those results as well. This is a way by which we've rationalized the process and worked hard over quite a long period of time to make it happen.

I know there's lots of residual sort of resentment about how school boards have had their powers diminished over the last 15 or 20 years, really. Certainly, we also know about the importance of having the funder at the table to ensure fiscal prudence and responsible bargaining on these very important issues of compensation for teachers. We found this to be the best, most rational way to do so. Certainly, I know that while it's up to school

boards to, you know, put up their defences and demonstrate some reluctance in regard to these things, they also know that this is the most logical and reasonable way to move forward.

We have a responsibility through this Legislature to make sure that we are making responsible decisions about public monies that we have available to us, of which we have less than before. There will never be a better time to set a precedent by which we negotiate with the funder for these wage and big-money issues, not just with teachers but with the public service in general. Those of you who are onside with us in being responsible, pulling in and spending our public money in a responsible way, have a responsibility to vote for this bill. You know, I would urge you to do so. You will feel good as a result, I'm sure, when you go home to bed tonight to go to sleep. You'll turn over and feel really good about yourselves.

We know as well that it's very important for us to have a fair contract for teachers. We have one of the best education systems in North America and indeed in the world in regard to the standards that we produce, and I certainly intend to keep it that way. The first persons who are responsible for that are the teachers and the staff on the ground, who do the work every day with our children.

With those two things in mind, Madam Speaker, plus the fact that, in fact, if we don't do this by December 31, the whole discussion that we've gone through here will be moot because we'll revert to individual bargaining – so you must keep that in consideration as well. While some people might think that things have been rushed along, really they haven't. I know that the debate around these two-table bargaining processes has gone back at least 12 or 14 years. Certainly, from the day that I assumed my role as the Minister of Education, I have been engaging in this very actively, and I look forward to the next, more important round, which is what we are bargaining for.

Madam Speaker, I urge everyone to vote for this bill. I've been very proud to sit through the process, which has been most amicable and constructive, I believe, on the whole.

Thank you.

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:35 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Gray	Panda
Anderson, S.	Hanson	Piquette
Anderson, W.	Hoffman	Renaud
Babcock	Horne	Rosendahl
Bilous	Jansen	Sabir
Carson	Kazim	Schmidt
Ceci	Kleinsteuber	Schneider
Clark	Larivee	Smith
Coolahan	Littlewood	Stier
Cortes-Vargas	Luff	Sucha
Dang	Malkinson	Swann
Drever	McCuaig-Boyd	Sweet
Eggen	McKitrick	Turner
Feehan	McPherson	van Dijken
Fildebrandt	Miller	Westhead
Fitzpatrick	Nixon	Woollard
Ganley	Notley	Yao
Goehring	Orr	

Against the motion:

Drysdale	McIver	Starke
Totals:	For – 53	Against – 3

[Motion carried; Bill 8 read a third time]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 6

Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act

Mr. Cooper moved that the motion for second reading be amended to read that Bill 6, Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

[Debate adjourned December 8: Mr. Orr speaking]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm more than thrilled to be able to pick up where I was earlier today. I was saying that if consultation had been taking place in reality, there wouldn't be a need to keep lecturing farmers that it had been taking place; they would already know. I realize the hour is late, but if you'll grant me the indulgence of a little bit of reasoned and considered debate, I would like to introduce a bit of a multidisciplinary analogy if I could. The reality is that we have been seeing a trend in this government of not consulting, of moving ahead. One of the most famous books in the world of architecture is called *A Pattern Language*. *A Pattern Language* basically makes the point that the patterns that we create do in fact speak a language, and the language is what people hear about who we are. So I would suggest that the patterns being produced here of nonconsultation will in fact communicate to the people of this province.

I would like to take the core idea, actually, from that book, and then I'll not digress any further. At the core of *A Pattern Language* is the idea that people should design for themselves their own houses, streets, and communities. This idea comes simply from the observation that most of the wonderful places in the world are not made by architects but by people. I would like to suggest that with Bill 6 what we have is the government trying to be architects and on the other hand what we have is the people trying to create for themselves their own community, their own life, and their own place. When the trend is that the architects are continually trying to tell the people how they should live, the pattern that's being created here communicates to them in a way that is incredibly powerful, and they've heard it – they've heard the message – and quite frankly they don't want to have their life created for them by the professional experts, or the government in this case.

I know the Premier has stated numerous times that this government will push Bill 6 through regardless of stakeholder feedback, and I strongly urge the government caucus to seriously reconsider that. This pattern of pushing things through without consultation is creating a pattern, and the people are beginning to hear the language.

I come from a rural riding, as do some of the other caucus members. Ranching and farming are intertwined with the lifestyle of my constituents, as they do with the other caucus members. There are government members who have rural ridings. These members have the same kinds of rural constituents, and I know their offices are being inundated with phone calls and letters and e-mails. I know this because their constituents are frustrated with their

complaints falling on deaf ears, and they're contacting my office. I've heard from people all over Alberta, actually, calling in to my office because they feel as though their MLAs are not representing their interests.

Madam Speaker, the people are always right. This government just needs to be doing a better job of bringing Albertans to the table, listening to their input, and crafting legislation that reflects the best solution for those who are farming and ranching, and only then can there be meaningful contribution to the true safety of Alberta farms.

I'd like to just read a tiny bit from a letter that I've received. Really, the invitation here is that farmers just want to be invited to the table. This person says:

Farmers are [actually] pretty clever at figuring out how to do things, to make them work. Perhaps your government could get a few together and I assure you, they would figure something out that would make everyone happy. Please reconsider [this bill] as it stands today.

Well, as it is, it's going to be closed very quickly. But the invitation is to actually engage with farmers, allow them the opportunity to speak with you and to the legislation that's being formed. I actually believe that the discussion could lead to some increased farm safety but only if it actually engages those that have to live it and practise it.

What I have to say, I guess, is most concerning is that the government members from rural ridings haven't been rising to speak to this issue, haven't been speaking their constituents' wishes for them. I don't know whether they've been ordered not to speak, but I say to you that you have been elected to express the views of your constituents, not just to gain office and then be pushed or choose to push an ideological agenda onto constituents when they're repeatedly telling you not to. Stand up for your riding. Do your job. I mean, the people are making their voices heard. When will these members rise and speak for their people?

I've spoken to the Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose. I know he's here or he has been here, and he's watched much of this debate. I know he's heard the outrage from farmers across his riding, yet he has not stood up to speak for them. It's as if he's a bystander. I know there are close to 2,000 farm families in his riding. My challenge is: what are your constituents telling you, and are you going to speak for them?

I would like to read a letter, actually, that the Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose has already seen, but he hasn't chosen to stand up and speak toward it. It comes from the Camrose county, signed by the reeve of Camrose county. He speaks to the bill. He says that they would like to express their

support for the importance of safety and the protection of workers ...

However ...

It seems like all the letters go that way. They have a "however" or they have a "but" in them.

... pushing a somewhat confusing and misunderstood bill through the Legislature, into law without further consultation seems counter productive.

County Council has had an opportunity to meet and discuss ...

So this isn't just an individual. This is county council in a formal letter to the hon. Premier.

It goes on to say that they have met with their local MLA, Bruce Hinkley,

and it became abundantly clear that there is indeed some ...

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, please, a reminder about names.

11:00

Mr. Orr: I'm sorry. I retract it. You're correct. Wetaskiwin-Camrose. I'll get that in my brain.

[The member's] comments indicate, "it is difficult as a politician answering questions, much like standing in quicksand, as the target and intentions of the bill are constantly changing." In our conversation with [the MLA for Wetaskiwin-Camrose] the other common expression was "this is the first I have heard of that."

The county councillors express that they are

concerned that adequate research into how this bill should be handled has not been completed or communicated to Cabinet much less the farmers and ranchers.

That's what the county council says.

Camrose County [council] would respectfully request that the Provincial Government suspend implementation of [this bill] until complete and extensive consultation with all affected parties can be completed.

That's from Camrose county council.

While I'm on the subject of letters, I also have one from Lacombe county council. Lacombe county council met recently. This letter is dated December 4 to the hon. Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour.

On behalf of Lacombe County Council and the Lacombe County Agricultural Service Board . . .

They have concerns with the current process. They go into some details about that. They say:

There is clearly an information gap . . .

We strongly encourage the Legislature to defer further consideration of Bill 6 until the agricultural community is fully informed as to contents of the bill and proposed regulation, and that a meaningful consultation process with all agricultural sectors is completed . . .

Specifically Lacombe County Council is asking:

1. That further consideration of Bill 6 be deferred . . .
2. That information be disseminated to impacted parties [and]
3. That a public consultation process be initiated.

Signed, again, by the reeve of Lacombe county council.

Clearly, not just individuals are concerned about this. Now we have various government agencies also expressing their concern with this government. As well, I don't have the letter, but AAMDC has expressed the same kinds of concerns, and there are others. I think it's important that we realize that this is not just individuals who are alarmed and don't understand what's happening. These are considered people writing formal letters of concern and request for consideration.

I know that government members have seen the protests, the ones going on outside the building and all over the province. I suspect there has also been discussion at the cabinet level about the plans being made by various individuals to have convoys and all kinds of things. I know that the LAO sheriffs and the RCMP and the city of Edmonton were called about how to have a major convoy into the downtown part of Edmonton. They put that off. You know, I think the only reason the government has introduced amendments, has even blinked on this, is because of the degree and the intensity of the protests and the concerns about having the highways blocked and the complete chaos that this bill is creating.

The highly ineffective information sessions are just garnering more anger toward Bill 6 because they're condescending. They express that government-knows-best attitude. It's just sparked and fuelled outrage at the atrocious piece of legislation, which, unfortunately, is becoming the pattern language. A hallmark of the NDP government is that they barrel ahead without consultation or

consideration, a government that has only been in power for eight months yet knows more about family farming than families who have worked their lands for over a hundred years.

Madam Speaker, this government says that they're hearing, but they're by no means listening. How can this government consider putting forward Bill 6 after the concerns of Albertans all over the province are still not actually listened to? We've seen these information sessions, which are a far cry from consultation, conducted in venues that are too small, and they don't allow for proper dialogue. I'm sure I don't need to remind anybody about how ineffective these sessions have been. For those who haven't heard, the Okotoks session actually took place on a bench in a parking lot.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments for the hon. member under Standing Order 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Now, the hon. member stated that he'd received letters from municipalities. I think it was two municipalities. I know we've all received letters probably from ranchers and farmers. That's who we're receiving our letters from. But a comprehensive letter written by a town or a county or an MD, that was clearly discussed among several leaders of the community who took the time from their own municipality's business to write a letter about how the government is not listening to its farmers or ranchers, is significant. I'd like the member to respond to that.

Also, how has the member calmed the nerves of people that he has been in contact with that have been talking to him about this bill?

Mr. Orr: Well, I guess I would just add that we all know that there are all kinds of I guess we call them trolls on social media, who are out there saying all kinds of radical and extreme things that none of us, actually, quite frankly, wants to listen to. Half of what's said – I don't know – belongs in the Twittersphere somewhere. The reality is that when you have considered and measured officials who take the time to sit down in an official meeting and express their concerns, I at least can't write those things off as people just venting. I think these are far more serious than that, and some weight needs to be added to the fact of where these letters come from and the process whereby they have been delivered.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, before we continue with this, just a reminder that we are no longer in committee. Could everybody, please, take their proper seats or take their conversations outside. Thank you.

Any further questions for the hon. member under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, I will recognize Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise in second on Bill 6. Good policy decisions can have a profound and positive impact on the well-being of populations, and equally important is the process of policy decisions. Clearly, significant work needs to be done to rebuild the trust in Alberta of the agricultural community and the important values around ownership and respect for the family farm. I have no doubt that the new New Democrat government has learned important lessons about this process in the last four weeks.

Also important are the values for paid employees of occupational health and safety standards, workers' compensation, employment standards, and child labour standards, available in nearly all other

workplaces in Alberta and in Canada. Just today the CBC reported on a fatality inquiry I was involved with following a death on January 31, 2014. A 46-year-old, Stephen Gibson, a New Zealander drawn by the romance of a prairie cowboy life with his wife, became entangled in an exposed power takeoff as his employer looked on, owner Robert Hamilton, fighting back tears, told a two-day inquiry set up last Monday to investigate the death. The victim's wife said, quote: he did mention to me concerns about how things were being done safetywise. Mr. Hamilton was asked by the court if he'd made any changes since Gibson's death. He said that the next day he got rid of the power takeoff, which lacked the proper protective shielding and pulled him right in and wrenched him and killed him in minutes. Mr. Hamilton admitted that he didn't have any safety procedures in place on his farm near Cochrane, hadn't taken any safety courses, and that everything he knew about safety he'd learned on the job.

Disappointing to me are this government's communications and consultation. More disappointing is the absence of concern and action from the parties to my right for basic rights of farm workers, such as the seriously disabled and impoverished Eric Musekamp and Darlene Dunlop, who have been here many times over the last 12 years arguing for basic worker rights, some of which have been in place for decades in other jurisdictions. In fact, their active resistance to any progress on worker rights has been most profoundly disappointing. Nellie McClung in the last century said this about women: we are persons, too. Indeed, farm workers are persons, too.

11:10

Where has the Wildrose been in the last 20 years? Fighting for the rights of landowners – fair enough; fight for the rights of landowners – but denying the rights of farm workers? Why? The Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills chided the government earlier tonight for being selective in its consultations with educators and boards in Alberta over Bill 8. How many farm workers did you invite to your rallies? How many farm workers have you consulted about this critically important bill to their fundamental human rights? The Wildrose leader speaks of being a champion for human rights; his actions speak otherwise. Even last week he added his voice to that of the MC at the rally on the front steps, blocking my ability to speak to the audience.

Now, Madam Speaker, we have all been moved by the experience of our 800-year-old Magna Carta, which has been brought to Alberta, the only place in Canada to receive it. Our sense of justice, full participation in decisions that affect us, democracy, fundamental human rights: they emerged from this important historic document. Notwithstanding the miscommunication and lack of consultation over here by the New Democrats on Bill 6, it's fundamentally that this bill is about safe work, the right to refuse unsafe work, investigation of injuries and learning from deaths, fair treatment, and freedom to organize. How long do we have to say that?

The Wildrose has mobilized and incited many family-owned . . .

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, we have a point of order. If I could just pause you for a moment, we need to deal with that right away, and then we can continue.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Point of Order Relevance

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I refer to 23(b) section (i). It speaks to matters other than "the question under discussion."

I believe that we are on the referral amendment for Bill 6, referring the bill to committee.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, did you wish to respond to the point of order?

Any other hon. member who wishes to speak to that? We are on the referral amendment. Go ahead, leader of the third party.

Mr. McIver: I agree with the point of order and the citation. The hon. member is discussing something that is clearly not before the House. I would ask you to rule in favour of the point of order, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Did you wish to comment, hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View?

Dr. Swann: Yes. Madam Speaker, with respect, this is related to whether we move ahead on a bill that has been decades overdue or whether we refer it for significant delays, leaving more people injured, more people killed, and more people abandoned by a system that should have been in place for everyone. I don't see that this is out of order. I have 10 minutes to give my argument about why this needs to go forward.

Mr. Bilous: Madam Speaker, you know, I appreciate the tenacity that the Official Opposition is showing in relation to the debate on this bill. However, the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View was merely working his way to talking about the amendment, but it is still about the bill itself. There is precedent in this House of members, even as early as this afternoon or yesterday, talking about other bills when a bill was on the floor; for example, when Bill 8 was on the floor, members from the Official Opposition talking about Bill 4, which passed yesterday.

The point of the matter here, Madam Speaker, is that this is not a point of order. The Member for Calgary-Mountain View has the floor and is speaking to the bill and to the amendment, which affects the bill, and his position on not agreeing with the amendment to refer this bill to committee.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: I will rule on this. I find that it is not a point of order. I was giving the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View a little bit of leeway to explain his rationale for not referring the bill to committee. I will ask you to keep that in mind as you proceed, hon. member.

Please proceed.

Debate Continued

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Madam Speaker. For years these issues have been referred, denied, and each successive PC government has agreed that these are human rights violations. Unfortunately, quietly at least, while they would say that the risks were unacceptable, they could not – and I quote former Minister Hancock – get their members in the rural areas to support this change.

Make no mistake. The Alberta Federation of Agriculture has been consulted – it was formerly the wild rose agricultural producers – over many years, representing many commodity groups, as well as the Alberta Wheat Commission, CropLife. Barley, canola, potato, and beekeepers have been involved for years. To be fair, many farmers and ranchers, though, have not been individually consulted, probably because they're not associated with the Alberta Federation of Agriculture or have an association

with them. But I believe that the most ethical landowners in Alberta want Alberta to move into the 21st century and protect workplace safety and compensation for their workers.

Goals of the bill are to respect Canada's Constitution, fundamentally, and the Alberta Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which guarantee that paid workers have fair treatment, a safe workplace, and the right to organize. A legal review by the University of Calgary law school indicated four key areas of our Constitution that were violated by the exemptions currently in place in Alberta. New international buyers like McDonald's, PepsiCo, Walmart are signing on to international food production standards consistent with the ILO and the European Union through a food sustainability set of criteria. They plan to purchase increasingly over the next one to two years from sources that demonstrate indicators of environmental, social, and economic performance, including the following four criteria, Madam Speaker: humane animal practices; food safety; environmental protection, including carbon footprint; and safe working conditions for farm workers.

I'll skip down to the bottom. Clearly, the values of Canadians and most Albertans are now demanding action to address the inconvenient truth that we do not respect the most basic rights of some 40,000 paid farm workers in this province, who are exposed to mechanical, electrical, chemical, and other aerosolized risks without guarantee of compensation for injury and death, with employment standards that do not ensure fair treatment. It's time, Madam Speaker. It's long past time. We owe it to New Zealander Stephen Gibson; to Philippa Thomas, crippled and abandoned nine years ago and still speaking out for farm workers; to Lorna Chandler, the widow of Kevan Chandler, whom I've spoken about before. We owe it to ourselves as we all, I think, would adhere to: we want to be treated as others want to be treated.

I encourage all members to support Bill 6, to reject this amendment. With the protection afforded both worker and operator under the WCB and respectful consultations ongoing over occupational health and safety standards, which will form the code of standards within 12 to 14 months, including employment standards, child labour standards, in the months ahead we will all be proud to be Albertans.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Under Standing Order 29(2)(a), the hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and thank you to the member for his very passionate reason for wanting to reject this silly amendment. I'd like to ask the member . . . [interjections]

11:20

The Deputy Speaker: Could we have order, please, hon. members?

Mr. Westhead: I'd like to commend the member for all the work he's done on this issue over the last several years and the passion that he has put into this. I'd like to ask him: how many e-mails, how many phone calls, how much communication has your office received in support of this kind of legislation? Also, if you could speak to your experience as a physician with farm-related injuries. You also mentioned briefly the WCB. I'd like to know your thoughts around the WCB and whether or not that's an appropriate insurance product to offer to these workers.

Dr. Swann: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. It's very relevant to the amendment. If we refer this to committee, it will be many months before we see the basic protections for people with injuries, the security for family members following an injury. I would say

that one thing that has not been well communicated to the farming community is that WCB actually protects both the worker and the owner. There can be no lawsuit when you're under WCB.

Tongue Creek Feeders around Black Diamond, where Kevan Chandler was killed, went bankrupt after they were sued by the widow because she got no compensation. That's part of what a seven-year battle in court cost both her and Tongue Creek Feeders. WCB is a win-win, and there's nothing to compare to that relative to a private insurance company, which will fight, especially, long-term disability and require the individuals to go to court and battle for every dollar they get. WCB is there. It's a standard approach. Rehabilitation is an integral part of it, long-term disability, and significant compensation for loss of limbs and life are there. So I certainly endorse that.

I think it's also important to say that we've had over 450 deaths in the last 20 years, and some of those could certainly have been saved if we had in place standards, if we had investigated those injuries and deaths, if we had learned from those injuries and deaths, if we had made the changes that were basic, fundamental changes to improve safety like the power takeoff that I described earlier, that wasn't covered because the farmer was used to having it uncovered. He knew how to be aware of it, but a new person that came onto the property and walked too closely to the power takeoff got caught up in it, and he was gone in minutes.

These are aspects of employment that we have all come to take for granted, and we have somehow accepted the fact that farm workers deserve less. That's no longer acceptable. I have heard from hundreds of Albertans over the 11 years that I've been doing this – hundreds of Albertans – both farming community and urban community, who say that this is unacceptable. I feel badly about those people who are feeding me if we cannot provide some of the basic supports for their well-being, safety, and children. So 17, 18 people a year die on our farms. It's been the same for 30 years. I think we can do better. B.C. cut their rate by 60 per cent after bringing in mandatory WCB and occupational health and safety standards.

Education programs are absolutely important, but they have not been enough. They are an important component; they are simply not enough. They do not respect, really, the onus of the employer to create the safest possible standards for their paid employees to work under. I dare say that it's part of creating a culture of safety. When you actually legislate something like seat belts, it suddenly becomes part of the norm in our society, that safety is important, so important that we actually legislate it. We become attuned to playing a part in assessing risk, assessing changes, and not, in fact, as some of these large industrial operations are doing, taking advantage of paid farm workers by having cheap rates or no rates, no compensation on the backs of those people that actually provide the essentials of life for the rest of us.

I feel very strongly about this. It's been, well, since the '60s, when Social Credit brought in these exemptions for farm workers because they didn't want to burden the family farm with extra expenses. That's no longer acceptable, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Calgary-Foothills.

Mr. Panda: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Thank you for allowing me to rise and speak to this amendment, which I feel is desperately needed to provide some clarity and consultation for all Albertans. Bill 6 has elicited an unprecedented response from Albertans, who are resoundingly speaking out against this ill-conceived legislation. For the last two weeks the Wildrose and other opposition parties have actively called on the NDP government to stop, take a breath, and take into consideration the tens of thousands of Albertans that

they represent, people who have been marginalized by Bill 6 and the total lack of discussion surrounding the changes to their way of life.

Madam Speaker, as the Official Opposition we've heard the concerns of the farmers, and we are here to represent their voice. The response we heard from one of the NDP members today I'm really shocked to hear, you know. When they call the amendment silly, in turn, they are calling the farmers silly. That's unacceptable. That's not fair to farmers.

Mrs. Aheer: It's disrespectful.

Mr. Panda: Very disrespectful.

Our office phones have been ringing off the hook, letters have poured in, and stacks upon stacks of petitions have been dropped off at our offices as Alberta's agricultural sector has fought to preserve its way of life. Wildrose heard constituents go to great lengths in both time and personal expense to actively participate in the legislative process and fight to have their voices heard overtop of the NDP's deafening cries to legislate first and then consult later. Our office has had constituents who have travelled eight hours, round trip, just to drop off a petition that they have had signed in the hopes that their hard work would make a difference in stopping the NDP from trampling over the farmers in this province. This extraordinary effort represents the lengths that tens of thousands of Albertans have gone to speak out against Bill 6 and protect their way of life because, Madam Speaker, that's exactly what these Albertans are fighting for.

Farming is not just a means of making a living. It is not a nine-to-five job. It's a way of life that cannot fully be comprehended by those who have not lived it. For the NDP, particularly those members representing the huge agricultural areas, to stand up for a bill that legislates on something they know little to nothing about without bothering to take their constituents' concerns seriously is arrogant and misguided. That's why they are calling them silly. Perhaps if they had taken the time to actually sit down with farmers and ranchers to hear their concerns and listen to their stories, they would have a leg to stand on.

Sadly, the NDP did no such thing and has consistently refused to engage with and truly listen to the Albertans most directly affected by this legislation throughout this entire process. To date government members have been conspicuously silent on this issue in this House, rarely standing to speak to this legislation, that affects so many of their constituents and that so many of their constituents are decidedly against. The silence on this issue, both from government members and in the election campaign, is deeply troubling.

This government seems bound and determined to ram this legislation through with no regard for those it will supposedly protect. All indications are that they have intended to do this silently and secretly. The people living and working in Alberta's agricultural sector deserve a level of respect not yet shown to them by this government. They're proud, hard-working citizens who work diligently day in and day out to provide for Albertans and play an essential role in our economy, and they deserve to have their democratic voices heard. On this side of the House, despite what the members opposite have claimed, we are in no way, shape, or form opposed to safety practices that protect all Albertans.

11:30

However, why is it that those very same people that are supposed to be protected were not consulted in this process? Is it not fair to say that those directly affected by Bill 6 would have a better idea of the best way to legislate and implement regulations on farms? Would

they not have a better idea of the core problems facing farmers and ranchers and some well-thought-out solutions to these problems? Do you not think they could bring a level of nuance and understanding to these very complex issues the government is now trying to discreetly untangle? Bill 6 is a mess of the government's own making, and it would have seen its errors had they bothered to ask.

The NDP's handling of this issue illustrates their lack of support for Albertans and their unwillingness to put the needs of everyday Albertans over their own skewed agenda. Madam Speaker, we were under the impression that this government would respect that the laws that govern this province should represent the will of the people and that our job as representatives of the people of Alberta should be as advocates for our constituents. Apparently, we were misinformed. If we were to take our cues from this government, perhaps our roles as MLAs would be to bully our way through legislation despite mass public outcry and to push our agenda regardless of whether or not it best represents the will and interests of Albertans. I encourage all those MLAs across from me to reconnect with the democratic spirit and to remember that their first allegiance is always to their constituents.

Madam Speaker, just because a party has the numbers within the Assembly to push a piece of legislation through does not make it the right thing to do. The speed and aggressiveness with which Bill 6 is being forced through are unacceptable. Although the NDP's tabled amendments are a step in the right direction, Bill 6 is still not a reflection of what Alberta's farmers and ranchers want. We are still left waiting for a number of complicated details to be hammered out, and the public is not prepared to lend this government the trust to do these things behind closed doors. The trust is spent.

Madam Speaker, this government needs to see past its political pride, set aside its ego, and send this bill to committee, where the critical stage of proper and meaningful consultation can take place. The Wildrose remains baffled as to why the NDP feels that they're under the gun to pass this legislation. They have nothing to lose and everything to gain by taking the time to comprehensively consult, specify, clarify, and then put forward legislation that reflects the specific wants and needs of those who it directly affects. I need to repeat this: the needs of those affected, the needs of those for whom we all govern, not the wants and needs of the bureaucrats writing or enforcing it.

Madam Speaker, farm safety is an integral concern, but imposing broad-based, vaguely defined omnibus legislation on this sector is not the solution. The solution is not, as the Premier claims, to let the government pass whatever they feel like and work on the regulations behind closed doors. Democracy suffers when decision-making cannot be exposed to the light of day. This is the people's House, and we have a solemn duty to uphold by ensuring that public debate happens in this Chamber and in committee.

This bill needs the input of industry leaders and all stakeholders. To pick just one of the many groups concerned with the planning and implementation of Bill 6, a spokesperson for the Alberta Barley Commission has panned the faulty construction of the legislation, saying:

In September, the four crop commissions issued a news release stating we were ready and willing to contribute to the discussion ... We were ready to provide input before the specifics of Bill 6 were announced to ensure farmers' best interests were being represented, unfortunately that process was never initiated.

So the NDP has not only alienated the 60,000 farmers and ranchers in Alberta but also the groups representing the interests of all farmers.

Madam Speaker, the NDP needs to send this Bill 6 to committee. They need to listen to the heartfelt pleas of Albertans and to take the time to hear their voices so that they can make informed choices. They need to nail down the nitty-gritty details of this legislation, that will determine the details of employment standards, OH and S, WCB, and to whom and how these entities apply. They need to put these specifics in place before this bill is passed, not after. There has to be some accountability, and it has to come now if the government hopes to salvage the trust they have so carelessly thrown aside. The people of Alberta deserve to be heard and supported, and that is exactly what the Wildrose will continue to fight for for as long as it takes.

I urge all members to use the legislative policy committees to their fullest extent and to work with, not against, Albertans to get this right. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments for the hon. member?

Mr. Nixon: Thank you very much. I thank the hon. member for his comments. I certainly appreciate it. I appreciate seeing an urban MLA standing up in the Assembly and speaking on behalf of constituents all across the province. I have a couple of things I'd like to talk to the member about, through you, Madam Speaker.

The first is just a quick story that I have. I used to run a lodge west of Sundre, about two and a half hours away from pavement. One day I was out riding my horse – I know that everybody is going to make fun of me. I do have a big horse, obviously. His name is Tank . . .

An Hon. Member: A Clydesdale.

Mr. Nixon: . . . and, yes, he is half Clydesdale.

I was out riding with my family near the Ya Ha Tinda area in my riding, which is where the Brewster brothers started their organization. Of course, now if you go to Banff, you'll see nothing but buses, but a long time ago the Brewster brothers were breaking horses outside of Banff, and Ya Ha Tinda is where they train all the horses for the rangers. But that's not part of this bill, of course, Madam Speaker. We were riding, and we ran into a cowboy on a horse. Now, what happens out west of Sundre, all through that area, is that cattle free-graze during the summer. Ranchers own allotments, and they allow their cattle to graze in those areas, and then, of course, these guys have to work the cows through the summer and move them to different grass spots, make sure that they're cared for.

Now, this cowboy already had one rope on the cow, one rope on his horse. The cow was clearly hurt. You could tell that something was going on with the cow's feet. Let me tell you, Madam Speaker, that the skill of the cowboy and the horse – the horse was amazing as well. We stopped to watch. He's got this one rope on there, and he has to get off his horse, manage to rope the back feet. He's got to tie another rope to a tree. We're on the side of a mountain. We're two and a half hours away from pavement. It's amazing, the skill of the horse and the skill of the cowboy and all of the work that had to go into getting this cow secure so that it couldn't hurt itself, couldn't hurt the horse, couldn't hurt the cowboy, of course.

When he had got that all done, he then, on the side of the mountain, had to measure the exact medicine that that cow would need for what was going on with its hoofs and then, you know, give the cow the medicine and then, miraculously, let the cow go without anybody getting hurt. I know that I couldn't have done it. I can tell you that the skill sets of both the cowboy and the horse were spectacular.

The first question that I have – and I'll have two questions for the member – how could you regulate, legislate that without talking to somebody who does that for a living? To me, I don't understand how you could even begin that.

The other thing, Madam Speaker, is that I was back in my riding this weekend, and I spoke with a local feedlot just outside of Sundre. This feedlot had about 25 employees, T4 employees, definitely not family members. They would definitely follow this legislation that we have here today. This feedlot puts a significant amount of money into the economy both from what it purchases in the Sundre area as well as, of course, in a small town, by employing 25 employees in the area, so an important employer. I spoke to these workers about what kind of insurance they have while they work there. They went through their insurance plan that they have, and this insurance plan protected them 24 hours a day. So even when they were in their beds, they were protected under the insurance plan that their employer had provided. When they were on vacation with their families, they were protected by this insurance plan, that their employer provided, a good insurance plan.

11:40

Now, in talking to their employer afterwards, if WCB comes in with this legislation – and we know that this government is getting ready to time allocate and force this on people – that employer will have to remove that insurance for those people. So now we've taken these people, that have an excellent insurance plan, and we have forced them into WCB. We have forced WCB, which this Premier has said is terrible, on an entire segment of our society. How can we take something that the Premier herself has acknowledged is broken and force that onto them?

The other thing, Madam Speaker, through you to the member: in talking further with this employer, if this legislation comes through, he's worried about the union side of the stuff. He's almost 70 years old. He's been running this feedlot for a long time. He's just going to shut down. That's 25 employees without a job because this government wants to pass a bill without consulting people. Now, does that seem fair?

I don't think that you think that's fair, Madam Speaker. [interjections] You can hear the government members talking away there, laughing about this. You know, there were people in the gallery today crying. This is going to affect our communities. This is going to affect the people that live there, terribly. There are kids back home crying – crying – because their parents are scared about what they're doing, and they find that silly. You can hear them there, laughing and heckling away about that, about the people in my community that are suffering or scared. [interjections] See? There they go again. It doesn't have to be . . .

The Deputy Speaker: The time for 29(2)(a) is finished, hon. member.

I will recognize the hon. Member for Livingstone-Macleod.

Mr. Stier: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker, and good evening, everyone. It's a pleasure to speak tonight to this amendment that's been proposed, to send this to committee, as it should. That's where I think that this should go. There's an opportunity there to finally – finally, finally – have some full, robust consultations and get a lot of this stuff discussed with the people who will be most affected before this bill becomes law, and that's very important. It's before the bill becomes law.

I'm a guy that's been raised on a family farm, and I'm a Member of this Legislative Assembly, and I happen to represent one of the most pristine areas in all of Alberta, with some of the greatest, choice farm- and ranchland that there is. I understand therefore the

unique lifestyle of farming and ranching and why it simply cannot be compared to other jobs.

Madam Speaker, farming and ranching provided this province the very foundation on which its greatness was built. My own family came up from the States and settled here when the bull trains came up across the border. Having been raised in a pioneer family, I have a great appreciation for what this means. There was an attitude back then. It was like a can-do attitude of a welcoming nature. They had an independent outlook. They had an unrelenting work ethic and a willingness to lend a helping hand no matter who it was. Neighbour helping neighbour: that's what living in the country is all about. You can trace their roots back to the farmers and ranchers who settled way back, way back in the early eras of the shaping of the United States of America and prior to that, when people came across from Europe. Whether or not an Albertan was raised, though, in the farming and ranching lifestyle or lives in a rural or urban community today, we have been influenced and shaped by the heritage of those people that I just spoke about, and it's the heritage of farmers and ranchers predominantly.

Before becoming a member of this Chamber, I was privileged, actually, to be a municipal councillor for the MD of Foothills. While serving on that council, I was fortunate to be part of the decision-making process, of course, and the most important part of that decision-making process was asking the public what they thought on various matters. That's right. Public consultation: what a concept, huh? You know, it was done in front of constituents. We had meetings all over the place, at various halls all over our municipality, regarding numerous, numerous issues that came about. We had all kinds of people coming to talk about everything from subdivisions to development to development permits to feedlots, all kinds of different ideas and projects that were coming forward. Not only was that consultation important; it is mandated in the Municipal Government Act, actually.

Think about that. A council has to consult with their constituents. What that does is that it prevents the council from ignoring public input and ramming through legislation without allowing for consultation. That's what we're trying to do here, and that is wrong. It was common sense when I was on council, and it remains common sense today. It's for that reason that I'm supporting this amendment. It's the only thing that makes logical sense. Why wouldn't you do this? Try to tell me what the logical reason is for not putting this to committee and having a public consultation.

You know, I was on a committee a few years ago, the Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future. We went around this province to consult on pensions. Our committee went all over this province and went to every major centre and consulted with all the people that were concerned about pensions. It was crucially important. It was vital. Some of the members that are now on the opposition side served on that committee with me. The Minister of Education is smiling right now. He recalls those meetings, I'm sure.

This is an important piece of legislation, and it should be made only after a series of these kinds of public consultations that I've just described. They're not just information sharing but information gathering. That's what it's really about. If the purpose of this bill is ultimately to improve safety for farm workers, then, for goodness' sake, the first step can't be legislative. It must be consultative. If this government had consulted that way, they would have known that the key to improving safety is educating, not legislating. By holding thorough consultations with stakeholders, we not only allow for information gathering, but we allow for stakeholder buy-in and greater ownership of the implementation of those changes.

As the member representing my constituency, one of my many responsibilities includes participating in some of the committees

and meetings that we hold down in the south, in Lethbridge, once a month. One of them is the highway 3 committee with the mayors and reeves and also the major mayors' and reeves' meetings for southwest Alberta, where we continue to discuss how to encourage new industries to consider the corridor as a place to locate. Smart program development can only occur when public consultation takes place to ensure that major changes are given exhaustive review, to ensure we unlock the full potential of that community. So we're meeting every month to discuss how we can improve things. We're meeting with people from the public, people from the various government departments to try to improve the economic capabilities of our area.

In the past, you know, major decisions such as the installation of power lines and the South Saskatchewan regional plan, in fact, involved significant public consultation. Step by step, at every stage of the decision-making process, consultations were done by the previous government. There were opportunities for all stakeholders, including business owners, locally elected officials, and the general public, to ensure that they were properly informed at each and every stage.

Contrast that with what we're trying to do here today with this bill. Contrast that with this government's action on Bill 6, where it is clear that not only was the normal public consultation process not followed; it was purposely controlled and sometimes avoided altogether. Now, I know that in my own riding no meetings were held by the government. In a riding adjacent to mine, Little Bow, no hearings were held. You know, that's amazing because that is one of the largest farming areas in all of southern Alberta. None were held.

I'm not the only one in this Chamber that believed at one time in conducting robust consultations, actually, and I've got several examples I'd like to read tonight. On May 14, 2013, my hon. colleague the current Minister of Economic Development and Trade said:

A great relationship starts with trust. It starts with, well, building trust and having a conversation, a conversation or multiple conversations which lead to consultation, where they are equal partners with an equal voice at the table.

Amazing. He added further that

discussions and notification is not consultation.

Well, imagine that.

The day before, May 13, 2013, the same minister also stated in this Chamber:

First and foremost, the greatest concern that I'm hearing – I mean, there are several, and it's difficult to number them or prioritize them, but it all boils down to the fact that there was a lack of consultation and there was a lack of engaging in meaningful dialogue with the very groups that this bill is going to impact and govern.

Imagine that he said that then.

11:50

The minister wasn't the only one of my hon. colleagues across the aisle who mentioned these kinds of things. The current Premier, in fact, spoke on May 8, 2013, and declared:

It deserves to be given full debate . . . with genuine consultation in an open and transparent fashion, where we can all see what everybody has to say about the components of this.

Of course, she was referring to the bill she was discussing at that time.

In addition, Madam Speaker, 18 months ago the Minister of Infrastructure and Minister of Transportation, who was then a member of the fourth party in opposition, stated that there's been no consultation with workers directly affected, and there's no negotiation, just more dictation.

Then again on April 23, 2014, rising in support of his caucus colleagues, the Minister of Education stated:

If you're only consulting and then you bring the hammer down in a very short time period after, then that consultation is nothing but adding insult to injury from the process that's been changed so radically in the first place.

Well, I'm not sure if the Minister of Education tonight remembers that, but there's definitely some precedent set here, where members on the other side definitely supported what we're advocating tonight, to send this bill, with this amendment, to the committee.

More recently, actually, the Minister of Human Services also spoke of the importance of consultation when he said just three weeks ago:

We are committed to consulting extensively. If there is anybody who was left out who approached you, I would invite you to bring forward the names of those stakeholders, and I will pass it on to the consultation team so that they can consult more inclusively and more broadly to get it right.

A consultation team. Think of the concept over there. A consultation team might be a great idea. I guess the Human Services minister thought it was at that time.

Madam Speaker, I'm starting to feel like I'm the ghost of Christmas past here, you know. It's like Jacob Marley scolding a cold, grumpy, impudent, know-it-all Scrooge, who cares little for the concerns of his peers and dependants. I remember that he said: "I wear the chain I forged in life. I made it link by link, and yard by yard; I [secured] it on of my own free will, and of my own free will I wore it." Scrooge's associate, Jacob Marley, tried fruitlessly, I might add, to get Scrooge to see the error of his ways and become the person everyone wanted him to be.

This government still has that chance, Madam Speaker. By sending this bill to committee, holding robust, thorough, and exhaustive consultations with farmers and ranchers, this government can attempt to regain the trust of Albertans before it is too late and in three and a half years' time they, too, wear the chains of irrelevance that the current third party must wear.

My office has received hundreds and hundreds of letters and phone calls raising concerns about the lack of any meaningful consultation process. It is my hope that this government takes a step back for a thorough review by sending this bill to committee prior to putting this new legislation in place. It would certainly make for a good Christmas miracle.

The Deputy Speaker: Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. On the topic of consultation the Member for Livingstone-Macleod and I share a special bond with the Minister of Education. I remember that in I think it was roughly August 2014 he referred to a committee that travelled around the province. There were controversial bills on pension reform, and it was one of the very few times, actually, in my old role that I sided with the PC government of the day against the Wildrose. It created some headache for me, but I thought it was actually a reasonable bill. The government had taken some flak for it, rightly or wrongly, and under intense pressure from the NDP, then in opposition, the government did the right thing, which it should do with all bills, reasonably, at least, and sent it to committee.

The committee travelled around the province, and I remember going to be the lone witness to testify in support of the bill in a room with at least a few hundred screaming union activists. It sounded, actually, a bit like the House today. It was a rather hostile atmosphere, that I actually found quite enjoyable for reasons I'm not quite sure of. It was a chance for members of the government and the opposition to travel the province, to listen to members. I

remember that before I went in, the Minister of Education took me aside and warned me not to make my remarks too incendiary as the crowd might not receive them very well.

Mr. Loewen: Oh, you would have never done that.

Mr. Fildebrandt: I've never made incendiary remarks with the intention of getting a rise out of the unions.

In any case, it was a fruitful exercise that the Minister of Education was on, that the Member for Livingstone-Macleod was on and perhaps a few other of the few veteran members in this House. Perhaps the Member for Livingstone-Macleod can talk about that experience where they went out and listened to Albertans with their experience and their views on a particular piece of legislation.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Stier: Well, thank you. Thank you, hon. member, for the suggestion and the question and the comments. Yes, I do fondly remember with great enthusiasm one evening that I believe was actually in Calgary at the Coast hotel. We had a fairly robust discussion. A fairly large number of people were speaking with great, great, great levels of concern and volume regarding the Member for Strathmore-Brooks' comments that evening, in fact, with respect to pensions and them being unsustainable if I recall.

Certainly, we did on Alberta's Economic Future Committee embark on a number of ventures, and that was only one of many where we went out and talked to a lot of people about a lot of things. I do remember going to Grande Prairie for that same reason, with that same committee, and to Fort McMurray, Lethbridge, Medicine Hat, Calgary, Edmonton. It was a very well-done, I think, exercise in trying to garner the support from the people that wanted to support what was going on and to also get great feedback.

In other events during the time when I was on that committee we also worked on, believe it or not, high-speed rail. We spent an awful lot of time in committees going around talking to people about the potential for high-speed rail in Alberta. I thought that was a very interesting and rewarding venture as well. Another one that comes to mind in that same regard is the long-time duration of meetings and the work that we spent in looking into the best way to actually develop other forms of electricity in Alberta, and that would be with more hydroelectric projects. It was a great time and a great way to get the information. We had I don't know how many different companies and organizations coming into these committees to provide us with information.

Madam Speaker, I think it's the kind of thing that this government again needs to look at seriously. There's nothing wrong with sending it to committee. There's absolutely no reason in the world not to do it. There's no valid justification not to proceed in that manner.

I would urge the members of this House to please vote yes to this amendment. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any further questions or comments?

Seeing none, I will recognize the hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak against Bill 6 and in favour of sending it to a legislative policy committee, the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship.

I spoke against this bill in second reading. Since that time there's been another rally out here on the steps of the Legislature and several town hall meetings against this bill, at least one of which was held in an NDP riding. Even the fact that a couple of these town halls were held in NDP ridings, organized by someone other than

the NDP MLAs in that riding, who haven't been – well, I want to say that they haven't been listening. I hate to say that, but I keep getting their e-mails and their calls, so even if those people didn't organize those meetings for farmers and ranchers, it didn't slow down the questions from the farmers and ranchers. They absolutely and completely do not understand why their government refuses to listen, refuses to tap the brakes on this piece of legislation, refuses to give any inkling of an answer, even from the cabinet ministers. This is a slap in the face to the questions that are being asked by the farmers and ranchers.

12:00

You know, Madam Speaker, all parties within these walls, within this room, that is considered the centre of democracy in Alberta, likely hold some or all of the same values dear: freedom, equality, diversity, tolerance, and respect. But when we look at what is happening with this intolerable bill that's being shoved down the throats of voters, voters that represent one of the most established and important industries in this province, I can't help but think that these values are just not being represented in this House.

I want to quantify the importance of this issue before us. Next to oil, gas, and petrochemicals, crop and livestock represent one of the province's biggest exports, and as global demand for food rises, these markets will continue to grow. The voters and constituents that represent this portion of Alberta's economy, which, of course, is agriculture, that is destined to grow exponentially as demand across the world rises, wonder out loud: why is it that this government is lacking in one integral part of the human condition, that being compassion, that would make it abundantly clear that the people in this province who are charged with feeding the world actually matter to this government, matter enough to listen? They wonder why this isn't part of the Alberta government's list of values, at least when it comes to them.

It's one thing to listen, but as we've seen here, there's no guarantee that the concerns will actually be addressed. It's entirely another to actually take what you're hearing and let it affect your decisions, to show respect for the people giving you these suggestions by involving them in that decision-making process. The part that is missing, Madam Speaker, is compassion.

It's compassion in this situation. A compassionate government would listen, in a real sense, to people that take the time to come to town hall meetings. A compassionate government and its representatives would answer questions that are put forth by voters and constituents and give reasonable answers rather than simply saying: I can't answer that. I think that Albertans are actually quite concerned that their government is showing no compassion for a portion of the population that wants some answers, a portion of the population that's willing to give up days of work or have a neighbour help them by doing their chores so that they can make their way to a consultation meeting or a town hall meeting to try to get some answers to a piece of legislation that is about to change their lives.

I just want to read a few lines from a letter I've got here, Madam Speaker. I'll be happy to table these letters tomorrow. I have a few I want to read from.

In her election platform, Premier Notley promised this: "We will build standards based on independent science and international best practices, designed transparently in careful consultation with Albertans."

In her speech on election night, she promised to "always work to keep your trust."

Repeatedly we have been promised transparency and consultation . . .

Please hear this. Farmers don't want a few exemptions or amendments. They want consultation on issues that run deeper in order that they can feel secure that you understand all the consequences of this legislation that they can clearly see.

I'm reading verbatim.

At the moment they feel that you are throwing the small farms of Alberta on some sacrificial pyre and not one of them understands why. What really is the agenda here?

Regarding WCB: It is a system that isn't working well in Alberta. Please fix the system before mandatory inclusion of the agricultural sector. No farm or ranch, no employer or employee will say no to a system of protection and compensation that works!

So how do we answer this e-mail from a constituent? She wants consultation. I just want to define consultation, Madam Speaker. The NDP government has held several what they call consultation meetings, that were deliberately held with, well, far too few seats for the folks that were expected to arrive. The consultation meeting in Okotoks, I understand, was actually held out in a parking lot. I understand that the minister stood on a chair, stood on something, and hollered for over two hours.

I just want to read from an e-mail that I received from a constituent that was at that meeting.

I was at the Okotoks Town Hall meeting when the question was put forward to your Agricultural minister and your Jobs, Safety, Training, Labour minister about the intent of Bill 6 to override any existing legislation at any government level, giving the current provincial government the authority to install wind turbines and solar panels on farm land, with or without land owner consent. There are two huge concerns with this component of Bill 6 but I will only touch on one. You say Bill 6 is all about safety, how can you possibly say that when other jurisdictions here in Canada and in other countries have deemed wind turbines a health hazard? Wind turbines are very controversial . . . Until you can prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that wind turbines pose no threat to the farm family/worker's health, you are contradicting yourself in saying Bill 6 is all about safety.

In your haste to pass this bill because of safety concerns, you are not allowed to pick and choose which safety issues are worth protecting the farm family and worker from. Either our safety is the utmost importance or something else is . . .

We simply do not trust you or your word that you will make amendments after the fact. You stated that you talked to stakeholders, yet farmers deny you contacted them. You have access to land titles and it would have been very easy for you to send out a questionnaire/survey to every farmer in this province. Another example leading to distrust is you said during your campaign that "not in your watch" would we have a PST. Yet you introduce a Carbon tax. I say if it walks like a duck, quacks like a duck, it must be a duck. I don't care what name you give it, you are trying to add an additional tax that you said you wouldn't. We don't trust you.

You know, Madam Speaker, it's not that there isn't some compassion shown by this government. We sit in this Chamber day after day, talking about passing bills to the segments of the population of this province that require some compassion. Each group we legislate for pays taxes. They buy homes, they buy vehicles, and on and on. They contribute to the economy of the province, and members from both sides of this House show compassion for those affected by our legislation. We all try to, anyway. But that isn't happening in this case. Certainly, the population numbers of farmers and ranchers could be considered a small segment of the voters and constituents of Alberta. That would be fair.

But, as I've stated earlier, they are obviously monster contributors to the economy. Yes, it is fair to say that economic contribution shouldn't be the only guiding light as to how you treat

any segment of the population – you'll get no argument from me there – but I guess the question then becomes: why is this agricultural segment of the population not being treated with the same compassion as any other small segment of the population that's been dealt with? The government side of this House is definitely not showing any compassion for these folks, or people wouldn't be gathering on the steps of the Legislature.

I have another letter here, Madam Speaker.

The farmers protesting this bill are being described as against safety and regulations. This is not true.

Once again, I am trying to read these verbatim.

We are asking for the legislation to be written . . . yup, they are trying to pass it without having any of the details, telling us "trust us, it will be fine." When we ask questions about how it will affect our day to day lives, we are either given no answers or given answers that change every day . . .

We are asking for consultation. We're not asking for every farmer to be asked their opinion. We are though asking for a governmental party . . . to meet with [farmers and listen to them.]

We are asking for safety . . . yup. We are not opposed to protecting farm workers and insuring that someone working is not in unnecessary danger. What we are trying to create is a safe environment for everyone. After all, most farm work is done by friends, family and neighbours. Their safety is a huge priority. We just ask that it takes into account how each different level of farming goes about business . . .

We are asking for the ability to decline WCB coverage. WCB coverage has always been available to farmers but because it was optional it gave us the ability to research our own coverage. What farmers learned is that more wide ranging, industry specific coverage is available and most of the time at a lower cost. Why should we have to settle for less or pay extra to have both?

12:10

Just a line or two from another e-mail:

This bill covers too many aspects, with too little information on every aspect. It needs to be sent to committee, or dissolved and re-tabled as separate bills for the multiple areas it covers, with increased detail and information regarding each and every area. The NDP is asking citizens of Alberta to trust what they may do in the future, when they refuse to take the time to listen to us now. Consultation after the Bill has been passed is unacceptable. The NDP as a government has a responsibility to be informed, by their own consultative process – not those done by past governments, which is the leg they continue to stand on as their reasoning for pushing this bill through.

The NDP's platform during the Election was for Transparency in Government. So far, the NDP have failed Albertans with their back-door negotiations . . . and hidden agendas!

Stop this bill and take the time required to do comprehensive consultation on each and every point of this bill – not slap a Band-Aid on one concern in hopes that the public and citizens of Alberta will accept and be quiet.

I was privileged to be part of a town hall meeting this weekend in Bassano. We had four MLAs from the Official Opposition as part of the meeting, with about 500 farmers and ranchers that had a ton of questions. The agriculture minister was in attendance at this meeting as well and sat with the opposition MLAs in front of this crowd. At the end of the meeting I shook the minister's hand and told him that I thought he showed good intentions by showing up to a meeting that his government hadn't organized for him. Unfortunately, that meeting was indicative of the meetings that have been held across the entire province, meetings that have included cabinet ministers of several different portfolios.

Madam Speaker, there is a common theme from all these meetings, and that theme is that everyone that leaves these

meetings is more frustrated than when they showed up for the meeting because the answers that are given are, at the very least, canned answers, answers that don't have any meat in them, answers that tend to make the persons querying feel that their brand new government has no intention of listening to their concerns about their proposed legislation. Do you know what they're told? They're told time after time: I'll take this back to my colleagues. Now, that's not an answer, especially when it is stated time after time in a two-hour meeting. Furthermore, the feedback certainly does not seem to be making it back to their colleagues as promised if the Premier's and the NDP government's cavalier attitude is any indication.

I have another couple of lines from another e-mail.

If it appears that the rural community is over reacting to Bill 6, please consider this. We react because we feel threatened by too much regulation . . . Our industry is already heavily regulated by the unpredictable things like weather, animals, markets . . .

The issue I have is with the NDP's attempt at sneaking such a bill through without any consultation or even comprehension of the bill, particularly when we are told some amendments might be done after the bill is firmly in place. The NDP has done nothing yet to earn our trust so we can't trust the NDP on this one either.

Forty five days to pass a bill without proper consultation is wrong when it will affect many Alberta futures.

I sincerely hope that for my constituents and the constituents of the NDP MLAs, to be perfectly honest, that won't return calls or letters with regard to this subject, and for those constituents that feel compelled to send those letters to me or other members of the opposition, something is being brought back to the colleagues of this government, that has been referred to in about every consultation.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments under 29(2)(a)?
The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Yes. I just wonder if the Member for Little Bow has any further comments he would like to add to his discourse.

Thank you.

Mr. Schneider: Madam Speaker, I hope that every question that's been asked of this government by farmers and ranchers in those meetings is being brought back. But do you know what the problem is? The problem is that the people that are asking these questions in these meetings, that they aren't getting reasonable answers to, do not trust that this government is listening to anything they're saying, let alone bringing information back to Edmonton, to their colleagues, for further study or examination that would influence the outcome of Bill 6.

Another couple of lines from a different e-mail:

This intrusive legislation that the government has produced without any consultation whatsoever with the people it will affect is not only harmful to farm safety; it is just plain wrong. This government has lost any trust that they might have had with the people of Alberta by deliberately misinforming them regarding this flawed bill. I implore you to please table this bill and send it to committee or defeat it altogether until such a time as the government has consulted with the people it affects.

A few more lines from a different one, Madam Speaker:

You and your government should be ashamed of yourselves, saying that you are concerned about Farm Safety while pushing through a bill that your party would have fought against during the old regime because of its clarity. There has been no education, limited consultations regarding the proposed changes in this over reaching bill. Change never is achieved with laws; only education can effect change. I propose that you kill Bill 6 and do the

appropriate education and consultations and re-do the proposed changes with multiple bills.

With regard to your consultation in Okotoks on December 2, 2015, I was shocked at how you treated the people there; your government did not provide a safe environment to consult in. Holding it outdoors without prior knowledge meant that many were not dressed appropriately, all because your government didn't reserve a larger venue . . .

Stop and think about what your government is doing and how it will affect the family farm.

Just one more letter, a couple of lines from it. This was sent to every MLA, so if you haven't read it – well.

As an agricultural producer in southern Alberta I am e-mailing you to ask that you slow the process down for Bill 6 so that it can be carried out in a way that encourages open communication, engages industry stakeholders, allows for industry input and provides more time for details to be formulated and presented.

I am concerned that by rushing this Bill through without proper study and agricultural producer involvement the Bill will lack proper design and will lack supported implementation. The method by which the Alberta Government has chosen to push this Bill through is alienating the agricultural community and dividing the province. I have always been a proud Albertan but I am saddened by the lack of respect the Alberta Government is showing this industry.

Bill 6 has serious impacts on how farmers operate their business and how they work with their families on the farm. All I am requesting is that the current Alberta Government asks the agricultural industry for input before the Bill is passed to ensure proper and complete legislation and regulations are created.

For these reasons I ask that Bill 6 be sent to the legislative policy committee for a proper consultation to be done and answers provided throughout the consultation process. Only in that way can we help the NDP improve the bill and get it right or, failing that, move to kill the bill.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any further comments under Standing Order 29(2)(a)?

If not, then the Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's been a long and extensive evening, that I look forward to continuing tomorrow morning. I would move to adjourn debate for the night.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

Mr. Bilous: Madam Speaker, I move that we adjourn until 9 tomorrow morning.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 12:19 a.m. on Wednesday to 9 a.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday morning, December 9, 2015

Day 31

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

First Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

9 a.m.

Wednesday, December 9, 2015

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Deputy Speaker: Good morning. Let us reflect. As we begin another day in service to our province and its people, let us continue to work in a spirit of co-operation, always mindful of the traditions of parliamentary democracy that guide our work.

Please be seated.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 6

Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act

Mr. Cooper moved that the motion for second reading be amended to read that Bill 6, Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act, be not now read a second time but that the subject matter of the bill be referred to the Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship in accordance with Standing Order 74.2.

[Adjourned debate December 8: Mr. Fildebrandt]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's an honour to rise today, which is a fine day in the province of Alberta, to speak to the amendments on Bill 6 as an agriculturalist, a lifetime agriculturalist. Bill 6 is an important piece of legislation and, primarily, important legislation for farmers, farmers like myself. The implications of that bill will affect our family farm and many across the province. We've seen many producers at the Legislature, on the Legislature steps, at various government consultative meetings, and at town halls in locations like Bassano. There a great number of producers came out.

I was pleased to see the people from the Hutterian Brethren come out at Bassano because those people have a particular religious belief. The Hutterian Brethren are in North America because of their persecution in eastern Europe. They came to North America to escape that form of persecution based on political events of that time.

Madam Speaker, I have some notes that I'm hoping to go by here in speaking about the Bill 6 amendments. One of the things that I find is that, of all departments that this government of Alberta administers, agriculture is indeed the most diverse. Agriculture is affected by the weather, the elements, but there are secondary resource industries, not unlike what's happening on our farm: the development of the petroleum resources, the development of the mineral resources in gravel and other things like that. In the area that I represent, Drumheller-Stettler, the diversity is represented by an agency of the Crown called the special areas, and it truly is special in many ways.

With this diversity comes an endless list of scenarios that play out every day on Alberta's farms and ranches. It was interesting. As we were attending the Chamber here, Madam Speaker, my compatriot here to my right, from Edmonton-Rutherford, was talking about the issues with calving and how the hours that we're keeping in the Chamber here are not unlike the calving times. It's completely irregular.

I remember on one occasion – and the Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock is also appreciative of that – my wife and I purchased some cattle to improve our cattle herd, and the seller assured us that these calves were not going to arrive before the 1st of April. But when we were in Vancouver on a family holiday on Family Day, in February, the neighbour that was looking after our stock assured us that we had been told a fib, that these calves were arriving in great numbers. When we did finally come back from Vancouver, it was 30 below for a week constantly, so my wife and I took shifts to make sure that these newly born calves would not perish in the weather. We knew and we know from personal experience that legislation does not necessarily apply in those types of extreme circumstances.

Common sense and education are what the orders of the day are, and trying to legislate changes to a diverse industry like agriculture requires a comprehension that takes into account the concerns and the conditions of all sectors of this industry. I have business acquaintances at great distances in the fertilizer industry, and I found it interesting that just two days ago at the fertilizer plant in Medicine Hat there were two employees who were taken to the hospital because of their exposure to ammonia. We use anhydrous ammonia on our farm. My son is fully qualified to transport the pressure vessel and required material, and he has his hazardous-goods, his WHMIS, and his safety qualifications to do that. At 24 years of age I'm pleased that he also has his class 1 driver's licence to operate the semis that are required to move this fertilizer product.

Madam Speaker, safety is fully comprehensible at our farm and many like it. These sectors are fully coherent and relevant to that. We are not allowed to attend plants like the plant in Medicine Hat that had the safety accident because we don't have OH and S and WHMIS qualifications presently, and we would not be able to unless we complied with the requirements, the workmen's compensation and the OH and S requirements, that that plant site has. I find it interesting that even though that plant site in Medicine Hat – and the Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat fully is aware of that. Those people have all those safety qualifications, safety training, safety material . . .

An Hon. Member: One guy died.

Mr. Strankman: I understand that, unfortunately, one of the workers did pass. Although it's not a farm accident, it's a work-related accident. It was horrific, because in the training that we've taken – and I, too, have the same qualifications as my son. How anhydrous works is that it takes in the oxygen, and you simply can't breathe.

Madam Speaker, I have to reiterate that safety – safety in capital letters – on farms is of the utmost importance. A loss of one life – and I wasn't aware until just immediately that there was a loss of life regarding an agricultural product that we use. It's an important product for the growth of foodstuffs and the enhanced development of these plants. What anhydrous ammonia does is that it increases the uptake of carbon dioxide, which is believed in some circles to be a greenhouse gas. In some circles there is that belief.

Madam Speaker, the loss of one life or the injury of one is too many. I can relate to a family member. Just at the tender age of two my cousin also received a serious arm accident, and it affected his life. Even to this day he still is recovering, if you will, or adjusting to a farm accident, a machinery accident that affected his arm.

With that, Madam Speaker, farming is just not a job; it's a way of life. We know that while we're out there in the special area or in east-central Alberta, in the diverse constituency of Drumheller-Stettler, we are a great distance from safety, remedial services. It's a 45-minute to a one-hour drive just from our farm to a hospital.

Some of the members in the Chamber, repeat members, will know that the emergency care service in Consort is on a rotating basis, so when we drive to the community of Consort, we don't necessarily know whether there'll be a doctor there. That may only be one stop on the way to where you're going for emergency care.

9:10

The advancement of cellphones in regard to safety has been exactly perfect for our conditions although, because we live by the Saskatchewan border, many people do not realize that should they phone 911, sometimes the cellphones ring out to Saskatchewan. Therefore, there is no way that the Saskatchewan people will respond to an Albertan call.

With that, Madam Speaker, we know that safety is important. It's imperative that we have that because in these jobs we create the food that goes on Albertans' tables and indeed Canadian tables. The packing plants, Lakeside Packers in Brooks and Cargill at High River, are international-quality plants. They provide food that's distributed across Canada and indeed into the United States. In some cases, like Lambco at Innisfail, their processed lamb food goes internationally, and they make a marvellous market out of that.

Madam Speaker, I'll reiterate that there is no farmer in Alberta who does not want their operation to be as safe as possible. Hopefully, I can reiterate that because on our farm we do use a dangerous product, anhydrous ammonia, and we do use certified and licensed chemicals. On our farm we do use and have hired a complete aerial application, and we have since 1967. My father started it in 1967. My wife's father started aerial application in 1964. There are some goodly members across the way and even possibly on our side of the Chamber – it's interesting – that maybe don't relate to those kinds of years because that was somewhat before their cycle of gathering knowledge. Nobody cares more about farm safety than the moms and dads who operate them and call them home.

The gap between this government's proposed Bill 6, the Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act, and the common sense that Alberta farmers inherently believe in and deal with on a daily basis, when they're working with cattle or bison or even farm machinery that uses hydraulic equipment, powered, motorized equipment that is capable of inflicting damage, not unlike, Madam Speaker, the vehicles that we see on one of the main thoroughfares, Jasper Avenue – it's uncanny to me to watch people stand three to six feet away on a curb while a multitonne, industrial-sized vehicle, i.e. a city bus, goes by at 30 kilometres. The people stand there impervious to the potential danger that that piece of flying steel could inflict upon them. It's based on the fact that they do it every day, and they become complacent with that. You see people standing there, reading their newspapers, looking at their cellphones within six feet of a vehicle that probably weighs 20 tonnes, that's passing them at 30 kilometres an hour. Then you'll see out in the intersection, where people are passing at 30 kilometres an hour, which is a closing speed, a closing rate of 60 kilometres an hour, and they have no consequence to that.

It's interesting that a lot of those people don't have WCB coverage either. Possibly the bus driver does. I don't know; we haven't checked into whether that union actually has WCB coverage when they're at work.

Madam Speaker, agriculture is a vital part of Alberta's economy. It is shocking to me – and I'm trying to give some relative examples here – that this government has decided to introduce this legislation, Bill 6, which now we're debating amendments to, without a full, consultative, in-depth relationship with the ranchers and farmers. The ranchers and farmers that I've talked to in my constituency – I'm hoping to speak to many more in the community of Hanna this

Friday night at a town hall. I'm offering a full and complete invitation to any member of the government caucus to attend. I did that in question period yesterday, and I'm doing it now so that they will attend.

The Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments for the hon. member under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I was riveted by what my colleague was saying, and it would be appropriate to hear him continue along the same way that he was going. Please, I would love to hear the rest of your thoughts.

Mr. Strankman: Well, thank you to the Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake for that. I don't know that it was exactly riveting. I don't perceive to be speaking at a quarter after 9 in the morning in a riveting conversation.

I am going to follow up with the theme of consultation. In the democratic facility that we're in, where we have a chance every day when we're in the Chamber to have a direct back and forth, the in-your-face portion of democracy, that the government would be wanting to bring forward this bill and its extremely wide-reaching impacts – I sympathize with the Premier in her belief in the idea of protecting people. I hope that I've given examples that we do that on our farm, and I know others and many Albertans who do. The statistical information that we've had says that even without regulation Albertans are not statistically above any other safety record of any other province.

To bring this forward in 45 days or less without full consultation – I've brought forward letters, and I've spoken to some 18 different stakeholder organizations, who are not happy with the consultative process that's brought forward. We've had unprecedented demonstrations on the steps of the Legislature to that effect. It's frustrating that we can't achieve a democratic solution to this, and the government is resorting to the powers that they have, whether it be closure or any other method within this place, to bring this legislation forward. We're still getting calls and letters coming in. Our constituency offices are inundated with this material. It's frustrating that we are in this place, where we do get a chance from, in this case, 9 in the morning to the wee hours of the morning to have these debates, and the government is marginalizing the comments that are coming from our side of the House and marginalizing, I believe, the voices that are being heard outside the House in relation to this. It's openly frustrating.

One of the bigger comments that we bring forward is the definitive wish by the government to bring forward only one agency, the WCB, to be allowed to provide these workers with insurance. Many operations already have a choice solution that they bring forward, and that is private suppliers of insurance. It's openly frustrating. Reverting to the 18 farm organizations that I've been in consultation with, they do believe there needs to be some reform, and they've sought out these private sources to effect safety for their workers, for their employees. In some cases they have a very close personal relationship like the rancher-owner of Little Gem Ranches in my constituency, who called me and said that their employee, who has a family relationship with them, now has to have a completely different relationship, which may cause animosity, may cause contempt. It may create a completely different relationship than what was there. Bill 6 is one of these pieces of legislation that may lead to that.

9:20

These people are working out their solutions on their own, and they simply don't need to have legislation to do this. They've been

doing this for a goodly number of years, statistically within the range of any other province across the land, and we can't see how WCB coverage would make anything better. Even the Premier has stated on previous occasions, recorded conversations, that WCB is in sore need of overhaul. Why did the government not try to achieve the benefits of that organization?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise once again to bring the voices of my constituents to this Legislature and to all Albertans by speaking about the importance of referring Bill 6 to the legislative policy committee.

You know, daily I'm told – in the last two weeks it's been daily, hourly. We've been getting so many e-mails, so many phone calls from constituents about their voices not being heard. They have hired me to be their representative in this House and to bring their message here, just as all the members here have been hired to represent all Albertans in this Legislature. When I say all of the constituents, these are the farmers, too. We need to listen to the farmers, and they're clearly giving their voice. They clearly have a voice that's been shouting out and saying: stop; kill Bill 6; send it to committee.

That's what we're talking about now. This is a referral motion to send it to committee. Consultation: that's what they're saying to me. They want to have consultation. They don't believe that they've had an opportunity to have that consultation, that opportunity to talk to the government about what they believe is a problem. They've been using us as their sounding board to speak for them, but they would really, truly like to have this in committee so that they would have an opportunity to talk to the government and tell them their concerns.

Governments need to work for our constituents. We're all public servants, every one of us here. We're public servants, not public dictators. We shouldn't be running this from the top down, in an autocratic tone. We should be working here from the grassroots up, especially with these farmers, listening to their concerns and finding out what they want and how they can make this better. I believe that their input would help change this, Madam Speaker, and I think that we would have a better chance of having a bill that wouldn't be so contentious if we had conversations with constituents, the farmers and the ranchers.

I hoped that this government would be different. I hoped that they would listen. They said that they would. I know that the NDP government said that they would, but I guess not.

You know, I talked to one of my constituents in Killam. We had a town hall meeting in Killam. His name was Doug. Doug told me that no one in the room was against a conversation about safety or change. He said that this is a problem about the legislation. He told me: "I had an opportunity to participate in the rally on the steps with nearly 2,000 other producers and then attend question period. As the opposition parties defended farm interests, the governing party seemed more concerned about the success of Christmas lights in Calgary being changed to LED." He felt that was shameful. They came there with a true concern, and that's what they heard out on those steps of the Legislature. They heard from different people that they were excited about these LED lights. That's the word that I got from him.

I'd like to go on to a word, the word "represent." Represent means to be entitled or appointed to act or to speak for someone, especially in an official capacity. That would mean that we all have been commissioned with a great privilege to represent Albertans, an absolute, great privilege. I'm awed by the honour. Every time I look at the building and I walk through these doors, I'm awed by

this honour that I have to represent Albertans and represent my constituents, and I'm sure every last one of you, at least in our Wildrose Party, is honoured to represent your constituents and to be able to talk about Bill 6.

Wildrose believes in real representation. The farmers and the ranchers have asked this Assembly to stop and pause so this bill can be dealt with in a committee so that all the stakeholders – all the stakeholders – have time to provide input. The majority of the stakeholders represented in this situation are farmers, Madam Speaker.

The community of farmers and ranchers isn't quite sure what has hit them, Madam Speaker. When the legislation was tabled a few weeks ago, farmers and ranchers were surprised to find that the bill combined many complex elements like WCB, OH and S, the Employment Standards Code, and the Labour Relations Code. I think I referred to it as an ominous – I can't even say the word now.

An Hon. Member: Ominous omnibus.

Mr. Taylor: Omnibus. It's a tongue twister. Try saying that three times fast.

Since that time they have gathered across Alberta and here at the Legislature to let this government know that these changes should not have been pushed ahead. Rushing this bill through over a couple of weeks, especially due to the outrage, is clearly a mistake. I would think that now would be the right time to reflect and think about what it is that we are really trying to achieve here. If it's power and control at stake, I understand why this government wants to push this bill through, but if it's actual concern for the farmers and their families, the neighbours, the workers, then let us take our time and include the needs of about 44,000 or 45,000 farms in this bill.

Rushing through the amendments that have been introduced on this, given the backlash, will not correct this situation. We have reached the stage where we need to take some real time before making these changes, some real time, not just a few days, not till January 1 and then have consultation afterwards. Farmers don't like the idea of having consultation after this bill is passed. They've clearly told me time and time again that that's not proper consultation. They want to bring it to a committee and have their voices heard, have their voices heard over a period of 90 days, 120 days, you know, a year. Let's get this bill right. Why can't we slow down and start by improving education and holding discussions with farmers and ranchers and learning?

These are massive changes that we need to get right, not just draft up legislation that will affect so many people. We need consultation. We need their voices. We need that consultation. I know I've said it before – and I'll be saying it again – but it's so important that we listen to the farmers and consult with them. If we consult with them and we can actually look at what they've done on other bills, I think we could make a great bill. If we look to B.C. and say, "Okay; you've got these parts there; now we've got what we want here in Alberta," I think you can come up with something that's going to be tenable for the farmers.

9:30

They want safety. There's nobody that cares more about safety than the moms and dads that own and operate the farms that are out there, so let's make legislation that has education and has an opportunity to let them have their voice – their voice – to be able to speak about this. You know, by pushing through in such a forceful manner, without consultation and recognition of the farmers, we have begun a process whereby they are starting to feel alienated and picked on. They feel as if they're being perceived as uneducated

and that their industry is not valued, and nothing could be further from the truth.

Farmers take on so many different jobs. They take on jobs like being accountants, mechanics, welders. They have to be hedge fund traders. They have to go look and see where this market is at, how they can make the most money off this. The more legislation and the more things cost: well, they're market takers; they're not market makers, so they have to be even more cognizant and more risky with what's going on in the market. It's super important for them. I know they are experts. They are also experts in soil conditions. They've got to be able to read the soil and make sure of what fertilizer goes into that soil. So they've got to know so much more than just, say, the average person.

I talked to a guy named Brandon. He's from my riding, and he's sitting over in Holden. He was telling me that he works in a variety of different careers. He's six months away from becoming a mechanical engineer. He's worked in the construction industry. He's also worked in the oil industry and realizes the importance of safety and regulations. However, he feels Bill 6 will cause unsafe working environments. He doesn't feel there's going to be total compliance. He wants consultation. That is what he takes away from that. He feels it's going to take away rights of the individual. We need to bring this to committee, to let them have a chance to talk. He feels that he has not been given any say in how this bill has been laid out. If this bill is going to be passed, many aspects need to be changed, he was telling me. This bill considers farming as a job, a career, and it is not a job or a career. It's a lifestyle, and he's proud of it.

I've seen some of the signs they have used in the protest, one in particular that reads: farmers feed everyone. I mean, where do you think the food comes from? Farmers feed everyone. Have you thanked a farmer? Have you guys gone out and just done that much, thanked a farmer and said: "Thank you for the food. Thank you for the grains so we can have our bread. Thank you for the cattle so we can have the beef that we eat or the pigs so we can have our pork or for any one of the different dairy products, the milk, the eggs – there are so many – the poultry that we have"? Everybody needs to stop and thank a farmer for what they contribute to this society. Without them we're not eating.

Madam Speaker, are we truly showing farmers the respect they deserve? They do feed everyone. Is this how we thank them? I would like to know what other MLAs would eat at home, in restaurants if it weren't for the farmers. Every time you eat bread, a vegetable, a piece of meat, do you think about the work that went into it and where it came from or the many hours of work feeding and planting and harvesting?

Madam Speaker, they don't stop. When the cows are giving birth, they don't stop. They keep with the cattle. That has to be a safety issue for the farms. They have to make sure that that calf is born correctly. If the weather is in such a state, they know that in three days they're harvesting, and they know that in three days this weather is going to go, and it's going to change. They can see that on the Weather Network. When they look at the Weather Network and it says that it's going to snow and it's going to snow for the next week, do you think the farmers are going to stop working? They have to keep going out in those fields.

This needs to be able to go to committee so they can be consulted. This government has forgotten about the farmers' insight because it wants to pursue its own agenda and make some changes, some of which may not even be needed. Why can't we take the time to get this right? Farmers want to protect their families, their neighbours, their workers. They also want to have a little say in what goes down in this important piece of legislation. I think that it's only fair that we include them, and that is what they are asking. They've been

clearly asking this. They asked it on the steps of the Legislature. They've asked it in e-mails. I know they've had e-mails that have been sent to all the ridings because I've been CCed on the letters that they've sent to the Premier or to the Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, who has 19,055 farms in his riding.

In fact, if people are interested, his phone number, if you want to make sure you get a hold of him, is 780.352.0241. Again, that's 780.352.0241. Call now before we don't have a chance.

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, under 29(2)(a)? Go ahead.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I would like to ask the hon. member. I've received several e-mails and phone calls from third- and fourth-generation ranchers around the entire province that are hopeful that this Bill 6 will get hoisted to committee, where they come in and talk about how to ensure that the family farm gets safer. They're hearing from a lot of other Albertans – oil and gas workers, construction workers – that are very, very concerned that at this time this bill is going to have effects on employment in the agriculture industry at a time when they are facing such tremendous hardship themselves in our overall Alberta economy and with the lack of confidence that seems to be out there. I wonder if the Member for Battle River-Wainwright is hearing similar things.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Yes, I'm absolutely hearing concerns about the employment and how many people they can actually hire as a result of what's going on here. They're saying: how is it going to – well, they don't know what's going to be rolled out, and they don't know how it's going to be rolled out. They don't know the effects of what's going to happen to them. Just like the other member, I've talked to people that have had five generations of farms, and they're frankly concerned about what they're going to be able to hire. Do they have to now prove that they have WCB coverage if they're an independent worker? Or do they have to hire these people on and now go through all the work of having to get all this WCB and OH and S and different paperwork that's involved and then have the worry of making sure that it's in a good, orderly fashion in a desk somewhere when the OH and S operator comes and knocks on their door asking to see this paperwork, that they have to make sure that it's in good working order?

Some of them are saying that this is too much, so they're questioning if they should be hiring more people or if they should just go with automation and quit hiring more people. This could really affect jobs. I know this government has said that they want to protect jobs, but what's happening here, I'm afraid, is that it has the opposite effect. It's going to have the opposite effect in that there are going to be fewer jobs that are going to have people employed. If we have these certain hours of work that they are restricted to work at, well, there are only so many people that actually know how to operate farm equipment and how to operate things on the farm. There are very specific tasks that occur on a farm, and these people are concerned about being able to find them, so if they have to stop and let this person have the break – like I was mentioning before, it's going to be coming, and they know this is going to happen – well, they'd rather have that person for a couple more hours.

The people that are signing on to work on these things understand. They understand that if they tell their employer, "No, I can't work anymore," the employer will just say: "Fine. That's good." But the majority of people that work on farms are more than happy to go ahead and work and work with the farmers that are there.

Thank you.

9:40

The Deputy Speaker: We still have a few minutes under 29(2)(a). Any further members wishing to comment on the Member for Battle River-Wainwright?

Go ahead, hon. minister.

Mr. Mason: I appreciated the hon. member's speech. I know he's coming from a sincere place, and I know that he's attempting to represent his constituents, but he made a couple of statements about our views over here that I wish to correct. He said that the farmers were feeling that they were unappreciated, that their industry was unappreciated, and that they were seen as, you know, pretty unsophisticated. I just wanted to correct that because we have the utmost regard for that industry and the people who work in it. We know where food comes from; it's not the store. We know that. I think that if there was a prevailing view on this side, it would be that farmers are sophisticated businesspeople, and in some cases they run quite large industries – quite large – and they employ lots of workers. So from our perspective, Madam Speaker, I think it's important to note that people in business who employ people have responsibilities as well.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Ceci: Thank you very much. Madam Speaker, I rise to not support the amendment to Bill 6. Referring this to committee is not what I think needs to happen. Now is the time to deal with this bill, for reasons of timeliness. I find the whole issue of farm safety critical, that we move forward with it in a timely fashion.

It's been a while since I've been on a family farm. As a teen and even up to when I was 22, I was working on farms in southern Ontario for extended family members. They were managed by my older cousins, and I can remember those times with a lot of fondness. They were the best wages I ever made in my life up to that point. While I never felt unsafe in the workplace, there were things that could have been harmful, of course. There was exposure to herbicides that was happening on a regular basis early in the crop year. There was lots of work with heavy machinery. But, thankfully, you know, the kinds of things that were done to pass on the safety from the farm owner to the manager to the lead hand to me working in the fields all worked out okay.

While I haven't had a tremendous amount of experience on farms – and it's been a long while, for sure, since I've been working on farms – I have had experience working in workplaces, in factories in particular, where I felt quite unsafe. But being young and needing the job, I didn't do anything other than the best I could to protect myself in the workplace, by not partying a lot, going home and resting, coming back to work and being focused. To be sure, those were hard jobs, working a brake press that could bend quarter-inch steel, and the ramifications of a slip-up on that job would have been disastrous for me. It felt like there wasn't a lot of safety equipment, and there were old machines. For eight hours a day I was standing. It was tiring and laborious, but I did what I had to do to get past that job on a daily basis, get it behind me, and never look back, of course.

My point is that while that wasn't a ranch or a farm, I was a young man needing the money. I was not aware of what workplace rights I had, and I didn't speak up a lot because I needed to get the money so I could come back out west, frankly, and make my life out here. It's been a great life. But I can see how workers, paid employees in a farm or ranch setting like I was when I was a young man – and nothing bad happened to me on the farms that I worked on. But I could see how a young man in a ranch or farm setting who needs the money or is desperate or doesn't know his rights – and, frankly,

there are no kinds of protections like OH and S or WCB on a farm or ranch in this province – might not feel like they could refuse a dangerous job, how they might do all they could for their employer because they need the money or because they're really conscientious and want to do the best job they can possibly do. I can see how they may get into situations that could lead to outcomes that would be disastrous for them in the long run.

I think the time is now. We've heard many stories here about employment on farms and ranches that is not ideal. I've heard a lot of stories from people saying that, you know, it was the best time they ever had. There were talented people who could rope cows. They could treat them with medicine on a hillside. They could let them go, and everything worked out fine. But there are probably lots of situations that aren't ideal for workers on farms, and it's those situations we don't want to delay by a referral to committee. It's those situations. We want to kind of put some basic protections in place through this bill. It's those situations that aren't ideal, that would cause long-term ramifications for the person who was injured in the workplace, that need to be addressed.

I am conscious that this probably is a defining moment for us all with regard to a decision around the bill. I want to say that coming down on the side of protecting workers' rights is not a bad side to be on for any of us. It's a side we all should be on. So it should go forward now. It should put some basic protections in place for paid employees on farms. It should ensure that there's clarification that if you are an owner of a farm, if you're an extended family member, if you're a volunteer, that's not the situation we're endeavouring to address. We're endeavouring to address the situation where a person may feel like they don't have protections in the workplace.

Madam Speaker, I think a hoisting, as somebody called it, or an amendment or, ultimately, a referral to committee, which would prevent us from moving forward in an expeditious fashion, is not the right thing to do.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. leader under 29(2)(a).

Mr. Jean: Thank you. I did have an opportunity to listen to the speaker, the Minister of Finance. My question really relates to two things he said. The first was that he said that, of course, this is a defining moment. I agree with him. This is a defining moment for the government. It shows clearly, whether it be Bill 6 or Bill 8, that they're not consulting and not doing proper consultation with stakeholders, in particular school boards, who are still confused in relation to Bill 8 because we haven't had enough time to actually look at what's been brought forward, and Bill 6, of course, because there's been absolutely no consulting by this government whatsoever for farms. So I do agree with him. I think it's a defining moment, and it especially is going to be defined in the next election in rural Alberta.

You know, one thing that I do notice is that he kept mentioning: it should; it should; it should. Now, that is clearly what the Wildrose is talking about. We don't know – and neither does the Minister of Finance – what this bill is going to do. It should do things, but nobody knows what it's going to do, and that's because there has not been proper consultation.

I just say to the minister this. They brought forward a bill. The bill on its face and on content was totally inappropriate, and in fact Albertans rejected that bill. The government itself rejected that bill after saying and arguing in this place that it was a perfect bill. They rejected their own argument by bringing in not just one amendment, not just half a page of amendments but more pages of amendments than the original bill was, and they did it in just two days, Madam Speaker. Doesn't that clearly say that the government was wrong

the first time? What makes this minister believe they're right this time after only two days of changes and still no consultations with farmers? Farmers are still angry. They are not listening, Madam Speaker. What does he say to that?

9:50

Mr. Ceci: Thank you for the question. I think this is the first time that the Leader of the Opposition has asked me a question, so thank you very much for the opportunity to address the concerns.

You know, the defining moment: perhaps we need to kind of get our head around who it's defining for. It will be defining for the person who is injured. That's who will see this moment as a period in time when they were let down by their Legislature in this province. It's defining for them because they will not be able to go back and receive adequate insurance coverage for their disability, their injury. It's defining for them because they will live a life like the stories we have heard of some Albertans who have had to go through much pain and suffering to get basic workplace coverage for themselves and their families. That's who it'll be defining for. All of us will be fine. We will get up the next day. We will say: it's a great day in Alberta. But that person and the person after them and the person after them will be defined by our inability to move forward on this issue.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I think just some comments. This goes to the trust issue. We've seen this minister now just do exactly what the Premier has done in this Assembly over and over and over again, and that is to blame farmers and ranchers, say that for a hundred years they've been trying to hurt their employees, trying to kill their employees. This is why they're mad in rural Alberta. So through you, Madam Speaker, let me say: shame on the minister and shame on the Premier.

This is absolutely ridiculous. This is a government whose own documents show that they've tried to stop kids from participating in their family farms. They've tried to do that. Their minister now has risen in this House and has said that this is just the beginning, so we don't even know if we can trust their changes. Over and over and over the cabinet and the caucus across from me have stood up in this House and blamed farmers, said that farmers were trying to hurt people, said that farmers were trying to kill people and that that's what they're trying to rectify. That's not true, Madam Speaker. That is not true at all.

Farmers and ranchers are my neighbours. I love having them as my neighbours. I respect them very much. What these ministers are saying is absolutely ridiculous and not true. This caucus is all for safety, and so are farmers and ranchers. What we aren't for is a monster bill where nobody knows what it is, where this government doesn't even know what it is, that takes away the rights of farmers and ranchers. Let's be clear on that. It takes away the rights of farmers and ranchers without any consultation with the people that this legislation affects.

The only thing that this cabinet can do is to continually stand up in this House and blame good people: good people that make this province work, good people that have been here since long before any of us, good people that feed the world and feed this province. All this minister can do is stand up in this Assembly, Madam Speaker, over and over and blame farmers.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Airdrie.

Mrs. Pitt: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise today to speak in favour of the referral amendment for Bill 6. It should be no secret

where I or my colleagues stand on this issue. We do not support Bill 6. The farmers and ranchers of Alberta do not support Bill 6.

Madam Speaker, my caucus has heard from thousands of Albertans, and we've actually consulted with farmers about this bill. I believe it's quite easy to see that this bill needs to be completely redrawn. We have hosted telephone town halls, actual community meetings, responded to thousands of letters from within our constituencies and from others, especially from members opposite. Most importantly, we really listened. We listened to Albertans when the government did not.

The government wants this bill passed after only 45 days of being made public. This bill is one of the many reasons why they previously passed a motion for the House to sit mornings as well as afternoons and evenings. The NDP are determined to pass as much legislation as possible without consultation and education. They claim that this bill is about safety and protecting farmers, yet it ignores the key components of safety. I will repeat this very slowly, Madam Speaker: education. Education. Only this NDP government would conclude that legislation is the cause and effect of safety.

Madam Speaker, a bill of this magnitude, that affects 47,000 farms, needs to be dealt with in a proper way and should only be completed with extensive consultation. Consultation. Extensive consultation. If we say it enough, maybe you'll understand. The fact is that farmers have been left out, forcing even Albertan musicians and icons like George Canyon and Paul Brandt to lay out to the Premier how the family farm is a way of life and not just a business. Paul Brandt is an Airdrie boy, by the way.

To put it plainly, this Premier and her government are completely disconnected from rural Albertans. Further, and more importantly, this is just another way this government is reminding rural residents that their voice does not matter. These guys aren't going to forget, either.

If they won't go to the farmers, I will bring their voices here to this Legislature along with my colleagues here. I have spoken with many farmers in my riding and want to tell this government what I am hearing. To quote one Albertan:

I am a resident of a small town in Alberta. I am also a rancher's daughter that knows the value of being raised on a ranch in northeastern B.C. There are many different hours than any other industry. There is an opportunity to learn about animals and planting, from being a little person up until an age to safely work on my own. I chose town life; however, I will always celebrate who grows our food for everyone and who works hours without compensation to make their farm or ranch the best it can be.

The farmers want the government and the urban people to understand and respect them. They feel like they haven't been asked, just told, and that is because normally they keep working and they're quiet. Please listen to them for the next few months or years before the bill is proposed again. Set up meetings in every constituency and really listen to their needs.

I am thankful that I was raised on a ranch. I have many skills that others do not. Please look for those skills when listening to the food producers.

This is one letter. It's representative of thousands. Don't bite the hand that feeds you. You've done that.

Community consultation is not simply a stand-alone exercise but the building of nurturing relationships. We can't create policy without listening to the people whose lives are impacted by these policies. Truly, guys, give your heads a shake. I truly believe that farm parents are way more concerned about the safety of their children and will absolutely do the utmost to protect them. They will protect their children, not the government. Pushing unenforceable, expensive legislation onto the backs of our hard-working families and farms is not what we were elected to do.

The implementation of this bill without consultation will only serve to be a huge windfall for WCB, will not affect farm safety one bit, and will only denigrate our democratic process. This is not just a business. Like we've said, it's a way of life. Workers are not the proletariat; they are children, family members, friends, and neighbours. I think it is absurd to think that bringing in broad legislation will change anyone's willingness to keep their loved ones safe, especially when it comes to their children. Farmers will accept anything that will make farms safer, better, and more efficient, but as you can see from the mounting opposition, this is not the case. Never before has this Legislature seen protests like the ones that have been happening here – never before – from real people, not paid activists.

10:00

I would like to now talk about an article in the *National Post* which tells the story of a family who run a poultry farm and how a Saskatchewan OH and S official attempted to sanction parents for assigning their children farm chores, labelling them as an act of child labour. The following is a quote from the article, which I will table tomorrow in the House.

Cool Springs Ranch & Butchery north of Yorkton, Sask., is a magnet for the local food enthusiast – the kind of place that hosts farm to fork dinners and describes their animals as “pasture-fed” and “free-range.” It's family-run, to boot – with Janeen and Sam Covlin allowing their daughters Emma, 8, and Kate, 10, to help raise their animals, bring them to slaughter and prepare them for market.

That was, until the government dropped by last week with an Occupational Health and Safety order prohibiting the girls from working in the chicken processing plant, a major part of the farm's operation.

The couple posted their plight to social media and support came their way in waves, much of it critical of an overbearing government trying to mess with tradition and grassroots family life.

Hmm. Kind of like what's happening here.

In this article is an explanation which I believe will help many members in this House.

Since the Second World War, children living on farms performed all kinds of heavy labour, said Anne-Marie Ambert, a retired professor of sociology at York University who has written on changing family roles and expectations. “A farm can be very dangerous, but crossing the street can be very dangerous too,” she said.

That's something all of us here have taught our children, right?

As social values shifted to make children, as one U.S. sociologist put it “economically worthless, but emotionally priceless” labour laws also evolved in each province, though farming has remained somewhat of an outlier. Farms are what settled this country and they instill a work ethic that seems to be on the wane, Prof. Ambert said.

“It makes life meaningful to children to contribute [in this way] and maybe this is why we have so many kids in high school who feel very depressed,” absorbed by Facebook and on smartphone games. The case was also framed as an unjustified attack on a family farm. Though surprised the government withdrew the order, Prof. Barnetson said standing by it would have been a bad move politically. “They can't afford to lose rural seats,” he said, of Western provincial governments.

I'm sorry. This is just all too fresh and familiar right now.

This bill poses too many serious questions to be left up to the hope that the government gets it right in the regulations. They don't trust you. We need to be voting on what is before us and ensure that we are getting it right the first time. There is no need to rush this piece of legislation through the House. The minister and the

Premier should refer this to committee so it can receive the due attention it deserves and the farmers can have the input that they deserve. To many farmers this is another slight to their livelihood and way of life, making criminals of parents who are trying to teach their children a hard-work ethic – shame on you – and neighbours who receive a hand from their community. Shame again.

Madam Speaker, this government needs to engage in real consultation with the hundreds of people who are voicing concerns. Simply put, this government must send this bill to committee for further study. I will support the motion put forward by my hon. colleague, the referral amendment, and I urge all of you in this House to do that.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Under 29(2)(a)? Go ahead, hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you. I appreciate the words from my esteemed colleague, and I have a question for her. Previously, when the NDP were on this side of the House in opposition, they referred to the government of that day's omnibus bills many times and even asked the government of that day to keep Alberta omnibus bill free. Somehow that's been forgotten. It must be the dome effect, when you get over on that side, or something. They referred to them as a tool that the federal Conservatives had been using and called it “odious and offensive.” Again, I guess that's forgotten. That's that dome effect again.

Farming, being one of the oldest occupations that we have in this province, doesn't seem to be recognized too much. This seven-month-old government wants to come in and slam down a bill in less than 45 days – and I trust that the hon. Member for Airdrie has been hearing about that from the farmers – a bill that really should be dealt with in four separate bills. They've done this without consulting the main stakeholders, who are the farmers, the experts on farm safety, by the way, and somehow expect the farmers to just sit quiet and take it. Well, what we're hearing – and I trust the hon. member is as well – is that this bill should be pulled apart into four separate bills, not an omnibus, so that the details of employment standards and OH and S, in particular, can be included in legislation so everyone knows what's involved when it has to be voted on.

Farmers all over Alberta have told us – and I trust they've also told the members opposite – to come to this House and represent them, and that's not what we've been seeing. We've also heard them repeatedly in the farmers' rallies and in the town halls saying: slow down; put this bill to committee. Call in the witnesses, the farm safety experts, those farmers out there that rallied around this place, and reflect and refer on this bill deeply. Call in experts, and have advisers come and discuss this bill.

Now, we've heard from the Premier that it's important for the sake of potential injured workers that this bill be passed yesterday, like that wouldn't be fast enough, and that for the sake of those potential injured workers we just have to ram this thing through the House right now and somehow that will immediately save people. When this thing comes into law on January 1 – shazam – everybody is safe now. Isn't that how it's being portrayed?

Hon. member, could you maybe just elucidate a bit on this business of how all of a sudden on January 1 we're all going to be safer on the farm because the Alberta Legislature passed this Bill 6?

An Hon. Member: Shazam.

Mr. MacIntyre: Shazam.

Mrs. Pitt: I would absolutely just love to speak to that comment. Wow. January 1 is going to be such a big day for farm safety here in Alberta. You know, unfortunately, the government sort of backpedalled on their plans for this bill, claiming just a day or two ago that these changes, when this bill is passed, the regulations that define how these changes with OH and S and WCB will apply, will actually be developed over the next 18 to 24 months. Sometimes it's 36 months – we've heard that as well – so clarification from this government is certainly of the utmost necessity here. I'm absolutely shocked that this government would ram through safety regulations and protect farmers as quickly as possible, but we forgot to ask what year that was going to be. Just absolutely shocking. You know, it's really quite interesting that this government is so quick to ram through this piece of legislation without consultation.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'm honoured to rise to speak to the referral amendment to send this bill back to committee. I'd like to start off by saying that my constituents of Chestermere-Rocky View and actually many of the constituents that I've heard from in many of the other constituencies on the other side of this House are reacting with nothing less than outrage. To them, the NDP does not understand the uniqueness of operating a farm, and they have no interest in taking advice or consulting those who do.

10:10

I would like to start off, if I may, by entering some letters into the record here, which I will happily table later.

I and my husband emphatically oppose Bill 6. You have not consulted actual farmers and ranchers adequately. You cannot apply 9 to 5 job rules in an industry that never was and never will be a 9 to 5 job. This is unfair and discriminatory. OH and S rules do not fit the ag industry, and any regulations legislated must be made with the ag industry's unique needs and the function in mind. This must be done in consultation and in partnership with grassroots farmers and ranchers, with lots of time for input and discussion and with all the rules and applications hammered out . . .

I am sure that it's starting to sound redundant, Madam Speaker, but I will continue on because perhaps with as many family farms as we have, we maybe need to say it 47,000 times before it starts to resonate.

. . . not after a bill has been passed that is completely unacceptable and undemocratic.

Madam Speaker, he goes on to say:

Bill 6 is an attack on families, imposing regulations on how people raise their kids, threatens the livelihood and the right to work and provide. Furthermore, it limits kids' abilities to work and bond with their families while on the farm, a good work ethic, and responsible ownership.

He goes on say that Bill 6 – and he adds in the carbon tax, which he also officially opposes – attacks the family farm.

The NDP is not for people, and they're blatantly trying to squeeze out smaller businesses in favour of large corporations; unions, a conflict of interest; and excessive government control. This bill also attacks private property and ownership rights.

This is one of my constituents, Madam Speaker.

I mean, let me be perfectly clear. I don't believe for one moment that this House is not committed to safety. That has been stated over and over again, and I am appalled that there are people on the other side of this House who would take the attitude about our farmers, the people of this province, the people who are the fabric of the beginning of this province, and say out loud that farmers do not care about their families, their children, or the workers that work on

those farms. It's appalling to me. Absolutely appalling. It's disgusting.

Safety comes through proper consultation. How does the opposite side, how does the government understand what safety even is, how to regulate safety if they've never been on a farm, if they don't understand things that need to happen on that farm? Every farm is a thumbprint, Madam Speaker. Every farm has different needs and different consultation. Every farm has different buildings, fences, equipment, people, whether it's a beef farm or a grain farm. Whatever it is, it's a unique experience, and until that consultation is done, there is no broad-spectrum bill that can be passed here that will help out each of these individual farms.

We cannot trust the NDP when they promise to consult after this bill is passed. Regulations can be passed without consultation. Without consultation: let me make that clear. I'm appalled that the NDP deems farmers unworthy of proper consultation in advance of drafting this actual bill. It's shameful. Attempts at consultation after introducing this bill have been insufficient so far, and they have failed to realize that our farmers deserve an opportunity to speak to the ministers or the government or the MLAs by whom they are allegedly represented. Let me tell you. The amount of letters and e-mails and phone calls that I have gotten in my office from other constituencies is overwhelming. We are maxed out. We can't even keep up.

The attempts that this government has made to communicate with Alberta farmers so far have resulted in, and I quote: a miscommunication. This is unacceptable and entirely the fault of the government. I appreciate the fact that there has been an apology for the miscommunication. Mistakes are made. We are all going to have to hold that we've made a mistake at some point in time, and I appreciate that. But with the miscommunication in mind, perhaps we want to look at it from the point of view that it is time to slow down. How many more miscommunications does this government want to be responsible for in advance of making sure that this bill actually represents farmers? Perhaps that is exactly the reason to take the time to slow this down to talk to farmers.

Talk to us. We are more than happy to provide you with the information that we've been given so far. We have thousands of letters that were tabled that will give you the information and help to make succinct decisions with regard to safety.

They want safety. As it's been said by hon. members, there's nobody that wants safety more than the families on these farms, that want safety for the children and the workers that actually work on these farms. Please, we are begging you to listen to the people that we represent, that you represent. You represent them. This is their House. You are here to represent them. Since you refuse to listen to the cries of farmers outside this House and inside this House, I might add – unfortunately, you do not have the view that I had yesterday of people weeping in the stands. It was hard to look up there. These are our people, the people who put food on our tables weeping in the stands, out on the front steps, in my constituency. [interjections] Please don't laugh. It's not funny. It's not funny. These are our people. You are laughing at the fabric of this community and the fabric of this province.

I am going to read another letter. Let me just give you a small smattering of what I'm getting here, a tiny bit of what I'm receiving.

I am writing to you as my MLA to express my concerns and opposition to Bill 6 as it currently stands. I would hope to see further discussion and education . . .

I think we've said this before, but I'll say it again.

. . . with farming communities before anything is passed through legislation. I am concerned that the supposed NDP, who campaigned on the promise of open and transparent government . . .

Let me say it again: open and transparent government.

... would underhandedly and secretly try to push this bill through without proper forums or discussions.

Madam Speaker, I'd like that to be entered.

I have more. Let me continue.

Please, please, do all you can to stall Bill 6 until after the consultations with farmers and ranchers in the coming month. There needs to be much more consultation with grassroots producers, or the freedom for farms to be successful in Alberta will disappear.

Madam Speaker, please, they are asking. I know you understand this when I say this to you.

Please do this immediately. This draconian measure must be stopped.

This is from a retired farmer and rancher in my constituency who worked more than 50 years of hard work.

This next letter actually comes with a name, and if it's all right with you, Madam Speaker, I would like to mention this person's name from my letter.

My name is Janet Carr, and my son Riley and his young family farm and ranch in this area. We have approximately 235 head of beef cows and bulls on our cow-calf operation. As well, we grow our own feed, with about 610 acres of hay land, and we have over 900 acres in grain. We also do local custom farming to supplement our income to make ends meet in order to support our two families. My grandson and granddaughter are the fifth generation from farms in this very community. The following is an e-mail that I have sent.

And she sent this to everybody in this House. Everybody has received this e-mail.

The government must stop interfering in our livelihoods as to when we can work and how we raise our children. If they have their way while ours is being limited, who will spend all day and night in a winter storm looking after the cows and calves ...

Maybe it would be the members opposite. I'd love to see that happen. We'd invite them at 3 o'clock in the morning onto our family farms in our constituencies to come help out with this job so that you can actually have an understanding of what goes on to get food to your table.

Let me continue, Madam Speaker.

... especially when you have 18 calves born in a 24-hour period that need assistance calving, nursing, kept warm and dry, in an effort to keep both calves and cows alive? Who will get the hay off in time when there's five days of rain in the forecast and the hay is your livestock's food, their winter feed, where the quality affects the animals' health and production. How will we get our crop seeded in time in the spring? How do we get rid of our crop diseases and the bugs on our plants, that don't care if it's somebody's day off when they're harming the crop's quality and the yields so they need to be sprayed when time is of the essence? How do we get our harvest completed in time when winter is looming? As we know, in this province winter could come at any time. We do not have any control over the weather and are one of the few industries that has no control over commodity prices that factor in our successes or our failures, yet we do this anyway as it is our past and our future, our way of life and our homes. All of this affects our animals, our crops, and our financial well-being. There are farmers and ranchers, and there are some that do both. That calls for even longer periods of their busy times. No one ...

10:20

And let me repeat to the members opposite, through you, Madam Speaker.

No one that we know would ever – ever – put their children, themselves, or their employees in harm's way.

Just in case it hasn't been said enough, let me say it again: never would put them in harm's way, ever.

Let me continue, Madam Speaker.

This is not some commercial type of industry that has a construction-type yard in the city with the consistent danger that requires such strict safety measures.

Safety is of the utmost importance. They are willing to speak with the members opposite. They want to speak with you. They want to be consulted. This House owes them that consultation. That's why we're here in the first place.

This is just a farm where kids run and play, ride their horses, do their chores, and help work alongside their parents, grandparents, friends, and neighbours. The very nature of our way of life is having all of those around for branding, cattle drives, hauling bees, getting cattle to the grass, harvest times. We all pitch in to help each other in order to get the work done before the weather turns.

This sounds to me like a high-functioning community. Is that what this sounds like?

Some Hon. Members: Yes.

Mrs. Aheer: Yes, a high-functioning community. If you go into any community, some aspects of this will be in that community.

Again:

This is our livelihood and our way of life and always has been, the way it has been since farmers and ranchers existed. Yes, we hire casual and part-time labour throughout our busy season, but we have high levels of liability insurance because farmers actually care about who is on their farms, taking care of them, and making sure that they are safe.

Again, if I can mention one more time for the record, it is appalling to me that members of this House would assume that our farmers and ranchers would not be willing to take care of their own and the people that feel honoured and privileged to work on those farms in the first place.

She continues on, Madam Speaker:

The government interference is completely inappropriate. Are they going to pay us for livestock or crop losses because we weren't allowed to take care of our own business because of something that happens that might need to be addressed and the person on duty cannot do anything because they might be a few minutes over their allotted work time? We all have safety protocols for safe beef, chemical, and grain handling, et cetera., and we follow them. Enough is enough. When we all go broke due to their new workplace legislation and fines, who will feed us?

I have a constituent, Madam Speaker, who after 50 years of work is pleading that I do all that I can. He's willing to do all that he can to help me address this situation and address the House so that our members here understand what we're actually getting at here. We are behind the safety measures. We are with you on that. This is not a matter for discussion. We, the farmers, the people that we represent want safety on their farms, have safety, have liability insurance, have those things. They are willing to discuss it and have consultation with you so that as you go through the process with these farms, we can find the necessary things that need to happen. But you owe them that consultation. Again, consultation.

I'd like to read another letter, please, Madam Speaker.

We are deeply disappointed in the Bill 6 proposal by the NDP government. We are not thrilled with this outright attack on the family farm.

The Deputy Speaker: Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre under Standing Order 29(2)(a).

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Through you, I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View for her words. I found that presentation interesting. I'd like to ask her a question about something that is applicable to why I think we would need to send this to committee and what many of the people of my constituency are concerned about and why they think this should go to committee. That goes back to what the Minister of Municipal Affairs said yesterday in question period. Yesterday in a response to a question about Bill 6 she said, "We will move forward on with Bill 6 because [this is just a] very basic and a small piece of the big picture moving forward."

Now, this government, again, put documents – we've talked about this – on websites that have said that they would restrict children on family farms. They said that they would restrict neighbours helping neighbours on family farms. The government, of course, says that they didn't mean for those documents to go up. I don't know the exact situation that happened there, but they do acknowledge those documents were up. So farmers and ranchers are very concerned, and I would say rightly so, after seeing documents like that that could significantly affect their livelihood and significantly affect their lifestyle.

Then what the government is doing is saying: "Here we go. We have this blank cheque. We've put in these little changes to the bill that we are saying will protect you, but we have a blank cheque that can do all the regulations afterwards, after this bill is passed and the elected officials of this Assembly that represent farmers and ranchers can no longer defend them in this place." Then the minister, Madam Speaker, is standing in this Assembly and saying: actually, this is only a small part of this; this is only a tiny part of the big picture. Well, that concerns me, and I know it concerns constituents that heard it, and I think that's all the more reason why this bill should be going to committee so that farmers and ranchers can have their say, because, quite frankly, they've lost trust in this government. I've lost trust in this government; most definitely farmers and ranchers have lost trust in the government. I don't have to tell you; it's pretty clear why. I'm sure you recognize that they have not acted in a very trustworthy and honest way with farmers and ranchers.

So I'd like the member to maybe comment on how she thinks the farmers and ranchers in her community feel given that the Municipal Affairs minister stands up here and hints that there's more to come, that there'll be maybe more punishment or more restrictions on farmers and ranchers in the future, you know. I'd be curious about what she has to say about that.

Thank you very much, Madam Speaker.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you for the question. To my point on the broad nature of that statement and on the flip side to say that it is a small portion of what is actually going to come forward: they're extremely concerning statements regarding an industry that, as I said before, Madam Speaker, is complex. It's a thumbprint. You could talk to any of the farmers on this side of the House or to people who've had the privilege of working with farmers, knowing farmers, growing up with them. Each farm is like a family. They have unique situations; they have different relationships on that farm. They also have various types of things that they do on those farms. They're not all the same.

So for a comment like that to be made, that things are coming down the pipe that we will be legislating, that they have some ideas and that this is just a small portion is extremely concerning. That just goes to show that the government actually doesn't have any idea what they're talking about. They haven't consulted with farmers because that comment would have come out with details,

suggestions, thoughtful discussion regarding an industry that is the fabric of Alberta.

Thank you for the question.

The Deputy Speaker: Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Speaker. My question, actually, to the member is: if a farmer was to have an accident under this present legislation with one of his workers and OH and S was to come onto that farm and, in order to be able to do a proper assessment, shut everything down during harvest and that farmer was to now be unable to get the harvest in because of maybe a freak snowstorm, which happens in Alberta, or was to lose his harvest, would the government be responsible? Because insurance would not cover that, would the government be responsible for that loss for that farmer? I'd like to ask the member what she thinks about that.

Thank you.

Mrs. Aheer: Yes. Thank you for that. That's actually a very . . . [Mrs. Aheer's speaking time expired]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I move that we adjourn debate at this time.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

10:30

Government Motions

Time Allocation on Bill 6

26. Mr. Mason moved:

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 6, Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act, is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill in second reading, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of the bill at this stage shall be put forthwith.

The Deputy Speaker: There is a period to respond for the Official Opposition. Go ahead, hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Yes, thank you very much. Madam Speaker, it's become clear through the words of the members opposite and through their actions in this Chamber that not only do they want to block important safety measures for Alberta farmers from coming into force, but they even want to block the bill from getting to the Committee of the Whole.

Members of this House will know that based on feedback from the members of the public, our government has announced our intention to make amendments to Bill 6, which confirm that farm and ranch families will be excluded from the new rules. Members of the opposition parties have been briefed on this amendment, Madam Speaker, and it's been tabled in this Chamber for the review of all members. Rather than allowing the bill to get to committee, where our amendment and, presumably, amendments of the opposition as well could be discussed, we are still stuck in second reading, with a number of motions designed to delay second reading coming from the opposition. The bill has been debated for over 10 hours at second reading. All members have had ample opportunity to speak. Rather than getting the bill to committee, the opposition would like us to spend another 10 hours debating a bill that the government has already indicated will be amended.

For that reason a time allocation motion has been put forward to help move the bill along while also providing the opposition time to participate in debate and, in particular, to focus the remainder of

our time here in Committee of the Whole so that we may discuss our amendments and amendments that the opposition may have.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre to respond.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd like to first point out that I think the hon. Government House Leader's assertion that the opposition is filibustering is unfortunate. We're not anywhere near a stage where anybody can discuss that yet. I'd like to maybe illustrate that through you, Madam Speaker, to the Government House Leader and talk about the first time that time allocation was used in this Assembly. At the time the Government House Leader said that debate on the motion would be limited to six days on an opposition filibuster on spending from the heritage trust fund. Six days. This Government House Leader is attempting to do that for one hour.

Now, at the time that that happened, there was a combined total opposition of five, one NDP and three Social Credit MLAs as well as an independent. That's five. In this Assembly today we have 33 members of the opposition. Not all of them have even been given an opportunity yet to speak on this bill. Not all of them have. Many of them have, but they've been working their way through there. So for the Government House Leader to say that this is a filibuster is completely unrealistic. The members on this side of the Assembly have just as much of a right and just as much of a responsibility to their constituents as the government members do to theirs.

Now, Madam Speaker, as you no doubt know, the government chooses not to speak to their bills. That's unfortunate. I can see why they would want to end debate and go home, but the people that sent me here and have sent my colleagues in the Official Opposition party as well as the third party and the independent colleagues in this Assembly, our constituents, have made it clear that they want us to speak to this bill. They want us to debate this bill because it affects their lives. Yesterday we sat in this Assembly and we watched people crying in the gallery because this bill means so much to them. We're getting thousands of phone calls. We can't even keep up with the phone calls, trying to process the information on how this bill will affect them. And this government has the gall to put forward time allocation of an hour – an hour – not six days, not something reasonable so that we can get our constituents' views on the record.

Madam Speaker, I think we'll go with some quotes from opposite on how they felt about this when they were in opposition because I think their arguments at the time made sense. To quote our hon. Premier, on December 6, 2011:

All of this balancing back and forth ultimately leads . . . to several conclusions. This is not a piece of legislation that is either completely good or completely bad. There are problems within this legislation. It is being rammed through very quickly. The use of time allocation has made that go even faster than it should have.

That is not acceptable to Albertans.

Again the Premier, Madam Speaker:

A week ago this PC government apologized to party members for its failure to listen to the grassroots. Yesterday they backtracked again, this time on pension rollbacks, because they failed to listen to Albertans. It's clear that they still don't get it because now they plan to ram through . . . [a] bill without written briefings to the Assembly members and without listening to Albertans.

Again the Premier:

That apparently is the emergency that has pushed us into this situation, where the government is, I would suggest, misusing the rules of the House to ram through this bill. So just in principle it's really difficult to support such a mechanism . . .

Madam Speaker, that's exactly what they're doing now. It's unacceptable.

This government has made some mistakes on this bill, and they're running scared. We've seen it. They're getting beat up back home. They're getting the same number of calls. So what they're doing now, Madam Speaker, is trying to stifle debate so that they can get through this. They can hopefully change the story and go home for Christmas, but that is unacceptable to Albertans, and it should be unacceptable to Albertans because this is the Assembly where their issues are supposed to be dealt with. This is where democracy is supposed to take place. This is where debate is supposed to happen, and by the government taking this action, they are stifling debate. They're not just stifling the opposition members; they're stifling the people who sent us here to represent them, and I think they should very much be ashamed of their behaviour.

I will very much be voting against this motion, and I would humbly ask all members of the Assembly, including the backbench NDP MLAs, who do represent the constituents who will be very upset about this decision.

Thank you very much.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 26 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:37 a.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, S.	Gray	Miranda
Babcock	Hinkley	Nielsen
Carson	Horne	Payne
Ceci	Kazim	Renaud
Connolly	Kleinsteuber	Rosendahl
Coolahan	Littlewood	Sabir
Cortes-Vargas	Loyola	Schmidt
Dach	Luff	Schreiner
Dang	Malkinson	Shepherd
Feehan	Mason	Sucha
Fitzpatrick	McCuaig-Boyd	Sweet
Ganley	McKitrick	Westhead
Goehring	McLean	Woollard

Against the motion:

Aheer	Hanson	Rodney
Barnes	Hunter	Schneider
Clark	Jansen	Starke
Cyr	Loewen	Strankman
Drysdale	MacIntyre	Swann
Ellis	McIver	Taylor
Fraser	Nixon	van Dijken
Gotfried	Pitt	Yao

Totals: For – 39 Against – 24

[Government Motion 26 carried]

Government Bills and Orders Second Reading

Bill 6

Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act (continued)

[Adjourned debate December 9: Mr. Mason]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'd seek unanimous consent for one-minute bells on the referral amendment only, please.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any further speakers on the referral amendment?

Seeing no further speakers, we're calling for the question on the referral amendment to Bill 6.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment R1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:55 a.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Hanson	Rodney
Barnes	Hunter	Schneider
Clark	Jansen	Starke
Cyr	Loewen	Strankman
Drysdale	MacIntyre	Taylor
Ellis	McIver	van Dijken
Fraser	Nixon	Yao
Gotfried		

11:00

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Gray	Miranda
Babcock	Hinkley	Nielsen
Carson	Horne	Payne
Ceci	Kazim	Renaud
Connolly	Kleinstauber	Rosendahl
Coolahan	Littlewood	Sabir
Cortes-Vargas	Loyola	Schmidt
Dach	Luff	Schreiner
Dang	Malkinson	Shepherd
Feehan	Mason	Sucha
Fitzpatrick	McCuaig-Boyd	Sweet
Ganley	McKittrick	Westhead
Goehring	McLean	Woollard
Totals:	For – 22	Against – 39

[Motion on amendment R1 lost]

The Deputy Speaker: Back on Bill 6. The hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed.

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am honoured to rise today and speak to second reading of Bill 6. To begin, I will quote the Premier and Government House Leader on their views on closure. Sadly, the following is not a tragic comedy; it is reality. The Premier said, on Wednesday, April 24, 2013:

To further limit debate by significantly limiting the amount of time allowed for budget debate within each of the days when we're allowed to debate, in my view, represents an excessive use of its majority by the government caucus.

She went on to say:

Marleau and Monpetit on pages 66 to 67 speaks to the issue of privilege and states that

any disregard of or attack on the rights, powers and immunities of the House and its Members . . . is referred to as a "breach of privilege" and is punishable by the House.

Erskine May, 22nd edition, on page 108 states that

any act or omission which obstructs or impedes either House of Parliament in the performance of its functions, or which obstructs or impedes any Member or officer of such House in the discharge of his duty, or which has a tendency, directly or indirectly, to produce such results may be treated as a contempt even though there is no precedent of the offence.

Madam Speaker, very strong words. Some – some – would say: reeking with hypocrisy today.

To add fuel to the fire, the Government House Leader said, on December 3, 2013:

According to *Beauchesne*, section 75, "The privilege of freedom of speech is both the least questioned and the most fundamental right of the Member." *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* on page 89 also states that freedom of speech is the first right of members. "By far, the most important right accorded to Members of the House is the exercise of freedom of speech in parliamentary proceedings."

He continues:

In 1977 the First Report of the Special Committee on Rights and Immunities of Members stated that freedom of speech is a fundamental right without which [the members] would be hampered in the performance of their duties. It permits them to speak in the House without inhibition, to refer to any matter or express any opinion as they see fit, to say what they feel needs to be said in the furtherance of the national . . .

Mr. Mason: Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Pardon me, hon. member.

You have a point of order?

Mr. Mason: I hesitate to raise this, Madam Speaker. I know that the third party is precluded by the rules that are in place from speaking to a motion to invoke time allocation, but the motion that's now before us is, in fact, second reading of Bill 6 and not the closure motion, which has been disposed of by the House. One ought not to reflect upon a decision that's already been made by the House.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Rodney: And that's a perfect segue. Thank you.

It is clear, according to authorities, that time allocation was not intended as a mechanism by which the right of members to speak could be limited arbitrarily by the government of the day.

Madam Speaker, as the second longest serving MLA in this Legislature I can tell you that I have never seen anything like what is happening now with Bill 6. For this government to proclaim that they will take up to two years to compose regulations for this bill and only dedicate a precious few days to debating it is baffling. If you don't take it from me, take it from thousands of Albertans clear across the province. Equally absurd are introducing a bill without consultation and a set of amendments that's even longer than the original bill. As mentioned, for the government to invoke closure when ranchers and farmers are demonstrating clear across the province with a simple, decent request for consultation is simply beyond comprehension. Many find it utterly disrespectful.

Madam Speaker, I am not an expert in this field, clearly, but as a youth I lived and worked on my uncle's farm, so I can relate to the plight of our ranchers and farmers.

Here in this Legislature we've heard from many members of this House about the lack of consultation and about lumping together

pieces of policy that really should not be pushed through as one piece of legislation. Madam Speaker, there is one simple way forward. The bill can be amended so that we can legislate on what this government has marketed this bill as, a piece of safety legislation for farm and ranch workers, by omitting the elements of the bill that have nothing to do with safety for ranchers and farmers. Or we can pause. We can take a step back in a very meaningful way, and we can decide how best to proceed after meaningful consultation. We might actually find that increasing education and supports and creating a system where best practices can be shared and implemented is a much more meaningful way forward. You may also decide that this legislation needs to be put again before the House, but that's a decision that you do have the ability to make.

Throughout their time as opposition members those in the government who previously sat in this Chamber were very critical of omnibus legislation. For instance, the Minister of Economic Development and Trade said, on March 19, 2015, "Omnibus bills that group together significant pieces of legislation that should be given their due course for debate in this Chamber . . . hinders our ability to get into each of these . . . as separate issues." On May 7, 2014, the member spoke of "the breakneck speed with which this PC government rams through legislation." Madam Speaker, it's obvious that history is repeating itself and not in a good way.

A year earlier the current Premier spoke to an omnibus bill that tied together three pieces of legislation. She noted that the general rule is for each issue to have a separate piece of legislation. The Premier said, on May 8, 2013:

By putting three pieces together, of course, we cut that opportunity . . .
the time for discussion,
. . . by two-thirds.

Madam Speaker, Bill 6 is actually four pieces of legislation, so all the more reason for sober second thought. If this government wishes to rush this legislation through in the next 24 hours, they have the ability to do that given the position this government has, with a majority government. However, they would be doing a massive disservice to those Albertans who've braved the cold across the province as they protested against this legislation.

Ironically, one year ago, almost exactly on today's date the Minister of Economic Development and Trade said, in his capacity at that time as opposition critic, regarding the Condominium Property Amendment Act, which was on the table at the time – one of his criticisms was that passing legislation but leaving many decisions to regulation left Albertans in the dark as to what the new rules would actually be. Essentially, some of the members opposite believed that decisions would be swept into a dark corner, where they could be developed away from the light that is the Legislature.

Madam Speaker, the member stated:

Changes that impact people's homes should happen in the Legislative Assembly through, you know, our robust debate, through different points of view, and through adequate oversight.

He went on to state:

Well – you know what? – nobody said that democracy is the most expedient form of government, but we do live in a . . . Westminster-style democracy, and details that affect condominium owners should be discussed in the light of day, not behind closed doors in the cover of darkness. That, I think, is a very legitimate concern.

If the member stands by this sentiment, then why is he prepared for his government to do the opposite for issues that are critical for ranchers and farmers?

Madam Speaker, I have some friendly and timely advice for the current government. We as the previous government made errors of

judgment on legislation. That contributed to the fact that we are now sitting on this side of the aisle, so please consider this: do yourselves and all Albertans a favour; do not do the same thing. By this Premier's own admission she has lost the trust of farmers and ranchers, and if the Premier and the government want that trust back, they have the time to allow for extensive consultation, starting now. This government has a wonderful opportunity to evolve from what's perceived as a heavy-handed group that, many say, is suffering from dome disease to a much more reasonable organization. It's simply nonsensical to invoke legislation before true consultation, and that's the opposite of what any government, including this one, would strive for.

Thankfully, that can be fixed easily. They can listen to the advice of our party and the Official Opposition and the Alberta Party, but if they won't do that, they would be applauded for taking the advice of thousands of farmers and ranchers clear across Alberta, who are pleading for this government to slow down and be reasonable. Madam Speaker, I shudder at the possibility that this NDP government thinks that they're the only ones who are right on this issue and that rural and urban Albertans are all wrong. It's time for the tail to stop wagging the dog.

Therefore, Madam Speaker, I am honoured to move that the motion for second reading of Bill 6, Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act, be amended by deleting all the words after "that" and substituting the following:

Bill 6, Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act, be not now read a second time but that it be read a second time this day six months hence.

I have so much more prepared, Madam Speaker, but out of respect for other speakers, I will conclude with the . . .

11:10

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, could you just pause for a moment while we get the amendment, an original copy.

Mr. Rodney: I will just conclude with these thoughts as you come to collect. This time, Madam Speaker and all hon. members, is critical for the government and all Albertans to go back to the drawing board, to do the due diligence that is not only necessary but extremely beneficial, to achieve the true goals that you have originally intended so that all of those who are affected by this bill in their lives every day have the information they require to make any and all necessary changes on their farm, so that any and all of the very well-publicized pieces of misinformation and imperfections of the bill are actually addressed in a way that reflects the opinions of those who have made sure that these serious concerns are heard.

Madam Speaker, I do not feel the need to use up all of my time. I'm happy to pass the puck. I can't wait to hear the debate on this, and I trust that, indeed, we all will do the smart thing in this House for all Albertans.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Minister of Transportation.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. Well, I thank the hon. member for his motion. It is, in fact, for those that have not experienced this before, a hoist motion. Were it to come to completion, every member would have a right to speak again, and then it would be voted, and if it were passed, the bill would just disappear. It's a way that the opposition has of trying to basically defeat a bill by making a motion that it not be read now, because if, in fact, the House is not sitting six months from now, the bill just dies because there is nobody there to catch it.

Having said that, Madam Speaker, this is clearly an attempt to get rid of the bill and to prevent its passage by this House. As the government has indicated its intention that the bill should be passed, I urge all hon. members to vote against this amendment when the question is put, and the question will be put at the end of the hour of debate, as will the main motion. If it is defeated, then we will go on to the main motion, just so all members are clear. I urge all hon. members to defeat the hoist motion that the hon. Member for Calgary-Lougheed has put forward and to support second reading of Bill 6.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other members wishing to speak to amendment H1? The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. I'm very pleased to stand up in support of the amendment put forward by the Member for Calgary-Lougheed. One of the first assignments I had as a new MLA was to get to know my constituents and the stakeholders in my portfolio. The goal of these meetings was to make sure that I understood the issues and challenges faced by the people I represent as well as the stakeholders across the province. I was supposed to find out what was unique about my constituency and what is similar to things that are happening across the province. Bill 6 has been a very eye-opening experience for all of us.

Since May I've worked very hard to provide a voice for issues of importance. You may remember me asking questions about that dialysis unit in Lac La Biche or the Mennonite school in Two Hills. Those are not the only issues I've addressed, though. I have met with First Nations and Métis. I've attended powwows and was on hand when the evacuations were happening due to the fires in Saskatchewan, along with my counterpart from Bonnyville-Cold Lake. I've met with municipal councillors to discuss local issues, and I have met with several government ministers to address broader provincial issues. My point is that for me and the rest of the Wildrose caucus our objective is to stand up in the Assembly and provide a real voice for constituents. Our goal is to ensure that what we do here reflects the concerns that we hear.

One of the concerns I heard at a town hall that I held on Saturday in St. Paul: one of the constituents stood up and was very concerned about the implications of OH and S. He related a story of a machine shop owner who had a drill press. The drill press was, you know, in the area of 30 years old, was out of manufacture, and the start-up switch went on it. Unable to get a proper start-up switch from the manufacturer, he called in an electrician, and they made it work. Unfortunately, one of his workers caught a finger and had a finger injury in the drill press, went through OH and S and Workers' Compensation Board. OH and S came and investigated. All of his paperwork was good. Everything was in place. They had a look at this unit and discovered that they had modified this drill press. Now, the switch had nothing to do at all with the incident. There was a foot pedal switch, and that was just a manual override on that thing. The company faced such an onerous fine by OH and S for modifying that piece of equipment that they went bankrupt and closed their doors. These are the concerns – these are real concerns – from my constituents.

We don't just stand up here and throw out ideas or questions that we make up in our legislative offices. We use what we have heard to inform our work, to inform our policies, and to inform our approach to addressing the government's proposed legislation. Bill 6 is a prime example of how out of touch this government is with respect to tax-paying Albertans. This legislation has angered so many Albertans that it makes it very clear how little respect this

government has for the people that elected them. It seems pretty obvious that the NDP government does not have the same approach to working with Albertans.

I have received many calls from concerned constituents from very many neighbouring constituencies, frustrated that their voice and opinions are not being relayed to this Legislature unless it's through an opposition MLA. They cannot get through to their NDP MLAs, and even if they do, they do not see them standing up and voicing those views in this House. They do not feel that they are being adequately represented. I have not heard one person call and tell me that they are in favour of this Bill 6. To quote the minister of jobs, skills, and labour: I've been listening to Albertans about what Bill 6, the Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act, will mean for their family farms. End quote. Well, I would suggest that the minister should have consulted with farmers and ranchers before this legislation was tabled to ensure that it contained provisions suggested by the very people it supposedly protects. Listening after the fact is not the same thing as consultation before legislation.

I very much look forward to the standing votes coming up on Bill 6 and watching as the members sit down one by one by one like lemmings jumping off a political cliff.

Farmers and ranchers wanted consultation before legislation. Now this government is having to make amendments to the legislation they tabled, again without consultation. We will be expected to vote on this new amendment, again without having an opportunity to hear from our constituents. This is unacceptable and is not democratic. We need time to get this amendment out to our people so that they can have time to look at it, and this hoist amendment would give us that opportunity. We need to understand it and provide feedback. This is real consultation. That is what hard-working Albertans deserve. Most farmers and ranchers in Alberta are second, third, or even fourth generation. They know their business. If it was as dangerous as the government would like us to believe, do you not think that they would have moved away from such a horrific industry?

I'd like to at this point bring up a survey, an online survey, on labour legislation. I'll just read you a couple of the questions. Number 1, "Hours of work for employees: Limited to 12 hours in a day except during critical times."

Question 2, "Break: 30 minute break after 5 hours of work in most situations."

Then they go on to where you can check off: "Please indicate the impact you feel providing employees with a break after 5 hours of work would have on farm or ranch employees." You know, I've been involved in a lot of harvest activities where people are working, driving combines, driving the grain trucks, and mom and auntie and grandma come out to the field with a table and set it up, and everybody stops. They're not punching clocks or looking at clocks, Madam Speaker.

11:20

"Rest days: One day of rest for every full week worked (7 consecutive days)."

"Overtime: Overtime pay of at least 1.5 times the hourly rate" or banked time "for hours worked in excess of 8 hours a day or 44 hours in a week." It gets onerous there. Then, again, they ask you how it's going to affect farm or ranch employees. You know, I have been a union member in my past. This reads just like a collective bargaining document to me.

Getting back to my question about the generations of farmers, if agriculture was so dangerous, I'm surprised that farmers and ranchers survived for four generations to be here today with all of their limbs intact. It's an absolute miracle.

Had the government listened first and done a true job of consulting with farmers and ranchers, they would not now be faced with the embarrassing reality of having to amend their own legislation coming forward. I certainly hope that they get it right this time. But we know that until we hear from the people, they will not get it right. To quote the Premier from *Hansard* in June of this year: "I think that's a good start to show that we're all going to be working together. But we'll do that transparently, and we will consult with . . . Albertans to make sure that what we do works." She seems to have forgotten her own statement. Even though at the time she was talking about working on a climate change policy, her supposed commitment to consultation certainly fell short when it came to Bill 6.

Only after continued pressure from average Albertans and the Wildrose Official Opposition has this government decided to have a second look at this bill. Unfortunately, again, we will not likely have the opportunity to bring it to our constituents for consultation first. The Premier seems to be blaming public servants for miscommunication and confusion about the contents of this bill instead of taking responsibility, which she actually finally admitted to here in the House a few days ago, for the shortcomings of the legislation itself. Had she simply followed a proper consultation process, we would likely be a lot further along with a lot less trouble from our farmers and ranchers.

This government tabled a bill that impacts over 45,000 farms. The resulting public backlash is pretty clear. This bill does not reflect the concerns of farmers and ranchers across this province. This government and the Premier need to own up to the fact that her government is trying to rush through legislation that will have negative consequences for a major piece of Alberta's economy.

There was a clear attempt to try to cause a division amongst farmers over the last weekend by reports that the Hutterite colonies would be exempt from this legislation. Well, it didn't work. Farmers stand united in this fight against Bill 6, and the Hutterite leadership has spoken publicly against accepting any form of exemption that does not include all family operations equally. You will not divide family farming communities.

Farmers in my area that attended a quickly formed town hall in St. Paul this weekend were unanimous in supporting putting Bill 6 to committee, where they can have their input. It is time for real consultation on this matter. We need to support this hoist amendment and get this bill stopped for at least six months.

I wonder how many NDP MLAs in rural ridings held town hall meetings over the past weekend to find out what their farm and ranch families really think. That many: quite likely zero, as they do not want to hear what the farm community has to say. Easier to ignore people and hope they go away. They're not going to go away. They have asked me to fight this to the end, and that's exactly what we're doing as an opposition.

The fact that the government may propose amendments to clarify this bill speaks more loudly than anyone ever could that this legislation is ill-advised and misinformed. The fact that they have to make corrections on the fly further supports our concern that the government really does not know much about the potential impact of their legislation and probably not a lot about the industry itself. If they had gone about this properly, they would have spent time working with farmers and ranchers to ensure that the legislation they tabled actually made sense and addressed necessary safety issues properly in a way that actually supports the industry. While there is definitely the need to bring improved regulations for large operators, we are disappointed that there is no recognition of the special nature of the family farm.

This bill is much more important than partisan politics. This government is trying to rush through legislation that will undermine

the industry that impacts approximately 60,000 people in this province. You need to get it right. Wildrose is strongly urging the government to take our advice, slow down this bill, vote for this amendment, and send it to committee for authentic consultation with the agricultural community of Alberta.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments for the hon. member under 29(2)(a)?

Seeing none, I will recognize the hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise on the amendment before the House. You know what? The first thing I'm going to do is start out by agreeing with the Government House Leader. He said some things that are important. This is normally what's called a hoist amendment, and it's normally what is designed to get rid of a piece of bad legislation or what the opposition thinks is a piece of bad legislation. This is a little unique in that this is actually an opportunity for the government to get it right. As the hon. House leader for the government said, this is to bring it back in six months. Six months from today, June 9, is a Thursday. Between now and June 9 the government could, if they decided to do the right thing and serve Albertans, use that time wisely, talking to farmers, talking to ranchers, getting it right, deciding what the rules and regulations will be around new legislation for safety for farmers and ranchers, and come back into this House and force us on this side of the House to bang our desks in approval and vote for it and cheer the government on. They have that ability right now if they love Alberta enough to do the right thing and only if.

I can only imagine, Madam Speaker, the joy that the government would have in forcing us on this side of the House to bang our desks in approval after all we've gone through in the last week or two on this particular bill. I think members on this side of the House, while we don't expect it, actually will agree with me that they could force us to do that.

The government has done something almost impossible, Madam Speaker. They have united the far right, the medium right, the centre right, the centre, and even a good part of the left against what this government is doing. You know what? Unfortunately, without the consultation this is completely disrespectful of all farmers and all ranchers in rural Alberta. In fact, this government has actually united rural and urban Alberta against this government. I can tell you as a Calgary MLA that people are not happy. I'm getting e-mails and phone calls constantly, and they cannot believe the heavy-handed, high-handed – sorry to say it – arrogant way in which this has been handled. What's most disappointing, Madam Speaker, is that the opportunity to make it better is so easy.

You know what? I'm not going to name where the member from the government is from because they're not a minister and I think we're here to hold the government to account, and private members, of course, are not part of government, but there was a private member from the government side this last week that stood up in front of 500 of that member's constituents and said: no, we're not going to listen to you; we're going to ram this through even though you pretty much all want us to not do that. Wow, Madam Speaker. The member signed the member's own political finish line. I'm trying to avoid using overexaggerated words, but really she set the expiry on her political career to the next election. It doesn't have to be that way. It doesn't have to be that way.

You know what? The Progressive Conservative Party – our members have tried every which way to get the government to do the right thing, to listen to farmers and ranchers, to let the family

farm survive and work with them to put safety regulations and legislation in place with their co-operation. They've made it quite clear, the farm and ranch community, that they want to co-operate. They do. I say: let them. Let them. We could do this together. What a great day that would be.

Madam Speaker, I could go on. There's an hour. We've gotta share it between all of our colleagues. Out of respect for this House, out of respect for my colleagues, out of respect for the farmers and ranchers and all Albertans that may be listening, I'm going to sit down saying that I will be supporting this motion, and I implore the government to do the right thing between now and June 9. There is still time.

11:30

The Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments under 29(2)(a)?

If not, I'll recognize the hon. Member for Calgary-Klein, followed by Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Coolahan: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It's been stated ad nauseam in this Assembly that we have regrets, the government has regrets, about how Bill 6 was initially communicated to the public and to farmers. However, I am proud to be part of a government working to protect the rights of vulnerable working people and to provide them with the basic protections that they deserve, and I'm not prepared to delay these rights for another minute.

I appreciate that farm families have concerns, but let's be clear, Madam Speaker. This government and this bill will delineate between what it means to be a parent and what it means to be an employer on a farm. There is no desire to change the way family farms operate and how farm families raise their children. The only goal is to protect paid employees and give them a financial safety net in the event of injury or death.

Madam Speaker, I always appreciate the sage input from our loyal opposition. What's been missing from their input, however, has been the positive aspects of this bill and the positive aspects that it will bring to families who make a living hiring themselves out for farm work. This is primarily the peace of mind that comes with the financial safety net and the ability to be able to refuse unsafe work and working conditions. We've heard the stories over the years of paid farm workers being killed and leaving their family without any means. We've heard the stories of how these families have to litigate to receive any type of compensation. This bill will give peace of mind to these families and will also help to protect farmers from the aforementioned litigation.

Madam Speaker, the lack of rights for paid farm workers is a black hole in Alberta's legislation. When I read the OH and S Act, with all its protections around refusing unsafe work, et cetera, and I see that there's an exemption for farm workers, it makes me sick to my stomach. This exemption is disturbing, antiquated, and long overdue for change. With this bill we'll be able to provide paid workers with basic protections, and through consultation we will be able to provide the exemptions necessary to run a farm such as hours of work, days of work, et cetera. Other occupations have these types of exemptions, made in consultation, and the same will be true for farms. We've heard in this Assembly over the past week that when labour and OH and S legislation was first crafted, workers were given basic protections first and that the details such as hours of work were worked out in consultation after the basic protections were in place. That's what will happen with this bill.

There have been a lot of alarmist things said both inside and outside of the Assembly, and one of those things is that our government is trying to unionize all farms in Alberta. Well, Madam Speaker, that's not true. No government in Canada has this ability. While the ability for paid farm workers to organize is available

through this bill, the Supreme Court of Canada already gave them this right in a decision. I well know that groups that do organize unions do so when they feel unsafe and unhappy about their working conditions. Well, Bill 6 just may give paid farm workers the say that they need for good working conditions, that may remove the need for these workers to organize.

I read a quote recently from the leader of the third party from January 2015, and I believe it was an interview coming on the heels of the death of a paid farm worker. He was asked why his government wasn't moving to protect farm workers with legislation. His response – and I paraphrase – was that it's an Albertan tradition that we don't want to change. A tradition, Madam Speaker? Hazing on kids' sports teams used to be a tradition, but it's dangerous, so it's not done anymore. Tradition is not a reason to put paid farm workers and their families in danger or leave them without a means of livelihood.

I encourage everyone in this Assembly to move past the early miscommunication and move forward with the work of protecting all of Alberta's workers and developing the necessary regulations to make it work through consultation.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane under 29(2)(a).

Mr. Westhead: Well, I'd really like to thank the member for his take on this subject. He talked a little bit about changing traditions and, you know, sort of sometimes breaking from the status quo, so I'd like him to maybe expand a little bit about what that means to him and maybe about what his motivations were for running for election to do some of these kinds of things.

My other question. He talked about occupational health and safety, and I'd like him to, if he wouldn't mind, elaborate on how our occupational health and safety system here in Alberta contemplates a joint relationship between the employer and the employee, to work together in a collaborative manner, to determine and create a safe workplace.

Mr. Coolahan: I'm sorry, hon. member. What was the first part of that question?

Mr. Westhead: You talked about sort of challenging the status quo and breaking from tradition. You know, some of us here ran for election for the purpose of making some positive changes for the people here in Alberta in the best interests of the public, and I wonder if you want to talk a little bit about that.

Mr. Coolahan: Certainly. I've been advocating for rights for paid farm workers for many years. I think it's something that's been sorely lacking from Alberta's legislation – there's no question – and that was part of the NDs' platform during the election.

OH and S legislation says that we have joint health and safety committees. That's usually run between the employer and, if there's a union, a union rep there. If there's not, then there'll be a representative from the workers. They're great at maintaining safety. You know, there's been a lot of talk about education being a source of protection. It's very true. I mean, you need education to make sure that people are safe. What's missing in that piece is the compensation piece, that I think is very important with this bill. Education is not going to compensate a family whose breadwinner died.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Cardston-Taber-Warner under 29(2)(a)?

Mr. Hunter: Yes, Madam Speaker. I find this absolutely rich. We have had a debate about this. Now we've been time allocated to one hour, and all of a sudden now the NDP decide to start getting up and talking about this issue. It's absolutely hypocritical. Absolutely hypocritical. Now what we're going to find here is that . . .

Mr. Schmidt: We've got lots to say now.

Mr. Hunter: Yes, they have lots to say after we have one hour to be able to discuss this. "Okay. Now we're going to add insult to injury." We have a situation where we have one hour to be able to talk about this now, and they're going to take and make sure that they use up that hour. It's absolutely hypocritical that they would do such a thing.

Now, under the rules, from what I understand, I have to ask a question, so I will ask a question. You talked about miscommunication. Here's a miscommunication for you. Madam Speaker, the Premier said that the Hutterites were going to be exempt from this. The Hutterites never asked for that, but let's just go with this for a second, that the Hutterites are exempt. The Premier also said that every Albertan deserves to be able to come home safe. Now, she can't have it both ways. Do Hutterites have the right to come home safe? If she's saying that they're exempt, then she's saying that they don't deserve to come home safe. They're one of the biggest farmers in Alberta. I would absolutely love to see the spin on this one.

11:40

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member for Calgary-Klein, did you wish to comment?

Mr. Coolahan: Sure. My colleagues are telling me that the Premier didn't say that, for one, and that Hutterites are not paid farm workers.

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

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Speaker. To the hon. member. In your speech you mentioned hazing, one of the extreme forms of bullying. I found that interesting during this discussion, this time-shortened discussion, on Bill 6. I'd like you to clarify, please.

Mr. Coolahan: I was only using it as an example of tradition, Madam Speaker. That's all. If it was a poor analogy related to bullying and the hon. member takes it that way, I apologize.

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

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I am in support of this hoist motion, and I'd like to speak about it. "Peace, Order, and good Government" is the introductory phrase of section 91 of the Canadian Constitution Act, 1867 – "Peace, Order, and good Government" – generally stating the scope of the legislative jurisdiction of Parliament. In the eyes of some of the Fathers of Confederation this clause was a general power enabling Parliament to enact laws. When we as legislators sit in this House, we must remember the foundations on which our representative democracy is built. "Peace, Order, and good Government" is not just a phrase; it is a responsibility we have when we make our decisions.

I want to quickly lay out the process for the hon. members of this Assembly. Madam Speaker, here is what we know as absolute facts. Bill 6 was tabled in the House on November 17, 2015. Consultation, this term used very lightly, was done, whereas some have dubbed it

as the come-out-and-be-told meetings, where the bureaucrats kicked out opponents to the bill and failed to listen to the concerns. I don't know if this is considered as consultation. Thousands of farmers have come from all over this province to protest this piece of legislation through rallies in every way that they know how, yet this government has still not listened.

To abate some of these issues, the Premier has thrown the bureaucrats under the bus – I would hate to be a bureaucrat under this government – offered divisive, politically charged exemptions for certain groups such as Hutterite colonies, and is now haphazardly amending their own legislation. The law was five pages, and the amendments are six pages. Obviously, there hasn't been enough consultation amongst themselves on this issue. The NDP have denied that they meant to include children on family farms despite a government-issued document where they clearly state that this is their intent.

This morning the government not only said, "No more debate in this House" – we don't get to debate this anymore in the House; I guess you could say that one hour is a debate – but now they're saying that farmers and ranchers no longer get any representation on this issue. That's the most deplorable part about this, Madam Speaker. In this House we will differ – that's the democratic process that we have signed up for – but this isn't about us. This isn't about an individual person. This is about 65,000 farmers and ranchers that have not been consulted on this issue. They have not had the right to be able to say yes or no. It will take time to be able to get that information. If they don't get that information to the government, how will the government know what they want? Do they represent the people? Do they represent the farmers and ranchers? They say that they do, but if they're not willing to consult on this issue, really, where is the representation?

Madam Speaker, farmers are confused, and so am I. I'm confused as to why this government insists on trudging through on an ideological piece of legislation without fully considering the effects it will have on our farmers. I'm confused as to why this government has not properly consulted with stakeholders, the people who are in the trenches. They deserve this. I'm confused as to why this government cannot get their story straight, their facts right, but I am even more confused as to how they can honestly expect us and all Albertans to trust them from now on.

Madam Speaker, this is not a democracy; this is a party running off ideology and refusing to listen to its citizens. They're telling rural Albertans how to live their lives and how to get paid doing it and how much they can make. This is a government that does not create peace. It creates disorder. But, most importantly, they have shown that this NDP caucus is not a good government.

I urge the members opposite to follow these tenets of our parliamentary system and respectfully ask them to vote in favour of this hoist amendment so that the bill, that all of our farmers have been asking for, can be killed.

Now, one of the members across the way mentioned their work experience dealing with federal bills. If I understand the member's underlying message, it was that government should take things to committee. She referred to the federal government. At the federal level all bills go to committee to ensure proper consultation, Madam Speaker. All bills. Here we have seen a few bills being sent to committee so that we can get proper consultation and proper direction from our stakeholders. But on the ones that really matter, such as Bill 6, for the farmers and ranchers, the 65,000 that are represented here: no consultation. That is shameful.

At the federal level they consult. They don't rush things through. They do their due diligence. Hearings are held. These are special meetings, where different people inside and outside the government

can comment on the bill. They ask government officials and experts, also known as witnesses, to come and answer questions. These special meetings are called committee meetings. These committees can suggest changes or amendments to the bill when it gives a report to the House. They then go to a report stage. This is where the committee reports the bill back to the House. All parliamentarians can then debate the bill. The bill then goes to third reading, where it is debated again. Madam Speaker, this is the proper process. This is the Westminster process, that has taken hundreds of years to develop because it is the right approach, because if you do it this way, you have the best chance of being able to get the legislation right for the people you're supposed to be representing.

Now, the message from the farmers and ranchers has been clear, and they have chanted it on the steps of our Legislature over and over again: kill Bill 6. I don't think you can miss that message unless you're not listening. I didn't see a lot of our members opposite out amongst the crowd out there.

Now, this is the worst part, Madam Speaker. While farmers and ranchers sat in these galleries over the past two weeks, they wrung their hands, they shook their heads, and they shed tears because of what this government is doing. The most deplorable part about it is that I've sat back here and looked over to the other side, and I've seen the smirks, the smiles, and the absolute disrespect for the farmers and ranchers and the plight that they're in. This is the sort of thing that is so unclassy, absolutely unclassy. I would hope – I would absolutely hope – that the members opposite would think about their actions, think about the people that they're going to be affecting by this legislation, that they're ramming through, and remember that if the tables were turned, would they appreciate this kind of behaviour towards them? I highly doubt it. I highly doubt it.

The people of Alberta, the farmers and ranchers that we have talked to have spoken clearly and have told us their message. We have over 30,000 petition names that we will be presenting. The parliamentary secretary has been overwhelmed by the names. We only have 20,000 that we can present today, which we will. We have over 10,000 more that we will present as soon as we can have them go through the proper processes and be checked. We have letter after letter that concerned Alberta farmers and ranchers have presented to us. I have no doubt, because I've seen who they've CCed these letters to, that they have sent them to the members opposite. I have never heard you read one of those letters. That is deplorable. Do you represent the people in your riding? If you do, then you should read the letters. You should represent the face of them.

11:50

This is the sort of thing that we in the opposition are opposed to. We are opposed to this government and the NDP caucus not representing their people, having the courage to be able to say that this is bad legislation or at least the courage to say that we need more consultation for the people we represent. We have not heard that, Madam Speaker, and the question is: why is it so silent on that side?

Improving safety on farms is critical, but these changes are coming too fast against our second most important industry and without consultation. The small family farm, the people who put the bread on our table, deserve to be better consulted about these changes. We are calling on the government, through this hoist amendment, to stop this bill and consult thoroughly before making any changes. The hoist amendment will postpone the passing of this bill for six months, which effectively means that it will not pass. This will also allow time for the government to really think about

the best amendments, the best way to approach this issue. It will also allow time for farmers and ranchers to be heard, to come to Edmonton to discuss their concerns, and to digest the proposed changes. Hopefully, the government will realize that an omnibus bill is the wrong way to go and break it up into maybe four bills and consult properly on each of those.

While we understand the need to bring in improved regulations for larger commercial operations, we are disappointed that there is no recognition of the special nature of the family farm. B.C. allows this special recognition for family farms. Alberta farmers are now at a competitive disadvantage to our neighbours.

The pace that this government has set will allow only 45 days to consult and pass a law that will make massive changes and bring in big costs and red-tape increases to our agricultural industry, especially for small farmers. Madam Speaker, we are in a situation already in this province where young children of farmers on small family farms are struggling with wanting to take over the family farm. Do you honestly believe that adding more red tape, more regulations, more cost to small family farms would incentivize young children to want to take over family farms? In fact, what you're doing is that you're actually saying, "Let's get rid of small family farms, and let's make the big corporate farms bigger," because you'll drive small family farms out of the industry. This is the sort of thing that we don't want to have.

We live in a province that has one of the highest per capita family farms in Canada. Do we want to stop that? Do we want to inhibit that? We should be proud of that. That's something that we should be proud of. This government needs to recognize this. Had they done the proper consultation, they would have recognized that. They would have seen that. But because they're pushing this through because of ideological reasons, they have not given this the proper due diligence that they need to, and farmers are upset because of that.

Farmers that we have talked to across the province do not feel consulted and were looking for more flexibility to achieve the desired outcome of improving safety on farms. If the government was serious about getting the legislation right, they would have actually consulted with stakeholders, not dropped wide-ranging omnibus legislation that will have an impact on the 45,000 farms and ranches across Alberta. The NDP has already aggravated Alberta's largest industry, energy, gas and oil. Now they're going after the second-largest . . .

The Deputy Speaker: I hesitate to interrupt you, hon. member, but pursuant to Government Motion 26, agreed to earlier this morning, the time allotted has now expired.

I must put the hoist amendment motion to a question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment H1 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:55 a.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Hunter	Pitt
Anderson, W.	Jansen	Rodney
Barnes	Jean	Schneider
Clark	Loewen	Smith
Cyr	MacIntyre	Starke
Drysdale	McIver	Stier
Ellis	Nixon	Strankman

Fraser	Orr	Taylor	For the motion:		
Gotfried	Panda	Yao	Anderson, S.	Goehring	Miranda
Hanson			Babcock	Gray	Nielsen
12:10			Carson	Hinkley	Notley
Against the motion:			Ceci	Horne	Payne
Anderson, S.	Hinkley	Nielsen	Connolly	Kazim	Renaud
Babcock	Horne	Notley	Coolahan	Kleinsteuber	Rosendahl
Carson	Kazim	Payne	Cortes-Vargas	Littlewood	Schmidt
Connolly	Kleinsteuber	Renaud	Dach	Loyola	Schreiner
Coolahan	Littlewood	Rosendahl	Dang	Luff	Shepherd
Cortes-Vargas	Loyola	Schmidt	Drever	Malkinson	Sucha
Dach	Luff	Schreiner	Eggen	Mason	Sweet
Dang	Malkinson	Shepherd	Feehan	McCuaig-Boyd	Turner
Feehan	Mason	Sucha	Fitzpatrick	McKitrick	Westhead
Fitzpatrick	McCuaig-Boyd	Sweet	Ganley	McLean	Woollard
Ganley	McKitrick	Turner	Against the motion:		
Goehring	McLean	Westhead	Aheer	Hunter	Pitt
Gray	Miranda	Woollard	Anderson, W.	Jansen	Rodney
Totals:	For – 28	Against – 39	Barnes	Jean	Schneider
[Motion on amendment H1 lost]			Clark	Loewen	Smith
The Deputy Speaker: I will now call the vote on Bill 6 in second reading.			Cyr	MacIntyre	Starke
[The voice vote indicated that the motion for second reading carried]			Drysdale	McIver	Stier
[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 12:13 p.m.]			Ellis	Nixon	Strankman
[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]			Fraser	Orr	Taylor
[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]			Gotfried	Panda	Yao
			Hanson		
			Totals:	For – 42	Against – 28
			[Motion carried; Bill 6 read a second time]		
			The Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, the House stands adjourned.		
			[The Assembly adjourned at 12:30 p.m. to 1:30 p.m.]		

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Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday afternoon, December 9, 2015

Day 31

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

First Session

Wanner, Hon. Robert E., Medicine Hat (ND), Speaker
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Standing Committee on Resource Stewardship

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Deputy Chair: Mr. Loewen

Aheer	Kleinsteuber
Babcock	MacIntyre
Clark	Rosendahl
Dang	Stier
Drysdale	Sucha
Horne	Woollard
Kazim	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

1:30 p.m.

Wednesday, December 9, 2015

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Introduction of Visitors

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Hon. members, I hope that you'll give me some licence to make this introduction myself today. I have the honour of introducing a friend, a mentor to not only myself but to this Assembly. The former member is with us today in two capacities, first, as a former Speaker of this Assembly; and, secondly, as a board member for the Alberta Association of Former MLAs, which you may hear more about later today. It is my great pleasure to introduce Mr. Gene Zwodzsky, who is seated in our Speaker's gallery. If he would rise and receive the warm welcome.

The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is indeed my honour today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Ms Jacquie Fenske. Jacquie is the former Progressive Conservative caucus colleague who represented the good people of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville from 2012 to 2015. Previous to her election to this Legislature, she served a distinguished career as a three-term councillor in Strathcona, where she was a respected advocate for her rural areas. She has brought not only effective advocacy to the provincial Legislature, but she remains a strong voice for rural Albertans to this day. Despite the fact that Ms Fenske is being eclipsed by the Legislature clock, I would ask that she slide out from behind it and accept the warm traditional welcome of the Assembly.

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: Hon. members, are there any school groups with us today?

I would recognize the Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. Feehan: Thank you. Hon. members, on behalf of yourself, Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise and introduce to you and through you the Legislative Assembly Office managers. We have Scott Ellis, senior financial officer and director of FMAS; Cheryl Scarlett, director of human resources, information technology, and broadcast services; Jacqueline Breault, manager of corporate services; Val Rutherford, manager of IT planning and development; Lyndsay Tischer, human resource services manager; Jillian Tilley, manager of IT operations; Darren Joy, manager of financial services; Val Footz, Legislature Librarian; Rhonda Sorensen, manager of corporate communications and broadcast services; Al Chapman, manager of visitor services; Allison Quast, executive assistant to the Clerk. They are joined by Jessica Dion, paralegal; and Trafton Koenig, legal counsel. They are here for this historic and special day of recognition for Dr. David McNeil, Clerk of the Legislative Assembly. They have had the privilege of working closely alongside Dr. McNeil over the last several years. I'd ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I'm pleased to meet the people who do the real work around here.

I would also acknowledge the Member for Peace River.

Ms Jabbour: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the great honour today of rising to introduce to you and through you Dr. Mary Machum, who happens to be our Clerk's fiancée, and his little sister, Ms Linda McNeil. Now, it says here that this is a real surprise to the Clerk, but I suspect he's kind of had a sense that this was coming. I know we're all thrilled to welcome these two women, who are able to join us today to see the Clerk in his home away from home. I would ask both Mary and Linda to rise and receive the warm traditional welcome of this House.

The Speaker: Welcome, guests. This is a particularly pleasant day for this House and a milestone.

I would ask the Member for Edmonton-Decore to please rise.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise and introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly some of the hard-working staff from the Edmonton North primary care network. The Edmonton PCN, located at Northgate Centre, is comprised of family doctors and health care professionals working together to improve the health of the community. Visiting us today are Leanne McGeachy, general manager; and Carly Strong, communications co-ordinator. I would ask them to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Minister of Education and Minister of Culture and Tourism.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly here today the AUPE Pay and Social Equity Committee. With us observing the proceedings are Susan Slade, Phyllis Faulkner, Raminder Gill, Barbara Brolly, Janet Ansah, Val Whelen, Cassandra Campeau, Christina Misquitta, and last but not least, my wife, Somboon Eggen. If they could please rise and receive the warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Carson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Theresa Levasseur. Theresa joins us today because of the outstanding work she does within our city. As the founder of Smile-Edmonton Theresa spends every Sunday in front of the Hope Mission, feeding and interacting with as well as clothing the people waiting in line for the shelter. Her goal from the onset was to connect those who have enough with those who don't. I have watched Smile-Edmonton grow over the last few years, and I am very grateful for the work that they have done within our community. Theresa is accompanied today by her daughter Rachelle as well as Eve Butz. I'd ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Welcome.

The Member for Calgary-Shaw.

Mr. Sucha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm extremely happy today to be able to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly my cousin Tracy Douglas-Blowers. Tracy is currently the director of membership and industry relations with the Alberta Hotel & Lodging Association. She also served as councillor for the city of Lloydminster, being elected in 1997. Her election and desire to give back to her community was a huge motivation for me

to aspire for public office as well at such a young age. I'd ask that she please rise and receive the warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.
Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to rise on this most special day – it's bring-your-cousin-to-work day – and introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly my second cousin Mike Shiplack. Like so many before him, he has brought his talents to Alberta, from Saskatchewan most recently. Mike, I would ask you to please rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.
The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

1:40

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real pleasure for me today to introduce through you to the Assembly five prominent community members from Mill Woods, active members of the Alberta Liberal Party. I'll introduce them to you and ask them to stand as I mention their names so that we can recognize them. Sital Singh Nanuan is a successful engineer. He has been president of the Edmonton Mill Woods Liberal Party of Canada's riding association for many years. He ran as a candidate and has helped many other candidates in various capacities. Mr. Nanuan also played a major role in the water treatment system for Golden Temple as an engineer. Amarjeet Singh Grewal is a renowned community leader and has held various positions with the Liberal Party of Canada along with running for the federal Liberals in Edmonton Mill Woods in 2006. He also has a strong background as a union leader and activist.

Maghar Singh Ubhi is a very successful hotelier and leader in the Sikh community – stay standing, if you will; that's fine – and has held various positions with the Liberal Party over the past many years, also as a fundraising chair for Edmonton-Mill Creek. Parminder Singh Boparai is a successful entrepreneur and is currently serving as treasurer for the federal Liberal EDA of Edmonton Mill Woods, and Avtar Singh Pannu has served as president of the Sikh Federation of Edmonton and was one of the key members in then Liberal leader and current Senator Grant Mitchell's leadership team.

Thank you for joining us. Let's give them the warm welcome of the Legislature.

The Speaker: Welcome.
The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm delighted today to introduce to you and through you to all members of this Assembly Leah and Christine Allen. Leah is a proud born-and-raised Albertan from my constituency who lives in Cochrane. She lives with posttraumatic stress disorder from a former abusive marriage. She is also a mother of three fantastic girls, one of whom is with us today. Leah is a volunteer in her community of Cochrane not only as a 4-H leader but in the local schools as well. Leah's daughter Christine became interested in the Legislature a year ago after learning about government in her grade 7 social class. She also took part in a mock vote for the recent provincial and municipal elections, and she is involved with 4-H, curling, volleyball, and the chess club. I'd ask them both to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Ministerial Statements

The Speaker: Hon. members, you will note that at the table today we have all of the table officers present. This Assembly has very many devoted public servants who every day assist and support us in this institution we call democracy. One of those individuals will be soon leaving us after some 28 years of service.

I will make a few additional comments, but I know there are several members of the House who would like to make some comments. I would ask the Government House Leader to proceed.

Dr. W.J. David McNeil Clerk of the Legislative Assembly

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's indeed my pleasure today to acknowledge the distinguished service of the Clerk of our Legislative Assembly, Dr. David McNeil. After 27 years and as the second-longest serving Clerk in Alberta's history Dr. McNeil is retiring. We've had six Clerks since the first sitting of the House in 1906, and only one has served longer. David McNeil has served with five Speakers and seven Premiers over that time. David McNeil became Clerk of the Legislative Assembly on August 1, 1987, the day after Edmonton's tornado, the worst natural disaster in our history, and he has weathered many storms since, deftly guiding this House through procedure in a nonpartisan, informed, and objective manner.

Now, Mr. Speaker, knowing that this was coming up, I took the opportunity in the halls on the way out of the building to look at all of the pictures – you know, they have the pictures of all the MLAs and the officers of the Assembly – and I saw that the most consistent photo in each Assembly's picture was Dr. McNeil. I could follow him back into, well, not quite his youth, but he had the most amazing pair of 1980s glasses in one of the earliest ones.

No doubt his doctorate in management science has served the House well as he helped the Legislature navigate a course through, shall we say, some rocky situations from time to time. Equally, his chemical engineering degree, unique amongst parliamentarians, prepared him to be a problem solver. He knows which things not to mix.

Whether it was ensuring that office space was provided in all corners of the province for our constituencies or tackling complex issues over caucus allowances, Dr. McNeil's approach has always been based on finding good solutions. As he described his role: my job is to look after the 87 politicians and make sure they have the office space, the staff, and all the other resources they need to do an effective job representing their constituents.

Beyond his duties in the House, Dr. McNeil's responsibilities extend to all government and opposition caucus offices, constituency offices and allowances, the Legislature Library, *Hansard*, and the smooth running of the offices of the Assembly, including the Information and Privacy Commissioner, the Auditor General, and the Ethics Commissioner.

Dr. McNeil's distinguished career has guided this Legislature through many transitions over the past 28 years, and through those transitions he has offered a steady hand and learned advice. He has also embraced technological advance so that, for example, the records of the Legislature are now available digitally to all Albertans no matter how remote. Recognizing his exemplary service, Dr. McNeil was awarded a Queen's Diamond Jubilee medal in November 2012. His prior public service includes duties with the Alberta government's personnel administration office and the government of Saskatchewan. He has been actively involved with organizations such as the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, Athabasca University, and the United Way.

Hon. members, in view of his significant contribution to current and, particularly, to former members of the Assembly, it's my great pleasure to announce that the board of directors of the Alberta Association of Former MLAs this last weekend voted unanimously to make Dr. David McNeil its first honorary member. In this regard I was very pleased that former Speaker Zwodzesky, who chairs the membership committee of that organization, has delivered to me a letter confirming this, and I will later table that in the Assembly for the record.

On a personal note, I just want to say that Dr. McNeil has been a good friend. I've admired his advice and his great sense of humour. We've had some great talks about fast cars, of which he is a bit of an aficionado, and he is a big fan of NDP Christmas videos as well, I think, Mr. Speaker. I believe I speak for all MLAs when I congratulate David McNeil for this honour, thank him for his dedicated, exemplary public service, and wish him a long and happy retirement. [Standing ovation]

The Speaker: Hon. members, I know there is much more applause to come. There are a number of other individuals who would like to extend their appreciation.

The Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, representing the Official Opposition.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is with great pleasure that I rise here to honour a great man and a great friend to all in the Assembly, Dr. David McNeil. Dr. McNeil has served the Assembly with honour and distinction for almost 30 years. Dr. McNeil has seen seven Premiers come and go from this House during his time as Clerk. Some of them went before they were ready to go, but you, sir, you always served well. The Clerk was also there to provide assistance and leadership to 392 MLAs during his tenure, and I am proud to be one of them.

I first got to know Dr. McNeil four years ago, upon my election in 2012. At that time 15 of the 17 members in our caucus were brand new. I remember thinking that Dr. McNeil would need a lot of patience with the sizable crop of new MLAs. While some might say patience, I like to think that we were just testing him to keep him sharp. I sure hope the experience working with those rookies came in handy this time around because the Wildrose elected 18 brand new MLAs, just a fraction of the 70 new faces.

1:50

All of us have done our job better because of Dr. McNeil's kind assistance. Dr. McNeil's ability to handle the demands of new members requires a special kind of patience and delicacy that he has demonstrated both time and time again. It was about a year ago that some of my former colleagues decided that Christmas would be a good time to really test the mettle of our Clerk and our entire staff. With just a day or two before LAO staff were to break for the holidays, news broke that some significant MLA office and personnel changes were required.

His service to the province and this Assembly is well known, but I want to take the opportunity to thank him on a personal level for all you did for me and the Wildrose caucus at that time. I also know that my colleagues who were here at the time share that feeling as well.

Our House leader can attest to the value that Dr. McNeil provided to our caucus as our House leader previously served as our chief of staff. I know he wishes that he could be here to speak his tribute, but he wanted me to let the Assembly know that not only is our Clerk the consummate professional; he is also one of the friendliest people on the grounds. I agree. He wanted to particularly thank the Clerk for the kindness and attention he gave to the House leader's

small children. I know that a generation of school kids have experienced that very same thing.

I am just one of the about 400 former and current members of this Assembly who could stand up and wax poetic about their experience with Dr. McNeil. Sir, you've served us all well. I want to thank the Clerk for all the help and guidance he has given me. I want to thank him for his determination to protect and safeguard democracy in this place, and I want to thank him for his wonderful sense of humour. Those are all qualities I will always remember.

On behalf of the Wildrose Official Opposition I wish Dr. McNeil all the best in his much-deserved retirement, and I know he'll enjoy much of it ripping around in cars, as the Government House Leader said, often too fast. Best of luck, Dr. McNeil, and thank you for all your service. We will all miss you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

On the way in the Clerk did not know that his other table officers were in the line behind us. I whispered to him as we were coming in if I could have some licence to seek that other members might get a chance to speak, and he gave me the same line that he's continued to give me: "Mr. Speaker, follow the procedure. Follow the procedure."

Notwithstanding that, I will therefore ask for unanimous consent to recognize the comments from the third party and the leaders of the Liberals and the Alberta Party.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to speak on behalf of both present and past members of the Progressive Conservative caucuses that have served with Dr. McNeil in this august Chamber during his long and distinguished career as our Clerk. In speaking to my colleagues both past and present, there is a universal sense of respect and admiration for Dr. McNeil.

He has been integral to the development of the Legislative Assembly Office, the LAO, as an independent and highly professional body serving Members of this Legislative Assembly and assisting them in discharging their duties to Albertans. In fact, the LAO did not exist as an independent, nonpartisan body in this province until 1972. Since taking on the role of Clerk in 1987, Dr. McNeil has brought his professionalism, his analytical ability, and his steadfast adherence to the principles of independence and impartiality. As only the sixth Clerk, as has been noted, to serve this Assembly since 1905 – and I would say that I take a certain amount of guilty pleasure in saying that we in the Progressive Conservative caucus helped pad his Premier statistics – he has gained a national and international reputation, well deserved, as the dean of Clerks in all of the Commonwealth parliaments all around the world.

I know that people know Dr. McNeil for his unimpeachable professionalism and his calm demeanour, but he is also well known for his enthusiasm for working with the youth of Alberta, whether it's been with the hundreds of pages that have served in this Chamber, with the thousands of children that have attended the School at the Legislature program as well as the MLA for a Day initiative. Professionalism, mentorship, leadership, and devotion to duty: these have all been the hallmarks of his service to this Assembly and to the people of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, when preparing a tribute such as this, I always like to probe for some personal anecdotes and accounts that might be lesser known about the individual. Well, I found a few. Dr. McNeil is a true Renaissance man. He keeps up to date with the latest trends in music, in art, and he also worked for many years as a ski instructor at Snow Valley. I guess it's not as little known as I thought it was, but our Clerk drives a Porsche and regularly attends,

as he did this year, the Porsche Sport Driving School. Well, finally we've answered the mystery as to who was burning doughnuts in the Legislature parking lot earlier this year.

Mr. Speaker, on a final note that is very personal to our caucus, I want to thank Dr. McNeil for his friendship and compassion on the day of the tragic accident that took the Member for Calgary-Greenway from among us. Doctor, your calm on a day when our hearts were broken and emotions were laid bare was a source of great comfort to our caucus and indeed to all members of this Assembly.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of all of the members of Progressive Conservative caucuses past and present, our legislative staff, our constituency office staff, those present here today, and for the hundreds that have served in the past with you, we all convey our very best wishes to you for a retirement that is filled with many new adventures, very few points of order, and that your orders of the day and your daily routine include many hours of cruising around our wonderful province, that you have served with such dedication and distinction.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. A real honour to stand today on behalf of the Liberal caucus and express my personal appreciation and that of many, many past Liberals to Dr. David McNeil, a gracious and distinguished Clerk, as he prepares to close his final days in service of this Assembly. For 28 years, Dr. McNeil, you have helped our Assembly do the people's work. Your time in office has seen passionate debate on issues of importance, filibusters some of us will never forget, amendments, subamendments, Orders of the Day, sittings that stretched through night into morning, and even perhaps, Mr. Speaker, the occasional violation of orders 23(h), (i), (j), or (k).

Whatever the issue, David McNeil was there to assist all of us – our Speaker's predecessors and all members of the Assembly – to operate in a productive and orderly and sometimes respectful fashion, including the very challenging renovations he oversaw on the federal building, which have been a phenomenon for all of us today.

David, your time in service to this Assembly has witnessed a sea change in technology, functionality, and ideology. You've witnessed changes in ministers, ministries, leaders, Premiers, parties, and governments, yet at all points, no matter the challenge or test, your abilities were always equal or superior to the task. Please accept my personal thanks and that of the Assembly and all Albertans, that we represent, for your wonderful service, and to you, sir, good health in the years ahead.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You know, in a Legislature that is filled with ever-evolving procedures, tumultuous change, robust debate – sometimes maybe a little too robust, as we've seen – there has been Dr. David McNeil, serving, as we've heard today, with five different Speakers, seven different Premiers, through eight elections, and with 392 different members. I've just briefly done some quick math, and that is 44 per cent of all members who have ever served in this Assembly.

He is a stalwart, reassuring presence within the Legislative Assembly Office, and I can say, as a new MLA and, I hope, on behalf of all of the new members who were recently elected, that he has given us comfort and assurance, answered every single question. It has been remarkable, a remarkably easy transition. But

despite those changes – the government moves to new buildings, the ever-changing uses of technology in the way we conduct business – Dr. McNeil has guided us through all of these adjustments with a steady, calm, and professional hand.

When I was elected, I assumed, like I'm sure most of us did, that Dr. McNeil was, in fact, a lawyer, but he's not, as we've heard today. He's a professional engineer, which I believe makes him absolutely unique amongst Clerks of all Assemblies in Canada and very likely the world.

2:00

Dr. McNeil has referred to himself and his processes as that of a problem solver. We give you lots of problems to solve, I think, as well. Problem solvers have a different way of looking at the world. They give themselves room to analyze, think laterally to come up with unique and innovative solutions, and when determining budgets, who but an engineer would turn to algebraic formulas to ensure a lack of bias and fairness in something that could be – how should we say it? – somewhat contentious? In tackling these complex issues with an analytical approach, gathering information and then coming up with practical, pragmatic, and fair solutions, Dr. McNeil should be an inspiration to us all, and indeed I think you are.

I want to thank you for your years of service, for guiding us, and for teaching so many of us new members what it means to serve as a professional. Dr. McNeil, thank you, and good luck in your next adventures.

The Speaker: Dr. McNeil, I've always felt that when one makes changes in one's life, as you are now doing, there's no greater acknowledgement that can come from two groups: first of all, your family and, secondly, the peers that you work with. I've always measured that as a good, sound measurement in determining that I was successful or not successful. I think you can see, by the tone and the presence of the people here, that you truly have been successful.

I want to personally thank you. Contrary to what the hon. Government House Leader may have said, this particular transition with this particular Speaker was a unique one, and I hope I don't end up sometime in a book that you've written. I personally want to thank you for the time and effort that you've provided to me. It is very much appreciated.

Hon. members, there will be another, more formal event that will be taking place at a later date. But I would ask that we all rise again and express our collective appreciation. And you know what? The table can stand up, too. [Standing ovation]

Oral Question Period

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

Farm and Ranch Worker Legislation

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The NDP is pulling every trick out of their book to ram through legislation that farmers and ranchers are simply asking to be consulted on, tricks that the NDP once railed against. Once upon a time the Government House Leader said that, quote, this time allocation thing is a way for the government to short-circuit democracy. Premier, we've seen consultation ignored, debate muzzled, and now democracy subverted. Is there any principle you won't sacrifice to ram through your agenda?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, to begin with and to be clear, the principle that we are actually pursuing with respect to Bill 6 is the protection of vulnerable workers, that have been prevented from accessing that for far too long. That is the principle that we are pursuing. I'd like to read a quote as well. It goes like this. "I mean, we're prepared to do anything, as long as it has an exit strategy. We're not prepared to continue on in the same filibuster that we've had all day today." That, Mr. Speaker, is the Leader of the Official Opposition when he was in Ottawa.

Mr. Barnes: Mr. Speaker, the NDP have broken the trust of Albertans. The story changes all the time, and they have no interest in letting debate see the light of day. We've gone from the NDP proclaiming family farms would have to be covered to flip-flopping and blaming it on misinformation. This isn't about misinformation. This is about the government deceiving farmers and ranchers and playing fast and loose with their lifestyles. To the Premier: how could Albertans ever trust you when you operate under such confusion, secrecy, and arrogance?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I've said before, we very clearly brought in an amendment to clarify the confusion, which I said very clearly that I take responsibility for. But this bill is about protecting vulnerable, paid farm workers and ensuring that they get access to workers' compensation and have the ability to refuse unsafe work. These are fundamental human rights, and it's about time that they, like other Alberta workers, can enjoy them.

Mr. Barnes: You reap what you sow. I can promise you this, Mr. Speaker. The NDP will reap a legacy of broken trust, deafness to the concerns of constituents, ignorance of Albertan values, and a constant attack on Alberta's industries and economy. We've seen massive taxes on all consumers, burdens on the energy sector, and now they've sharpened their focus onto agriculture. It's with a heavy heart I ask: which group of Albertans will the NDP go after next?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I think just on the issue of Bill 6 and the process, one thing that I forgot to mention previously was that the Leader of the Official Opposition, when he was in Ottawa, voted in favour of time allocation 60 times. Six, zero. Sixty times. Now, I'm sorry that we haven't given him that opportunity to vote for it that many times here in Alberta. But you know what? I think that perhaps they should consider establishing just a little bit of consistency on that side of the House on some of these issues.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government continues to tear down relationships with rural Alberta and make a mess of Bill 6. Yesterday they invoked closure to muzzle debate and force Bill 6 through this Assembly without consultation and, indeed, co-operation. This is a drastic step. In the words of the Government House Leader: this time allocation thing is a way to short-circuit democracy. To the Premier: why are you short-circuiting democracy and muzzling free speech in this Legislature?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, to be clear, the Assembly has debated Bill 6 so far for 17 hours, and that's just in second reading. I'd like to just read another quote. "This motion . . . to time limit debate and to get it done today [is being done] so that

we're done in about 15 hours." That again is a quote from the Leader of the Official Opposition when he was in Ottawa justifying a time limit motion, fifteen hours. We're at 17, and we're not done, as much as I'm sure you'd like to be today. The fact of the matter is that we've given tremendous opportunity for debate in this Legislature, and we'd like to get to a point where we can introduce our amendment.

Mr. Strankman: Again, Mr. Speaker, the Premier talks about regaining trust with rural Alberta. The only way she can regain that trust – the only way – is if she sends Bill 6 to committee or kills it outright. She doesn't understand that farmers hold the notion of co-operation in high regard. We are in a constant state of co-operation. To the Premier. Farmers want to work with you, not against you. Why will you not co-operate and put the brakes on Bill 6?

The Speaker: Hon. member, again, through the Speaker if you would.

The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, as I've said before and will say again, it's very important to us that vulnerable, paid farm workers who are not related to the farmers for whom they work can refuse unsafe work should they be directed to do it and they and their families can receive the benefits of workers' compensation should they be injured or killed. After that what we are going to do is consult on the regulations extensively. We've said that over and over. Those guys don't want to believe it, but the proof will be in our actions and in our record. You can trust that we will absolutely do that, and that's my message to farmers.

Mr. Strankman: Mr. Speaker, regulations are unaccountable law.

If the last few weeks were not enough evidence that the Premier should know better than to take farmers and ranchers for granted, there will be more protests, there will be more rallies, and there will be more letters, phone calls, and e-mails. They won't forget, and in 2019 this government will pay a heavy electoral price. Does the Premier think that it is worth it, or does she want to start over, consult, and do Bill 6 right?

2:10

Ms Notley: Well, as I've said before, Mr. Speaker, what I'm very committed to doing is respecting and enforcing the basic human rights of this very vulnerable group of workers, human rights that have been ignored for far too long, and I am very, very proud that our caucus is coming together to make sure that those rights are finally being recognized in this province like every other province in the country.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Climate Change Strategy

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The price of oil is below \$40, and 80,000 Albertans have lost work, the majority of them in our energy sector. What's the NDP response? Bring in a \$3 billion carbon tax that targets businesses and families across the province. We know that this isn't satisfying our critics, but now we are hearing that Ottawa is about to sign a deal in Paris that will make things even worse. It's crazy to think that Alberta has both its provincial and federal government working against their main industry. How can the Premier stand for this?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's been our view and one that has been supported by an unprecedented level of consensus that it is in the best interests of future Albertans – our children, our grandchildren – and also in the best interests of our current energy industry for us to do our part in a reasonable, productive way on climate change so that we can increase our access to markets, so that we can remediate our reputation, and so that we can help diversify the economy and strengthen the energy industry. That's why we've had such unprecedented support for the plan that we have moving forward. We will continue to work with Albertans, and we believe that in the long run it'll prove to have been a good decision.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mrs. Aheer: Our children and grandchildren are going to be paying for this debt for generations.

Our energy companies are barely able to keep their heads above water, and all the NDP talk about is this new way to further strangle our economy. Companies are cutting wages and shedding 500 jobs a day. If Ontario manufacturers were getting hammered like this, they would be talking about bailouts, but because Alberta has now lost its voice, they're talking about how they can make things even worse. A Trudeau government sticking its nose in Alberta is bad news. Can the Premier tell Albertans why the government isn't fighting back?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, in fact, our climate leadership plan is a practical, made-in-Alberta solution that will protect Alberta's interests. That was one of the reasons we moved forward so ambitiously with this plan. We knew that if we put a practical solution in place that enjoyed the consensus that this one does, we could then say to the federal government: "We've got our plan. We're doing our part. You do your thing, but that's what we're doing here." That's what we did. We're standing up for Alberta. We're standing up for Alberta industry, and we're making sure that we all move forward in a way that builds our economy here in this province.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you. It's clear that when the Premier called us embarrassing cousins, she meant it. That's why they're bringing in a \$3 billion backdoor PST, it's why they don't take these threats against our industry seriously, and it's why they're forcing through a royalty review. The carbon tax brought Alberta goodwill for less than a week. ForestEthics is back to campaigning against pipelines. Ottawa is blocking tankers on the west coast, and now we're talking about even more risky policies coming from this Trudeau government. Why are you standing up for everyone but Albertans? Why, Premier? Why?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, as we move forward with our climate leadership plan, we will continue to work as productive partners with industry and with other civil society leaders in Alberta. At the end of the day this plan will help our industry. It will help our access to markets. It will help all Albertans. It will help our kids. At the end of the day, you know, ignoring climate change is not the solution to a low price of oil. I know that those guys think that laying off nurses, laying off teachers, and ignoring climate change is a solution and that somehow the price of oil will come up if you

do that, but that's not the solution. We need to take action, and that's what we've done.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party.

Farm and Ranch Worker Legislation (continued)

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday the Minister of Municipal Affairs, when talking about Bill 6, stated: "We will move forward on [changes] with Bill 6 because they're very basic and a small piece of the big picture moving forward." Minister, given your government's ongoing fondness for legislating first and hastily consulting later or not at all, please elaborate on what the big picture is for farmers and ranchers in the future.

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I really appreciate the opportunity. What the member was referring to yesterday was the fact that what we are doing as of January 1 is this very basic thing where we are giving vulnerable paid farm workers access to the right to refuse unsafe work and ensuring that they have access to WCB. As we've said over and over, as with any sector of the economy, whether it be agriculture, oil and gas, manufacturing, any one, there is a lot of work that has to be done to negotiate the specific health and safety standards, and that is the work that we will do in consultation with industry stakeholders going forward.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. McIver: So, Mr. Speaker, it's about WCB. On May 16, 2013, the Premier decided to absolutely trash the WCB. During her drive-by smearing of WCB she stated, and I quote: employers pay almost half the national average of what employers in every other province pay into the workers' compensation system. To the Premier: if you really believe this to be true, after you are done forcing WCB onto farmers and ranchers, can they expect their premiums to double under your direction?

The Speaker: The hon. Premier.

Ms Notley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. What I have said is that certain issues that the WCB deals with can be improved, and we're going to move forward with that because we think injured workers deserve fair compensation. The other thing, to be clear, is that those farms that will be adopting WCB will be those farms who have paid farm workers, not unpaid neighbours, not family members, and not even paid family members. So to be very, very clear about that because the member misstated the presumption in his question, overall what we're going to do . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. McIver: Brace yourselves, farmers and ranchers.

Just yesterday a minister of the Crown, while answering a question from the opposition, turned and taunted hard-working farm and ranch families who were seated in the gallery. This comes after the Premier, shortly after winning on May 5, stated, and I quote: Alberta has voted for change; they voted for a new kind of respect and a renewed relationship with their government. To the Premier: is your minister's rudeness to guests of this House yesterday indicative of the respect that Albertans can expect from you and your government?

Ms Notley: Mr. Speaker, I completely disagree with the untrue characterization of the answers that were given by our ministers yesterday as they were struggling to be heard over the din over there. What is indicative of the respect of this government is the fact that our ministers have gone to 8 consultations across this province in the last two weeks, and they have met with Albertans. They have gone to rallies of people that were very angry with them and talked to them one on one. They stood on benches in the middle of rallies to try and get their point across. They've made themselves accessible in a way that members from the former government couldn't even begin to imagine because they never ever did it, and that . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.
The Member for Calgary-Elbow.

Members' Accommodation Allowance

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Now, we as MLAs get a pretty fair deal. We have stable income at a time when many Albertans are losing their jobs, and our travel and living expenses are taken care of. MLAs are allowed to claim \$1,930 per month, irrespective of what it actually costs us, for a living allowance. In my case that's nearly \$700 a month more, or \$10,000 a year more, than it actually costs me. Now, I've found a way around the rules to claim less, but the system is set up to allow MLAs to actually claim more than it costs them for rent every month. To the Premier: do you feel that's fair?

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.
The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. With respect, I believe the question is not in order as it deals with a matter that has been delegated by this Legislature to the Members' Services Committee. It is not a matter for the government to answer.

Mr. Clark: Mr. Speaker, I'll keep trying because the Members' Services Committee, in fact, is not . . .

The Speaker: Hon. member, I believe that the Government House Leader is correct. This is a matter for the administration of the Assembly. Do you have a first supplemental question?

2:20

Mr. Clark: I'll ask the second question, Mr. Speaker. I think I know what the answer is going to be.

One of the first things that I did as an MLA, even before I was sworn in, was in fact to request this of the Members' Services Committee, that the rules change to allow MLAs or require MLAs to claim only up to the \$1,930 cap, not absolutely that amount. When that does come before the Members' Services Committee, Madam Premier, will your members support my motion?

The Speaker: I believe, hon. member, that if that line of questioning continues, you are out of order with respect to this question.

I would like to move on to Red Deer-South if I could.

Promotion of Alberta's Energy Industry

Ms Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My constituents know that if we want to gain access to new markets for our energy resources, we need to improve our international reputation when it comes to the responsible and sustainable development of our energy resources.

To the Minister of Energy: how will a climate leadership plan help our energy producers access new markets for their products?

The Speaker: The Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you for the question, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, it's been up to us to demonstrate to people that we're taking climate change seriously. A few weeks ago that was proven to us when President Obama made his decision on Keystone. When it comes to market access, we need to improve our reputation environmentally and work on those markets to get our product to tidewater.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that building and maintaining positive relationships with other provinces will be crucial to ensuring the future health of our energy industry, to the same minister: what are you doing to improve relationships with your energy counterparts in other provinces when it comes to Alberta's energy products?

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, we continue to meet with industry, and many of our industries are multiprovincial, in fact multinational. Last June I met in Halifax with my minister counterparts. Recently I met with the Minister of Natural Resources, and in the last few weeks I've met with four pipeline companies to talk about how we can work together as government and industry to make those pipelines a reality.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Miller: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that promoting Alberta's energy industry to oil and gas investors is of particular importance given the current economic situation, again to the Energy minister: what are you doing to assure energy investors that we are open for business and to encourage investment to stay here in Alberta?

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, first of all, from day one I've said that we are an energy province, and we will continue to be an energy province. We meet constantly with industry. We've conducted talks back and forth with industry on their concerns with business and markets, and we have worked with investors, talking to them both in Calgary and across the country to discuss knowledge. We're also putting money into ATB and AIMCo and Alberta Enterprise Corporation.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

The Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Farm and Ranch Worker Legislation

(continued)

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm proud to be an MLA for a riding that represents so many farmers and ranchers. They are the pillars of their community, the hardest workers I know, and they embody what being an Albertan is. The NDP's handling of Bill 6 has been a complete slap in the face to these tens of thousands of Albertans, and they won't forget how you've broken their trust and how they have been treated. To the Premier: why do you insist on pushing forward with this bill without consulting the very Albertans whose livelihood you are destroying?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. We certainly have heard a number of concerns, and we've honoured those. We wanted to make sure that the intent of our bill, which was the intent from the beginning, protecting vulnerable paid farm workers, was going to move forward. In terms of the specifics that have been raised, a number of them will be fleshed out in collaboration with different types of industry experts in the months and years to come because we want to make sure that we get this right, but we aren't going to stop standing up for vulnerable farm workers in the meantime.

Mr. Nixon: Given that the yells and chants of thousands of Albertans who have showed up at rallies all across this province won't make the Premier listen and use common sense, maybe this will. Given that last night as we debated Bill 6 in this Chamber there were farmers and ranchers up in the galleries listening closely and all they heard from the NDP was the deafening roar of silence, I'd like the minister of agriculture to answer this question. What does he have to say to the two ladies who drove all the way from Nanton and listened with tears in their eyes?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our government is incredibly proud of our agriculture minister for his leadership on this initiative. Yes, there have been times that he has had to enter into difficult conversations, but he has stood strong to the principle of supporting and standing up for people when they are killed on the job, injured on the job, making sure that they have basic protections and that they have compensation. That is fundamental. He has to answer to the family members of those people who die on the farms in unsafe workplaces if we don't move forward with this legislation. He's not willing to do that, so he's going to make sure that he continues to work in collaboration with farmers and ranchers and industry while protecting workers.

Mr. Nixon: What they did, Mr. Speaker, was taunt them.

Whereas the NDP know full well that they have dug themselves into a hole on Bill 6 that they are too stubborn to climb out of and given that their treatment of farmers and ranchers should be a rude wake-up call to all Albertans about how this government is willing to govern, I would like to give the NDP one more chance. For the thousandth time, will you do the right thing, listen to Alberta's farmers and ranchers, and kill Bill 6?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I know that members opposite may find it difficult to actually think about when you promise you're going to do something in an election and you get elected, you fulfill that promise. We promised that we were going to move forward on protecting farm workers and ranch workers. We heard that there are concerns about how that is going to happen and protecting neighbours who want to help out with neighbours and ensuring that there can be 4-H going forward, ensuring that family members who may get paid through the corporation can still do that without having to be part of this legislation. It isn't intended to cause any concern. It's intended to protect vulnerable workers, and that's exactly what it's going to do.

Climate Change Strategy (continued)

Mr. Fraser: Mr. Speaker, we applaud the government's enthusiasm, but we're more concerned with their inexperience: the climate

change strategy, Bill 5, Bill 6, Bill 8, and growing concerns from the energy companies, school boards, nurses, doctors, teachers, of course farmers, taxpayers in general, and we're also hearing from their own appointed government experts. To the Premier. The head of your climate change panel has recently stated that if Alberta is the only player in the game trying to achieve the climate change goal, we will run the risk of losing all future investment in our energy sector. Premier, wouldn't it be wise to start listening to the people and slow down?

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for that question. I think, unfortunately, that he has the comments out of context. The head of our panel has said that were we to move beyond what is currently recommended in terms of carbon pricing and other initiatives, we would then run into difficult problems with respect to emissions leakage and trade-exposed industry. But it was the opinion of that panel, which achieved great consensus as you know, that the carbon pricing mechanisms and the other mechanisms included within the recommendations are sufficient to get us to emissions reductions while ensuring we don't experience emissions leakage or . . .

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

Mr. Fraser: Given the fact that Germany has already surpassed Alberta's targets in terms of green energy delivery and given the fact that they have just commissioned 16 coal-fired energy plants to get up and running and that here in Alberta we don't even have that green energy yet or the transmission lines to feed the province's energy and the current government is in a rush to shut down coal-fired generation plants, to the Minister of Energy: can you please articulate the plan moving forward so that Albertans won't literally be left in the cold or the dark?

The Speaker: The Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you for the question, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, in our plan we are moving forward to work – we've described the what; now we're working with industry on the how. We will be shortly appointing a facilitator that will work with the coal industry, the communities, and the workers for a plan. We have 15 years to transition these folks, and we will be doing that in a thoughtful and collaborative manner.

Mr. Fraser: Given the fact that the information coming from the Paris climate change summit is telling us that the federal Liberals have deferred to the Green Party's Elizabeth May to represent Canada around further discussions and now the Liberals are setting a target of only a 1.5 degree increase in global temperature versus the 2 that Alberta has set, experts are saying that if we follow this, it will be catastrophic to Alberta. Premier: will you stand up for Alberta and ensure that you will listen to your own experts and put a stop to this idea?

2:30

Ms Notley: Well, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that question because that's exactly what we're going to do. As I said before, the reason we developed this plan was so that we didn't have a different plan from Ottawa or elsewhere imposed upon us. We have confidence that this plan represents real action with real progress and real, measurable outcomes, and we will stick to this plan because it is what represents the best balance between environmental issues, civil society issues, and industry leadership and it preserves and protects the integrity and viability of our economy, including the energy industry. So that's what we will do. We will take a balanced

approach, and we'll move forward in a way that protects Alberta's interests.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. Premier.

The Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills

Northern Alberta Concerns

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For weeks we have been warning NDP MLAs that rural Alberta is upset and that they feel they are being ignored. This is especially the case in northern Alberta. They've been forced to drive hours just to try to get someone to listen. In Vegreville farmers and ranchers were either furious or have been driven to tears with their opinions being completely ignored. When is this NDP government going to start listening to the people of northern Alberta instead of ramming through misguided legislation?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Certainly, the first consultation meeting we had was in northern Alberta, and we did not feel that the information being shared through official channels was in line with what the bill and the intention of the regulations were going to be. That's why we changed the structure of the meetings. We've had cabinet ministers at every single meeting since then. I was in Medicine Hat. We've got members in northern Alberta. We've had members consulting throughout Alberta, and we are certainly happy to take their feedback into consideration as we move forward in partnership on supporting vulnerable farm workers and protecting the family farm.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Northern Alberta is tired of being ignored. Given that northern Alberta, where one-third of government revenues come from, has been plagued with many issues along our main transportation corridors, from road bans to crumbling highways, loss of rail services, when will this government stop ignoring northern Albertans, stop hurting our economy, and start listening to us on issues such as Bill 6 and the job-killing carbon tax?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. I'm proud of the fact that I grew up in northern Alberta. Many of our caucus members did, and we are certainly engaged in collaborations with communities. We have strong representation in our government caucus as well. I've also visited the hon. member's riding and taken concerns that he's raised about local health care desires into consideration as we continue to move forward in partnership. We're elected to serve all Albertans no matter where you live, and that's exactly what this government is doing.

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Whether it's in Lac La Biche, Athabasca, or the Peace Country, northern Alberta farm and rural families are feeling shunned. Given that no one in any of the northeastern Alberta Wildrose ridings was even offered one of your come-and-be-told consultation sessions, are northeastern Albertans correct in assuming your government doesn't care to hear the real concerns of our farmers and ranchers and oil field workers?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. As I said, I, for example, attended some of these consultation meetings. It certainly was a lot of time that the government was there paying attention, listening, and honouring the concerns that were being raised. That's exactly why they said: "Put it in writing. Put it in writing, Minister, that this isn't going to apply to me and my family if we don't have any paid farm workers on our farm." That's exactly what we plan on doing when we finally get to the committee stage and can introduce our amendments.

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

Emergency Medical Services in Willow Creek

Mr. Stier: Mr. Speaker, in 2013 the MD of Willow Creek entered into a pilot project with AHS to provide emergency ambulance service in southern Alberta due to inadequate coverage, the non-emergency interfacility transfer issue, and the ambulance flexing problems from region to region. To restore service, the municipality purchased three ambulance units. However, seven weeks ago the executive director of EMS suddenly decommissioned these units, rendering them useless. To the Health minister: will you take control of this bureaucratic disaster and restore the authorization of these crucial emergency units today?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the member for the question. We certainly want to make sure that no matter where you live in Alberta, you get the right care in the right place at the right time by the right health professional, and that, of course, includes having confidence that you've got adequate emergency response services in your own community. That's why, certainly, one of Alberta Health Services key priorities is making sure that that is a driving value moving forward. I have certainly been holding them to high account in that regard and look forward to collaborating with the hon. member in terms of the specific community that he refers to. I have received some information about the matter, and I'll be happy to follow up with him offline.

The Speaker: Through the Speaker, hon. member.

Mr. Stier: Well, Mr. Speaker, this has become an enormous safety concern for patients and their families in southern Alberta. Given that rural ambulance service is a vital artery to getting patients into emergency care and that residents cannot trust this government and this faulty system and given that, unlike AHS, the MD of Willow Creek recognized the desperate plight that local residents face with unnecessary risk caused by this inadequate system, why is the minister punishing and not rewarding Willow Creek for picking up these pieces where her government failed?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I guess at this point in the discussion today it's going to be a spend day – why won't you spend more money? – when we spend hours being told how we need to be cutting billions of dollars from front-line services, that go towards supporting things exactly like EMS. I have to say that this is very surprising to me, that today we're being asked to spend more money. We are, of course, in collaboration. Alberta Health Services receives an allocation from the government of Alberta, and they are responsible for emergency medical services. I'll be happy to provide more details to the hon. member.

The Speaker: Through the Speaker, hon. member.

Mr. Stier: Well, Mr. Speaker, to the minister: they sent you a letter; they think they deserve an explanation for their dedicated efforts.

Given that the adjacent community on the Blood reserve found themselves in similar circumstances due to AHS mismanagement and the lack of adequate services and seeing as they were allowed to keep the emergency unit they purchased whereas Willow Creek's remain in a storage facility collecting dust, will the minister and AHS stop bullying the MD of Willow Creek, exercise a little common sense, and reinstate the authority to utilize these units. They spent the money. They are the ones that are making the effort, Minister; you're not.

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the question and for the opportunity to clarify to everyone that it doesn't matter where you live, you deserve to have access to the right care in the right place at the right time by the right professional. We do this in consultation with communities throughout the province. I actually met yesterday with two different municipalities to talk about their concerns and with members of the hon. member's own caucus to discuss some of the issues there. We're working to make sure that we can maximize the opportunities for local communities to meet local needs. In terms of this specific situation I'll be happy to follow up afterwards.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-North West.

Primary Care Networks

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Crowfoot Village Family Practice is one of the great innovators of health care delivery in Alberta. They have developed a unique model to provide a high quality of care to Albertans. This PCN provides service to 2 per cent of all Calgarians, including myself and my entire family and 25,000 other people. It saves the government up to \$17 million a year in hospital costs, so I was surprised to hear that Crowfoot might be facing a sizable reduction in their funding for the coming year. To the Minister of Health: is it true that CVFP is facing a 20 per cent cut?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. When I moved into this portfolio back in May, I learned about the cuts that were being proposed by that very same government that had been in previously that were far greater than what we've discussed with PCNs to ensure that we have stability of front-line services. There are a number of PCNs that have millions of dollars in surplus. We've said that having money sitting in the bank when you have patients who need to be cared for is not the right way to spend taxpayer money. So what we've done is work in collaboration with PCNs to discuss ways that they can use their reserves to offset this year's current operations so that money isn't sitting in the bank.

The Speaker: First supplemental.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the same minister. We can appreciate the issues around cash reserves. However, given that the work done by Crowfoot has resulted in significant reductions in ER visits and hospital admissions and given that we have heard from constituents that Crowfoot was already denied the 2.5 per cent increase in physician funding that was approved in 2015 and given the government's stated goal to ensure stability in

the health care field, can the minister explain the rationale as to why Crowfoot might be penalized?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the question. As the House is well aware, I launched a financial review of PCNs because I wanted to make sure – a number of them are being very responsible with their allocations, spending them on primary care within a reasonable time frame, a year or two years of when they received those allocations. Others have been sitting on millions of dollars of reserves. That certainly isn't in the best interests of Albertans. The financial review is in the process of wrapping up. I've been working in collaboration with the PCN leads to make sure that they have an opportunity to give their feedback on the report. I'll be happy to share an update with this House, likely in the early months of the new year, around specifics of how we're going to be moving forward in partnership with PCNs.

2:40

The Speaker: Second supplemental.

Ms Jansen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm assuming that you're insinuating that Crowfoot is not being responsible. I just want to be clear on that. It's worrisome that primary care networks like Crowfoot, who are showing such great results, would face these kinds of cuts. Given that the government has prided itself on standing up for front-line services and with Crowfoot providing world-class service to the community, can the minister tell us whether she supports the work of PCNs like Crowfoot, and if so, will she reverse these cuts?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The budget that was proposed by the party that the member opposite is a part of would have had all of the reserves taken back, and that was rejected. That was seen as being rash and short-sighted. What we've done is work in partnership with the PCNs to find ways that we can be responsible with the money that's sitting in the bank, working in collaboration. Every PCN receives \$62 per patient per year towards operating the PCN. What we've said is: if you have significant reserves, we want you to help offset that allocation this year. Of course, everyone knows what a difficult financial year this is for Albertans and for Alberta families.

The Speaker: Edmonton-South West.

Student Assessment

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We need to be able to assess and provide proper feedback to our students so they can excel as they progress through the school system and on to graduation. We know that assessments in Alberta have been controversial in the past. I've heard from my constituents, from teachers, from students, and from parents about this. To the Minister of Education: what plans do you have to evolve how we assess students so we can ensure that they have the tools they need to succeed?

The Speaker: The Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the question. Certainly, I've been working with our education partners, with parents and students and teachers, to ensure that we improve our methods for assessing students. For example, the SLAs, or the student learning assessments, at the grade 3 level: we ran a second

year of pilots, and it was very successful, a made-in-Alberta construction for assessment at the beginning of the year rather than at the end of the year. These are the sorts of innovations that we're using to ensure that all of our students get a high quality of education.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
First supplemental.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Now that the minister has brought up the SLAs, given that these SLAs, or student learning assessments, in particular, were criticized by some during the first year of the pilot, what have you changed this year to improve the program, and what has been the feedback on that?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Eggen: Well, thank you for the question, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, in response to feedback from teachers and from parents as well, we have put in different evaluation models. For example, with the SLAs we reduced the time to administer the evaluations by half this year. I still made it optional for each of the school boards, and I had 59 out of 61 school boards participate, expressing the value of this SLA testing. The feedback is very positive, and I'm working together with partners to make it even better next year.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Second supplemental.

Mr. Dang: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that the SLAs will help ensure that our students have the building blocks they'll need to succeed and given that students are required to write diploma exams before graduating high school, to the same minister: how are these assessments going to be conducted going forward?

The Speaker: The Minister of Education.

Mr. Eggen: Yes. Thanks for the question, Mr. Speaker. We know that there had been consensus amongst our partners, amongst teachers and parents and students, that we needed to reassess the weighting of the grade 12 examinations. We know the importance and the value of those diploma exams – indeed, I was a diploma teacher myself – however, we did see the utility of reducing those to 30 per cent. It allows teachers greater latitude for their assessments to come into play. Certainly, it's important to note that we've seen our high school completion rates increase by 5 per cent in recent years, and we'll continue to push that.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.
The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Farm and Ranch Worker Legislation (continued)

Mr. Taylor: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Battle River-Wainwright is a provincial hub of agriculture activity. The people I represent are honest and fair, but they simply can't believe the way this government is ramming through Bill 6. The mayor of Bashaw wrote me yesterday saying that she wants the same level of collaboration and consultation for farmers that she gets as an elected official. To the Premier: will you put the brakes on Bill 6 and take the time to collaborate and consult with farmers?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. We are committed to making sure that we move forward with the most basic human rights protection for farm workers and ranch workers. That includes, if you are in a work situation that you feel is unsafe, the right to say: I can't do that; I don't feel safe in that situation. It includes, if you are injured or you die on the work site, your family having compensation, your being able to provide for your family because it wasn't your fault and it wasn't your employer's fault. Certainly, we are moving forward with the very basic protections, and we'll be working in collaboration with industry, with farmers, with ranchers, and with the workers to make sure we get the regulations right moving forward.

Mr. Taylor: It's not just Bashaw.

Now, given that I'm getting flooded with letters and calls from mayors and reeves who want this government to kill Bill 6 and I'm sure the members opposite are flooded with letters and calls opposing Bill 6, too, and given that we know that the NDP government took the time to consult with union bosses and failed NDP candidates, why does this Premier think they know better than the farmers, the ranchers, and the officials who represent them?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and for the question. Certainly, just in NDP ridings alone there are 11,000 farms, and we've been working to make sure that the concerns that have been raised are honoured and reflected as we move forward with the legislation. That's why we hope to get to committee stage so that we can introduce the very clear amendment that the farmers and ranchers, who own the industry, have actually asked us to do, to bring forward in writing the specific protections. This is about protecting workers. This is about also making sure that we protect the family farm.

Thank you.

Mr. Taylor: Given that last week I held a Bill 6 town hall meeting at Killam and I saw over 300 people in attendance and given that the room was unanimously against Bill 6 – in fact, the rooms were unanimously against Bill 6 at town halls right across Alberta – when will this NDP government get the picture that people in rural Alberta understand this bill and what it is? Why are you forcing this through on farms without consultation?

Ms Hoffman: Mr. Speaker, we've been at meetings throughout the province, and I think that what we've heard very clearly is that we want to make sure that farms are safe places for Albertans. I think all members of this House agree with that. We want to make sure that we move forward in collaboration, but I also know in my heart of hearts that nobody wants to deny a family member who is left widowed with no means of providing for her family because her husband or her other partner has died on the work site. That's why we're moving forward, to make sure that we have the most basic human rights protections for farm workers and ranch workers. We'll work in collaboration to get the rest of the details right moving forward.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. minister.

Coal-fired Electric Power Plant Retirement

Mr. Gotfried: Mr. Speaker, this government is intent on irresponsible acceleration of coal phase-out while attacking jobs, communities, and the Alberta advantage of safe, reliable, and

relatively inexpensive electricity for consumers and businesses. Ontario's NDP leader has stated, and I quote: people are paying more for electricity because this government arrogantly chose to ignore the advice of experts. To the minister of environment specifically: how will you assure Albertans that the rejection of responsible, industry-proposed, dial-down, dial-up strategies will not also lead to overpriced green energy, unsustainable government intervention, and unreliable service in our province?

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, since we unveiled our climate leadership plan, where I said that we created the what, we have met with industry. All of our electrical partners have agreed that there's a lot of work to be done but that it is doable, and we will move forward in collaboration to do that work.

Mr. Gottfried: Work to be done, indeed.

Again to the minister: given that the Auditor General of Ontario issued a damning report outlining that taxpayer costs associated with attracting investment under a flawed, uneconomical, unsustainable coal-reduction plan could reach \$170 billion by 2032 and given that this government has rejected a responsible dial-down, dial-up strategy proposed through industry consultation, can you tell Albertans and Alberta businesses today how many more billions of taxpayer dollars it will cost them for your irresponsible plan?

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you for the question. Mr. Speaker, we have committed to take action on renewables, and we have committed to take action on coal phase-out. We are working with the industry, we're working with the Alberta Electric System Operator and the Alberta Utilities Commission to make sure that this is done in a responsible manner, keeping prices as low as possible, keeping the lights on, and working with industry, workers, and communities.

2:50

Mr. Gottfried: Given your party's leadership in a world of unintended consequences, this government has not delivered a concrete plan on how to attract investment to replace the dependable, peak-generating baseload that coal provides, nor have you been honest with Albertans on the likely cost to taxpayers of compensating stranded capital. Minister, can you give us at least a rough estimate in the billions of dollars of the costs to taxpayers of industrial compensation related to accelerated coal phase-out?

The Speaker: The Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll tell you what's irresponsible: being in power for 44 years and failing to act to protect our environment, to protect our jobs, to protect our international reputation. We are absolutely committed to making sure that we move forward in partnership. That's why there were so many people supporting us and standing on stage at our carbon announcement. I wish members opposite would stop standing alone.

Public Service Compensation Disclosure

Dr. Turner: Mr. Speaker, this government is committed to being open and transparent, a big change from the previous government. Part of that means ensuring that Albertans are made aware of salaries for management positions. To the Minister of Justice: how will the public-sector transparency act impact agencies, boards, and commissions?

The Speaker: The Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. I'm very proud to say that the disclosure of those earning more than \$125,000 per year – this goal focuses on higher income earners – will apply to agencies, boards, and commissions since this bill passed with unanimous support from the House. The ABCs under the Alberta Public Agencies Governance Act will also have to disclose all compensation of their board members. We think that expanding public-sector disclosure will give Albertans a better idea of where their tax money is going.

Thank you.

Dr. Turner: Given that medical professionals and physicians are compensated through a variety of rules and given that we are hearing different opinions about the disclosure of salaries of hard-working physicians in our community, to the same minister: how is your ministry ensuring that their voices are heard?

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Well, of course, the act only brings in the general enabling provisions with respect to physicians because, as the member has noted quite correctly, their compensation is incredibly complicated. Going forward, we will be working with physicians and with the AMA to ensure that we get it right on physician compensation disclosure. I know that my colleague the Minister of Health has already been in contact with the AMA to discuss their concerns, and we will be working closely with them to develop regulations going forward.

Dr. Turner: Given that there are also concerns about publishing names of those over the threshold, to the same minister: can you explain why we are doing this and how safety concerns will be addressed?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and to the member for the question. Well, of course, this bill just expands salary compensation disclosure to agencies, boards, and commissions. As we're all aware, whether rightly or wrongly, some of those positions have been criticized as being patronage appointments, so by disclosing the names, this bill will ensure not only that the taxpayers know how their tax money is spent but that the government is hiring the right people and putting the right people in the right positions. In addition, the legislation allows for people to make an application for personal safety exemptions.

Thank you.

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, before continuing with Members' Statements, I wonder if I might ask for the unanimous consent of the House to continue the Routine past 3 o'clock.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Chestermere-Rocky View.

Referral Amendment on Bill 6

Mrs. Aheer: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Albertans from Nanton were sitting up in our gallery yesterday. They are honest people, they live off the land, and they don't ask for anything special from the government, just to be listened to and, for the most part, to be left alone as they conduct their business. They are moms and dads who

care more than anyone about keeping their family farms safe, and like almost everyone in their province, they're worried about their livelihoods.

Imagine how the farmers and ranchers in Banff-Cochrane felt when their MLA stood up on a referral motion that we put forward and said that it was silly. Imagine the consternation of those people in that area and the family from Nanton, who left in tears. This government should be ashamed of themselves – these men and women feed us; they keep our province moving – and what this government's arrogance is doing to our province. What a proud moment for the constituents of Banff-Cochrane to see their MLA stand up, but instead of defending farmers and ranchers in his riding, he chose to call the referral, that will engage stakeholders and shed light on how to make this legislation successful, silly. The farmers have clearly said: do not ram Bill 6 through. Listen to their concerns and consult them. That's why we put the motion forward to send Bill 6 to committee. It's what farmers wanted. It would allow them to be consulted on all aspects of this ominous omnibus bill.

The NDP response has been absolutely appalling. I beg of the government to please listen to farmers, to please listen to us over here, and to please consider putting this bill to referral to consider all of the aspects that have been put forward by the members of this side of the House.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville.

War Horse Awareness Foundation

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my honour to rise and recognize the efforts of Deanna Lennox of Fort Saskatchewan, who joined us here in the House last week, and the great contributions she has made in establishing the War Horse Awareness Foundation. As a 16-year veteran of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Deanna has dedicated her time and efforts in support of first responders who suffer posttraumatic stress disorder and other occupational stress injuries. For her contributions Deanna was nominated and awarded the Stars of Alberta volunteer award just this past week.

Being a first responder in our province is a noble cause that brave women and men take up the charge to do every day. The price they pay can be very high: divorce rates as high as 84 per cent; 1 out of 4 struggles with alcoholism; life expectancy is reduced by an average of 15 years compared to the general population; between 10 and 30 per cent, depending on the department, suffer from PTSD; and these responders are twice as likely to die from suicide as in the line of duty.

This is where Deanna Lennox has worked to bridge the gap. Her foundation provides something very unique, the opportunity to engage with horses as an effective means of therapy. In addition to facilitating horse therapy, the foundation is committed to getting front-line service providers and their families connected with the resources and programs that best suit their needs. Deanna Lennox and her work through the War Horse Awareness Foundation is rightly recognized by the province, exemplifying community service, demonstrating exemplary initiative, leadership, and creativity. Deanna serves as a role model to her family, her community, inspiring others and improving the quality of life of Albertans.

I thank Deanna for her service, and I look forward to seeing the fulfillment of her future plans for the foundation.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Government Policies

Mr. Rodney: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's only been seven months, but the list of accomplishments of the new NDP government already includes passing legislation that could take Alberta to an unprecedented \$50 billion in debt; clandestine borrowing of an additional \$6 billion while reversing all spending restraint; increasing all sorts of taxes, including a \$3 billion carbon tax that was never even hinted at before the election; drawing every last cent out of the multibillion-dollar contingency fund; failing to deliver on the promise of balancing the budget by 2017; failing to deliver on the promise to build the new cancer centre by 2020; cutting millions of dollars from addiction and detox centres during this fentanyl crisis; a regrettable list of world-class officials who've been let go, including the chief medical officer, the addictions and mental health officer, the cancer control chief, the AHS CEO, and dozens in other disciplines; promoting a job-creation plan that has created no jobs; proposing a raise for the budget of the officers of the Legislature while thousands of Albertans are losing their livelihoods; declaring that coal has no future in our electricity system; and turning a blind eye to U.S. Senators visiting the oil sands while referring to Albertans as Canada's embarrassing cousins; throwing their own employees under the bus and delaying the opening of partisan constituency offices for months; selling access to the Premier and her cabinet at a fundraiser; creating a sunshine list that they admit may never see the light of day; leaving an untold number of decisions to be made behind closed doors on cabinet-approved regulations; offering lip service at best instead of real consultation; launching a three-minute briefing lecture on Bill 8 to school boards but not allowing any time for questions; invoking closure on Bill 6, which tells ranchers and farmers that they are not worth talking about. Sadly, there is so much more, but I only have two minutes, Mr. Speaker.

I'll say this in conclusion. Albertans are left to wonder who this new NDP government is targeting next, but I can assure you that our PC caucus will defend the quality of life of every Albertan every step of the way.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

3:00 Farm and Ranch Worker Legislation

Dr. Turner: Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak about one of the greatest opportunities we have to make a real impact in preventative medicine in this province. As a practising physician it's my professional responsibility to be alert to these opportunities. Similarly, we as legislators have a responsibility to recognize and remediate our laws and associated regulations so as to reduce preventable deaths in Alberta.

Examples of far-sighted past legislation include pasteurization, highway speed limits, and clean water acts. Another example is our stringent food safety rules. These rules are enacted at the slightest possibility of food-borne illnesses, resulting in recalls, investigations, and mandatory remedies. Public health investigations can enter an agribusiness on a report that the business may be a cause of food-borne illness because it's widely agreed that it's important that farm businesses be accountable to the customers and the marketplace.

Recently large restaurants have also indicated that they expect farm workers to be safe. However, current Alberta law doesn't allow for OHS inspectors to review accidents in order to prevent them from recurring. In presenting the Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act, we legislators have an opportunity to ensure that paid farm and ranch employees work in as safe a workplace as possible. This is not a new idea. Every other province

does it. A 2008 Alberta fatality inquiry explicitly recommended it. At least two previous Premiers promised it.

In April 2015 the journal *OHS Canada* reported that the chief medical officer of Alberta said that there were 17 work-related deaths on farms and ranches in 2014. It also reported, “The progressive parties, the Liberals and New Democrats, are full-square in favour of equality for farm workers.” That was before the general election, and I was proud to run on that promise, which appealed to the many nurses and doctors in Edmonton-Whitemud who are concerned about the injuries they see every day in our hospitals.

I ask that my MLA colleagues all work together and pass the Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act to reduce the toll of preventable deaths.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The Member for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Postsecondary End of Semester

Mr. Connolly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It’s the most wonderful time of the year. No, I’m not talking about Christmas but about the end of the fall semester, which means final exams and papers. I want to wish all postsecondary students in Alberta good luck in finishing their fall semester. If you’re watching this right now, you’re either in political science or desperate for a reason to procrastinate or, as was the case when I was in university, a nice mélange of both. Nevertheless, I sincerely hope that the tuition freeze our government announced earlier this year has made completing your studies a little less stressful.

Calgary is home to the Alberta College of Art and Design, SAIT Polytechnic, Mount Royal University, Saint Mary’s University, Ambrose University, the University of Calgary, and numerous other institutions. My riding of Calgary-Hawkwood has almost 1,500 students at the University of Calgary alone, and I couldn’t be prouder to help represent all of Alberta’s students, who are pulling all-nighters along with us here at the Legislature.

Soon you’ll all be free to deck the halls, be jolly with friends and family, and catch up on washing your gay apparel. Once again, good luck, merry Christmas, and happy holidays.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Farm and Ranch Worker Legislation

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Democracy: rule by and for the people. Good governance is the result of citizens coming together to ensure that the decisions, the laws under which they will live, are created by them, that the laws that will govern civil society are not created by an elite that thinks they know what is in the people’s best interest. As MLAs our most basic responsibility is to represent our constituents, to speak and vote in such a way that we represent those that have elected us to this public office. It is clear to all Albertans that the NDP government has abandoned this most basic requirement of an elected official.

When we review this past session, and especially their actions on Bill 6, the facts are clear. The NDP decided that they knew better than the people they serve, who are farmers, ranchers, and farm workers. Alberta’s farmers and ranchers were not asking for Bill 6. The NDP did not campaign on Bill 6. The NDP did not consult with farmers ahead of time and only created a consultative process as an afterthought. In spite of massive protests across the province, they refuse to listen and kill this bill. In spite of farmers listening respectfully and crying in the gallery, they will not kill this bill. In spite of opposition questioning and protests, in spite of the petitions

that have been tabled, the letters of protest that have been read into the legislative record, this government refuses to either kill Bill 6, send it to committee for proper consultation with the people, or amend it in any significant way.

The facts are clear. This government will invoke closure on Bill 6 and silence the debate. This government will end debate in the people’s Assembly. They will shut down the meetings which so imperfectly allowed the people to voice their opinions on Bill 6, and the people of Drayton Valley-Devon have spoken. This MLA will vote against Bill 6.

I leave this government with one last thought. In a democracy a government that wishes to stay in power must always remember that the people always have the last word.

Presenting Petitions

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

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today in order to table almost 30,000 names on petitions for this Legislature and to show the resolve of farmers and ranchers unified together to stop Bill 6. This is the message they’ve given us. I have all the petitions here for Parliamentary Counsel.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, stand to present petitions against Bill 6 from my local riding. I have 900-plus signatures on here, and I will table those.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I also rise today to table a petition to this Legislature. These petitions have been approved by Parliamentary Counsel. Farmers, ranchers, and constituents right across my constituency have signed about 1,000 names here with regard to Bill 6, which has been debated for a short time in this House. More petitions are to come from my constituency next time.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have a considerable number of petitions, almost numbering 2,000. One that touches my heart dearly is from 15-year-old Tanner Madge from Youngstown school. He writes in one paragraph, “We are the next generation that are going to put the bread and meat on the tables of many, so don’t rush this bill.”

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Strankman: Apparently a miscommunication, Mr. Speaker.

Tabling Returns and Reports

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

Mr. Rodney: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Last night, when Madam Speaker was in the chair, she asked me to table the requisite copies of three letters, one from the Calgary Catholic school district, one from Golden Hills school division, and one from the Calgary board of education board of trustees urging the government to delay the third reading of Bill 8, the Public Education Collective Bargaining Act, until such time as appropriate consultation may

occur with key stakeholders, the publicly elected school boards of Alberta.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table letters sent by my constituents in opposition to Bill 6. Again, there are 278 letters here from my constituency alone, and I wish to table these for Parliamentary Counsel.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Drumheller-Stettler, let's try again.

Mr. Strankman: Practice makes perfect, Mr. Speaker. I'm sorry. I'm starting to wear thin here. Yes, I do want to table the letter from my young constituent, Tanner Madge, from Youngstown. He writes, "We are the next generation that are going to put the bread and meat on the tables of many, so don't rush this bill." That's included with almost 2,000 letters.

Mr. Ceci: Mr. Speaker, today I have three reports to table, beginning with the requisite number of copies of the Report of Selected Payments to the Members and Former Members of the Legislative Assembly and Persons Directly Associated with Members of the Legislative Assembly for the year ended March 31, 2015.

Also, in accordance with the Gaming and Liquor Act I'd like to table the 2014-15 Alberta Gaming and Liquor Commission annual report as well as the Charitable Gaming in Review report. Over the past year the AGLC has continued to provide gaming and liquor choices that Albertans can trust, ensuring that revenue generation goes hand in hand with high standards of integrity, security, and social responsibility.

Last fiscal year, members may be interested to know, the Alberta charities in this province raised over \$342 million through charitable gaming activities. These charities worked hard for numerous causes, including nature conservation, arts programs, and seniors' services.

Thank you very much.

3:10

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First, I rise to table the appropriate number of copies of letters from constituents in my riding in regard to Bill 6, clearly indicating that they would like to see Bill 6 killed.

As well, I would like to rise on behalf of the Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock to table the requisite number of copies of a reasoned amendment that he had planned to introduce before the government took away his right to speak on behalf of his constituents. This amendment shows very clearly that the government did not consider an exemption for family farms prior to introducing their bill.

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to take this opportunity to table the requisite number of copies of a letter from the Alberta Association of Former MLAs, signed by Karen Leibovici, president; and Gene Zwozdesky, chairman of the membership committee, to Dr. David McNeil, granting him an honorary membership in the association. They wish to do that, recognizing his outstanding contributions as Clerk and his untiring efforts to

help former members who had the honour to serve with him. I suspect they also are hoping that he will give them a spin in his Porsche.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

The Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand to submit the requisite number of copies of 130 letters and correspondence from constituents against Bill 6 and also stand for the Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock. He has 117 letters as well from his constituents. We're looking at a total of close to 260 letters here.

The Speaker: Little Bow.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I stand today with two tablings. First of all, I have several hundred e-mails here, that I've received from constituents all across the province, actually. These e-mails all have one common theme, and that is farmers' and ranchers' concerns regarding Bill 6. There are several hundred more to come, but there are about 300 here, and the next one will have to wait till next time. I have the requisite number of copies here.

The second tabling is five copies of eight e-mails that I read while I was involved in debate on Bill 6 last evening, and I told you that I'd have them here.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to table the following letters, the requisite number that is required, that represent that the people of Alberta are trying to speak through the Wildrose and express their views about Bill 6.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Cyr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my honour today to present for the Leader of the Official Opposition letters regarding the concerns for Bill 6.

I also have tablings for both Highwood and Livingstone-Macleod, that have had letters sent in to them, that I'm tabling as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to table the following letters from constituents with their concerns with regard to Bill 6 and would pray that they would be listened to by the government.

The Speaker: The Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I, too, have two tablings. The first one is copies of letters, the requisite number of copies, that I've received from around Alberta from constituencies held by the government members, people that are also against Bill 6. Here are the requisite copies of that.

Mr. Speaker, I have copies of 193 of the over 2,000 letters I have received in my constituency office that are absolutely against Bill 6. I will table the requisite copies of these 193 letters and forward the other almost 2,000 to the government electronically.

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

Mr. Clark: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to table the requisite number of copies of an online article from the *Western Producer* that I referenced yesterday in debate entitled *What the Other Provinces Are Doing about Farm Worker Safety*. It talks about the rules and exemptions that exist in three neighbouring provinces to Alberta.

The Speaker: Hon. members, any other returns or reports?

Mr. MacIntyre: I have two tablings, Mr. Speaker. First, the requisite number of copies of two letters that I referred to yesterday.

As well, I have the requisite number of copies of letters that I have received in opposition to Bill 6, and I might note that a significant number of these came from NDP-held ridings, who apparently are not getting responses to their mail from their MLA. So I submit those on their behalf.

The Speaker: Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Taylor: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I rise to table these copies of letters from my constituents and from Albertans that are in opposition to Bill 6.

Tablings to the Clerk

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Ms Hoffman, Minister of Health and Minister of Seniors, pursuant to the Health Professions Act the Alberta College and Association of Chiropractors 2014-15 annual report; the Alberta College of Optometrists 2014 annual report; the Alberta Dental Association and College annual report 2014; the College of Alberta Dental Assistants annual report 2014-15, June 1, 2014, to May 31, 2015; and the College of Opticians of Alberta 2014 annual report.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 6

Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act

The Chair: Are there any comments, questions, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Stony Plain.

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Madam Chair. We recognize our province has long enjoyed the many contributions of farmers, ranchers, and their workers. Thanks to their commitment to the land, the livestock, and the lifestyle, Alberta continues to benefit, both socially and economically. The people in this industry deserve our utmost gratitude and respect. They also deserve the same basic workplace protections enjoyed by workers in every other industry.

As a government we have said from the very beginning that farm and ranch employees should be safe at work and that when they have an incident that prevents them from working, they should be compensated for that. The statistics are clear, Madam Speaker. On average in Alberta 18 people die in work-related farm incidents. For every one of those deaths, 25 more are hospitalized as a result of a work-related injury. Laws to protect wage-earning employees on

farms and ranches work in other provinces, and they can work here, too.

Madam Chair, it's a fact that since laws to protect farm and ranch employees were introduced in British Columbia, the farm fatality rate was reduced by 68 per cent, the farm injury rate was reduced by 52 percent, and the serious injury rate was reduced by 41 per cent. That's why we're extending OH and S protection and mandatory WCB insurance coverage to nonfamily wage employees who work on Alberta's farms and ranches.

3:20

Madam Chair, many ministers and government members have participated in eight town halls held across the province. These town halls gave the government the opportunity to hear from producers and share information with them about the proposed changes. We heard loud and clear that we needed to clear up some misconceptions. That's why I am introducing amendments to confirm our intent to exclude farm and ranch owners and their families from OH and S and WCB.

The Chair: This will be amendment A1.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Ms Babcock: Thank you, Madam Chair. These amendments will also make it clear that volunteer assistance on the farm will be exempted from OH and S and WCB. It's not right that Alberta has the least protection for workers when compared to all other jurisdictions in Canada. Other provinces make it work, and Alberta will, too. Extending protections to farm and ranch workers, as I have outlined, is the right thing to do.

This important conversation has only begun. We will continue discussing other elements of this legislation with industry in the new year. Those elements include employment standards, labour relations, and technical requirements for occupational health and safety.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Are there any hon. members wishing to speak to the amendment? Sorry. I didn't see who stood first, but I'll go with Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise today to speak to this amendment as I believe it does not fully nor accurately reflect the message that farmers and ranchers have been saying about Bill 6. It's because of that that I do not and cannot nor will I support this amendment. In the letters that we tabled today, in the petitions that we tabled today, if you took the time to read them, the farmers and the ranchers of Alberta have clearly spoken. This does not go far enough: they've clearly spoken. If you stood on the stairs of the Legislative Assembly and you heard that they want us to kill this bill, you didn't have to have ears that were very wide open to hear that.

The government cannot see itself through to killing this bill. We can see that this amendment does not go even as far as referring this bill to committee, where ranchers and farmers and farm organizations would be able to present, would be able to provide suggestions, would be able to ensure that their voices have actually been heard, that their recommendations have had a fair hearing, and that they would be able to see by the actions of this committee that they are responsive to the concerns of the farmers and ranchers of Alberta.

This amendment is sadly lacking. It's clear that Alberta farmers and ranchers do not want these amendments for they do not address in enough detail their concerns. It is clear that Albertans, whether this amendment is passed or it's defeated, do not want closure in

this House. They want further consultation. They want further debate, of which this amendment is only a part.

This amendment, while it may exempt family members from WCB and OH and S, does not address the many other issues that arise when they hire even one part-time worker. Once a farm has an employee, then the full weight of OH and S and the WCB will fall upon the already burdened shoulders of the average Albertan farm family.

I read yesterday into the record some of the concerns that a constituent of mine had brought to the table and that I have brought into this Legislature with regard to OH and S and WCB and just how many of these regulations these farm families would actually have to comply with and how burdensome those would be.

Regulating work hours in a situation where, when you're farming, you cannot predict when a cow will calf, when a cow will have problems in calving, when, Madam Chair, you have no idea exactly when the rains are going to stop or begin – farming by its very nature is unpredictable. The hours will be unpredictable. I think of all the farmers in my family, and I have seen them combining through the night. I have seen them getting up at all hours of the evening and the day to be able to check the cattle. I have been out in the fields with the farm families of Drayton Valley bringing in calves when it's minus 40, rubbing them down, making sure that they will survive. That's not something that happens between 9 and 5. I have been out helping farm families when they are on the verge of exhaustion, because farming never really stops. I believe this amendment, while probably well intentioned, does not go far enough.

I would like to read a portion of a letter that was sent to me by one of my constituents that, I believe, speaks to this issue of OH and S and the WCB and their concerns with regard to Bill 6.

Although I agree that safety should be paramount in handling equipment and animals, I do not agree with the way the bill wants to instate it. It should be done through education, not OH and S.

Also, in regard to regulating the hours worked, farm and ranch schedules are not run by the clock. They are determined by the weather, the seasons, circumstances, and the animals themselves.

A person with a horse down with colic cannot just take a break in caring for that animal because OH and S says so. I stayed up 24 hours with my mare when she had colic. You cannot tell the cow not to calve because it is time for you to take a break, nor can you take a day off from feeding your stock and let them go hungry just because OH and S said so.

See, Madam Chair, if I hire even one employee, my farm now falls under those regulations.

3:30

This farm family, my constituents, has an issue with this. You cannot take a forced break during a cattle drive when you've just worked to get the cattle organized and where you want them or finally have them moving nicely. You have to make hay while the sun shines and take advantage of the long summer day hours. Days, hours are dictated by season, not the clock. I think a fair-minded person can understand that the amendment that we're debating right now does not go far enough to meet the needs of this farm family. They're not being unreasonable, and they're not trying to be unsafe. They are trying to ensure that they can continue to farm.

You see, Madam Chair, for many farmers mandatory WCB just makes no sense. It makes no sense when private insurance is often a better option for the farm families and for their farm employees. I know that I attended a rally just outside on the steps here, and I had at least one farm family, one mother, approach me. She couldn't understand why they would have to go with WCB, which they saw as completely inferior to the private insurance plan, which would

cover their employees 24 hours a day. To expect them to have private insurance and WCB would be an unnecessary and burdensome problem in an industry where the margins are very narrow to begin with.

This amendment does not recognize the realities of the farm families that we have in our constituencies across this province. This is bad legislation. This needs to go back. It either needs to be killed or it needs to go back to committee, where it can be studied, where you can do more listening.

I have a second letter that I would like to read portions of.

My father came to Canada as a small child with his family in the 1930s. They settled in southern Alberta where they were sugar beet farmers. As a grown man, Dad moved his family to the Drayton Valley area where we continue to farm today. Our farm consists of beef cows and feeder calves. We also grow our own feed barley and oats in addition to canola. Mostly, I manage this operation with my adult son. We farm together as a family as we have always done.

There are busy times of the year, though – calving, silaging, harvest – that we hire on additional staff. I believe I treat all of my staff fairly. They receive a fair wage – until recently we had fierce competition from oil field salaries.

That's something that I think sometimes we forget. If we've never been in the farming industry and if we haven't lived in rural Alberta, perhaps we don't understand how fierce the competition for labour has been in Alberta over the last 10 years. When I can make \$17, \$19 – well, I believe my son made something like \$24 the last time he worked in the oil industry as he was going to university. Most farm families can't afford to pay that kind of a salary. They've had to compete for people and for workers, so they've had to treat them properly. They've had to ensure that what they were doing was safe, or they would not have those workers because usually they had to pay them a smaller salary than what they could get in the oil industry.

I never ask my workers to do anything I would not be prepared to do myself. Sometimes, they must work long days, but I can guarantee you their days are hours shorter than my own. Sometimes, they must work on holidays. Easter usually falls in the middle of calving and Thanksgiving during harvest. But my staff has always been invited with their families to enjoy turkey dinner with my own family.

I can support a requirement for producers to have a certain level of insurance coverage for their workers. But mandatory WCB coverage is not the best choice for producers or for farm workers. Many workers will have less coverage under WCB come January 1 than they currently have under their employer's insurance coverage.

See, I will readily admit that I perhaps don't understand all of the ins and outs of WCB or OH and S regulations, but the people that are on the farms are the experts. Why is it that you're not willing to listen to those experts? I don't understand it. They are coming to you right now, today, through this letter, and they're saying to you that WCB is not necessarily the best way of going through this and that you shouldn't have to have WCB put on yourself as a farmer. It's clear. But this amendment doesn't recognize that. Why would you support the amendment on either side of this House when you can clearly hear from the farmers themselves that this is not a good enough amendment?

This letter ends with this comment.

I believe in doing things right the first time, even if that means it takes longer. I'm concerned about the government's haste in introducing this legislation without genuine consultation from the agricultural community. We are talking about mere weeks before this bill becomes law.

We're talking days now, maybe even less.

I urge the government to truly think about the consequences of their actions. We all want safe, viable family farms, but Bill 6 puts a huge regulatory burden on farmers and ranchers without achieving these goals.

What more do you need to say? This farmer has given you the advice that we've tried to present to you over the last four, five, six, seven days. What was that advice? Take the time and do this right. Your goals are laudable, but the means and the way that you're doing it are not going to end up doing what you want to have done.

3:40

It's a mystery to me. It truly is. It's a mystery that we can speak the same language, we can live in the same province, we can love the same people, want at the end of the day many of the same things, yet we can't seem to break through to get good legislation on this bill.

You know, it's clear that we make exemptions for all sorts of jobs and for all sorts of occupations when it comes to WCB and OH and S. Traditionally, farming has been one of them because that recognized the realities of farming. This amendment doesn't recognize those realities. This amendment doesn't recognize that farming has a legitimate reason for being exempted from these pieces of legislation as they stand right now.

Some of the jobs and occupations that are exempted: agricultural financial services, animal grooming. I've been around enough farm animals, horses, et cetera, to know that you can get bruised pretty quickly when you're working around animals and trying to groom them. I hazard a guess that if any of you good members in this Legislature were to see my first day of castrating and branding, when they threw the city slicker out into the middle of the barnyard and said, "tackle that calf and put him on the ground," you'd have laughed yourselves silly, and you would have laughed if you saw all the bruises at the end of the day on my shins and my forearms and a couple on the top of my head, where a cow gave me a kick in the head as I was trying to be on the back end of that calf.

You know, we don't dispute that some of these jobs that you do on a farm are dangerous and that you can get hurt, but there are times when we understand that in the real world, when you've been given the experience and you've been given the ability to learn, these jobs become far less dangerous.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Go ahead, Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I've been trying to get through this amendment. Again, the unfortunate part is that we have no opportunity to go back to our communities and go through this stuff and talk to them. It's been the problem through this whole debate on Bill 6. Yesterday, against my better judgment, I voted in favour of the amendments to Bill 8, again, without being able to consult with the four school boards in my area. I'm hoping that they were for it and they don't lynch me when I go home.

This amendment is almost there. You know, it starts to address the exemption for family farms, and then it ties their hands behind their backs if they need to hire somebody to help out with calving or with fall work. I'm still having some issues with the WCB. I've dealt with it with employees of my own and people that worked for me over the years, and it can be quite a problem.

I had an e-mail from a constituent up by Plamondon. He sent it to me at 19 minutes after 12 today, as a matter of fact. He started talking about some brushing that he wanted done on a road. He had contacted Transportation, and they kind of brushed him off: oh, there's no money. He kind of sank that around to: everybody's concerned about farmer safety. The most dangerous part of anybody's day is driving down our roads. You can read any newspaper any

day of the week or listen to the news. There are wrecks all over the place. He was trying to get a corner on his property brushed so that people could see when they came up to a stop sign and see what's coming and going.

In his fourth paragraph he mentions that, you know, his concern is that everybody is concerned about farmer safety, yet there's no money when it comes to actual, real safety issues. Then he brings up a point and says that he's been paying into workers' compensation as a rancher for years and years and years. He says that just recently he got kicked in the shoulder and broke his arm. He went to put a WCB claim in, and they denied his claim. They said that he wasn't covered. It was only after him digging and pestering and digging and pestering to a very, very frustrating end – I wish I could find the e-mail here so I could read you the exact words – that they finally said: oh, yeah; I guess you are covered. I've got it now. I'll read it for you. It says:

Alberta Transportation's response to my request for financial assistance has been that there is no money to help with the clearing of brush along [the] roadside to [my] fence line. This is an outrage because Bill 6 is all about safety for farms & ranches in Alberta, and it seems to me that getting this section of road is not being seriously considered to clear & brush.

This is a contradiction to Bill 6 – all about safety and WCB coverage for Farmers & Ranchers. I have recently been injured (broken arm) from being kicked by a cow, and when I put in my claim for benefits, WCB informed me that I was no longer covered. I have been paying premiums for Ranching WCB coverage for many years and my claim was declined benefits . . . on that I phoned to complain and asked how all of a sudden I was no longer covered.

Just as a sideline I wonder how many other people phone in and get the runaround that they're not covered and then just walk away from it. This is a real heck of a good deal for the Workers' Compensation Board and the managers' bonuses.

I'll carry on here.

Upon their research, and my persistence they found that I was covered for benefits. This recent experience with WCB has not been pleasurable and Bill 6 is pushing WCB coverage for ranches & farms.

I just want this situation to be taken seriously because we Ranchers & Farmers work hard to keep our operations going and safely. If Bill 6 wants us to take them seriously I need to see more effort when needed to keep our roads safe for all.

I have contacted the Lac La Biche Post regarding the road allowance stated above and they are interested in my story. You may contact me . . .

And he gives his name and phone number at the bottom.

You know, there are going to be ongoing stories. People in the opposition have stood up and said that the number one concern that our constituency offices have to deal with is Workers' Compensation Board issues. What are they going to do when they have another 45,000 farm families dumped on them? They're already run ragged.

They held a training session for our constituency staff here last week. They didn't have any idea what the legislation was going to be, what the amendments were going to be, so we wasted our people's time coming into Edmonton for this training session. They got absolutely zero benefit out of it. Another waste of government funding.

Farming coverage. This is a document that I think I might have tabled already, but if not, I can table it again. It was on the WCB website but has since disappeared. It talks about the farm rates that people will be paying. You know, if you're claiming \$50,000 a year in revenue, you're going to pay \$1,485 per year. Well, that's pretty

small potatoes these days when it comes to even a medium-size or a small farming operation.

Now we'll look at a couple of the work related and nonwork related. This is where it gets very confusing. It's going to be very confusing for doctors. It's going to be very confusing for people that work at the Workers' Compensation Board. One of them: "Sue is driving a quad to check on the fence line. She hits a large rut and flips the quad, injuring her head." That's a work-related injury. And it says: "Sue is riding along on a tractor as a passenger, without any specific duties to perform. As the tractor hits a large dip, she falls off, injuring her head." That's nonwork related. I'm getting very confused as to where the farming operation starts, where recreation starts and ends, and where your house and property starts and ends. I think that this is one of the very confusing issues that's never been defined in any of the, well, lack of debate and lack of consultation that we've had with this government over this bill. This is the confusing part.

3:50

This bill has been put forward here. There are currently down in Olds over 800 people at a town hall. They are opposed to this bill. They are opposed to this amendment. I will not be supporting this amendment. Last weekend I held a town hall in the town of St. Paul. People were very adamant. They want this bill put to committee for consultation and discussion with them. They told me that whatever I had to do to oppose it, they would be behind me a hundred per cent. I have not had one phone call telling me to back off at all. Everybody wants us to keep going. Of the people out there that are watching – and there are a lot of them that are watching – not one of them has phoned me and said: "You know what? We're probably going to be okay with this. You guys can probably pull back a little bit." Not one. The people down in Olds right now: no; keep going, guys. They want this thing pushed off, the bill killed, and to start some real debate on it.

There is almost unprecedented outrage over the bill. This amendment is not far enough. As I said before, it ties farmers' hands as soon as they happen to hire somebody. There has to be some real distinction put forward here about what constitutes a small farm and what is a medium farm and what is a commercial operation that should be put under OH and S and workers' compensation coverage.

Like I said, I've talked about this one farmer and rancher here. He's been with WCB for years. A lot of people have been doing it voluntarily. Why do we have to force it down their throats? There's absolutely no reason for this bill. This is nothing more than a money grab and an increase in bureaucracy in the Workers' Compensation Board.

The amendments to the bill – my goodness – were six pages.

Mr. Rodney: Yeah. It's longer than the original bill.

Mr. Hanson: Is that longer than the original bill? Are you serious?

Mr. Rodney: It's hard to believe.

Mr. Hanson: That is hard to believe. Isn't that something? A bill that was perfect.

The Chair: Hon. member, through the chair, please.

Mr. Hanson: I'm sorry, Madam Chair. I just get a little carried away. It's been a long couple of days.

A bill that was so perfect that it did not require any consultation with farmers, ranchers, or the opposition. A bill that was so perfect that it did not require any consultation with farmers and ranchers.

Now, after a bunch of outcry and people getting a little bit nervous on the other side, all of a sudden we have an amendment that's longer than the original bill. Does that make sense to you, folks? Sorry. Does that make sense to you, Madam Chair? No, it doesn't.

Let's have a look at this. Section 1 is amended

- (a) by adding the following after (k):
 - (k.1) "family member", in relation to a shareholder, sole proprietor or partner, means
 - (i) the spouse or adult interdependent partner of the shareholder . . .

Interdependent partner of the shareholder. Okay. That's legalese that we're going to have to get clarified. You see, this is the thing. How can farmers understand this? We need to sit down and consult and get this stuff clarified, put it into common terms.

It goes on.

- . . . sole proprietor or partner, or
- (ii) whether by blood, marriage or adoption or by virtue of an adult interdependent relationship, a child, parent, grandparent, sibling, aunt, uncle, niece, nephew or first cousin of a shareholder, sole proprietor or partner or of the shareholder's, sole proprietor's or partner's spouse or adult interdependent partner, . . .

Oh, my God. This is very confusing.

- . . . and includes any other person prescribed by the regulations to be a family member.

That's incredible. That covers a lot of people.

Section 2(b):

by repealing clause (s)(i) and substituting the following:

- (i) farming and ranching operations that are specified in the regulations and in respect of which
 - (A) no wages, as defined in the Employment Standards Code, are paid to persons for the performance of farming or ranching work, or
 - (B) wages, as defined in the Employment Standards Code, are paid only to the following persons for the performance of farming or ranching work.

Again, you know, now we've got to dig out the Employment Standards Code so that we can get to the bottom of this clause.

We need time to talk to farmers and ranchers to see if they're going to accept this amendment. We're not given any time. Just like yesterday with Bill 8: whammo; here's your amendment; you've got one hour to debate it, and we're going to vote. Like I said, I hope that those of us that voted in favour of that don't get lynched by our school boards when we get home.

Okay.

- (B) wages, as defined in the Employment Standards Code, are paid only to the following persons for the performance of farming or ranching work:
 - (I) shareholders of a corporation engaged in a farming or ranching operation of which all shareholders are family members of the same family;

Well, that's fairly clear.

- (II) family members of a shareholder of a corporation engaged in a farming or ranching operation of which all shareholders are family members of the same family;

That's kind of a double, family members of the same family. Nice wording, for sure.

- (III) family members of a sole proprietor engaged in a farming or ranching operation;
- (IV) family members of a partner in a partnership engaged in a farming or ranching operation where all partners are family members of the same family.

There we go again, family members of the same family. Incredible.

The next one is (c):

by repealing clause (bb) and substituting the following:

(bb) “worker” means a person engaged in an occupation, but does not include, except for the purpose of section 2(2), the following persons engaged in a farming and ranching operation specified in the regulations:

(i) a person to whom no wages, as defined in the Employment Standards Code . . .

Okay. Now we’ve got to go back to the Employment Standard Code and find out what that means.

. . . are paid for the performance of farming or ranching work;

(ii) a person referred to in clause (s)(i)(B)(I) to (IV) to whom wages, as defined in the Employment Standards Code, are paid for the performance of farming and ranching work.

Very confusing. Again, six pages of legalese that we don’t have time to debate properly or talk to our constituents about and get their input.

Madam Chair, this amendment to the bill is almost – almost – as bad as the original bill itself. I can’t support the bill. The people I represent don’t want me to support the bill. They want this bill brought back to committee, not Committee of the Whole. They want it brought back to committee, where they will have time to consult with the government and get it right. Personally, I think this is a waste of our time to even debate or look at this bill, but I mean, we can continue.

You know, we get to a bunch of the businesses that are being struck out here.

(3) Schedule A is amended by striking out

“agrology and agronomy . . .”

“apiary . . .”

“artificial breeding services . . .”

“breeding of animals, birds, fish, or reptiles;”

“collection of urine from pregnant mares;”

I don’t think that’s even happening anymore. Is it?

Mr. MacIntyre: Oh, yeah.

Mr. Hanson: Is it?

Mr. MacIntyre: A little bit.

Mr. Hanson: A little bit. Oh. Okay.

“dude ranch . . .”

Operation of a dude ranch.

Mr. Strankman: How do you define a dude ranch?

Mr. Hanson: How do you define a dude ranch? Is that just for dudes?

“egg producer, commercial, carrying on business as;”

I mean, there are some egg producers that are pretty big businesses.

“farming, carrying on business of;”

What all does that include? Is that a small farm? Is that a big farm, Madam Chair? We need some clarification on this.

Some of these things that are being removed, while they may make sense, need to be defined. How big is a family farm? Is a Hutterite colony a family farm? It’s all family, you know, families of the same family, as I’d stated. There are a lot of family farms that are third and fourth generations at home, that grandpa is still there. Grandma and grandpa are still there and help with the cooking and help with the machinery, right down to the great-grandchildren. But as soon as they hire somebody, it changes everything.

4:00

I mean, I could go on and on and on, but in the interest of having some of my fellow members get a chance to speak, I’ll just say that I’ll be standing behind the decision that was given to me by the people in my constituency that are against Bill 6. All the hundreds of letters that we turned in today, all the thousands of names on the petitions that we turned in today: the people are against Bill 6. They want us to kill Bill 6, and I can’t wait to watch the lemmings stepping off the political cliff.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: I’ll recognize the hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane, followed by the hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Madam Chair. Just a question to the members opposite. [interjections] Well, I can speak freely, though, right? You know you’re not obligated to speak, but I’m just giving you an opportunity to maybe elaborate, either for the member who just spoke or any of the members opposite. I’ve heard this, WCB, referred to as a cash grab. I just want to know from people over there: what is your understanding of how the WCB premiums are handled and how those funds are managed? Just a simple question.

The Chair: The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. You know what? I think WCB does a good job, but there’s room for improvement. That’s one thing I’ll agree with the Premier on although the Premier goes a lot farther than saying that they need room for improvement. As I said in the House today, the Premier has done some pretty severe drive-by smearings of the WCB, claiming that they are severely favouring the employers and that the rates should be twice as high as they are. At the same time she says this, she’s trying to force all farmers and ranchers into WCB, after which time, we can only assume, she’ll double their rates because that’s what she suggested she’ll do. These are the Premier’s words. The gentleman was asking about what kind of a job the WCB does. Maybe he should ask his own party leader because she is extremely uncomplimentary of the WCB. You know what? I know that they’re imperfect.

Here’s the problem, Madam Chair. Again, my colleague there talked about how there’s a six-page amendment to a five-page bill, which absolutely is a complete indictment of how bad this bill is. There’s just no getting around that. There’s no defending your position. There’s no saying: yeah, but this is a little bit of an adjustment. This is an absolute admission that the job was botched. Yet the government is taking the position that they don’t need to talk to farmers and ranchers until this is already passed, because now they’re so sure they’ve gotten everything right that they need to seal this in legislative authority before going back and trying to adjust it to something that makes sense to farmers and ranchers. If they were so right about that, you would think that we’d have 2,000 farmers and ranchers out on the front steps of this Legislature saying: “Pass this bill. Pass this bill.” But you know what? That’s not what they were saying. They were saying: “Kill Bill 6. Kill Bill 6.” Clearly, there’s a big disconnect between what the government is saying and what Alberta people want, a complete divergence, 180 degrees, opposite directions.

I’m on my feet to make sure that I know that Albertans know that I and our members of the PC Party are aware of this and will continue to fight against the government arrogance that would have them drive a bill through the Legislature that is so at odds with what the will is of the people of Alberta.

You know what, Madam Chair? It's not just the farmers and ranchers. City people, towns and villages, urban people in Alberta, are getting almost as unhappy with this bill as our rural people. Why? Because Albertans respect each other. City people respect rural people. City people know that all the wealth in Alberta is earned in rural Alberta and that that allows us, we people that live in the city, to make our livings administering that wealth. It's how it works. That's how Alberta works: mutual respect between rural Alberta and urban Alberta, everybody doing their part, working together, which is why a good part of urban Alberta is as upset as rural Alberta is. They care about their fellow Albertans.

What does drive them crazy is that the people in government don't seem to have that connection. They don't. I'm not calling them bad people. I think they're good people across the aisle, Madam Chair, but they're not connected, clearly, or they would be taking a different position than they're taking. It's a lack of connection, and really it points, unfortunately, to the fact that, well, some people here are just probably not suited for this line of work. Nonetheless, I respect democracy, and those that get elected should get to do the job, suited or not. I've always respected democracy, and I think the voters should have the representative that they elect. That includes all of us. It includes me, it includes the other opposition parties, it includes everybody in our party, and, yes, it includes everybody in the government. Everybody that's here has the right to be here, and I support that. It just makes me crazy that the connections between those people that the voters have selected and the best interests of those people are so at odds, and the government just refuses to accept that obvious fact.

Now, if this was a good bill, the government wouldn't need to roll out a bunch of misdirections in order to do it. I'm not going to call them half-truths, because I'm going to talk about some things that they said that are true. It's just not the whole truth. I've heard several members on the government side stand up and talk about how British Columbia put in legislation and their injury and death rate dropped dramatically. That's true. I'm not calling anybody a liar here. I'm saying, in fact, that they're telling the truth. The problem is that they're not telling the whole truth. Even after that, the fact is that without this legislation Alberta's injury and death rates are as good as B.C.'s already. They say half the truth, hoping that Albertans will think, by them passing this legislation, that nobody wants, that it's going to save a whole bunch of lives and injuries on Alberta's farms and ranches when the fact is that Alberta's farms and ranches are as safe as British Columbia's already.

In fact, Madam Chair, I'm looking at a document here dated November 17 from the Alberta government. It's on the Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act. Here's another truth in there. At some point in this document it talks about the average number of deaths in Saskatchewan being 13 and Alberta being 17. The Premier said 18, but I won't quibble with her; it's a rounding error. I'm not saying – you know what, Madam Chair? That's the truth, but once again it's not the whole truth. The whole truth is that Saskatchewan has a million people and Alberta has 4 million people, so when you look at 13 deaths versus 17 deaths, Alberta's death rate on farms is way better than Saskatchewan's is. Yet the government has selectively chosen true facts but not the whole facts. If the legislation was so good, they could actually tell the whole facts, and the legislation would still look good. Folks, you know what? If it's a good piece of legislation, you don't have to play those games. You don't have to stand up in the House.

I also hear members from the government side talking about how every worker needs to be covered by workers' compensation and every worker needs to be covered by occupational health and safety. They wave the flag and wrap themselves in the flag of safety, and

they say: this is the way it's got to be, or Alberta farmers and ranchers will be dying by the dozens or the hundreds. But you know what? Then in the next breath – let's read – they're exempting Hutterite colonies, and they're exempting family farms. One minute everybody has got to be covered, and the next minute 40 per cent don't need to be. They don't seem to see the inconsistency. Albertans, though, see the inconsistency, city folk see the inconsistency, and rural folk see the inconsistency because they're Albertans and they're intelligent and they listen and they care. That's why I'm so proud to represent all Albertans, why our whole PC caucus is so proud to represent all Albertans, urban and rural, because they are hard-working people that deserve to have the truth told, the whole truth, not half the truth, and deserve to be supported by their government.

Again, on the November 17 document it talks about immediate impacts, mandatory workers' compensation – of course, with the amendment that changes that – employers protected from legal action. Well, isn't that interesting? The Premier was talking before about how she's all fired up about protecting workers, yet their own document says that they're worried about protecting employers. Well, actually, I think that you need to protect both. It's just that the government has chosen one side, and the documents they produce seem to support the other side. It would be better if they were more consistent, and that points to the problem, that this bill is not ready to be passed and it's not ready to be proclaimed.

It talks about how certain regulations would apply related to equipment, general protection of workers, duties of workers, and safety training. All of that sounds good. It also talks about how occupational health and safety officers could visit work sites to investigate serious incidents. There's been conflicting information from the government here, too. In some cases they say that the inspectors will only come when there is a serious incident. At other times they'll say that they'll drop in and see.

4:10

Well, you can just imagine how concerned farmers and ranchers are about that. Certainly, they don't have anything to hide, but farms and ranches are not like other businesses in Alberta. The fact is that if you're running a shoe factory or a button factory and the safety inspector shuts you down for six hours, you fire up the machine and you start making shoes or buttons. It's not like that during seeding. If you missed the weather window, you're done. You may lose a whole year's revenue. If you don't make the harvest window – and sometimes it comes down to six or eight hours before the hailstorm, before the snowstorm, before the rain, before the wind, before whatever the good Lord sends to this wonderful land called Alberta – you might miss the harvest window. The government is not giving farmers and ranchers assurances that that will not happen. So you can only imagine how reasonable farmers and ranchers are when they're upset about the government ramming this down their throat before they've sat down with them and agreed on a set of reasonable regulations and rules that they could live by to, yes, keep them safe.

You know, then you get toxic attitudes from the government, the labour minister talking about how we're going to create a culture of safety, and I heard it from another government member today about how we're going to create a culture of safety, an absolute, amazingly huge insult to farmers and ranchers. Suggesting that for the last hundred years they haven't created their own culture of safety: it's an absolute insult, absolute disrespect, absolutely talking down to the people that we should be answering to and respecting. It's disrespectful, and that is not the way that Albertans, whether they're rural or urban, whether they're farmers or engineers or doctors or lawyers or labourers, deserve to be talked to by their government. Yet that's what's happening.

It says here – this is really good – that the government will be consulting in the late fall, after the busy harvest season. Well, apparently, they're going to consult not only after the busy harvest season but after the busy political season, after it's too late to actually change the legislation. It's despicable.

You know, the document talks about how Alberta is the sole remaining jurisdiction that has not made the adjustment to include occupational health and safety. It says that there are four Canadian jurisdictions without mandatory WCB. Again, Madam Chair, the government continues to tell the truth, just not the whole truth. They have. And you know what? They talked about a couple of cases where a farm worker has been injured or killed on the job and they or their family have not been compensated, have not been looked after. They are right about those cases: shameful, despicable, unfortunate.

But here's the thing. What they're offering is not the solution. They're saying that if you put everybody on WCB and OH and S, it's all going to go away. Well, I can tell you that I was the labour minister not that long ago, and I had a parade of people coming through my office with WCB coverage and occupational health and safety coverage that had the same thing and more happen to them, where they lost their home, they lost their family, and they couldn't support themselves. So the government, unfortunately, trotting out terrible examples of real victims and suggesting to Albertans that we will fix all of this with occupational health and safety and the Workers' Compensation Board is absolutely not believable. Yes, the tragedies that they rolled out are tragedies. But you know what? There are just as many tragedies or more from families and individuals that have died or been injured with occupational health and safety coverage or Workers' Compensation Board coverage that to this day are complaining because they can't get paid, they can't get their families supported, and those are tragedies, too. They are.

So while I agree with the government that we need to make some improvements to workers' compensation and occupational health and safety, when you tell Albertans that this won't happen anymore with this change, that is the farthest thing from the truth that the government could possibly tell to their citizens.

Why would they do that? It does say in the document – and I'll give the government credit for this – that this is about unionizing farm workers. You know what, Madam Chair? There was a Supreme Court decision that says that farm workers should be able to unionize and that the government is required to put legislation in place to do that. So good. I agree with that. But if the government wants to do that, why don't they just tell the truth? "We are going to comply with the Supreme Court decision and allow farm workers to unionize." Albertans would say: "Great. That's what the Supreme Court said, and Alberta is law abiding." But why would you hide it behind a bunch of safety things that don't make sense that are supported by half-truths?

Mr. Rodney: A secret agenda.

Mr. McIver: A secret agenda, as my colleague says.

You know what? Whether the government has a secret agenda or not, you can hardly blame Albertans for thinking that the government does because of the way they're operating. Albertans know the difference between the whole truth and a half-truth. They just haven't had the whole truth from their government yet, and it's shameful. It's shameful. That's why you get thousands of people.

You know, there are members on the other side that proudly said that they should be proud for protesting because that's a right that all Canadians have. But the people that were out front here with the protestors: a lot of them were, like, weekly protestors or monthly

protestors or regular protestors. I applaud them, too, for doing it, but I can tell you that what's really powerful is when you get 2,000 people from all over Alberta that have never protested before in their entire life coming out for one issue. That's powerful. That tells you the government is on the wrong track and that they're not listening, and people are trying to drill it through their heads to remember who works for whom. The PC Party knows that the people of Alberta are our bosses. Some of the opposition know that. It's time for the government to get on the program, Madam Chair. It really is.

When you add all of this up – and there's more. I'll be back up here speaking before this is done. I'm going to leave some time for my colleagues in the opposition and for the government members, if they're tired of warming their hands, because that's what happens when you sit on them, to get up and talk and defend your bill.

Tell the whole truth, not half the truth. Tell Albertans that the tragedies that you trot out, the real tragedies, the ones we should all feel bad about, that it will not solve that. Occupational health and safety and WCB will not guarantee it won't happen again. Tell them that. Look them in the eye and tell them the truth. They'll respect you more, and they might even think about whether you're on their side or not. Tell them that your leader says that the WCB rate should be doubled, so one day we're going to force farmers and ranchers onto WCB, and the next day our leader is going to consider doubling your rates. Tell them that. They might respect you more. They might actually think that you've listened to them.

Madam Chair, you can tell I'm wound up. You know why I'm wound up? Because it is painful to hear and see such a lack of feeling for the people of Alberta by the people they have elected to represent them, and until that changes, I just can't help but be wound up. You'll have to forgive me because I just care that much, and I just want everybody to.

The Chair: Leduc-Beaumont.

Mr. S. Anderson: Thank you, Madam Chair. Bill 6 is framework legislation. The details that are going to be applied will be worked out in consultation with the very stakeholders that it's going to affect: we've said this time and again. I don't think we can wait to enact basic safety provisions for paid farm workers. I'm not saying that farmers are unsafe. I don't say that they don't care about them. I have never said those words ever. This amendment stems from listening to these farm families that were talking about the exemption they're looking for.

Madam Chair, I know first-hand what kind of effect workplace accidents can have on families. A lot of my family is from Vancouver Island or in the forestry industry and a lot of my friends as well, and that's a tough and dangerous industry. When I was six years old, I lost my grandad to an accident at a log-sorting facility because the safety standards weren't quite as good as they are today. While he and another fellow were tying down the logs on the back of the truck, the chains came loose. The logs back on my island aren't small. They came down, and they crushed my grandad, Ernest Joseph Anderson, our patriarch, our rock. It was hard for us. But he was covered by the laws, and my grandmother was taken care of.

4:20

Just 10 years ago I lost my best friend, Robert Arthur Strang, in a logging accident. Forestry is dangerous, but for some it is a calling. My friend was a faller. For some who don't know, that's, I guess, what some people would call a lumberjack. They work hard day in and day out in all types of weather and in dangerous situations out in the forest. Safety is key, but you can't account for

everything, and the trees are big on my island. My friend was cutting down about a 250-foot-tall tree. Unbeknownst to him, about halfway up the tree was dead. All we can know is that maybe he heard the crack, looked up, threw his saw, and he ran. He didn't make it. The tree hit him, and he was killed instantly, thank goodness. He was found lying there peacefully in the bush, but he was gone. He had a wife and a young son, and his wife was pregnant with their unborn child. But he had coverage, and his wife and family were taken care of. Madam Chair, I apologize for getting emotional about that.

There are just a few things that I think need a little bit of clarity. The bill isn't going to interfere with the family's ability to teach their children about farming and pass on their way of life. This is a way of life that is cherished and will remain alive and well, as it always has been. Neighbours can still lend a helping hand, whether it be for harvest or the birth of a calf. Kids can still do chores and help out on the farm, so, sorry, kids; you're not getting out of those. The bill won't interfere with the 4-H clubs and all the good that they do, and 4-H clubs are an amazing part of rural life. It's not going to interfere – and I have a lot of friends that are happy about this – with the recreational activities on farms such as hunting, quadding, snowmobiling, and more.

Yesterday I was at a round-table discussion in my constituency of Leduc-Beaumont. I heard stories of second- and third- and fourth-generation farmers, and I heard and saw their fear and their pain. I saw strong men and women bare their souls and tell me about how they thought that the government wasn't listening to them. But that's what I was there for, and I wanted to tell them all that I was listening. I heard them tell me about how they buckle up their grandkids on the combine and that they treat their employees like family. They're worried about how they're going to manage when the growing cost of producing in the world favours large corporate farms. I heard that. They love their way of life, and they'll do anything and everything to protect it, and I have the absolute, utmost respect for that. I'm here listening, and I want to work together on this.

While we do this, I'm glad that farm workers will have more rights under the law and that farmers will have added protection for those nonpaid, familial employees under WCB. Now, I'm bound to represent you, just like all my other constituents, and I'm bound to uphold the law of the land, including passing legislation that brings the same labour standards to employees on farms as in the rest of the country. I'm bound by the Supreme Court of Canada ruling that gives all workers the right to organize – the right to organize – not forced but the right. I'm bound by my conscience in knowing that this bill is a good bill. I'm part of a team, a caucus, a party, but I am not a lemming, and I never will be.

Some members might say that we on the government side are being pushed or bullied into voting for the bill, but that's not the case. It's not true. We have free will and the right to voice our opinions, our concerns, and those of our constituents. I feel that in good conscience I have no choice but to support this bill to give farm workers the basic labour rights afforded in every other industry. I promise this to the farm and ranch constituents of Leduc-Beaumont, that as we move forward with consultation, I will hold this government to account for its actions. I will be a tireless advocate for your way of life, and I won't stop speaking out for you even if it makes me a black sheep in my own party and even if it means that I have to ask tough questions and ruffle feathers.

I'm not going to make excuses for our lack of clarity in communicating this bill. It was an error on our part, and it led to a lot of unnecessary worry, anxiety, and fear. I'll do my best to make sure that we have open and clear communication going forward, and I will be a voice in this government. You have an advocate and

a partner in making these regulations work for you, not making you work for the regulations.

We need to take the emotion and the partisanship out of this debate because it's not about politics. I don't have any political agenda here. This is simply about doing what's right. Madam Chair, I will stand up for what I believe is right. These lines to a song kept going through my head this morning as I was driving here, and they say: "You've got to stand for something or you'll fall for anything. You've got to be your own man not a puppet on a string." I won't be played by anyone from either side.

Madam Chair, I do stand for something, and that something is the basic rights of all workers in this province. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would just like to start by thanking the hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont, who just spoke. I appreciate his comments, I appreciate his very clear sincerity, and, you know, I appreciate his opinion, that he articulates very well.

What I will say is that if this bill was just about and if this bill only did what we are repeatedly being told, you know, certainly in question period, if this was just about vulnerable farm workers receiving some form of compensation in the event of an injury or a fatality, if that was all this was about, if all of it was about whether or not accidents can be investigated – you know what? – there wouldn't be protests. There wouldn't be 800 people in Olds today, there wouldn't have been 500 people in Vegreville yesterday, and there wouldn't be 1,500 people on the front steps. If you talk to farmers, if you talk to people around the province, they say: that's not what it's about.

The problem is that this ham-handed piece of legislation tries to take it all, tries to do it all. It is doing surgery with a butter knife instead of a scalpel. The problem is that there is nothing surgical about the government's approach to this. This amendment that we're discussing right now is a very desperate attempt to improve a very, very bad piece of legislation, a piece of legislation from which, while its intentions are good, while it intends to offer and provide to farm workers some basic protections that they deserve to have – and I acknowledge that they deserve to have them – there is so much collateral damage to the innocent, I'll say, that in its attempt to protect farm workers, quite frankly, the collateral damage of this is astounding.

Now, speaking to the amendment, I am, quite frankly, a little bit torn as to how to vote on the amendment, and I'll tell you why. The bill is awful. The bill is, flat out, poor legislation. It's been poorly executed, it's been poorly communicated, and it's been poorly put together. It tries to do everything all at once instead of having a surgical approach. It is a mess, or as we would say on the farm, this thing is a wreck. In a desperate attempt to salvage this piece of legislation, this poor, poor, poor piece of legislation, the government a couple of days ago came out with six pages' worth of amendments to amend a five-page bill. You know, I will tell you that there are some really, really basic things about writing legislation. If you need six pages of amendments and your bill was only five pages, there's a problem. There's a very basic and a very large problem.

Now, what I will acknowledge is that in the amendments the government is making an attempt to at least provide some clarity as to who is and who isn't covered by the legislation. That clarity should have been there from the outset. That clarity should have been there right from the get-go. A lot of this discussion and a lot of this, you know, miscommunication I lay squarely at the feet of the government, and they have in fact said that it is their

responsibility. This lack of clarity is their fault, and now they have to try to fix it. The amendment does make an attempt at fixing it.

Because we know that the government has a majority and because we know that they are even resorting to closure to ram this piece of legislation through regardless, my quandary is that I think the amendment, quite frankly, slightly improves, slightly clarifies a very bad piece of legislation. Since we know that we're going to get this very, very bad piece of legislation because the government has promised that to all of us, my quandary is: well, are we better off with a bad piece of legislation that is at least clear or a bad piece of legislation that is unclear? Frankly, Madam Chair, I don't think either one is particularly good, but I'm leaning towards supporting the amendment because at least it provides some spelled-out clarity within the legislation, which is what farmers and ranchers have indeed been asking for. Now, don't fool yourself. That doesn't mean they like what's in here. At least, though, they're somewhat more clear as to what's in here.

4:30

Let me give you an example of some of the miscommunication in clarity. Just yesterday – just yesterday – I attended the government-sponsored information session in Vegreville, and at that session there were brief opening comments, and then the Minister of Economic Development and Trade and the Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour as well as the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville were on hand to answer questions. There was a question from one attendee that asked to define what is meant by wage-earning employees, which is the term that's used in the amendment, and the Minister of Economic Development and Trade stated that a wage-earning employee in terms of who would be exempt would be family members and neighbours. Any family member or a neighbour, whether it's calving season or harvest, that comes to help: they are exempt. I said: well, wait a minute; neighbours? This doesn't talk about neighbours; this just talks about family members. It gives the list, and it defines it. You know, there's clarity in terms of who is defined as a family member. It's very broadly defined. I was glad to see that, too. We're talking sisters and nieces and nephews and cousins, you name it. That's good because it creates a fairly broad definition. But the whole thing with neighbours?

Then the question was further asked: well, what about a paid neighbour? The Minister of Economic Development and Trade said: well, whether it's a payment under the table or some work that's done in exchange, it would be exempt. So, once again, there is a lack of clarity. If the neighbour is paid and given a T4, is the neighbour exempt or not exempt? I have it on tape. In the space of five minutes the minister said two different things.

Now, the minister may have misspoken – that's fine – but at least 500 people in Vegreville heard him yesterday and heard what he had to say, so now there is confusion as to whether neighbours are included with this in this act, included in this amendment or not. I've gone through the amendment. There's nothing about neighbours in the amendment. There's certainly a lot about family members.

Madam Chair, this is the problem. This is the problem. I will say – and it's not something I'm necessarily proud of – that I've been in the position of the members of the government. I've been in the position as a cabinet minister; I've been in the position as a private member, not in cabinet. It is a feeling of tremendous discomfort when you know you've got a crappy piece of legislation. It is a feeling of tremendous discomfort when you are being called on to vote and to support, because it is well intentioned but poorly executed, a piece of legislation that is not a good piece of legislation. I could name off some of the ones from the past terms, but

I'm sure that because they're so interested in what's happened for the last 44 years and some of our failings, we'll hear about it from over there, so I won't waste our time.

This is poor legislation. This amendment makes the poor legislation somewhat clearer, so I'm inclined on the basis of clarity to support it, but I will tell you, Madam Chair, that this is still tremendously poor legislation. The amendments that are here do answer some questions. They do provide some clarity, but there is so much in this bill that is still unclear, that is still unanswered. You know, there were two hours' worth of questions, and people were still lined up at the microphones yesterday wanting to ask questions to get some clarity. It is so clear and it should be so obvious to this government that this piece of legislation is poorly executed, poorly written, and really needs to be taken back to the drawing board, but when we gave you two separate opportunities to do that, a referral motion and then a hoist motion, you defeated both of them. We are giving you every lifeline that is available under legislative procedure to correct your errors, and you refuse. This is problematic.

Now, you know, some people will say: "Well, let them dig their own grave. Let them hang themselves politically." But, quite frankly, we are legislators. Our job as legislators is to produce the best legislation that we can here in this Legislature. What happens three and a half years from now: that will sort itself out. We have to worry about what we are dealing with right now. Right now we're dealing with poor legislation, and right now, perhaps more importantly, we're dealing with the broken trust of Albertans across the province: rural, urban, and right across from north to south. That is a problem for this government because when you've broken the trust of the people, I can tell you that it makes it that much more difficult to govern on a lot of different areas, not just on whether you're talking about farm safety but a whole wide range of issues. Whether they're economic issues or social issues, this government will have an increasing level of difficulty governing because they simply are not listening to people. They have demonstrated that they will forge ahead with something that is so clearly being opposed right across this province.

Madam Chair, I'm going to actually listen to the rest of the debate on this amendment. As I said, I'm a little bit torn. I think I'm probably going to support it, which seems odd, but it does provide some clarity to an otherwise very poor bill. You can rest assured that when it comes up for third reading, I will be against the bill. For however long it takes this evening in Committee of the Whole until this government once again invokes closure and cuts off the democratic process, I will be listening and most likely supporting most of the amendments that attempt – attempt – to try to fix, to patch, to amend, to alter the poor elements within this bill that still remain. I can tell you that one night, quite frankly, isn't enough time to do it, but we will work however late we need to tonight on the amendments to try and pass them to make this legislation at least somewhat more palatable to the people of Alberta.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Madam Chair. I will be brief because I think that we will talk a lot more about some of the subamendments that are coming as we attempt to fix this legislation. Just briefly, on behalf of the Wildrose caucus, specifically on this amendment, the issue with this amendment is that it doesn't fix nearly enough problems with Bill 6. This government has shown itself to be totally deaf to what voters wanted in this regard leading up to this, and now they might be starting to become partially deaf. Now they're

starting to slowly listen, but the problem is that because they're trying to ram this through so fast, I don't think that we're going to have time to make them fully listen to what voters want. So they're going to take this half-measure, and that's disappointing.

First of all, Madam Chair, the amendment itself leaves room where cabinet can later change regulations, which will affect the people whose protection under legislation we are going to take away if this bill passes. Now, for the farmers and the ranchers that I'm speaking to back in my constituency and across the province, that's not acceptable. The reason that it's not acceptable is because they don't trust this government anymore. They don't trust this government because this government tried to put in legislation that would totally disrupt their way of life. Their own website shows it. They tried to put in legislation that would put WCB on kids working in chicken coops on farms, put in legislation that would have affected kids using 4-H cows in their parents' barns or corrals. That's a fact.

Now they've changed that. There was outcry. There were protests, letters. We've seen all of my colleagues bring forward all the letters that have been coming from their riding. We've seen the protests on the Legislature steps. So now the government is panicking, Madam Chair. They know that they're in trouble. They know that they're in trouble in rural Alberta. Despite being known as an urban party, they do actually have a lot of rural seats, as you know full well, and they know they're in trouble in rural Alberta. So they have to try to bring forward this amendment, but it does not go far enough. It still leaves a blank cheque, which Albertans will not accept because they do not trust this government. Let's be very clear on that.

Now, there are several things that we are going to try to do, as my colleague the House leader for the third party articulated very well, I believe. We are going to try tonight, but we know that the government is only going to give us so much time, unfortunately, because they are going to take away our democratic right as MLAs to fight for our constituents. We are going to try to help them fix this legislation even more. We know that they're going to take their majority and they're going to try to force this through, but we want to try to help our constituents back home as much as possible. We're going to go through it. We're going to try to fix it. We're going to start that shortly.

4:40

I want to be clear, Madam Chair. I couldn't be in Olds today for the government no-tell session, as we like to call them now, and it sounds like it was about the same, from the reports I'm getting from there today. My wife went. Several members of my family went and several friends, and they spoke with many, many farmers. I know that the hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills was there today. He spoke with many farmers. We talked specifically about this amendment, and the message was loud and clear from our constituents: this amendment is still not acceptable. The bill itself is not acceptable, and they were very clear that they expect us to stand up in this House and vote against this amendment, vote against this bill, and stop this outrageous behaviour on farmers and ranchers.

While I respect the Member for Leduc-Beaumont – and I do respect him very much, and I respect him for standing up and having the courage – you know, we have not seen many of his colleagues stand up and defend this bill. He had the courage to do that, and I respect that, but I also respectfully disagree. I was sent here by my constituents to vote for them. Now, along the way, with the burden of office it's going to be tough to decide sometimes what your riding wants. Many of the veteran MLAs in here can probably confirm that there are going to be issues along the way where you're

not going to be sure what your riding wants, but I can tell you right now that there's no doubt what the people of Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre want. Thousands of phone calls, thousands of e-mails and not one person from my constituency, from my riding, has come to me and said: vote for this.

Madam Chair, I can tell you that I and my Wildrose colleagues are going to do what our constituents sent us to do. We're going to follow their instructions, and we are going to vote against this bill.

I thank you very much for your time, Madam Chair.

The Chair: I'm going to go next to the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow and then Drumheller-Stettler.

Ms Drever: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm glad to have the opportunity to rise to speak to Bill 6 today. I'm pleased to vote for this amendment, which I believe clarifies the original intent of this bill, which is to offer workplace protections to paid farm and agriculture workers. Although my riding of Calgary-Bow is not considered a rural riding, I have had some constituents who have formerly lived on farms who have contacted me to share their opinions on the bill, which is why I rise to explain my support.

Agriculture represents a vital industry to our economy here in Alberta, and our farmers and ranchers work hard to put food on our tables every day. That's not all, Madam Chair. Our farmers and ranchers are also some of our key job creators in this province. We are a proud province, with workers who realize that a day's work means showing up far before the sun rises and going home far after it sets. What this bill seeks to accomplish is to ensure that we as a government are offering the same level of protection to a vital industry that we as a government offer to every other industry.

Alberta is the only province without employment standards coverage for farm and ranch workers. Our farm workers here in Alberta are currently exempt from occupational health and safety laws and have no right to refuse unsafe work. To clarify, what that means is that if a farm worker refuses to complete a job due to safety concerns, they have no legal protection. We as a government need to ensure that we are protecting all Alberta workers while also ensuring that we are respecting the preservation of family farm traditions and that do-good Alberta nature of neighbour helping neighbour.

This amendment accomplishes that, and for that reason I support this legislation. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Madam Chair. For those of you and even for myself, the understanding of *Robert's Rules of Order* is going to be important as we go forward. I'd like to give notice of a subamendment to Bill 6, the Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act. I have the required number of copies here for that.

Madam Chair, could I proceed through it, or do you want to wait till they're distributed?

The Chair: Just let me get the original. Is this an original? I need the original.

Mr. Strankman: I guess this is the original. Sorry. Thank you.

The Chair: This will be subamendment SA1.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that amendment A1 to Bill 6, Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act, be amended in part A in the proposed section 5(2) as

follows. Under (a), in clause (b), in the proposed subclause (i), by adding the following after paragraph (A):

(A.1) the operation does not pay wages, as defined in the Employment Standards Code, to more than 5 persons not including family members for the performance of farming or ranching work, or

Under (b), in clause (c), in the proposed subclause (bb), by adding the following after subclause (ii):

(iii) a person employed by a farming or ranching operation referred to in clause (s)(i)(A.1);

Madam Chair, if I could speak to the amendment briefly within the allotted time. I'm presenting the amendment in an attempt to – as we've heard many times today from the Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre and from the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster and even in a somewhat cordial fashion or amenable fashion, I'll say, from the Member for Leduc-Beaumont, this legislation is in need of improvement. This is a way that, hopefully, we can try an improvement.

I have great consternation about the fact that we are left to try and make these improvements in this Chamber to the best of our abilities because, Madam Chair, I have great consternation about unintended consequences. I think that's what's come forward in spades, if you will, to this legislation and the fact that when it was presented, it was a small number of pages. Then the government, after some feedback, I'll say, from the public and from opposition, came forward with five more pages of amendments.

With that, I looked into legislation that's prevalent in Saskatchewan. In my earlier presentation, speaking to this legislation, I spoke about the options in Saskatchewan. It's actually considerably different from what we have here or what this bill is proposing in Alberta. I find it significant that they talk about it in an interesting fashion. They give several exemptions. It exempts farming. It prescribes that farms and ranches over 10 employees must have an occupational health and safety program. It prescribes that farms and ranches with more than four or less than 10 employees must have an employee representative and must set out in writing who is the supervisor of the work site. These are options that easily could have been presented to the legislation in Alberta. That is for the OH and S portion of it.

Part of the major contentious issue in Alberta is the WCB mandate. The Wildrose has heard significantly from many, many constituents across the province about the unsatisfactory performance of the WCB and about their request for the provision of choice, whether that be any sort of a provider, not unlike what many of the citizens of Alberta are allowed under public liability and property damage, commonly referred to as PL/PD, for their automotive insurance. They have and are able to receive multiple sources or multiple options for that coverage.

In Saskatchewan the WCB exclusion act excludes dairy farming and feedlot or livestock yard operations that are not in connection with an industry within the scope of the act. They go on to list fur farms; grazing co-operatives; land clearing, brush cutting, or stumping that is not in connection with an industry within the scope of the act. Madam Chair, it includes livestock brokers, mobile farm feed service, portable seed-cleaning plants, piggery farms, poultry farms, trapping. There are many options in this other jurisdiction that are brought forward.

4:50

What I'm trying to do with this subamendment is to simply increase the designation beyond a single hiree, a temporary farm employee such as what we use on our farm, where we normally hire a single operator to help bring in the harvest, that would require the extent of ongoing OH and S requirements for the whole rest of the

year. Fall protection, OH and S designated sites, et cetera, are all required for the short season that that operator would be there, but those extensive and expensive requirements are the unintended consequences of this government's legislation in its present form.

With that, we're trying to achieve some small form of an option and, as the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster pointed out, trying to extend a lifeline to the government to bring forward improvements to their own legislation. We're doing this with the full comprehension and understanding that there may even be unintended consequences to what we're presenting here. It's a dangerous precedent that we're in, but we're trying to work with what's handed to us. It's simply something that's the only option that we have left and are presenting. We're trying to work with the government in many ways to bring these things forward.

Madam Chair, I'm anxious to hear what the comments are from members opposite and from others in regard to this subamendment. At the risk of being complicated and bringing this to a further amendment of an amendment of legislation, it's something that we're trying to do, hopefully in good faith – and, hopefully, it will be received in good faith – to bring forward positive legislation. As representatives of Albertans and representatives of our constituents the onus is entirely upon us to try and do this.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I rise to speak against the subamendment today. This subamendment essentially proposes to amend the definition of our amendment. The amendment was proposed to ensure that family farms were exempted and that a certain way of life was protected, but this subamendment increases the exempted people for farms that employ five or less paid workers.

The entire intent of the legislation is to defend paid farm workers. These people have been without protections for a number of years. Like every other employee in the province, they have the right to be able to refuse unsafe work. You know, if someone says, "Stick your hand in that live machine and take out that block of wood that's stuck," they should be able to say no. That is what our belief is, and that's how we're proceeding forward.

We also think that paid farm workers should have access to compensation in the event that they are grievously injured and unable to work for the rest of their lives. In the event that someone is tragically killed in a farm accident, we feel that their family should have access to that compensation.

You know, it was always our intention to exempt family farms, and we've brought in amendments to clarify this, as we have been asked to do by numerous parties. I think the Official Opposition, in bringing forward this amendment, is really indicating that maybe everything wasn't all about the family farm because this would exempt more than just family farms. An operation with five employees, while being a small business, is not a family business. It's a small business. Like any other small business, they will now be required to be subject to occupational health and safety and to be subject to WCB. This is the case for every other small business across the province, so it's not unreasonable to think that vulnerable workers in this particular sector should also be included in this case.

I'd also like to point out while I have risen here that back in March it seemed that the Leader of the Official Opposition was, in fact, in favour of extending rights to farm workers, so I am surprised now that the Official Opposition is taking the position that they are taking. I understand that there have been some concerns about family farms, and I believe that our amendment makes it absolutely clear what our intention is with respect to that going forward.

You know, this amendment would increase that exemption. It would increase it beyond family farms. It would increase it to include paid employees, the very same paid and vulnerable employees that we are acting to protect and that our party has pretty much throughout its history indicated that it will act to protect.

Madam Chair, I will be voting against the subamendment, and I would urge all members to do the same. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. First of all, I do support this amendment for a couple of reasons. The first is that this bill is going to cost farmers jobs. It's already happening. We're already hearing from the Olds rally today that ranchers are not going to be able to afford to do what the requirements are if they have hired hands now, to be able to keep up with families that don't need as many hired hands. So we've broken farmers into two different groups, which is extremely unfortunate. People are going to lose jobs, and that's tough in my community.

Again, we just watched a minister stand in this House again and accuse farmers, Madam Chair, of forcing people to do unsafe work and say that she wouldn't support this thing because she actually thinks some farmer or rancher somewhere is going around and forcing people to do things that they do not want to do, forcing people to do things unsafely, and that's not true. It's the same thing her Premier has said. Then they wonder why Albertans won't trust them anymore. This is what they keep standing up in this House and saying. They keep standing up and saying: farmers and ranchers are trying to hurt people; they're trying to kill people. That's what this government is saying. Shame on the minister for saying that, and shame on the Premier for continuing to allow it to happen.

Farmers and ranchers are not trying to hurt people, and the quicker we all get that through our heads, the quicker we can try to get some proper legislation done. But saying that you will not vote for this amendment because you think a farmer or rancher would now force somebody to do something and it takes away their protection to not do it is unacceptable.

I can tell you that back home all the farmers and ranchers I'm talking to are outraged, and that is one of the reasons that they will never vote for this government again. This minister should stand up in this House and apologize to farmers and ranchers.

Mr. Mason: I would hope that the hon. member would be able to hear the response to that nonsense that he has just spouted. In all industries there are safe and unsafe situations that arise from time to time. They are not usually or almost never or completely never a deliberate attempt by the employer to force somebody to do something that's dangerous. To suggest that if you talk about the existence of unsafe working conditions from time to time in the agriculture industry, it's somehow an attack on farmers is completely twisting the words of the minister and is attempting to further fan the flames for people who don't understand the legislation. It is not adding any clarity to this discussion whatsoever. It's misleading, Madam Chair.

Every year in Alberta 17 people die in work-related farm accidents, and for every one of those deaths there are another 25 that are hospitalized as a result of a work-related injury. These kinds of accidents occur in all industries, Madam Chair, not just on farms.

To say that if you talk about the injuries, for example, in oil field drilling or deaths in industry, you're somehow accusing those employers of deliberately sending people to their deaths, you know, is an absolute outrage and an insult. For the hon. member to stand here and then have the gall to stand up further and demand an

apology from this side when it's that hon. member that actually owes an apology for twisting and misleading and trying to inflame the situation further, deliberately, I might add, Madam Chair, by misleading farmers about what this government is saying and about what the intention of this government is – he is the one, frankly, that should apologize.

5:00

The Chair: I'll recognize the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka first.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Madam Chair. I have no intention of inflaming this. But I want to take you to a farm, in a way. I received this very long text message, pecked out on a phone – I don't know how many hours he spent doing it – sharing his story with me, a young family farm. The reality is that he expresses things that I think maybe are not understood about the nature and the reality of the farm world.

The truth of the matter here is that the nature of the farming world has changed in recent years. If you look at commodity prices versus expenses, what farms earn hasn't really gone up in 10 or maybe even in some cases 15 years. Costs have continued to rise. The truth of the matter is that farming margins are so thin right now that many of them are actually going bankrupt. The reality is that almost all farm families, every time they get a break in their farming schedule, go off farm and have to work somewhere else, usually in the oil field, so that they can make enough money to keep their farm alive.

Part of that reality is also that – and this is in relation to the amendment; in fact, it relates directly to SA1 here – I don't think people understand that most multigenerational farms don't get it handed to them on a silver platter for free. What happens is that one generation buys it from the next so that they have money to retire, so that the older people have money to live. It starts over with every generation, with this incredibly massive cost factor that comes in, and then the costs of operating have escalated while the incomes haven't. The reality is that for many farmers it truly is a lifestyle; it isn't a business.

In regard to the business side of it, which is what this relates to, farms that have not grown, farms that have not increased their size are not able to earn enough revenue off their operational expense to actually keep a family alive. There isn't enough income left at the end of the day for a family to live on, hence working outside, hence trying to get bigger so that they can create enough revenue and get a thin margin of 5 per cent or so to try and live on. This is something that really becomes difficult for them to do.

The price of land has escalated to the point where, in my area, land is costing between \$4,500 and \$12,000 an acre. Farming business analysts have pointed out that you can't cash-flow on that kind of purchase price. You have to fund it some other way: working outside, trying to get bigger. The reality is that about \$2,000 an acre is all you can actually earn on a farm.

So this young man, who's been through all of this experience, bought his father's home quarter then had to borrow money to buy two more quarters to try and get a little bit bigger. He says:

I totally get safety. One thing you need to understand is that we just don't hire masses of people. We hire people who are just as passionate as we are. There are lots of farmers at heart that can't afford to farm because of the incredible costs that are related to it. They can't afford to farm themselves, and these are the people who we usually hire. If it's about the money or safety, they wouldn't work for us, in truth. But truth be told, the guys that work for me and all farms will never be a number. They become family. They eat dinner with us every day. They're over for all the holidays. Do you really think we don't care about their safety? Truth be told, my guys are more upset . . .

Now, these are the farm workers.

... and worried than I am now. They know that I don't have a lot of money. I've shown them my books. They will tell you that they are paid more a month than I am. To a very small group of employees that have gotten hurt in the past, gone to the government to complain...

Et cetera, et cetera.

The reality is that in many cases, yes, we need to protect the rights of the farm workers, but what if the farm workers don't want it? Will they have the right to say no, or will it be forced upon them? And I understand that, yes, there are cases where some farm workers need help, but that's where this legislation needs to be fine-tuned and not steamrolled over everyone else. The reality of the farming economy these days is that it's not possible to operate on a one- or two-person operation and actually survive, and family farms have been forced to get bigger in order to even survive. They do care about their people, and oftentimes it is the neighbour's son or somebody from across the next quarter. So there is an extremely important point to this that actually makes it possible for the family farm to survive.

Unless you understand those economics and those realities and those generational passings on, how it is that they even get to become the next generation that farms, I think you don't understand why it is that we are getting so inundated. I mean, we didn't make this up, friends: 30,000 signatures presented today. We didn't go out and con those. We didn't go out and beg people to sign it so we could hand something in here. Thousands of letters were sent to us.

Yes, there are people who need some protection, but this protection needs to be wisely thought about and carefully administered, and that is not what's happening with this legislation. That kind of careful thought has not been put into this. Quite frankly, the partial solution to a very, very bad piece of legislation is in this subamendment, and I have to encourage you, based on one farmer's testimony and experience, that the reality is that without some consideration for being able to do these things in the community of farming, quite frankly, you will drive many of these operations out of business. They will cease to exist, and what you will end up with is big corporate farms. That's what will be left.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Just in regard to the dispute between the House leader and our opposition whip with regard to comments made by the minister, the wonderful thing about this House is that all words are recorded in *Hansard*, and we'll get somebody to pull those statements and just make sure that there's clarity on that.

Anyway, getting back to the amendment, I find it interesting that the government can put forward a six-page amendment on a five-page bill, and everybody jumps up and rags and says how wonderful it is, and then when the opposition puts through a very small, half-page subamendment to it, all of a sudden, you know, that's got to be rejected.

All it does is to provide some clarity as to the size of a family farm and give them – like I said before, in my previous speech, this six-page amendment, although it is an improvement on the bill, isn't quite clear as to what size a family farm is and kind of ties their hands behind their backs if they do need some help. Sometimes a small family farm is just a couple. I have family members that calve out 350 to 400 head of cattle every year, and it's a 24-hour job. It's tough. They're both, you know, in their 60s, and to be up 24 hours a day checking on calves is just beyond their capability, so they hire a hired man, that comes and stays with them for a couple of months

while they do their calving. So all that is that we're just trying to eliminate that. This person that they hire sleeps in their house and eats breakfast at their table, so he is like a family member, but he's not. He's a hired hand.

So I'm pleased to rise and speak in support of the subamendment to the Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act. This amendment will provide more stability and security to family farms by excluding them from mandatory OH and S due to the fact that they only employ a handful of paid employees. Again, sometimes it's on a part-time basis, only for a month. It's the paperwork involved in providing WCB coverage and OH and S coverage. A lot of these families already have insurance that covers their employees. It's blanket coverage, and it comes and goes. They're not in the market to have their employee or the person that comes and helps them on a yearly basis get hurt so that he doesn't come back and they have to look for someone else. It's not in the cards.

5:10

Nobody disputes the fact that safety is important; however, we seem to disagree on the fact that those most concerned with safety are the moms and dads operating farms. Moms and dads are not only concerned with the safety of their children but also of the workers that they may have. It's a small outfit, so these employees may not be blood relatives, but they're treated as though they are. Like I said, they sleep in the house, they have breakfast, they have lunch, dinner, and supper with them, and sit and watch TV at night together. Moms and dads do everything within their power to ensure the safety of everyone on the farm while also introducing their children to the joys and, at times, burdens of farm life. By broadly instituting OH and S on all farms, the government is in effect saying: "You're not doing it right. You're not looking out for your family, neighbours, and employees. We know better. We can do better. We will do it."

Come to think of it, that's exactly what the Premier said last week, that this bill will be passed. No discussion. This bill will be passed prior to Christmas: no ifs, ands, or buts; no thorough consultation; no consideration. Is that what we've come to in this province? The idea that government can better take care of farmers' families is categorically false. So is the idea that the government knows better on this issue.

Furthermore, at this point OH and S executives don't even know what implementation will look like. According to Ross Nairne, the executive director of occupational health and safety, speaking in Grande Prairie, "Answers will be unclear until technical rules are developed and implemented in 2017." That is as reported in the *Western Producer* on December 3. What we're doing here is attempting to pass legislation, and it seems nobody knows what the final product will look like, Madam Chair. This kind of uncertainty for at least one full year and likely more is not helpful to anyone, least of all to those family farms who will be stuck in limbo while they await confirmation of what implementation will look like for a small operation. Do they invest? Do they try and grow bigger, knowing that down the road they're going to get legislation that could cripple them?

I don't think it's asking too much for there to be a minimum, basic framework in place. That's all we're asking; that's all this amendment does. It adds to the six pages of the amendment one little section that dictates how many employees you can have before this legislation goes into effect. I think a small farm with five employees on a part-time basis or even on a full-time basis is not going to cripple the government.

Farmers and ranchers have questions for which neither the government, OH and S, nor WCB have answers. That's the problem. That's a problem of more than just misinformation. That's

a problem of lack of information. It's also a problem of lack of foresight and, as I'm sure the government is tired of being reminded, a lack of consultation. To address this, in this last-minute amendment the government re-exempted family farms so long as they don't hire a single employee for any part of the year. All we're trying to do is clarify that a small family farm can hire up to five employees. It's not that onerous. [interjections] That's better, but it does not actually exempt family farms; it only exempts the family members themselves, so we still have the same host of problems, just on a smaller scale. But this error can be fixed. That brings me to this amendment, which would actually exclude from mandatory OH and S those family farms by letting them hire a few seasonal employees without suddenly having their homestead treated like a factory.

Questions abound for family farmers. They're asking if they're able to continue operating. They're asking if they'll be able to continue to hire the additional hand or hands that they need to ensure that their family farm runs smoothly and safely, above board, not under the table. They're asking if they'll be able to afford whatever upgrades an OH and S inspector might demand on their 80-year-old farm. They're asking these questions, and they're not receiving answers. In my previous statement I alluded to the machinist company that went bankrupt after being fined close to \$300,000 by OH and S because they had modified a switch on a drill press. How many farmers out there have modified a piece of farm equipment?

An Hon. Member: All of them.

Mr. Hanson: All of them. You buy a piece of equipment, and you tinker with it to make it work better. Sometimes you add a little bit. You know, if something happens, is the farmer going to lose his farm because he's added an extra plowshare to a 50-foot cultivator?

Farm families are not large enterprises that bring in big money. They're not large corporations with dozens or hundreds of employees. They're small. They operate on a tight budget, and they do it for the love of the job and the love of the accompanying life. In order to help things run smoothly, they sometimes need to hire only a few people to help out for a season or on a long-term basis.

Exempting family farms from this mandatory OH and S makes sense. It doesn't mean in regard to safety that any corners will be cut. It doesn't mean that safety suddenly flies out the window. Not at all. These farmers are already concerned with safety. For years, without legislation in place, they've already been doing everything within their power to mitigate any injuries. Safety is already being considered and being acted upon on family farms. Nobody wants to see injuries anywhere, least of all families, and 90 per cent of them that we've talked to do provide insurance for themselves and for people that they hire on a part-time basis.

Passing this amendment is one of the best things this government can do, outside of killing the bill completely or referring it to committee, to ensure that proper, thorough consultation can take place. Passing this amendment would only mean that the government stands up in front of all Albertans and says that it recognizes that family farms are different. That's all we're asking for, just some clarity on: what is a family farm?

It would mean that the government is beginning to gain an appreciation and an understanding of the variation that exists in the agricultural community. Passing this amendment would mean that the government is prepared to start listening to Albertans and start taking their concerns into account. In fact, it would show Albertans that the government is not just prepared to start listening but is actually listening to them, which, let's be honest, this government could use a little bit of help on.

In an economy already shaken, fragile, and despairing, the last thing that we need to do in this province is pass legislation that will further hurt our economy. Worse, the last thing this government should want to do is hurt more Albertans by bringing about further job loss and insecurity.

I'm not fearmongering here. I know that the other side of the House enjoys accusing us of that on a regular basis, but that's not what I'm doing. I'm stating facts, and I'm supporting the people in my constituency that have asked me to do this, every day, every letter, every phone call, every e-mail. Not one for Bill 6. Not one.

Numerous farming families have raised their voices and have spoken to MLAs and media about the fact that the potential costs associated with instituting OH and S are very concerning, inhibiting, and unaffordable. Let's read between the lines. That means closure, and that's closure not just of a family business but of a way of life.

Before I finish speaking on this amendment, I'd like to ask a few questions of the government members opposite. Over the past weeks this House has spent some time debating Bill 202, the Alberta Local Food Act. Has the government considered what effect passing Bill 6 may have on the implementation of Bill 202? As far as I can see, we have two bills which share something of a relationship. In previous days a number of members opposite have spoken on shopping locally and speaking with farmers. Have those same members asked those farmers how this bill will affect them? Probably not. They don't want to hear it.

Or consider the implementation of the unpopular carbon tax. The monies that will be owed by small family farms on this will already serve to raise their costs. How will Bill 6 on top of the carbon tax affect the costs imposed on family farms? Has the government, have members opposite asked that question?

These questions are important to answer when you're considering family farms with only a few employees. The intent should be to promote business and employment, not stifle it and not put it under the table, as was suggested in Vegreville.

As mentioned before, safety is a high priority for the moms and dads who run these farms. However, if they see increases in costs, not only from the carbon tax but also barriers from extensive OH and S implementation, there's a possibility that they will be unable to hire those few employees that they need to help maintain operations. That puts extra stress on the family.

If they can't afford to hire some additional people to help, that could, in turn, have negative consequences of making the owners take on even more responsibility, even longer hours, which could affect their safety. Passing this amendment, therefore, promotes safety on family farms by letting them hire the help they need when they need it. Safety is important for everyone, and passing this amendment will not diminish the application of safety measures for anyone, nor will it put people at risk.

5:20

In closing, I'd like to reiterate my support for this amendment to exempt family farms that employ fewer than five workers from mandatory OH and S. I don't think it's that difficult to do. I encourage all members of this House to take some time to consider what Bill 6 would look like and what it would mean to family farms both with and without this amendment. Once that has been truly and honestly considered, I believe you will understand the importance and necessity of passing this amendment. Again, I'll add: all we're asking is to add half a page to your already six pages of amendments on a five-page bill.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to speak in support of this subamendment from my esteemed colleague. It would be truly amusing, if it wasn't so insulting, that this government expects Alberta farmers to believe that they had planned to exempt farm owners and family farms all along when everybody, especially farmers, know that that is absolutely not true. Documentation proves it's so.

Although we have heard time and again empty rhetoric about how this government is listening – we hear it all the time – their actions are speaking louder than their empty rhetoric because we still see no formal process in place for farmers to have concrete input into Bill 6. There's nothing there. There's been talk and no concrete process put in place.

Now, this amendment that we have is a good amendment intended to protect family farms. The reason why the members opposite are having a struggle with this is because they do not understand farming. For example, a family farm during harvest time needs an intense amount of work to be done around the clock for a short period of time to get that harvest in.

Same thing at roundup. When it's time to bring the cattle in, they are scattered all over the countryside. I worked for a cattleman. We had cattle in three different locations. I think that the closest location was a mile away, and the farthest location was about 15 miles away at a pasture. When it was time to round up the cattle and bring them back – and there were at any given point in time between 500 and 600 head – we were going to need help. For that short period of time it's not uncommon for family farmers to hire some people to come on over and get that job done and to take as long as it takes to get that job done.

Now, going back to harvest time as an example, you're always fighting the weather when you're a farmer. Of course, at harvest time, the way seeding is done today, the intention is to have all that grain come ready at the same time and get it off the field and into the bins. When a family farm has only two or three family members, quite often they will hire out to get enough manpower there for that short amount of time, and they give 'er all day, from sun-up to sundown. Well, actually, when you're taking grain off, you will combine until the dew doesn't let you anymore. It's called when it gets "tough." That's a farming word. [interjection] Yeah. It gets tough, too. But the last thing you want is dew-laden grain. It will heat up and just go to rot on you.

In this intense operation you're working from as early in the morning as you possibly can till as late at night as the dew falls. That means you have a really short window that day and maybe the next day and however many days it's going to be until that weather comes against you. You need lots of people, lots of machines, and lots of times a family farm will hire out for this short period of harvest. It may only be six or seven days, and that's it for the whole year. There will be no more hired workers needed. So because of this, if a family farm has to hire these workers temporarily for these few days – whammo – they are now subject to everything in this bill although they are, indeed, a family farm.

Because of the way this bill has been so poorly crafted, because this government did not talk to the experts on the farm, you don't know that. You don't know farming. You don't know the cycle of farming and the different kinds of farming that there are, whether it be grain farming, whether it be cattle, whether it be poultry. You don't understand it, but you're trying to legislate it. This is patently wrong, and that is the reason why in our parliamentary system we have standing committees, so that legislation that politicians think is great can go to the standing committees and the standing committees can bring in the experts, the farmers in this case, and the farmers can come to the standing committee and tell you in far

greater detail than I'm telling you all of the very unique but complex aspects of farming in the prairie provinces.

There's nothing like it. You can hardly compare this even to, you know, orchards in the Okanagan. I have experience with that. I also have experience with cattle from out here and grain farming and haying and all the rest of it. There are these moments of intensity where the family farmer has to hire out, and when that happens under this legislation as it is now – whammo – that family farm comes under the whole breadth of this legislation, and that's wrong. It shouldn't be that way.

If your intention was to exempt family farms, you haven't done it. I'll say it again. The reason you haven't done it – and I'm not being facetious or malicious when I say this – is that you don't understand farming. You don't understand prairie farming. Since you don't understand all of the complexities of farming because you haven't sent these things to committee, you haven't brought in the farmers – we keep suggesting to you that you do that – since you won't do that, well, okay, we're going to have to introduce a subamendment to your amendment.

Your amendment is an admission by you that your original bill was flawed, and you refuse to admit just how flawed it was, calling it mistaken communication. But, frankly, just think about this. If the farmers had not demonstrated and protested as loudly as they have, if the opposition had not protested as loudly and long as we have, you would have passed Bill 6 as it was, thinking that it's just fine, when in fact it is so flawed that you finally brought forward your own amendment in an attempt to fix it.

Again, the people who brought forward the amendment in an attempt to fix a flawed bill still didn't send it to committee and still didn't invite in a few thousand farmers to come and tell us from their expert testimony the different complexities that we need to know as legislators to draft sound legislation. Again, you relied on politicians and bureaucrats to fix a flawed bill developed by politicians and bureaucrats and not the farmers themselves. That is the fundamental flaw of Bill 6. It was not created by farmers, and it needs to be. There wasn't enough consultation. If you're really serious about farm safety, there are no better experts than the farmers themselves. They have not created this bill, and neither have they created this amendment. That is still your fundamental flaw.

We just keep hearing rhetoric about, "We hear; we hear; we're listening; we're listening," and what have the farmers been telling you? Kill Bill 6. It's a universal statement that you see at every rally, all over Facebook, all over Twitter, all of these e-mails, all of these letters. You know, earlier today my colleagues here in the Wildrose opposition put out – I don't know – five or six dead trees' worth of paper from our constituents and your constituents protesting Bill 6. The one thing that I noticed was: none from you.

5:30

Where were your stacks of petitions, of 30,000 names in support of Bill 6? Where were your stacks upon stacks upon stacks of thousands and thousands of letters from your constituents in support of your Bill 6? You don't have them. But I know that you have a lot of the same e-mails that I got, because I can read the header. I know that it was CCed to you, to these members. I also know how many I got in support of Bill 6, and I presented every single one of those letters that were in support of Bill 6: exactly none, not even one.

My constituency assistant in Sylvan Lake has been run off her feet. The phone just keeps ringing and ringing and ringing: we don't want Bill 6. We have letters from the Alberta federation of rural electric associations. They're saying: we don't want Bill 6. Rural Alberta has been pleading with this government, saying: kill this

bill. It was flawed from the get-go. No Band-Aid is going to successfully repair it.

We are going to try to propose amendments in an attempt to help repair this thing because this government is so doggedly determined to ram this bill through without listening to the very farmers whose lives this bill is going to impact. That is rude, and it is insulting to the democratic process and every Alberta farmer that's out there and has to be subject to this kind of totalitarian treatment. It's shameful.

Then we've had some statements from the other side that demonstrate clearly the lack of understanding that this government has about farmers, farm safety. For example, we have heard this government state that Bill 6 gives farm workers the right to refuse dangerous work. News flash: all Canadians have the right to refuse dangerous work.

Some Hon. Members: No, they don't.

Mr. MacIntyre: We can all say no. There is no person that can force me to do a dangerous job. Nobody. No one can force me to do a dangerous job. Nobody. So now you're accusing farmers of purposely, consciously ordering their workers to do dangerous work? Is that what that member is suggesting? [interjections]

The Chair: Hon. members, through the chair, please. Innisfail-Sylvan Lake has the floor.

Mr. MacIntyre: Yes, ma'am.

Charging Alberta farmers with forcing their employees to perform dangerous jobs: that deserves an apology. At 2:11 today, approximately, the Premier said that farm workers' "human rights . . . have been ignored." That's a quote, that farm workers' "human rights . . . have been ignored" for years, I believe she said. By whom? The farmers that employ them? Are you charging farmers who employ farm workers of ignoring farmer workers' human rights? Show me one. Show me one farmer who has ignored the rights of their workers. What a shameful accusation. It is a baseless charge and deserving of an apology from this Premier.

At 2:25 today the Minister of Health called farm workers "vulnerable." I was a farm worker. At no time did I feel vulnerable. Insinuating that farmers who employ them are purposely mistreating or taking advantage vulnerable employees, again, charging Alberta farmers with mistreatment: this is absolutely unacceptable. It deserves an apology from this government. Good grief.

Again, I really believe that it comes down to a genuine ignorance on the part of members opposite as to what farming is all about, the complexities of farming, and especially family farming. You just don't get it. You know, consultation is supposed to be a discussion where both parties speak and listen and – here is the key – respect the wisdom of both. This government has not demonstrated any respect for the wisdom of Alberta's farmers.

They've been farming this land for over a hundred years. I had the pleasure this summer of participating in a celebration at the McAllister farm. I believe it was the 125th anniversary of them farming the same dirt, 125 years. They've been on that dirt longer than this province has existed. That farm is an amazing operation. They have been farming continually, safely, generation after generation, and I was just blessed to be able to take a photograph of four generations of McAllisters: great-granddad, granddad, the dad, and the child. It was a wonderful moment.

I have neighbours who have been farming the same land for 105 years; others, 100 years.

Dr. Turner: What does this have to do with the subamendment?

Mr. MacIntyre: Everything. The subamendment goes to protecting those family farms from this legislation, that simply doesn't understand the family farm. That's what this is all about. We brought this subamendment to you because you're just going to have to accept that the family farms who tilled this province's earth for generation upon generation know a thing or two more than you.

You've rushed in with a Band-Aid amendment brought forth by a government that still fails to get to the core of the problem with this problematic legislation, which is that you still think you know more about farming than the farmers of Alberta. It's not unsurprising given your refusal to slow this process down, to properly consult, to put this thing into committee. You've got an amendment that is proposing to plug some holes, but there are too many holes. You don't have enough fingers and toes to plug them all.

You're claiming that your intention was never to impose this legislation on the family farm, and you've gone so far as to accuse Wildrose of spreading misinformation, but here we are with an amendment that fundamentally fails to exempt family farms, really. As I've just described to you, during harvest family farms are going to have to hire for that little window, and as soon as they do: wham.

Farming is seasonal work. You will be hard-pressed to find family operations that do not at any point require seasonal, additional paid help to do things like get the crops in or branding. These farm hands often live on site. They become part of the family. They come year after year. These relationships are symbiotic. The owner of the farm needs the farmhand just as much as the farmhand needs work from their farmer.

Dr. Turner: And a safe workplace.

Mr. MacIntyre: Are you saying that are farms are not safe, that farmers don't have safe workplaces? There are just more charges against our farmers. Goodness sakes. You need to go work on the farm. You need to learn a thing or two about farming.

Dr. Turner: I own a farm. I actually own a farm.

Mr. MacIntyre: I'm not talking about the computer game. I'm not talking about the app.

The Chair: Hon members, can we have order. The hon. Member for Innisfail-Sylvan Lake has the floor.

Mr. MacIntyre: In a province like Alberta, where the harvest season is short and demanding and there are options for work on any one of Alberta's nearly 50,000 farms, the power dynamics between a farmer and their help are far more balanced than this government would imply. We cannot help on this side of the House but to hear in the words of the NDP what amounts to a fundamental mistrust of the farmers' intentions. The NDP seems to believe that farmers are some type of selfish, oppressive owner of the means of production looking to take advantage of their employees. This legislation and the government rhetoric around it is laced with the notion that farmers are somehow abusing their employees or denying them human rights. It is simply not true, and frankly hundreds of farmers and ranchers whom I've spoken to find it insulting and inflammatory and deserving of an apology. Farmers only ask that you acknowledge that 9 to 5 office hours are not functional or tenable during calving and harvest season or most of the year on a farm.

5:40

More than just farmhands, what about contract workers? This legislation says that this only applies to ranch and farm work. But

what exactly constitutes farm work, then? Even with this amendment from the government it is still not clear to many in the agricultural community whom I have consulted with that a family farm can bring paid or unpaid workers.

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

Mrs. Littlewood: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise to speak today against the subamendment. I have spent many hours, many days visiting, calling, e-mailing, and learning from the constituents of Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville and their concerns. Among those concerns has been that the people are afraid that the government wants to tell parents how to raise their children. I don't want that for Albertans. I have seen how many issues around provincial legislation in our history have stirred the hearts of parents worried that the government did not believe that parents have the fundamental right to raise their children as they see best.

My father raised me and my sister as a single dad. As an owner of his own painting business, builder of trailers, engineer of geodesic domes, and overall inventor extraordinaire, he believed it was the most important thing to teach his children how to work. I held a paintbrush at the age of nine or 10. I had small hands, so I was well suited to cutting around doorknobs and light switches, and I would take the tape and I would tape off the baseboard, and I would wash windows. As I got older, I carried wood and scaffolding, helping my dad build geodesic domes, which he shipped all across the globe. I helped him build his dream house. It is a geodesic home in Wetaskiwin, and this is how we spent our time. Over that year that was how we bonded. This is what makes me the better IKEA builder between me and my husband.

Sometimes it felt like work, but more often it was just how we spent our time. Sometimes I was paid a few bucks. Sometimes, most of the time, I was not, but I helped my dad. I freely gave of my time to help my dad build his home because of the love of the work that he raised me to have and the love of my dad.

The original amendment speaks to what is fundamental about being Albertan and Canadian, protecting the right to raise your children in the traditions that you choose, whether it's the religion that you choose or the education that you choose or the home that you choose. I have visited hundreds of people across the region since May. I have gone walking in their fields to do crop checks. I have seen first-hand the difficulty of what it means to sow a new crop and wait and see through the season's changes to find out what you will actually get out of that yield come harvest time. I have met many, many families that have deep roots in our province, seen so many Century farm awards that are proudly hung at the outside of ranches' gates. This is what people were telling me. As people that have an identity of farming – fourth, fifth, sixth generation – they wanted the freedom to shape the world that their children live in. They wanted to teach them the values that their family held most dearly. I have listened. I have heard, and now we have that in writing. It is the original amendment, a common-sense approach by the government to underline the intent of the Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act, that what we value as Albertans is to enshrine the basic human rights and protection of farm and ranch workers.

I will continue to listen to many constituents, to every constituent. I will answer every phone call. I will answer every e-mail. I will go to every event that I necessarily have the human time for. Absolutely, that's what I do. What I've learned is that my constituents have conflicting points of view. There are people that argue on many different sides of a debate, but I am their voice, and I stand in this House, and I stand in caucus, and I speak to every person that I know can make a difference, and I ensure that their

concerns and their very special and unique perspectives are voiced to this government and in this House every day, now and in the future.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Ms Ganley: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise again to speak against this subamendment. You know, I'd like to begin by addressing some of the comments that were made earlier. I don't think that myself or any member of our caucus at all has ever implied or ever intended to imply that any farmer is deliberately exposing anyone to unsafe work. The fact is that in any given workplace there is a potential that an unsafe situation will arise, and that's why it's so critical that an employee have a right to refuse that unsafe work if they feel that it is unsafe. We think that that's a pretty basic position to take.

You know, with respect to people who become injured, they should be entitled to compensation. As so many of my colleagues have said, every year in Alberta 17 people die in work-related farm accidents, and for every one of those deaths 25 or more are hospitalized as a result of a work-related injury. Laws that protect wage-earning employees on farms and ranches are working quite well in other provinces in this country.

You know, we have heard the concerns of the people who brought their concerns forward, and those people are concerned about their way of life and their ability to have their children participate in their family life. We have brought forward an exemption which I think outlines that quite well. But to also say that just because there are a small number of employees on a farm those employees are not entitled to the same protections that all other employees are entitled to, whether on larger farms or any other sector in the province: I just don't think that's appropriate. It doesn't carry forward the spirit and intent of the bill, which is, of course, to protect vulnerable farm workers.

You know, in B.C. when similar legislation was brought in, the farm fatality rate was reduced by 68 per cent, the farm injury rate was reduced by 52 per cent, and the serious injury rate was reduced by 41 per cent. I think it's certainly interesting, Madam Chair, that the members across keep citing that we have the lowest rate of injury of any province, because, actually, we don't keep those statistics, because without the protections of the occupational health and safety code, that enables us to keep those statistics and to investigate unsafe conditions that arise and to investigate injuries that occur and prevent such future injuries, we don't actually have that information.

You know, when we talk about education – well, education is important. Absolutely, we should educate people, but when we're talking about education, we also need to be talking about learning. Occupational health and safety provides a really critical learning mechanism, so when someone is in fact injured on a farm or in any other workplace – injuries, obviously, happen in every sector, everywhere – occupational health and safety can come in, and they can investigate that injury. Sometimes that will, going forward in time, cause changes to the code. Sometimes they discover a new unsafe condition, that hadn't previously been listed, and going forward, workers are protected from that. That's how the law advances. We think that that's a pretty good system. It's a pretty good system of both learning and teaching. I think it's a little bit silly to say that legislation and education are two separate things that can't possibly go together.

5:50

Of course, we know that everybody wants to keep workers safe, and we certainly know that, you know, both farmers and farm workers want safety in this instance. What this bill does is that it just provides very basic protections. It allows that in the tragic event of an accident, not necessarily the fault of anyone, if someone is injured, they are able to claim WCB. The reason it's so important that they have that WCB protection is because, sure, there are other forms of insurance out there, but if the insurance decides to deny the claim, then the individual is left to sue. Often you're talking about someone who's a vulnerable person, potentially, already. They've now been injured, they are unable to work, – so they're not making any income – and they have to go out and they have to start a lawsuit. That can be very expensive, and it can be very challenging for them.

We just don't think that that's the appropriate way to proceed forward. We don't think that, you know, those people who find themselves already injured and already in a vulnerable position should be forced to go out and retain a lawyer, sometimes at extreme cost to themselves, cost that they can't afford, in order to be able to access compensation like long-term disability.

Unfortunately, some workers, when they are injured, may be permanently injured. They may never be able to go back to work, and with workers' compensation they are provided with long-term disability, and that long-term disability enables them to continue to be able to have the necessities of life, to be able to pay for rent and for food and for shelter so that they can continue to live even though they find themselves without income.

You know, these amendments, I think, clarify the government's intention. Certainly, we have taken responsibility for the fact that maybe that intention wasn't clear from the start, but we think that this makes it clear and this addresses the concerns. We don't think that additionally extending those exemptions to paid workers, the very people that we are attempting to protect, is in any way appropriate. This legislation is intended to cover wage earners, right? Even if there are only five wage earners who are on a farm,

they continue to be wage earners nonetheless, and they continue to be entitled to protections, just the same as anyone on a bigger farm. I mean, this would also potentially create an incentive whereby someone might try to stay under that number to avoid the legislation, but certainly we don't think it's the case that this amendment is in any way necessary to get around the situations that have been created.

You know, this government is and has been committed – I think, historically, that it should come as a surprise to no one – to ensuring that vulnerable populations, including vulnerable paid workers, have access to rights and have access to be full participants in society. That's exactly what this will do. It will allow them to have the right to refuse unsafe work, it will allow us to investigate when an injury or a death occurs, and it will allow people to have access to compensation.

In sum, Madam Chair, I think I would now like to move that the committee rise to report progress. Thank you.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

Mrs. Schreiner: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 6. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

Ms Ganley: Madam Speaker, I move that we adjourn the House until 7:30 this evening.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 5:56 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Wednesday evening, December 9, 2015

Day 31

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

First Session

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Legislative Assembly of Alberta

7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, December 9, 2015

[The Speaker in the chair]

The Speaker: Please be seated.

The minister of economic development.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much. I rise to request through you, Mr. Speaker, unanimous consent to revert to introductions.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

The Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise this evening and introduce to you and through you to all Members of the Legislative Assembly a number of guests representing what I hope will soon be the newly named King's University, located in my riding of Edmonton-Gold Bar. My guests have lobbied tirelessly for this name change, and they are very excited to be here to witness this happening here tonight. I know that this bill has come up for third reading on very short notice, and I deeply appreciate the efforts they have made to rearrange their schedules so that they could join us in the gallery this evening.

I will introduce them one by one, and I ask that they rise as I read their names. We've got Dr. Melanie Humphreys, who is the president of King's University; Mr. Bill Diepeveen, who is the chair of the board of governors; Dr. Henk Van Andel, who is president emeritus; Jim Visser, retired board member; Rick Mast, current board member; Dan VanKeeken, vice-president of advancement; Ellen Vlieg-Paquette, vice-president, administrative and finance; Dr. Gerda Kits, professor; Dr. John Hiemstra, professor; Dr. Peter Mahaffy, professor; Cheryl Mahaffy; Dr. Robert Bruinsma, retired professor; Louisa Bruinsma; Catherine Kuehne, director of marketing; Liam Kachkar; Carol Moreno, manager, alumni relations; Nik Vander Kooy, co-ordinator of marketing; Abigail Douglass, student association president; Melissa Grounds, a student at King's; Elyse Abma, student; Abbi Hofstede, another student.

I ask that the Assembly now please give the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

The Speaker: Welcome.

Private Bills Third Reading

Bill Pr. 1

The King's University College Amendment Act, 2015

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad that I don't have to keep our audience waiting.

I'm pleased to rise to move third reading of Bill Pr. 1, The King's University College Amendment Act, 2015.

This bill, if passed, will change the name of King's University College to King's University. It also formally recognizes the ability of King's to grant baccalaureate, master's, and doctoral degrees. Some of the language is modernized, substituting the word "employees" for "servants," which no doubt will boost the egos of the employees of King's but will undoubtedly be a blow to the ego of the president now that she no longer has servants to supervise.

King's occupies the building on 50th Street in my riding that used to be known, I believe, as the Capilano Hotel. You can still see some vestiges of the old hotel in the building. The student dormitories are the old hotel rooms, complete with the original orange shag carpeting. When I took a tour of the building, my hosts were a bit embarrassed by the orange carpet, and I told them not to worry; I really like orange. I'm sure that in the days when it was still the Capilano Hotel, there were more than a few young men and women who received a bit of an education in some of those hotel rooms.

King's has been providing a formal education to young men and women on that site since 1979 and has been formally granting degrees since 1987.

King's is a Christian university, and its mission is "to provide university education that inspires and equips learners to bring renewal and reconciliation to every walk of life as followers of Jesus Christ, the Servant-King." To get an idea of how King's carries out its mission, I asked Melinda Steenbergen, a friend of mine and a ministerial assistant to the Minister of Municipal Affairs, to share her experience at King's. She shared with me a letter that I'd like to share with you, Mr. Speaker. She says:

King's is a caring community – I applied there as my mom was sick, and I needed a last minute transfer to Alberta to be close to her. When my Mom died, I was embraced by the professors, staff, and students. This is a small community that really nurtures and supports its students. I'll always be grateful to King's for the support given to me during a difficult time . . .

King's is academically rigorous – All of my professors had PhDs, and spent considerable time with me in small classes and individual studies . . .

King's gave me a practical education – As a major in Political Science, History, and Economics, I was required to produce briefing notes and policy presentations, and to debate social issues and apply my studies to current issues. I graduated as someone who could hit the ground running as a public servant and now a political staffer.

King's encouraged my ambition – I was editor-in-chief of the student newspaper and student association president. There are benefits to being a bigger fish in a small pond, and King's provides significant leadership experiences for students. My professors have written glowing and thoughtful recommendations for me with every job application and my masters program – they know me and they care about what I achieve.

Edmonton Strathcona MP Linda Duncan has been a long-time supporter of King's University. I asked her for her thoughts about King's, to be read during this bill debate, and she sent me this letter. She admires the breadth of accomplishments of this small campus and the daily interaction between King's leadership, faculty, and students. She's especially delighted by King's efforts to engage their students in global issues through their interdisciplinary studies conferences. This year's conference, by the way, is entitled Change Is in the Air: From Climate Chaos to Climate Justice, and it takes place January 20 and 21, 2016. I encourage everyone to come and learn about our changing climate, those affected most by it, and how our world can chart a course towards a positive climate future.

Perhaps King's most famous student, though, is someone who has never formally registered there at all, Mr. Omar Khadr. For many years several King's professors have worked with Mr. Khadr. One of them, English professor Arlette Zinck, has worked with him for five years. Zinck has been tutoring Khadr, through his detention at Guantánamo Bay to his three prison stays in Canada. She's been called a proselytizer and an opportunist and has received numerous threats by mail, two of which she turned over to police.

with him – accused her of turning King’s into a factory for Khadr groupies and compared her tutorials to conjugal visits. Levant later apologized by e-mail.

The Christian university where Arlette Zinck teaches does emphasize an interdisciplinary curriculum that reflects the Creator’s design and will encourage students to examine real-world issues from a Christian perspective and to become agents of social transformation. She looks upon working with Omar Khadr as a gift: we’ve said to him repeatedly that you don’t have to give back, that you are under no obligation, and if there is a program that interests you that is not at King’s, you know we’ll be walking right beside you; we are going to be writing letters of reference and doing whatever it takes to see you through.

King’s vision is to grow as a university community by creative teaching, passionate learning, rigorous scholarship, compassionate care, and joyful service. Passing this bill to change the name of King’s will aid in their pursuit of that vision. Randolph Haluza-DeLay, an associate professor of sociology at King’s, explained how it would effect faculty at King’s in his letter to me.

The King’s University College is a university in everything but name. The bill allowing a change in name to University would be highly beneficial to this institution, and to the higher education landscape in Alberta.

If I can serve as an example ... here at The Kings University ...

Herein are flyers he included on environmental justice in Canada and on climate change.

I serve on the board of the Parkland Institute. And yet, the word “college” generates a second-class status. Recently, CBC Radio held an interview with representatives of “Edmonton’s two universities.” Wait! What about King’s and Concordia!?

But as this CBC incident shows – and its not the only one – the “college” piece of the name is a problem. It has a definite effect on my ability to secure research grants. It affects the ability to get attention for our research. It affects recruitment of students and yet our teaching has repeatedly achieved very high levels of recognition. A longtime colleague working for the City of Edmonton expressed surprise last year that “King’s offers Bachelor’s? I thought you were a college.” Even my children’s mother tells the kids that their father “doesn’t work at a real university.”

7:40

Abigail Douglass, who’s here tonight, kindly gathered input from her fellow students on what the name change would mean to them.

Becoming a university means our school can now officially be part of the CIS athletic conference. It also means prestige! I can say I went to a university and that I have a university degree.

That was from Olivier Prophete, who is in his fifth year.

To me, it makes my school more well recognized as a Post-Secondary institution. It legitimizes the quality education King’s offers, and in the eyes of the public, makes that known and recognizable.

Joelle Noot, who is in her third year.

The name change finally recognizes King’s for what it has always been: a fully-fledged University that offers an amazing education. It also means I no longer have to explain what a “University College” is when I tell people where I study.

Joshua Thomas, who is in his third year.

The King’s University name change shows that a Christian Post-Secondary Institution can have the same standard of academic prestige as any other University.

Daniel Libert, fifth year.

This name change proves that King’s can produce the same value of education as any other University.

Connor De Groot, fourth year.

The King’s University name change is not only a pivotal change for the external perception of King’s but it also allows more pride and confidence in who we are. Whenever someone asks me what being a University College is, I simply respond we are a University and that’s all that matters. Although my grandma still has some convincing, I am very proud of this institution I call my second home and I hope that this name change can only further prove how amazing this place truly is and that King’s can receive the respect it deserves.

Abigail Douglass, third year.

There are a couple of other comments here, but in the interest of brevity, Mr. Speaker, I will table those perhaps at a later date. I want to extend a sincere thank you to Abigail Douglass for putting in the effort to collect those statements.

Mr. Speaker, I’d like to thank all of the members of the King’s community, past and present, for providing me with this information, which I hope the members of the Assembly find helpful in considering whether they support this bill.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. I know I speak for all of you. I continue to learn the rich diversity of this province every time I hear presentations and new information like that.

Are there any other members who would like to speak to Bill Pr. 1, The King’s University College Amendment Act, 2015?

Hearing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar for closing comments.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was waiting for you to call me again, I had a couple more thoughts. I’d just like to quickly say that I hope that this name change will allow King’s to continue to grow and to serve the community of Edmonton-Gold Bar and all Albertans.

While I’m certain that many positive changes lie ahead for King’s, I do hope that they keep the orange carpet. Thank you.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 1 read a third time]

Bill Pr. 2

Bethesda Bible College Amendment Act, 2015

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

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is certainly a pleasure to be able to rise this evening to move third reading of Bill Pr. 2, the Bethesda Bible College Amendment Act, 2015.

When Bethesda Bible College was originally founded, it was done as an extension of the Bethesda church. The Bethesda church legally changed its name, though, in 2009 to Christcity Church Ltd. As well, the church itself moved to a new, modern facility located on St. Albert Trail. The theological programs are now being operated out of this new facility and through Christcity Church, which was formerly Bethesda, so the amendments simply reflect the new church name and maintain continuity now between the church and its theological programs.

This, of course, did go through the Standing Committee on Private Bills. It was recommended by the committee to accept this, and I would hope that all the members of this House are willing to take this bill and move it forward to allow these fine folks to change their name.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members who wish to speak to Bill Pr. 2?

Hearing none, I would call on the Member for Edmonton-Decore to close debate.

Mr. Nielsen: Well, thank you again, Mr. Speaker. Unfortunately, like my hon. colleague, I don't quite have any last-second thoughts prepared, so I will simply move to close debate on this and allow these folks to get their name changed.

Thanks very much.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 2 read a third time]

Bill Pr. 3

Rosary Hall, Edmonton Repeal Act

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise and move third reading of Bill Pr. 3, Rosary Hall, Edmonton Repeal Act.

Rosary Hall was founded by the Catholic Women's League here in Edmonton, back in 1915, and it operated until 2012. Since it has ceased operations and is no longer serving the people of Edmonton, they have requested to have it repealed. That is our reason for bringing this bill forward this evening. I ask all members to vote in favour.

The Speaker: Are there any other members who would wish to speak to Bill Pr. 3?

Hearing none, I would allow the member to close debate.

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I say that we go ahead and put the question.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 3 read a third time]

Bill Pr. 4

Canadian University College Amendment Act, 2015

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to move third reading of Bill Pr. 4, Canadian University College Amendment Act, 2015.

I would just like to say that Canadian University College has resided in the city of Lacombe for just over a hundred years. It represents part of the rich religious heritage of education that we have all across this province, from many different kinds of traditions. They have brought to the city of Lacombe a great wealth of benefit, not just the economic benefit of having a university present in the city but the vitality and life of students, the volunteer work that they and staff contribute as well as the sports facilities and events that they host, and a great deal of truly world-class music, that they bring in on a regular basis. This university college, as it has been called, has been a great blessing, actually, to the city of Lacombe.

As is the case with the others, this is a name change to reflect the reality of their university status and their degree-granting status in the province of Alberta. I would urge all members to vote for the bill.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members who wish to speak to Bill Pr. 4? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have to say that I'm probably alone in my enthusiasm for private bills this evening. But I am pleased to rise today to speak in favour of this bill, which would change the name of Canadian University College to Burman

University. This institution was founded in 1907 by Charles and Leona Burman, both of whom devoted their entire lives to the work of the Seventh-day Adventist church. CUC continues to be affiliated with the Seventh-day Adventist church to this day.

Now, my wife has a close connection to both the Seventh-day Adventist church and the CUC, having grown up in an Adventist family, with many members of her family attending CUC. I can't say that I know much about the teachings of the Seventh-day Adventists, but I have learned that they are people who have the courage to live by their convictions. Adventists believe that Saturday, the Sabbath, should be kept holy, and I know that in this secular world laying down work for even one day every week is a difficult task.

Adventists also emphasize healthy living, with many Adventists taking up work in the health professions and eating a strictly vegetarian diet. I once sat through a half-hour sermon at my mother-in-law's church that consisted only of a lesson about the evils of bacon. That was followed up with a potluck dinner that featured that most famous of all Adventist vegetarian dishes, Special K cottage cheese loaf. You only need to try it once. But for those who can stick with the no-bacon and all-cottage-cheese-loaf diet, the payoff is a long, healthy life. My wife's grandmother recently celebrated her 105th birthday, and Adventists live on average 10 years longer than the average North American.

7:50

Finally, many Adventists are pacifists, and I know that my wife's grandfather refused to serve in World War II because of his Adventist beliefs. Because he had the courage to stand up for what he believed in, he was belittled by his neighbours and forced by the government of the day to live in a work camp for the duration of the war.

The mission of Burman University springs from its Adventist roots. It is to educate students to think with discernment, to believe with insight and commitment, and to act with confidence, compassion, and competence.

My wife's aunt worked at CUC for a number of years, and I asked her about the name change. She said the following: the new name reminds us to look to the past and the values that have helped establish the school and also to the future as these values guide the university in preparing young men and women for lives of service.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud to support this name change and to support this institution's educational mission, and I also, like the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka, urge all of my fellow members to do the same.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any other members who would like to speak to Bill Pr. 4?

Hearing none, the hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka to close debate.

Mr. Orr: Thank you. I appreciate the comments from the member across the floor. Yes, it is a great college. It truly does bring great benefits to our city. I encourage you to pass this motion, please.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 4 read a third time]

Bill Pr. 5

Concordia University College of Alberta Amendment Act, 2015

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the comments from the member, and I have to say that tonight is a little bit of payback for having sat through so many of his speeches for the last six weeks here in this session.

On behalf of the Member for Calgary-Varsity I'm happy to move third reading of this bill. The Member for Calgary-Varsity asked me to say some comments on her behalf. Concordia University of Edmonton is the Member for Calgary-Varsity's alma mater though it was called Concordia University College of Alberta at that time, long ago, when she attended. The Member for Calgary-Varsity is proud to sponsor this bill as Concordia; its current president, Dr. Krispin; and professors Dr. Strand and Dr. Muir have been like family to her. This bill signifies the great advancements being made by this exemplary postsecondary institution.

I'm pleased to move third reading of this bill, and I encourage all members of the Assembly to support it.

The Speaker: Are there any other parties who would like to speak to Bill Pr. 5?

Ms Jabbour: I just wanted to say that one of my daughters graduated from Concordia with her degree in chemistry. I know it's a fabulous university. The instruction there is just absolutely the best you could get, so I'm so thrilled with this.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Dach: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to support this bill to change the name to Concordia University College. I, too, attended Concordia during my first year of university and can attest that it was a great place to attend university. I went on and got a degree from the University of Alberta, but I'm certainly glad that I chose to attend Concordia for my first year. I have very warm feelings for it and am grateful for the instruction I received there.

The Speaker: Hon. members, the wonderful little Standing Order 29(2)(a) is on the second speaker, Edmonton-McClung. Are there any questions under 29(2)(a)?

Are there other members who would like to speak to Bill Pr. 5?

Hearing none, is the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar prepared to close debate?

Mr. Schmidt: Close, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 5 read a third time]

Bill Pr. 6 Covenant Bible College Amendment Act, 2015

The Speaker: The Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to move Bill Pr. 6, the Covenant Bible College Amendment Act, 2015.

It's a bit of a shame that you didn't have a longer period of time to enjoy such silence on behalf of myself, but I might just add that I have enjoyed the comments.

The Speaker: Hon. member, it's been suggested – are you moving the motion on behalf of Strathmore-Brooks?

Mr. Cooper: I most certainly am.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Cooper: On behalf of my hon. colleague from Strathmore-Brooks I thought that I would take this time to provide a little

background on the Covenant Bible College, or CBC, as it's most commonly referred to, a vocational Bible school located in Strathmore, Alberta, where its last campus was held, in 2007. They did incredible work over a long period of time, beginning in 1941, in Norquay, Saskatchewan, and I know that they had a significant impact on the lives of many when it came to the instructional learning that can take place at such a critical facility. Unfortunately, a number of years ago, due to declining enrolment, they chose to close the Strathmore campus. This is the reason why we have Bill Pr. 6 before us.

I encourage all members of the Assembly to support the bill, and I hope that the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar might be able to add some context to this debate.

The Speaker: Are there any other comments on Bill Pr. 6?

Mr. Fraser: Mr. Speaker, I can't call a point of order, but, please, gentlemen, my ears are bleeding. Can we hurry up?

The Speaker: Hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills, on behalf of the Member for Strathmore-Brooks do you have anything to close debate?

Mr. Cooper: In light of the comments from my hon. colleague I might just close debate, sir.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 6 read a third time]

Bill Pr. 7 Living Faith Bible College Amendment Act, 2015

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move third reading of Bill Pr. 7, Living Faith Bible College Amendment Act, 2015, and certainly encourage all members of this House to support it.

The Speaker: Are there other members who would like to speak to Bill Pr. 7?

Hearing none, the hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre to close debate.

Mr. Nixon: I suggest you call the question.

[Motion carried; Bill Pr. 7 read a third time]

8:00 Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

The Chair: Hon. members, I'd like to call the committee to order.

Bill 6 Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act

The Chair: We have under consideration, Bill 6, Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act, and we are on subamendment SA1. Are there any further speakers to this subamendment? Little Bow.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Madam Speaker. It has to be short. Oh, goodness gracious. I rise to support this subamendment. Subamendment SA1 to Bill 6, in my opinion, does make sense. This amendment would allow a person that is engaged in a farming or ranching operation to have a couple of part-time

employees, part-time paid workers, because that's what we're really talking about here, for the performance of ranching or farming work exempt from all OH and S provisions in Bill 6.

If we look at the family farm, because generally this is how this all goes, a father would pass a farm on to his son, so his son would be growing up, and, of course, then the father is getting older as things are moving on. It comes to a point where the father and the son have been working together for years and the father is getting too old to work. The son is old enough to take the place by himself, but because there have been two people working there – now there's going to be one because the father is giving up or quitting or moving on. That's how things work. You would have a son who now has more land, if they happen to have land, cattle. It just ends up being a lot of work for one guy. You know, his children, of course, probably aren't going to be at the proper age for him to be able to start using his 17- or 18-year-old son to help him work.

It seems like in that operation, in those farming practices there's always a spot where one person is left alone until either his children are grown up – well, that's generally the one. The father has been farming. The father is slowing down. Now the son has a bunch of land, and if there are cattle involved, too, he needs help, probably, you know, just really seasonally, fencing, fencing through the summer or hauling grain.

Good grief. I mean, the elevator: it seems like they're always calling for grain at the times when you're doing something else, and they need it right now. The days of hauling grain whenever you felt like it are over. You generally have to have a contract. Sometimes they don't call it in the month that you've contracted it, but – boom – the next thing you know, they've called it. Lots of times I've seen where somebody will get help from a neighbour or somebody to haul grain. Certainly, haying, stuff like that is a two-man job, trying to get hay from one place to another. And, of course, harvest: harvest is a no-brainer. That's going to take more than one person. In that sense it makes some sense.

I guess I get a little confused when I keep hearing about this unsafe work that people are being forced to go do. The Minister of Justice stood over there and said – and it's in the Blues, and I read it, and I'll just give a reference to it – that the boss could tell a man to stick his arm in that machine that's running and take a block of wood out of it. I mean, please, let's be realistic here. I run my own farm by myself. I wouldn't put anyone in any situation that I wouldn't put myself in. It's just that simple. There isn't anybody I know that would be caught dead doing anything like that. I certainly wouldn't ask somebody to stick their arm into a machine that was operating while I stood there and watched him to see if he could get the piece of wood out. It's just absolute fearmongering. I can't believe it.

An Hon. Member: It's in *Hansard*.

Mr. Schneider: And it is in *Hansard*. I mean, okay; so maybe she didn't quite mean it that way, but that's how this stuff all gets going, right? “Well, there are people being hurt, and they're being forced to do things that they don't want to do.” Seriously? I've never heard of anything like that, and maybe that happens on places that I don't know anything about, but on a small family farm, that I've been around for 40 years? Never.

So this bill kind of handcuffs the family farm that's passing on a piece of land and some cows to a son because he can't handle all that work. If he can get a little extra help and not be tied up with all this OH and S stuff because he's going to hire somebody for two weeks here and maybe three weeks when we're doing harvest or, gee whiz, calving – you can have a neighbour come down and help you

pull a calf in the middle of the night or something, but he's got his own calves.

In trying to do this more than once, it gets to be more than just help, so it's easier to just get somebody from town and say: “Look; if I have trouble tonight, I'm going to call you. Come on in.” Yeah, there's a guy that can put an arm in, turn a calf around, a backwards, upside-down calf. That's the kind of stuff that you do at home. You don't race to the vet – and you know this as well as I do, Vermilion-Lloydminster. Those are the kind of jobs that maybe the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster can do by himself. I'm sure that he can. He's a bit taller, a bit longer in the arm. That's what it takes. You're right up to your nose in this stuff when you're working on something like that. For us guys that are six inches shorter and a little shorter in the arm, it's just a lot easier to have help, and if you've got a couple of hundred head of cattle, there's a lot of work to do. It's not as simple as it sounds.

Down in the country where I live, the wind blows, so, boy, if you blow a door off a building when a door happens to be open, putting that door back on the building is not a one-man job. I mean, it's a big job. It's more than a half-hour job probably, so having somebody around for these kinds of jobs is a good idea. Yeah, it's good.

You know, I'm not supposed to be going very long here, but I am going to go to a letter that I received from a constituent, a third-generation farmer.

Three of our children, their spouses and families currently farm with us. In addition, we have two full time employees and at peak season we may have up to four more on staff. We provide benefits and disability insurance to those who work with us. The key word here is work “with” us, for some have been here for sixteen years [and] others nearly ten. They are more like family, than employees.

We preach safety every day and try to practice it diligently. Other farmers obviously do the same, because farm accident and fatality rates in Alberta are similar or less to other [Canadian] provinces in Canada.

We can argue that number back and forth here probably, well, till it's 8 o'clock tomorrow morning. We probably will.

Mr. MacIntyre: Till the cows come home.

Mr. Schneider: We need help from Richard to pull them.

Your NDP Government says this bill is mainly about safety, but when I asked Minister Sigurdson in Okotoks about Occupational, Health and Safety not having experience in our industry, and how could they possibly set reasonable standards for it without consulting us, she had no answer.

Anyway, I'll go back to where I was, wherever that was. I guess the other point that I kind of wanted to make here – so this bill is going to pass, I expect. We hope to get some amendments, maybe between the two sides, that can make something work and make it look good, but we keep hearing the government talk about sending this to consultations with farmers after this bill has passed. So sometime after the 1st of January we'll expect to see some kind of notification, I guess, that would allow farmers to become part of a consultation that's going to build this document that will help define the codes that are going to be within this brand new, OH and S, agriculture-related document.

I'm curious who the experts will be for this job. To find an expert in agriculture: that will help. Drumheller-Stettler, would you agree? If I was trying to go find an expert in agriculture that would help me write codes for an OH and S document, who would I talk to? Would it be a farmer? Who else in this province would have the knowledge? Edmonton-Whitemud, help me out there. [interjections]

8:10

The Chair: Hon. members, through the chair, please.

Mr. Schneider: I'm sorry, Madam Chair. You're right. You're always right. I mess that up every time.

At any rate, I would suggest to this House that if you're looking for an expert to help write a document such as that, you'd have to talk to a farmer because they know every end of it, inside and out and backwards and forwards.

This amendment would help improve this bill by providing some kind of definition as to what a small farm operation is, just like my own operation. I do have to hire labour on a small scale now and then, and if I had to fit into the OH and S that's coming, I can expect that it would cost a lot of money.

I do want to say that I couldn't be in the House on Monday. I had to do something with my mother. I met a neighbour where I was at. Now, he had just put up a new bin, and I expect it was a pretty big bin. They didn't bring the safety cage that comes with the bin. It wasn't included in the package when he bought it, so he had to go buy it himself. He knew exactly what the package cost to put a safety cage around a ladder going up a bin. He did the math on that and the number of bins that he has on the place. It was going to take him \$300,000 if he had to come up to code on OH and S to put up these cages. A farmer can't pass that on to anybody. That's just basically gone, that money.

An Hon. Member: He just absorbs it.

Mr. Schneider: You just absorb it.

I know that I don't want to be bogged down in more paperwork for some obscure regulatory compliance – I need to meet about – about when I should be out on a piece of machinery trying to get the farming done. And I'm pretty sure I'm not interested in filling out pages and pages of paperwork every morning when the guy I hire, that comes and helps me farm, like the Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock does – he gets a guy just like I do. Every morning we go out and do a walk around. We make sure that we have tire pressure on all the wheels on the truck. We go look over the loader, make sure that it's greased. We do talk about safety all day long when we're going. I mean, this is just standard procedure. I don't have to fill out a document to say that I did this with my hired guy.

Anyway, I think I'm going to leave it at that. I was told to be short. The subamendment is within the full spirit of the government's amendment, that seeks to reassure that family farms stay family farms, and I trust that my hon. colleagues will support this subamendment.

The Chair: Any other speakers on the subamendment?

Seeing none, I'll call the question.

[Motion on subamendment SA1 lost]

The Chair: We're back on the amendment. [interjections]

Hon. members, you were not fast enough. I'm sorry. We've already moved on. We are back on the amendment.

I will call on the hon. Member for West Yellowhead to speak.

Mr. Rosendahl: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise today in support of this bill. My member's statement a few days ago stated my background in farming, much to the dissatisfaction of the opposition over there. I spent 18 years on a mixed farm, and we did everything on that mixed farm. So I do know about farming and the hours that it needs to make it successful, like I said in my member's statement.

My other background, by the way, is from the industrial work site. Yes, it was unionized, and thank God it was. Health and safety were

prominent in this atmosphere, and they had to be. We had to stick up for ourselves. We spent countless hours and dollars training ourselves, and this was time and money well spent. All workers deserve to work in a safe environment, and this training helped ensure that that was true.

Throughout the years I attended many classes over the 31 years in the plant. I attended courses all over the province representing health and safety as one of the main items, environment and many others on top of that. This knowledge helped provide me with the ability to train others, and I spent many years before coming to this House representing workers all across the province, not just in my own riding but all across the province, in all walks of life, unionized and non-unionized. I represented workers across Canada, even on the world stage. One occasion was the world conference on asbestos. Because it's such a horrible substance, I represented workers at that conference, representing Canada. So you can't say that I don't know what I'm talking about when it comes to health and safety because I live it, and I did so for many years in that plant.

I've worked representing workers also at the Alberta Federation of Labour, the AFL. I represented workers on different committees from that organization. One committee, in particular, was the health and safety committee. This committee, by the way, was very busy because of the many issues that we covered throughout the province: all workers, many issues. I still represent all workers here in this Legislature.

The opposition has talked a lot about consultation. Well, let's discuss that. Over my many years at the AFL representing workers, including farmers and ranchers, by the way, we had many meetings with them discussing the issues of health and safety for farm workers and ranchers. It had occurred for over a decade. The farmers and ranchers lobbied the AFL to represent them, to try and get the now third party to address the issue. I'm proud that this government is now finally addressing the issue. It's about time.

This bill is about respect for workers and workers' rights, nothing else. This includes farm and ranch workers, paid workers. Madam Chair, this bill does not kill the family farm. This bill does not regulate or interfere with children's ability to contribute to the family farm. Also, this bill does not interfere in any way with farm kids' ability to learn about and participate in the 4-H system. I talked about 4-H in my member's statement back in November, supporting 4-H. This bill was also never intended to interfere with a family's ability to teach their children about farming and pass on their way of life from their parents and so on and so forth. It wasn't intended to take that away. This legislation will not prevent neighbours from volunteering either. This bill will only cover farm and ranch operations with paid employees and only for the duration of the employment.

8:20

This bill will prevent death and injuries and assist workers and their families in the case of accidents. We heard about many when I was meeting with those farmers and ranchers at the AFL, the list of workers that had died and were injured because of the lack of insurance and everything else that they put up with, the loss of some farms because the farm couldn't stay viable because the main operator was no longer there. We heard lots of it over the 10 years that we met with them.

Again, it's about respect for workers and workers' rights, nothing else. I urge all members of this House to join me in supporting this bill. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd certainly like to thank the Member for West Yellowhead for the comments that he made, certainly passionately delivered. While I can appreciate his opinion that this bill is about workers' rights and nothing more, sir, there are an awful lot of farmers in Alberta who would disagree with you and quite vehemently disagree with you. If it was only about workers' rights and nothing more – and we'll have this discussion, I suggest, probably more than once this evening – then, you know, quite frankly, there wouldn't be the objection that is out there from farmers.

Madam Chair, I'm very pleased this evening to move an amendment that I believe would provide some improvement to this bill. I'll first give it to the pages for distribution. There's the original for the Clerk's table.

The Chair: Hon. member, this is a subamendment that you have?

Dr. Starke: This is a subamendment. Yes. Thank you. This is a subamendment to government amendment A1. While it's being distributed, I'll read it into the record. This is probably subamendment SA2, I would suggest.

The Chair: SA2.

Dr. Starke: Okay. I move that Bill 6, the Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act, be amended in part C in section 9(2)(a) by adding "or" at the end of the proposed clause (d) and by adding the following after the proposed clause (d):

- (e) persons in an industry listed in Schedule D whose employer maintains insurance coverage that provides benefits equivalent to compensation available under the Act, evidence of which has been provided in a form and manner that is satisfactory to the Minister.

Now, what this amendment essentially does, Madam Chair, is that it recognizes what is already very common practice on many, many farms across our province; that is, that employers are providing their employees with various forms of insurance, not just against an injury on the job that covers them while they're on the job, as workers' compensation does, but that indeed gives them insurance coverage around the clock and not just for work-related injuries but for various other perils that they could be facing. This is the sort of thing that employees and employers have worked out together in a co-operative way that, I would suggest, is the hallmark of healthy labour relations.

I know what the arguments against this are because I heard them yesterday in Vegreville. The first argument is: well, WCB is special because it's no fault. That does make WCB different, but unfortunately it doesn't make WCB good. There are still significant flaws in the workers' compensation system. Those flaws have been pointed out repeatedly by the Premier in many of her talks to the Canadian Injured Workers Association. In fact, the Premier has demonstrated in those speeches that she is extremely dissatisfied with how the Workers' Compensation Board takes care of injured workers, that it is insufficient and that it just simply does not do the job. In fact, in one speech the Premier indicated that they have a long list of suggested reforms and improvements that can and should be made to workers' compensation that would be brought in should her party ever form government.

Well, Madam Chair, we asked about this for a couple of days in question period, and we were told that the Workers' Compensation Board is being reviewed as part of the agencies, boards, and commissions that are being reviewed, some 200-plus agencies, boards, and commissions that are being reviewed by this government. You know, there's nothing wrong with that. In fact, that process had actually started to happen before the election was

called. But if this was such a high priority for the Premier, if reforming WCB was such a high priority for the new government, then why wasn't this initiated as one of the top priorities after the election? It hasn't happened. In fact, it's all in with the review of agencies, boards, and commissions, all 200 of them, that will be completed at some future date.

If this is such a high priority and if WCB indeed has so many deficiencies, that the Premier has been very public about, you can perhaps understand how farmers have drawn the conclusion that perhaps they don't want to be mandated and told that they have to participate in such a flawed program, especially, Madam Chair, given that so many farmers already provide coverage which they view to be superior to WCB. Really, what's important is that it's coverage that their employees view to be superior to WCB. In fact, we have heard from many farm workers, employed farm workers, farm workers that would fall under this act, that say: "Don't give me WCB. I want to keep my private insurance. If you mandate that my employer has to take out WCB, because of the narrow margins on farming operations, they may well decide to de-enroll or discontinue the private insurance policy that I have, that I like, that provides me and my family with good coverage and, instead, enrol in WCB, and I don't want it."

Madam Chair, I submit to you that while one of the goals of this piece of legislation is that any injured worker in Alberta – or in a case where a fatality occurs, it's the family of that injured worker – is taken care of, that should be a minimum that all employed farm workers should expect. I have no issue with that whatsoever. The question that I have, though, is whether workers' compensation, with the flaws that the Premier has pointed out, with the flaws that we as Members of this Legislative Assembly hear about on a regular basis from our constituents, is the program that should be mandated to farm workers when indeed many, many employers have chosen other coverage, coverage which they feel is superior, coverage which they feel provides better protection for their employees.

Madam Chair, we heard about this repeatedly during the sessions in Vegreville yesterday. You know, one of them was interesting because this was actually from a neighbour of mine. In speaking to the ministers that were on hand yesterday, he described that he provides insurance for his three employees, employees that are paid approximately \$54,000 a year. He provides insurance that provides coverage 24/7, round-the-clock insurance, at a cost to him of approximately \$16 a month.

Now, by comparison, at the rate that has been publicized for workers' compensation for coverage that would only cover them while they're on the job, at \$2.97 per \$100 of insurable earnings, that coverage for each of those employees would work out to \$1,600 a year, or \$133 a month. That's eight times what he is paying now for his private insurance, that his employees prefer, that his employees have said they would rather have than workers' compensation. This legislation does not provide for that choice. This legislation mandates that the workers must take an inferior insurance product compared to the one that they already have.

You know, this came up in Vegreville again yesterday as well, and I will say this to those of you who weren't in Vegreville: farmers aren't stupid; quit treating them like they are. That's a quote, Madam Chair. Those aren't my words; those are the words of the people in Vegreville. Farmers are sophisticated businesspeople. They understand risk tolerance. They understand the multiple factors that go in.

8:30

One of the biggest challenges in farming today is human resource management. What I mean by that is that it's hard to find good

workers, especially in a situation when the oil patch is hot, and when you have good workers, you want to keep them and you want to treat them well. That's why we had person after person going up to the microphone basically in tears because they felt – and they are sincere in this feeling – that they treat their workers extremely well, that their workers are treated like family. We heard that again and again and again. I know that myself from the various people that I worked with. They treat the workers like family, and because of that, they want to look after not only the worker but the worker's family, and they want to provide them the best coverage they know how.

They know that in a competitive labour market you have to provide more than just a good salary. You have to provide more than just, you know, safe working conditions. You have to provide the various benefits because, quite frankly, if you don't provide those other things, those workers will go elsewhere. In a competitive labour market, where labour is scarce, farmers need to provide those things for their workers.

So that's what this amendment does. This amendment provides workers and employers with a choice. Now, they can still enrol in WCB, and in fact many employers, farm employers, do choose to do that. But just as my friend the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti indicated in his speech on second reading, he has done both. He's done workers' compensation, but he's also done private insurance, and he found private insurance much more effective for his employees.

Now, going back to the no-fault thing, I got to thinking about this. You know, I'm concerned if the thing that makes workers' compensation so good is because it's no fault and we mandate it for everywhere. I looked at the provinces on either side of us, and I thought of car insurance, which is also required. The provinces on either side of us once made the mistake of electing NDP governments, and while those NDP governments were in, they developed state-run car insurance programs – SGI in Saskatchewan, ICBC in British Columbia – that also have no-fault car insurance. If no fault is the be-all and end-all, how long is it before this government brings in and nationalizes car insurance? I worry about that. I hope it doesn't happen. [interjections] Yes, of course, they want to have it. Amazing.

The other area that we're told about is that if there are private insurance workers, we'll have to go through protracted litigation in order to make claims. Well, Madam Chair, you know, my own experience with this situation is that this is also a competitive field. The provision of group insurance plans for workers is a competitive area. The word on a company that is unwilling to pay claims, reasonable claims, claims that are made in good faith: if the word gets out that there's protracted litigation required to make a claim, those companies – word gets around – very quickly find out that they don't have any more clients.

What this amendment does is that it provides farmers and their employees with a choice. It doesn't mandate one form of coverage. It means that they can customize their coverage to the needs of their employees. If indeed the concern of this government is for employees – and I do believe that it is – then they should recognize that this amendment provides for that and that this amendment provides the kind of choice that employers and employees deserve. I would encourage all members of this House to seriously consider this very reasonable amendment, that improves this piece of legislation, and support the amendment.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for – I'm going brain-dead tonight.

Mr. Nixon: It's okay, Madam Chair. It's Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. Am I acknowledged?

The Chair: Go ahead.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'd like to first just thank my colleague the hon. third-party House leader. This was something I spoke about a little bit in second reading. I talked – Madam Chair, I believe you were in the chair at the time – about a feedlot that operates near Sundre and has about 25 employees. I visited with those employees, and I asked them about this, in regard to Bill 6 and what they thought about WCB and that this government was trying to bring in WCB to protect them.

They took me through the insurance program that they have currently in place there, and as the hon. member has pointed out, it was better than WCB by a long shot, it was cheaper than WCB by a long shot, and it protected the employees 24 hours a day. Now, that's a big difference. With WCB they would only be protected when they're at work. The program that they currently have at this feedlot: they are protected when they're sleeping in their beds, Madam Chair. That is a big difference.

Now, as the hon. member has also pointed out, the Premier has pointed out the significant problems with WCB, and there are some issues with WCB. I think all sides would agree on that. What this government is asking us just on the WCB side – and there are some other major problems with this bill – is to take some employees that have better insurance options, because that is what their employer is able to provide, and force them to a subpar one compared to what they already have. If this government already acknowledges that there's trouble with WCB, Madam Chair, why would they want to force that on these employees and other ones across Alberta?

I think this amendment is reasonable. It will make sure – as the government says, they want to make sure that all employees that are hurt and their families are covered if there's an accident or a death, and I think that's noble. Most farmers and ranchers I talk to have no concerns with that, but why would we put in something that the Premier herself has acknowledged is broken and force that on these good people? Why would we not give them the option to figure out what's best for their employees, give them the option to figure out what's best for their business if it accomplishes the same thing, Madam Chair, or it accomplishes an even better thing? The question, I think, is why this government would like to force less on these employees at the feedlot that is near Sundre.

I'm going to support this amendment. I certainly encourage all members of this House to support this amendment. I would say, Madam Chair, that members that don't support this amendment clearly show that they're not actually interested in the insurance or in the protection of employees monetarily if there are accidents and death by supporting a subpar system, in my mind, and I do think that farmers are more than capable of making a decision on what package works better for their employees.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater.

Mr. Piquette: Yes. Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like to speak strongly against this amendment. [interjections] Yeah. Actually, until recently I was a licensed life and accident and sickness insurance agent. As well, I represented the company that would be the largest farm insurer in Canada. I've dealt, you know, with insurance with hundreds of farmers over the years, and I've dealt directly with the types of products that the hon. members are referring to. Unfortunately, I think that this amendment is, in fact, meaningless because there is no private enterprise equivalent to WCB, and I'm going to explain why that is. I think that it is really, really unfortunate to see members being so irresponsible to think

that they can give, you know, professional advice to farmers without understanding how insurance really works.

Unfortunately, many farmers are, in fact, misinformed about the type of coverage that they carry. That was something that we were always very careful about when speaking with farmers, right? A lot of farmers – you're talking about this \$16-a-month insurance. That could only be one product. That could only be an accidental death and dismemberment policy. Those policies are extremely limited. They tend to provide cash payouts if certain things happen, and to pay out on death, it tends to be that you have to die within a certain period of time. There are other exemptions as well.

Secondly, I know that a lot of farmers are misinformed and think that we already carry employers' liability as part of their farmers' general liability insurance policy. Every one of those policies, unless it's specifically stipulated in the declarations, have some very, very strong, you know, kinds of limitations. The biggest one is that if you have wages in excess of \$10,000 a year, there's no coverage, and secondly, it is how it's being characterized. As the owner you have to be liable in order for the policy to pay out, and it does mean, unfortunately, that sometimes farm labourers do have to take it to court, right? I mean, insurance companies have a fiduciary obligation to protect their premium holders' money, too.

8:40

I mean, those are some of the reasons why. The other reason why WCB is actually a superior product and in no way equivalent is because WCB and OH and S were meant to work together. Now, part of the reason that we've been having all of these issues with, you know, how many injuries, how many disabilities, how much lost time is involved is because we don't have any good information, and that's because there are no reporting requirements as it stands now in that industry. If we have mandatory WCB coverage, that information then goes to OH and S, and then OH and S can work to actually, you know, investigate it. We're not just talking about covering people when they become disabled or injured; we're talking about actually reducing injuries and disabilities.

Now, there's another reason why. It's a built-in incentive for the industry. The way the WCB works is that if the industry has a better experience with fatalities and injuries, then everybody's premiums go down. Everybody has a stake in doing what they can to reduce injuries, right?

Finally, speaking from the private insurance side, dealing with, you know, trying to track where people have to have insurance, if you make the private insurance option mandatory and go that way as an option, it's going to be a paper-chasing nightmare because you're going to be having to send certificates here and there and elsewhere. How do you actually enforce this in a way that's going to be as efficient as WCB?

The last point I want to make – and this is something that is fundamental to how insurance works. Generally speaking, we call it within the business the law of large numbers. That means that the larger a group of, you know, people you have insured, the better experience you have, and it gives you two things. One is that you're able to spread risk a lot better, to where you'd be able to adjust your premiums. The second thing is that you're going to have lower administrative costs. But the biggest thing is being able to predict with better accuracy how many claims you are going to have.

For those reasons I think that it's actually kind of irresponsible to suggest that private insurance can replace it. Now, that being said, I mean, the hon. members are correct in that WCB does have some major flaws. The biggest flaw, of course, is that you have to be injured or disabled at work. However, insurance companies – and I sold these products – already offer drop-down coverages and

wraparound coverages. If farmers are concerned about premiums, they can talk to their agent and they can actually, you know, remove the work site thing. If they're concerned about dealing with WCB, they can have drop-down coverage, or they can have the 24-hour nonoccupational. The thing is that there are solutions for this.

Once again, I'd like to speak against the amendment. Thank you for your attention.

The Chair: I'll recognize Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, followed by Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Madam Chair, and to my colleague: I promise I'll be brief. I just wanted to point out to the member that this amendment – and I'm not sure if he's been able to have the chance to read it yet – says:

- (e) persons in an industry listed in Schedule D whose employer maintains insurance coverage that provides benefits equivalent to compensation available under the Act, evidence of which has been provided in a form and manner that is satisfactory to the Minister.

His argument, I would submit to you, Madam Chair, doesn't make any sense because this would say that the insurance has to be at least the equivalent of WCB or better, so if somebody was coming forward with something that was subpar to WCB, it would not be able to fall under this amendment. As such, I think the member should probably support this excellent amendment.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Innisfail-Sylvan Lake.

Mr. MacIntyre: Thank you, Madam Chair. The hon. Member for West Yellowhead made a number of statements about how he is an expert in workplace safety. Well, so are all the farmers in Alberta. I wonder how the hon. member might feel if his expertise was ignored or, worse, belittled by an authority who presumed to know more about it than he did. Why are Alberta farmers protesting this flawed bill? Because that's exactly how they feel. They're the experts in farm safety, and they have been ignored from the get-go.

I rise today in an attempt to bring some common sense back to this House. I've heard from hundreds of Albertans through letters and at town halls, and they have told me time . . .

The Chair: Hon. member, are you speaking to the subamendment on the table?

Mr. MacIntyre: To the subamendment. Insurance.

The Chair: Okay.

Mr. MacIntyre: Here we go.

. . . and time again that they already have insurance. In a letter a former Alberta dairy farmer told the MLAs of this House, quote: many farmers who have employees already carry insurance to protect them as it is broader in coverage and more fiscally responsible to employees and employers than WCB currently is. End quote. I want to highlight this reality because, contrary to the misguided notions that the NDP continue to perpetuate, farmers in this province do hold insurance.

Now, we know that this entire bill isn't really about safety after all. It's about the government wanting to push through a socialist agenda at all costs and as quickly as possible. We know that union workers are exempt from WCB, and I would not be surprised if this legislation will encourage farm unionization. But let us pretend for a moment as though this bill is actually about farm worker coverage. We have a Premier that has railed against WCB in the past . . .

An Hon. Member: No.

Mr. MacIntyre: Yup.

... and has now turned around and insisted that our farmers are forced to join this system. She implied that the WCB is stingy, that they don't pay out enough benefits, that people have problems with coverage.

I mean, let's face it. There are so many litigations against WCB. If they had to compete with a private insurance company, they'd have been out of business a long time ago. The Premier knows that WCB is not the right course, yet here we are, forcing an entire industry away from better private options that provide better coverage, better payout, and are more responsive to the needs of their customers because they are just that: they are their customers.

Private insurance is better because when it fails to adequately service the customer, the customer has the option to leave. There is freedom to choose. But when a sector of our economy, like farmers, are going to be forced to one insurer, WCB, then WCB really hasn't got any motivation whatsoever to clean up their act. That is the problem with WCB. They don't have to compete. All the private insurers out there compete for customers' business. They are concerned about customer satisfaction. WCB, apparently, doesn't give a rip about it.

Take auto insurance as an example. Alberta legislation gives us the minimum parameters we all have to have regarding insurance of our cars. The government doesn't tell us whom to buy that insurance from, so we have the freedom to go and search the marketplace for the insurer that we think is going to give us the best rate, the best coverage, coverage that meets the minimum requirements or even beyond the minimum requirements of the law.

Why aren't we extending that same freedom to farmers? How come we're forcing farmers to deal with a monopoly system? Instead of respecting customer choice, this government is picking winners and losers. Worse yet, the winner is an agency that our own Premier has railed against, and, worse still, now you're removing the competition from WCB. There is no reason for it to up its game at all.

In a number of cases farmers are able to purchase insurance packages that offer an array of savings. Like more Albertans, they're able to purchase automotive insurance, our life insurance, our home insurance, our errors and omissions insurance, our liability insurance for businesses. We have choice in all these kinds of insurance. But, oh, no; farmers are going to be denied that freedom. Instead of forcing everyone under a system that our own Premier despises, we ought to be allowing for customer choice. WCB ought to be competing for farmers' money because only then are we going to see improvements.

Madam Chairman, competition in a free-market economy like we have – at least we'll have it for a while – naturally results in a better product and more customer-friendly service. That is the reality of competition. Competition is good for the consumer, and competition in insurance is good for the consumer.

8:50

Furthermore, private insurance is a thing that these farmers already have. They already understand it. Permitting them to continue with this option might just have the effect of quelling some of their fears about the uncertainty that comes with this kind of monumental change to farm life. Is this really about ensuring that farmers have adequate coverage in the event of a catastrophic loss? If it is, it remains entirely unclear why this government cannot extend to farmers the freedom to choose, that all the rest of us have for our insurance choices.

I urge everyone in this House to grant farmers the same freedom, to choose insurance that is best for them, best for their workers. This is, after all, still a free-market economy.

I urge everyone here to support this very sensible subamendment from our esteemed colleagues. Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you. I also would like to support the amendment. I think it only makes some sort of sense. I would like to, actually, refer to a letter that I've been holding here all night, waiting for the right moment. It comes from a gentleman in my riding who I actually think voted NDP by the sounds of other parts of the letter. But this part of it he's not happy with, that "Bill 6 is a half cooked solution." And he says:

WCB will not make any of us less stressed or safer, we already have the option to contribute and most of us choose different insurance. Why? Simply [because] WCB is an insurance program which will not help us cover expenses if we are injured. WCB is not set up for the volatile and unpredictable market place and environment which is farming. WCB has found more ways not to pay workers than it ever has to pay us.

Do you want to know something? The test of an insurance company is its payout record, not its sales line. This is an important test of how an insurance company operates, and anybody who really knows and is really checking commercial insurance would be smart enough to check a payout record of their insurance company, because it is the final test.

He says:

To add insult to injury, WCB interferes with our private plans and delays the much needed funds. I was injured, on the farm in February, if I had gone through WCB I would have been paid nothing for the four months I was off because I didn't sell any calves in January.

Here's something that needs to be understood about farms that many people don't get, and it relates to a lot of what we've been saying. Farmers normally get a paycheque a couple of times a year, not twice a month. I was reading the B.C. WCB website to see how it works. Farm workers have to be paid every two weeks, but farmers get paid twice a year.

Anyway, he argues:

I sell [my] product once or twice a year. WCB makes payouts based on monthly income, some months farming, there is no income.

So now the WCB bureaucrat has a hard time calculating how much payout to make.

He says:

My private insurance plan covered my lost wages, additional medical expenses and developed a back to work program which helped me not only return to work but life as well. Perhaps your government should look at reforms to WCB before forcing their incompetence on farmers and ranchers.

I would like to say to the Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater that although he understands the insurance industry, once again I don't think that he's telling us, as one of the other members said, the whole truth. The whole truth is that there are very stiff and difficult insurance programs out there, but there are also very clear insurance programs that cover loss of work, loss of business income, damages, all these different kinds of things. Farmers didn't fall off the turnip wagon yesterday. They are very smart when it comes to reading their insurance policies, buying the right kind of coverage. They know what they're doing. In fact, they take courses on how to do it.

He says:

OHS will not begin to comprehend what we do, how we do it and the variety of factors ... [in] the decisions we make. My family

farms, I farm, safety is my primary concern. Many of the proposed rules do not increase safety, they simply become burdens.

I think I'll leave it at that.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like to speak to the subamendment on the insurance coverage. It's about freedom of choice. That is the epitome of this amendment. The choice to choose an insurance provider is the ultimate in freedoms. The subamendment that the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster has provided us is excellent. It demonstrates the freedoms of our society, the freedoms of choice, the freedom of choice to allocate an individual's resources as they see fit to choose a good, a service, or an asset that is available to them, freedom of choice that demonstrates an individual's opportunity and autonomy to perform an action selected from more than one available option, unconstrained by external parties. When a monopoly exists, the consumer doesn't have a choice of freedom.

The Workers' Compensation Board, WCB: the hon. Premier, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona herself, has previously expressed her concerns about this sole-sourced agency that Albertans rely on. By having options, by giving the ability to choose, it gives the consumer the option to have a better choice, a better service, a better product, the opportunity for a better overall quality of product or service. This forces competition to get better to provide that service, that product, that is equivalent to or, if it is not equal to it, then better. Competition is good.

Madam Chair, in one study the Heritage Foundation 2011 Index of Economic Freedom report showed that there is a strong correlation between the index of economic freedom and happiness in the country. Here in Canada we are quite happy. We have the freedom of choice in so many aspects of our life. This House is based on freedom of choice. The people have the choice to choose a political party, a group of Canadians, to lead their legislation. Though members from the opposite side would prefer more of a socialist system like China or Venezuela or Russia, thank God we live in Canada. Here people have the choice of a political party that reflects their beliefs, or in some cases it is simply an opportunity for change, but at least they have that choice, as we have seen here in the 2015 elections in Alberta and Canada.

Insurance is a product, an equitable transfer of the risk of loss from one entity to another in exchange for money. It is a type of risk management that is used to hedge against the risk of loss. With most people, as an example, when we insure our vehicles, we have options. Each option might provide slightly different services, slightly different products for slightly different rates, but we can sift through those options. We have that freedom of choice to look through the various options that are available to us and to choose the one that fits us as an individual. Freedom of choice is a basic Canadian value.

Our government leans more towards that socialist side. You know, they have members and staffers that value more the teachings of Karl Marx than those that teach the values of liberty and freedom. That is a thought that scares me, Madam Chair, a group in government that does not believe in the basic core Canadian value of freedom. This amendment provides us with that freedom of choice. It provides us with an option to give an agency some competition. This is the epitome of a basic Canadian value. It is the freedom of choice.

I suggest that all members of this House strongly support this subamendment because it truly reflects your values of choice and

freedom and whether you're truly a Canadian or whether you truly want a socialist state.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Lacombe-Ponoka.

9:00

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Madam Chair. I forgot one little note that I did want to add, and I think it relates to the previous comments about the amendment and the reality of insurance. I did also want to comment on the Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater's comments about the size of the pool, that the larger the number of people, the more the rates go down, and that is all a hundred per cent correct. I couldn't agree more. The reality, though, is that the actuarial pool of private insurers is a lot larger than one little province. Private insurers cover the entire country in many cases, not always but in many, and sometimes they actually are international and cover the entire continent. The actuarial pool of those private insurers is much larger than one little province, Alberta, and the WCB's insurance pool is actually very small in relation to most of the insurance world that is out there, and that's one of the reasons it's so expensive.

The Chair: Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you, Madam Chair. You know, one of the values of doing what we're doing tonight is that we do get a chance to listen to more than one perspective, and I value that. I know that in my classroom one of the things that I spoke about with my kids at great length was that you do need to listen to another point of view, that it's important to listen and to consider, and sometimes you have to adjust your thinking.

I'm going to be speaking in favour of this subamendment, but as I've been listening to the various arguments that go back and forth across the Chamber, it's been fascinating for me to listen to it. The Member for West Yellowhead said that this bill is about workers' rights and nothing else. Well, the member is correct. This bill is about workers' rights, but it's also about more than just workers' rights. It's not just about workers' rights and nothing else, at least from my perspective. He said that it's about respect for workers' rights and nothing else. Well, I would agree with him. It is about respect for workers' rights, but it's about more than just respect for workers' rights.

I think that perhaps one of the things that is holding us back from creating a bill that actually serves farmers in this House tonight and for this past week has been that this is more than just a bill, and this amendment speaks to this, Madam Chair. This bill is more than just about workers' rights and businesses, and if you listened to the farmers that I've been hearing from, if you've read any of their letters as they come into your offices, perhaps the one thread that ties this all together is that farmers are saying: we're not just a business, and when we hire workers, they're not just employees.

So we've got two very different views being espoused here between the government's position that this is about safety and safety rights and only about safety or that this is only about workers' rights when the farmers are trying to explain to the government that this is about so much more. You'll notice that you rarely hear them talk about: my farm is a business. They talk about a family farm, and I think that speaks to part of the conflict that's going on here, part of the dynamic that's being heard in this Chamber, and maybe as legislators, as 87 members that have been elected to this Legislature, we need to consider that dynamic that's going on here.

You know, I'm not going to stand here and try to tell you that farming isn't a business. We can see that. When you hire employees

and when you do this to make a living and you receive an income from it, it's obviously a business, but that doesn't mean that it's only a business. I know because I've grown up in a family of farmers that have many, many times, all of the time, hired workers on their various farms.

When you've got a 64-section ranch in southern Saskatchewan, you don't farm that farm without help. When I was growing up, at various times all of my aunts and uncles had farm workers for at least part of the year or sometimes for many years. It's been my experience that those farm workers, while they are workers and they did expect a wage and they did expect to be treated fairly and to be provided with safe working conditions, were far more than just workers. In many cases they did become part of the family.

We're dealing with a business here, Madam Speaker, that is more than just a business, that has other values and interests and important questions to consider. So when we speak to this amendment tonight and we consider the idea of choice for insurance, I think we have to remember that this is more than just a business.

So let's take a look. We know that the Premier herself and many of the members in this Chamber have very convincingly spoken to the fact that there are some severe problems with the WCB at times. It's not that it's an insurance program that is unworthy of support but that it has some significant problems. On my side of the family my father was the first life insurance broker in Edmonton. My brothers are still life insurance brokers. They have spent many, many years providing employee benefit programs for businesses. It's not that I'm an expert on this, because I've never been in the insurance business, and I bow to your expertise.

But I do know this. I do know that because they're insurance brokers, one of their prime areas of responsibilities is to take care of their clients, to speak on their behalf, to ensure that that insurance program and that insurer are dealing fairly with the clients and with the employee benefits programs that they are placed under. I'm not going to say that it never happens that an employee might have to go to court, but I believe that the vast majority of times the insurance companies and the insurance brokers and the agents that are a part of that industry ensure that the fair and appropriate payout is done for their clients. I think that to paint any other picture is to take, again, an industry and probably unnecessarily paint it with too broad a brush. [interjection] Fair enough.

I would echo the comments of one of the members of this Assembly when we talk about the idea of choice and how important choice is. Every one of us in this Chamber at one point in time in our lives decides that we have to have choice in our lives. As a matter of fact, our lives become important and they become significant and they become meaningful to us because we have choice in our lives. Now, that doesn't mean that choice is unfettered. We restrict choices, but in a democracy the default position of every democracy is always freedom.

If you take a look at the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, that doesn't mean that my freedom of speech – although I have the privilege of speaking in this Assembly and I can say things that I can't say outside and be held accountable, there are limits to that freedom of speech in the real world. It's a part of what living in a democracy is all about, balancing those rights and those freedoms in what we would consider to be reasonable way in a free and democratic society.

9:10

I guess the question that I've got to ask the Legislature and the members of this Legislature tonight is: is this amendment reasonable? Is it reasonable to think that the workers of this province and the employers of this province should have the

freedom to choose which insurance programs they would offer their workers or which their workers would be allowed to have? I believe that it's a completely reasonable answer and would be seen as being reasonable in a free and democratic society to allow the employers and the workers to have freedom of choice.

I believe this subamendment actually speaks in a very positive way and actually makes this bill better. I really believe that if we are honest with ourselves and we set aside the party politics and we really ask ourselves, "Is this making this bill better?" we would support this. I know that's a challenge. I guess I don't set that challenge out to the backbenches because we know that in party politics sometimes those decisions are made in the leadership as to how we're going to vote, how we're going to support, but I'd throw that challenge out to you. This is one of those opportunities that the government has to show real leadership.

I don't see a downside to providing choice on this subamendment. We know that there are examples of lots of organizations out there that allow for choice. I don't really want to get into the debate about whether or not state insurance for car insurance is better than private insurance for car insurance. I'm not sure that we need to go down that path. I think it's a red herring. [interjection] Sorry, hon. member. I think we need to consider the fact – and it's the reality; it's the truth – that every province makes some exemptions for farm workers, especially in labour laws. Even in Saskatchewan and Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island we've got the WCB. We just make a few more exemptions in Alberta. I think we need to consider that we do that because we believe in freedom, in reasonable freedom, in this province. Again, I brought up in my very first speech that our motto in the province of Alberta is – what? – strong and free.

I think it's important that we provide and we allow our citizens this opportunity. Getting injury insurance for all employees is a good goal. I don't think that side of the House or this side of the House is going to disagree with the fact that we should have and want to make sure that our workers are safe and that they are covered by some form of insurance. I don't think that's the issue here today. But because that's not the issue, because we can agree on that, I think we should be able to agree on this subamendment.

I believe that if we were to take this bill to consultation and if we were to ask the farmers, based on the feedback that I've received and the correspondence that I've received, we would find out that the farmers of Alberta would support this subamendment.

I guess I would speak to a private conversation that one of the members and I had a little earlier today. You know, I can't speak for anybody else but my own actions in this House. I know that I have not gone out and tried to entice people to write me letters. I have talked with people, and in having conversations, I've said to them: you know, put your thoughts down on paper and send them to me. But I've not gone out and searched the highways and the byways of my constituency and asked for people to send me letters. This has been a grassroots thing, as far as I can see. When these farmers have come to me, it's not because I have been searching them out; it's because they have been wanting to tell their MLA what it is that they want. I've read the letters, and I've read the e-mails, and I've talked to my constituents. I believe that they would want me to support this subamendment.

So, Madam Chair, I would ask that the House consider supporting this subamendment and surprise me and the farmers of Alberta. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Any other speakers? The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Chair. It's my pleasure to rise and speak to the subamendment. I might just begin by saying that I fully support this subamendment. The reason why I support this subamendment is because I've had the opportunity to consult and hear from a lot of farmers and a lot of ranchers who have expressed concern about the lack of choice.

I had the opportunity today in a driving snowstorm to make my way to the constituency, the wonderful constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills – the wonderful constituency – and was joined by the hon. minister of agriculture, and I thank him for coming down. I'm not sure that the over 800 people who joined us in the meeting, some of them my close personal friends – I think today I actually made a few new friends as well, some that I didn't know but had the opportunity to talk to about this piece of legislation and to hear some of their concerns.

The people who joined us there in Olds today are so passionate, not only about this piece of legislation but about choice, about freedoms, that they would travel from near and far to come and express their concern and opinion around this piece of legislation, and they did it in ornery conditions. There was a significant convoy, reportedly up to five miles long. I know that I showed up at the venue and the convoy had already been arriving for quite some time, and for 25 minutes after the time that I arrived, a steady stream of vehicles came. The conditions were pretty ornery. I understand that they lost a combine on the way because of the road conditions. They were risking life and limb if you will. The reason why they are willing to do that is because, as my hon. colleague mentioned, this is more than their business; this is their life.

What this subamendment does is that it continues to provide choice that makes a difference in their lives. Madam Chair, today at that meeting every single person that I spoke to is concerned about farm safety. They're concerned about ways that they can make their operation safer. They're concerned about ways that they can keep their kids safe and their grandparents safe and their friends and neighbours and anyone who comes onto the property safe. That is always at the fore of what they do. When it comes to the subamendment, their concern is that they're being forced into a system that they know is broken, that the Premier knows is broken.

9:20

Madam Chair, the number one complaint that the constituency office in Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills receives isn't about the abysmal performance of AHS although it is abysmal. It isn't about the lack of direction that some departments provide. It isn't even about maintenance enforcement although that is number two. It is about the frustration and the pain, the heartache, and the havoc that is wreaked in the lives of Albertans by WCB. We've had this robust discussion around this being a farm safety bill, and just a few minutes ago we heard the hon. Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater say that this isn't as much about WCB as it is about OH and S. So the question begs to be asked: is this about farm safety, or is it about WCB? In his words: it's about more than that; it's about OH and S.

Farmers are confused. Ranchers are confused. They don't understand the direction that this government is actually trying to lead them in. Then they say to members on this side of the House and, I'm certain, members on that side of the House: "Please try to make this bill less bad. Try not to take away some of the fundamental freedoms, including choice, that we enjoy." Many, many farmers and ranchers across this great province of ours already opt in to the WCB program if they like to, and if they don't, many provide care and attention, that their employees deserve, in the form of other coverage.

I can tell you, Madam Chair, that one of the things that I heard today from the very deeply concerned constituents of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills was around their frustration that the government is saying that this is a safety bill and often implying that farms are a horribly unsafe place and that farmers and ranchers regularly create conditions that don't allow employees to refuse unsafe work. While I believe that those things, as horrible as they are, quite likely happen across this province, members of the farming and ranching community, just as they are frustrated about the lack of choice that they quite possibly will end up with, are frustrated with this sense that the government is communicating, I would say, another piece of misinformation on behalf of this government, that farms and ranches are unsafe and that farmers and ranchers that are employers are horrible, horrible, horrible employers and that they continually create unsafe workplaces for their workers, which is categorically untrue.

We've seen the government talk about the WCB piece, the OH and S piece, and then they said: this isn't about the family farm. They've taken it out of the farm safety realm, and they've said: this is actually about paid workers, paid workers not having WCB or similar insurances. When they've taken it from a safety bill and made it about a workers' bill, the question begs to be asked: is this really a piece of labour legislation, or is this a piece of farm safety legislation? The question is an important one. We've seen the Premier, ever since 2009, when she stood in the Legislature media room next to the United Food and Commercial Workers Union, champion the rights of farm workers. The question that they were asking today in Olds is: is this about championing farm workers, or is it about championing safety? We've heard all sorts of different things.

This breakdown in trust has created significant concern, which is why they – "they" being the folks that I spoke to in Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills today – don't trust that this is only about WCB. They're concerned that not only are pieces of their lifestyle being taken away but their choices are being taken away. In fact, the unintended consequence of this legislation is that it's going to make it worse for workers, not better, because while the abusers of the situation, the ones who are actually creating unsafe workplaces – well, we would be wise to ensure that that doesn't happen ever again. The net consequence for the vast majority of workers who have other insurance: they may actually be worse off when this bill passes than they were today, and that is a shame. It's one of the reasons why I fully support this subamendment.

Madam Chair, I will close with this. The Official Opposition has had the opportunity to provide a lot of context and good ideas for this government to consider, but my concern is that the Premier and the cabinet have dug their feet in a little on this. They're not really listening to the farmers and ranchers across this province; they're not listening anymore to the opposition. When we've seen the government make a conscious decision not to listen to the opposition, you know what we've seen? We've seen the government have to turn around, go back, fix the error of their ways. I think that 7.25 per cent pay raises come to mind. Killing bills that shouldn't have been killed and then sending them to committee comes to mind. When we get into a place as legislators in our mind, where we come to the point where we say, "Don't confuse me with the facts. We've made up our mind. We know better than farmers and ranchers. We're going to take away their choice. We're going to take away pieces of their lifestyles and their freedom," we are not better off in this province.

This is a small way that we can preserve some of the benefits that many farm workers across this province enjoy, and that's why I will fully support this subamendment.

The Chair: I'll recognize the hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane, followed by the leader of the third party.

Mr. Westhead: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I'm afraid that I am going to have to speak against this subamendment. I just want to start out by reminding the House what the title of this bill is: Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act. The key word here is "enhanced." We all know that farmers and ranchers already have safety top of mind. There's no questioning their commitment to safety for everyone in the agricultural workplace. There's no question whatsoever. This bill is about enhancing the already exemplary safety practices that exist. Given their already strong commitment to safety I'm confident that employers will have no problem with the common-sense provisions of the OH and S Act and the specific rules that they themselves will have a direct say in crafting over the course of the coming months and years. I think it's important to keep that in mind as we debate this subamendment.

Madam Chair, it's at times like this that we can really sense that we are playing a major role in the history of our province. Much as we did with bills 7 and 204, we are giving some very basic and fundamental rights to a group of people who have gone without them for far too long. I say: it's about time.

Speaking of history, in 1987 Alberta along with P.E.I. were the two last provinces to bring in mandatory seat belt laws. On the seat belt debate, back in 1987, they made some of the same statements we've heard during this debate on farm safety legislation, things like: educate, don't legislate. Does that sound familiar?

With all of the various opposing points of view being put forward on this subamendment, I decided to look toward some of the academic research to inform my own opinion. I can tell you, Madam Chair, that the research just doesn't support some of the claims that have been made here.

9:30

By the way, I really want to compliment the Legislature Library staff for assisting me with my literature search. They are fantastic down there. I will be tabling some of the research to which I'm going to be referring to this evening. I promise to not go on at length citing the research, Madam Chair, but since the library staff worked so hard, I owe it to them to mention a few of the germane points that helped me inform my decision.

First of all, I'd like to provide a brief synopsis of a Cochrane systematic review. Excuse me if I mispronounce the author's name. It's a research review by Risto Rautiainen and his colleagues. Dr. Rautiainen is based out of the Great Plains Center for Agricultural Health at the University of Iowa. For those who have not heard of Cochrane systematic reviews, these publications are held in very high regard by academic researchers. A Cochrane systematic review attempts to identify, appraise, and synthesize all of the empirical evidence that meets prespecified eligibility criteria to answer a given research question. Researchers conducting the systematic reviews use explicit methods aimed at minimizing bias in order to produce more reliable findings, that can be used to inform decision-making.

Now, keep that in mind, Madam Chair. This research is of very high quality and supports the approach that this side of the House is taking. The title of the study I'm referring to here is Interventions for Preventing Injuries in the Agricultural Industry. The author of this study states unequivocally: "The selected studies provide no evidence that education interventions are effective in decreasing injury rates among agricultural workers." Paraphrasing the article now, the point is that education by itself is not effective but is effective when combined with other complementary interventions.

To that end, the same author draws the conclusion that "insurance premium discounts as a financial incentive decreased injuries."

I am pleased to report that this is exactly the way our WCB system works. Indeed, there are several financial incentives that WCB offers to this end. The first one is called partners in injury reduction. This is a voluntary program that can result in up to a 20 per cent reduction in claims while simultaneously creating a safer workplace.

Another incentive that WCB provides is premium reductions for employers that provide modified work for workers who are injured on the job. On a similar note, workplaces can partner with an occupational injury services clinic to further reduce their premiums.

Yet another financial incentive, Madam Chair, is called a poor performance surcharge, or PPS. According to the WCB website PPS applies to large employers with very poor accident experience. These employers have reached the maximum surcharge for their size and experience rating plan. The additional surcharge is designed to encourage employers to take immediate action to improve health and safety and their claims management efforts to help reduce injuries and avoid further surcharges.

So there you have it. There's just one substantive piece of evidence that we can look to in order to inform our way forward. For the very reasonable cost of WCB employers will enjoy indemnity, and workers will enjoy going home alive and with all of their appendages.

Ms Notley: And an income.

Mr. Westhead: And an income.

Madam Chair, that bit of evidence supports one aspect of what we are proposing here.

I'd like to draw your attention to yet another academic research article that supports our position. This one is in relation to the application of the Occupational Health and Safety Act to workplaces. This particular study is titled Perceptions of Risk, Stressors, and Locus of Control Influence Intentions to Practice Safety Behaviors in Agriculture by Dr. Pamela Dee Elkind. Dr. Elkind is a professor and director at the Center for Farm Health and Safety in Eastern Washington University. I would like to quote some passages from this article, Madam Chair, because this article is rich with information. First of all, the author states: "The assumption that one only needs to provide information and develop knowledge, which, in turn, changes attitudes in order to change behaviour, has been demonstrated here to be simplistic at best and perhaps invalid."

I'll quote another passage because this is really good stuff.

An Hon. Member: More facts in the last five minutes than ... [interjections]

Mr. Westhead: Yes. Thank you. Lots of facts here tonight, some of them real, some of them not so real.

Another: "Sociologists argue that structural variables involving ... government policies lead to a contextual situation in which safety decisions are made."

One more quote, Madam Chair, and then I'll get to my point. I promise. "Three intervening variables make a significant contribution to the attitudes leading to the behavioural intentions equation. These are risk perception, chronic stress, and locus of control."

Now, there are a couple of important things here, Madam Chair. First of all, it's clear that there are a lot of complex variables at play affecting people's behaviour as it relates to risk taking and injury prevention. Here again we've heard that providing education in and

of itself is simply not good enough to alter injury-avoidance behaviours.

Another thing we can learn from this particular article is that government policies provide a context around how safety decisions are made. Indeed, we've heard before that sometimes legislating common-sense things like seat belts and occupational health and safety laws saves lives.

Finally, Madam Chair, we've learned that attitudes affecting behavioural intentions involve something called the locus of control. What is the locus of control, you might ask?

An Hon. Member: The Premier's office.

Mr. Westhead: Yeah. The Premier's office is probably an accurate description.

The locus of control as defined by the research, Madam Chair, is "the degree to which outcomes are attributed to one's own ability to alter a situation as opposed to external factors such as powerful others, luck, or chance."

An internal locus of control, the author states, is generally associated with the "adoption of health-maintaining lifestyles," and that's a good thing. By contrast, "an external locus of control often results in a lack of health-maintaining behaviour," and that's a bad thing. This so-called externality can lead to disconnection, apathy, a lack of response to risk, and a feeling of being out of control.

Now, I know this research can sometimes be a little dry, but I find this stuff fascinating.

An Hon. Member: We're riveted.

Mr. Westhead: Yeah. Okay. Great. I hope the folks watching at home are having a great time, too.

Dr. Starke: They all fell asleep a long time ago.

Mr. Westhead: Well, I'm building my case, and I'm coming to my point. I promise.

The point here is that the Occupational Health and Safety Act that we have here in Alberta allows for those who fall under its jurisdiction to have a meaningful say in their own occupational health and safety. This comes back, again, to fostering an internal locus of control, and that's a good thing. This provides both employers and employees a substantive role to play in jointly determining their own health and safety.

Imagine that, Madam Chair. We already have an OH and S system here in Alberta that research indicates is positively associated with health-maintaining lifestyles. Now, that's something I can support.

Madam Chair, I've used a lot of my time reflecting on the evidence out there that strongly supports the approach that this government is taking, and there's a lot more that I just don't have time to mention. Sorry to disappoint those who were looking for a little more. [interjections] I'd be happy to share the articles with you. There's some light reading for you.

Given all of these reasons, I am compelled to support this farm safety legislation and reject the amendment that we have before us. Notwithstanding all of that, there are many, many other good reasons that we need this legislation. One of those, I think, is the suggestion that our current laws, that exclude an arbitrary subset of workers, are potentially considered unconstitutional, and that's a dangerous thing. We are opening ourselves up to a constitutional challenge because we're excluding a group of workers based on arbitrary reasons. Now, I'm not a lawyer, so I'm not going to wade too deeply into that debate, but I know that there are certainly some compelling arguments along those lines.

9:40

I know that other speakers on this side of the House have put forward some very eloquent reasons to support this bill: the members for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, Leduc-Beaumont, Calgary-Klein, Calgary-Fort, and the Member for Stony Plain, to name a few. I believe there may have been a few more speakers. I know there are many very good reasons out there, that we still have yet to name, and I'm going to leave that in the very capable hands of my colleagues on this side of the House.

I thank you very much for your attention.

The Chair: The hon. leader.

Mr. McIver: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I was very interested to hear that the hon. member was compelled by the locus of control. My observation is that the locus of control is the occupant of room 307, which is the Premier's office. I'm sure he is compelled by that locus of control. On that at least we can agree. I'll give attribution. It was one of my colleagues to the right here that pointed out that the locus of control was the Premier's office. Good observation, if you don't mind my saying.

Madam Chair, I was looking at this amendment, and I have to say that it certainly seems to make sense to provide some choice in insurance. Certainly, the government, I'm sure, will agree with their locus of control, the Premier, who has some very negative things to say or has said some negative things about the Workers' Compensation Board, as we've discussed earlier in the House. It would seem natural that the government would say: well, if we're going to force people to have insurance, why wouldn't we give them a different choice as well? At this point there's every reason to believe that it may actually please the locus of control if there was a different choice.

Let's think about what we're doing here, too, and how many people we're doing it with. There's a report that was published by the Alberta Centre for Injury Control & Research at the University of Alberta and sponsored by none other than the government of Alberta. In this report it talks about agricultural-related injuries in Alberta. Now, in that report there's a chart on page 21 that is entitled Agricultural Deaths by Relationship to Farm Operator, and it covers a period of time from 1990 to 2009, so 20 years. It's a pretty good sample of where agricultural deaths come from. It's particularly pertinent, I think, to this discussion, Madam Chair, because it does talk about the relationship between those who died and the owner of the farm. Of course, with the amendment that the government has proposed, they've eliminated a lot of those groups of people.

Out of the deaths talked about during that 20-year time period, 139 of those were the operator of the farm. Of course, they wouldn't be included in the particular legislation that the government has as the owners of the farm. Out of those deaths, another 68 were the child of the operator – that wouldn't be included in the government's legislation – 15 of those would be a child visitor, which I think in most cases would not be, and 11 of them are other relatives of operator. In other words, according to this, about 233 of those farm deaths during those 20 years would not be covered by the legislation that the government is putting forward, a pretty high percentage.

Who would be? There's a group called hired worker, 26. There are two other categories – we'll give the government credit for that – one called adult visitor or contractor, but it could be a contractor. We'll say that they're included, the 13 of those. There's another category called other, so I clearly can't make any assumption, but – you know what? – I'll make the best assumption I can for the government.

But even at that, even if you figured that, the way the government currently has the legislation structured, it would only cover 49 out of 282 deaths. So what that tells me is that under the current government's legislation there are very few of the agricultural deaths that will actually be covered, which really kind of runs completely counter to the government's argument that everybody has to be included in this and everybody is going to be protected and it's going to keep everybody safe and nothing bad is going to happen if we put this in place. You know, when you take this to the logical conclusion, you end up kind of wondering what the government is actually trying to accomplish.

When you come to bring that small number of people that are involved – private insurance. Madam Chair, there's actually a better chance, probably, that farm and ranch operators and workers could get better insurance from a private company than they could from WCB, just based on volume. According to this again, since out of the 282 deaths there are only 49 covered by the government's bill and 233 not covered by the government's bill, there are a lot more people that need coverage that could get it from the private company than could get it from the WCB under the government's legislation. It's simple math.

You know, insurance is about spreading risk. I think most of us understand that. If it wasn't about spreading risk, you wouldn't have insurance; you'd just wait till your house burned down, and you'd save money to build it again. But the fact is that everybody throws a couple hundred or a thousand dollars a year into their insurance bill, and if you're one of the unlucky ones whose house burns down, you spend everybody else's thousand dollars to rebuild your house. That's insurance. That's essentially the nature of it, and if there's some left over, the insurance company gets it. Since they've stayed in business, there's always some left over. That's just the nature of business.

The point is that if you want to get a good deal on better insurance, you need lots of other people buying the policy so that you can spread that risk and have a bigger base of donors to that risk management pool of money, that you all share in. Again, only the unlucky people get to dip into that pool of money, whether it's for a death or a fire or an injury, whatever it happens to be. Of course, according to this report the vast majority of those would not be covered by the government's current form of the legislation. So it only seems incredibly logical that private insurance would be a more likely, a more viable vehicle for farm operators and workers to use to have that insurance.

Here's what we do know and, I think, has gone missing in this conversation, Madam Chair. The fact is that most – I won't say all. "All" is a big word. Two words that we should be careful about using in politics, in my opinion, are "always" and "never," because it's a long life. There have been many times in my life when I've either said "I always will" or "I never will," and I have lived to regret saying that. So I won't say "all," and I won't say "none," but I will say that the vast majority of farmers right now already have insurance. They do. They have it. They have a relationship with the insurance company, they understand how it works, they've budgeted the payments. It's working for them. So why would you not allow them to continue, as a choice, as an option, to have what they're comfortable with? Now, this would be doubly true if the government was interested in making those people happy with the government's decision. Let them stay with what they're comfortable with.

Dr. Starke: It doesn't seem to be a priority.

Mr. McIver: No, it doesn't seem to be a priority right now.

I see a piece of information from my colleague from Grande Prairie-Wapiti – we have a real, live farmer in our presence, folks, a farmer that knows this business; he's not the only one, but he's in our party – that 90 per cent of farms in Alberta already have insurance. Some of them actually have WCB. Some of them have chosen other insurance companies. So if the government is truly interested in having compliance – and I think it's a pretty good assumption that if the government is going to pass legislation, they want Albertans to comply with that legislation – why would you not actually offer them the choice that they've already made? That choice is the option to have WCB or the option to have other insurance. You'll need fewer inspectors. You won't have to chase people around as much to comply with your legislation if you're providing a choice, that they've already decided and already determined through their current behaviour is a choice that they want.

9:50

Madam Chair, I think that the logic is inescapable here. I think that the subamendment is undeniably sensible. I think that the history and the evidence, based on the fact that, again, 90 per cent of farms in Alberta already have insurance for themselves and their employees, are a tremendous indicator that this subamendment – well, here is what it doesn't fix. It doesn't fix the lack of consultation with farmers and ranchers. The only thing that will fix that is consultation with farmers and ranchers, but until the government comes to the obvious conclusion that they should stop and do that, this will actually make the legislation just a little bit better. If it won't make it better – I'll butcher the language – I'll say that it will make it less worse. Yes, I did butcher the language.

The point is that it won't make the legislation good, but it will make it less bad if you support this subamendment. It makes sense. You might make some people less unhappy. You'll get better compliance. You'll actually extend to people a choice that they're already able to make and are comfortable with. For that particular reason, I'm going to support this, and I recommend that all members of the House join me in so doing because this is a good idea.

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

Ms Renaud: Thank you, Madam Chair. We've spent quite a few hours in this House, so I've had a lot of time to look through *Hansard*, a lot, a lot, a lot of time. I've gone back two, three, five, 10 years just to get a better idea of what's been going on around farm and ranch safety, and I saw years and years and years of various governments being asked by various members to please remove the exclusion of farm and ranch workers from occupational health and safety, years of various members asking for coverage for farm and ranch workers. Politicians for years have used the very same rhetoric to justify their decisions to not do anything.

All Alberta workers have the basic right to know about unsafe working conditions. They all have the right to refuse unsafe working conditions. They have the right to a meaningful life following a serious injury. I keep hearing that farmers and ranchers already have insurance, but I can't seem to find solid stats. I think you mentioned that the Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti thought that 90 per cent had coverage. I haven't found those stats. I've been asking the question. I read 7 per cent somewhere. I haven't seen those stats. So if the number that I've read is incorrect, I'd love to know what the actual number is. What I did read is that agriculture has the highest fatality rate of any Canadian occupation. A lack of access to statutory protection is one characteristic of precarious work.

I managed an organization called Lo-Se-Ca Foundation, and we had employees, anywhere from 100 to 275. We also were subjected to occupational health and safety inspections, and often we did have inspectors come in and look at equipment that we used and check out the places where people lived, where they played. They didn't necessarily always grow things, but that's where they lived. It was their home; that's where they functioned. Sometimes it was an invasion of privacy, but at the end of the day, it was for everybody's safety. It was on a smaller scale, for sure, but at the end of the day, it was for everybody's safety, the employees and the people that we were supporting.

Being accused of being an urban MLA or legislator and therefore unqualified to discuss or have opinions about issues related to rural communities I found incredibly elitist. Is it fair to exclude the opinion of rural MLAs when we discuss urban issues? I don't think so.

I want to take you back to the comment shared by a physician, the Member for Edmonton-Whitemud; and an RN, the Member for Banff-Cochrane, members of this caucus, who remind us again and again that if we save one life or prevent one injury, we're doing our job. The injuries and deaths that occur on farms and ranches are preventable. I'm not going to talk about the cost of the injuries because that's not the point here. Shame on us, all of us, for not preventing them for years.

Years ago, when I was a student, I worked at the Abby Road Housing Co-op, where a portion of the condo units were wheelchair accessible for people that needed that kind of access. Let me tell you what life is like for a person with a life-changing spinal cord injury. I didn't have the injury, but I got to see it on a daily basis, and in many cases these injuries were preventable. They were no longer able to do the things that they loved to do, whether it was farming, riding a motorcycle, driving a car. They were no longer able to be with the people that they loved, and every aspect of their lives changed. What once was an accessible, unlimited future became a series of barriers. Certainly, life can be wonderful on two wheels, but it's never the same. I think it's incumbent on us to prevent any injuries we can as soon as we can.

You know, you keep telling us to slow down and stop, but that's the same message I read in *Hansard* for years and years and years. Who pays for the people who lose their lives while we play politics? Who replaces the income for injured workers? Who pays for the cost of daily living for families who lose income when a loved one dies? And at what point will you accept the political risk associated with regulating farm safety because it's the right thing to do?

When it's all said and done, the preventable deaths and injuries of workers are our responsibility. For that reason, I will not be supporting this subamendment.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Barnes: Thank you, Madam Chair. I want to talk about the lack of consultation, I want to talk about the loss of trust, I want to talk about the importance of choice, and I want to talk about making this bill less bad.

My goodness, how hard would it have been to consult? In just a week I've been at a town hall in Medicine Hat with 1,200 people, followed up the next day in Bassano with 500 people. I've been getting letters, e-mails, Facebook messages, LinkedIn messages, direct messages on Twitter, even phone calls by the thousands. Today alone in my constituency office more than 10 people walked in, all asking for a chance to consult, all asking for a chance to be involved in their livelihood, their lifestyle, to continue the work that

in some cases their great-great-grandfather and -grandmother started generations ago.

The *Western Producer* and five editors, collaborating, came out today with some of their thoughts on it from Saskatoon. I just want to read a couple of lines. The story starts:

Alberta's NDP government has bungled Bill 6.

The Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act has galvanized agriculture into unprecedented opposition, and with good reason.

Unprecedented opposition.

10:00

When I first got interested in politics, in about 2010, 2011, I met a fired-up ranching and farming community then, and it was over what the previous PC government had done on infringement: stripping, taking away covenants and property rights; taking away, without consultation, without access to courts of appeal, and without compensation, property rights, the bundle of rights attached to properties. I remember, in the early going, town halls of 250, 450 people, phone calls. Madam Chair, it's been nothing like this. This is much more galvanized. This is much more serious. To nail it down as simply as I can, it's about Albertans that want to be consulted. They want to have a say and a part in how this goes forward.

The *Western Producer's* five editors go on to say:

What is the rush, farmers ask. What would be the harm in delaying legislation until the agricultural community understands its ramifications and can prepare for its implementation?

Jeez, that doesn't sound unsafe, un-Albertan. It sounds reasonable when your family has been on a piece of land for four or five generations, when you might have millions and millions of dollars invested in it, when it's not only your job but it's your life.

The article goes on to say:

There could have been widespread support from farmers and ranchers for legislation that meets that goal . . .

That meets the government's goal.

. . . while recognizing the unique needs of the sector.

My goodness, has this side of the House been saying that for seven days?

Instead, the government completely misread farmer opinion . . .

Completely misread farmer opinion.

. . . and solidified the general feeling that the NDP, with a largely urban electoral base, does not understand rural Alberta.

That's the situation that our NDP government has created.

The five editors go on to say:

The Alberta agriculture and rural sector is worth \$77.4 billion . . . It is a sector that would be worthwhile to consult . . .

Here is some advice for the Alberta government: when you find yourself in a hole, stop digging. Stop the legislative procedure on Bill 6, undertake consultation and build some agreement on effective ways to improve farm safety and farm worker protection.

It's the execution.

To our government and our government caucus: you're dealing with a group of people who have built Alberta, who take pride in the way Alberta is, who have survived droughts, BSE, and country of origin labelling just in the last few years, labour shortage, property rights attacks, and who keep coming back as strong Albertans to pay their taxes, to build our province, and to build for the next generation.

Now, I want to talk for a second about the loss of trust. Obviously, if trust is high, if trust is there, compliance will be higher as well, but we've seen a Premier and a government rail strenuously against the Workers' Compensation Board, against omnibus bills,

against using closure to shut down debate, and against lack of consultation. Now, all those things were very, very true in our last, 44-year government, but, my goodness, you all wear this now. This lack of consultation, this borderline hypocrisy, maybe not even borderline, have caused a loss of trust, that you will wear.

The importance of choice. As a legislator and a conservative I always try to balance things with equity, fairness, and choice. I don't think I can say it better than one of the farmers and ranchers in Medicine Hat. After the first 200 people, all unanimously concerned about not having consultations, spoke before him, he got up to the mike and said something like this: I understand that the workers' compensation part of this bill is effective January 1; currently I have workers and after-hours coverage on all my workers, and carried with that are some extra benefits for health care, for health savings accounts, for life insurance, for other benefits that Alberta families need and that Alberta farmers, ranchers, Alberta employers are willing to pay for. His question was: who in the NDP government is going to come and tell my employees on January 1 that they're losing all these benefits because now I have to carry workers' compensation?

Just another reason why we needed to consult. Just another reason why we needed to work on the implementation time. Just another reason why the hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster's subamendment makes this bill less bad. As he outlined, it clearly talks about that it must be "satisfactory to the Minister." The insurance put in place must be satisfactory to the minister. Many of us have heard, some of us have had first-hand experience with how bureaucratic, employee-and-employer workers' compensation has many, many failings. What an opportunity – what an opportunity – to put in a little choice, to put in a little competition, and like the Edmonton Eskimos make the Calgary Stampede better, possibly private insurance would make workers' compensation better.

Here's the level of distrust that this Premier and this government have created. I've had a few people call me and say: "You know why I think they won't give us choice? You know why I think they won't let this happen? It's because if we get choice, other Alberta employees will want private insurance as well." That comes from employees and employers. NDP government, we recognize that workers' compensation has serious, serious deficiencies. We've recognized that thousands – thousands – of farmers and ranchers want to be consulted to make this better for all Albertans, employers and employees.

Because you're obviously not going to back up and do the right thing and send this to a committee, where thousands of Albertans would make it better, I will express my support and ask for everyone to support the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster in improving this bill and giving Alberta employees and employers more choice.

Thank you.

The Chair: I'll recognize the hon. Member for Red Deer-North first, followed by Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mrs. Schreiner: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am speaking against this subamendment. I think the original bill is the way we need to proceed. Bill 6 is important legislation. Bill 6 is long-overdue legislation. Bill 6 will make work life safer for employees who work on farms and ranches. Employees on farms and ranches deserve to have the same protection as other workers in Alberta. Employees on farms and ranches deserve to have the same protection that workers on farms and ranches are already enjoying in all other provinces in Canada.

10:10

Madam Chair, employees on farms and ranches have been asking for decades for employee protection. Bill 6 will give them that protection. Bill 6 will prevent injuries and deaths. That is what we have to focus on. Bill 6 will assist workers and their families in cases of accidents. Serious accidents and even deaths occur while working on farms and ranches. We have to do all that we can to protect each and every one of those employees to the best of our ability. We owe it to all Albertans. I am very proud to do my part to protect all employees in Alberta, and that is why I am in full support of Bill 6.

Madam Chair, I would like to share just one of the many stories that I have heard regarding Bill 6. A constituent of mine told me that she was very happy that the NDP had moved forward to introduce a bill to protect farm workers. She told me that approximately 13 years ago she returned to Alberta in search of employment and to move closer to her family. Circumstances led her to very unusual employment, at a cricket farm. It was actually a small acreage with big production. There were old farm buildings that had been modified to house the hatchery and the breeding of crickets for pet food. The process included working in temperatures up to 102 degrees Fahrenheit, with a humidity of up to 60 per cent, eight hours a day in the hatchery. Mostly women worked in the barn, and there was no washroom facility except at the house, approximately half a kilometre away. She told me that the employees were expected to go outside behind the barn. This was happening just a few years ago.

Madam Chair, as the operation of the cricket farm grew, problems developed with an infestation of beetles and pesticides. The employees were not provided with masks to protect their lungs. The employees were expected to spread pesticide that was in crystal form underneath the bins where the crickets were held. The bins had to be stocked and moved daily, and this process would crush the crystals, creating dust. The employees would have to sweep the barn daily, causing the dust to move. No masks.

The employees contacted the labour board, and after much communication someone was sent out to do an inspection. Unfortunately, the inspector drove halfway to Red Deer, then realized that this cricket supplier likely fell under different legislation than a farm. The employees were disappointed when the inspector called and said that he could not set foot onto the cricket farm.

Most employees had stayed employed at the farm for only a few months, maybe a year or two at the most. The farm was a profitable business, and the employees were paid fairly well. However, there was much abuse and many unsafe practices taking place. Most of the employees felt helpless as they were dependent on the income. There were a couple of private claims filed against this farm, and at the same time the Canada job bank would not let them continue advertising.

Bill 6 is definitely a great step forward in protecting farm and ranch workers. Madam Chair, I believe that employees on farms and ranches need to work under the protection and guidelines of occupational health and safety and WCB. Bill 6 surrounds the importance of safety. The importance of this legislation is that it provides safer working conditions for those who are employed on Alberta's farms and ranches. I have listened to my constituents. It has been very helpful to identify the opinions and viewpoints of all those who have responded to Bill 6. I have listened to those who support as well as to those who do not. I am proud of Bill 6. I am proud of the Premier and her ministers for their leadership around this bill.

Madam Chair, the intent of this bill is to protect nonfamily paid farm and ranch workers. The intent of this bill is to ensure that farm and ranch employees can receive compensation if the employee is hurt or killed on the job. The intent of this bill is to ensure that the employee has the ability to refuse unsafe work. The intent of this bill is to respect and enforce basic human rights, basic human rights that farmers and ranchers in every other province in Canada already enjoy.

Madam Chair, the intent is to protect the family farm. The intent of this bill is to ensure that farms and ranches are safe workplaces. Let's not forget all the people who have lost their lives while working on our farms and ranches. This bill is for them. This bill is for the present-day farm and ranch workers, and this bill is for the future farm and ranch workers.

Madam Chair, I urge all to support this bill. Thank you.

The Chair: Hon. members, just before I proceed with the next speaker, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, can I get unanimous consent of the House to revert to Introduction of Guests?

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests

(reversion)

The Chair: The hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo.

Mr. Yao: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I would like to speak to you and through you introduce three ladies that are up in the gallery here. Helen Kawaliuk is a poli-sci major at the University of Alberta, and it is her hospital; Brianna Vaxvick is currently taking a degree in intercultural studies; and Ileana Berezanski has a bachelor of science in animal health and is currently studying veterinary medicine at the University of Melbourne. If you could please rise and receive the warm welcome of this House.

Thank you very much.

Bill 6

Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act

(continued)

The Chair: Proceeding on, the hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock, and then I believe Edmonton-Centre would be next.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Madam Chair. It gives me pleasure to speak to the subamendment. But just for clarification to start with, the Member for St. Albert made a comment about farming being the most dangerous occupation. From a report published in the *Globe and Mail* in January 2014, with statistics from Service Canada's top 10: farming is not in the top position. Loggers and forestry rate number 1; fisheries, drownings and heavy equipment injuries, rate number 2; pilots and flight engineers rate number 3; roofers, number 4; structural ironworkers and steelworkers are number 5; garbage collectors, number 6; number 7 was electric power line installers; number 8, truck drivers and travelling salesmen; number 9, farmers and ranchers; and number 10, construction workers. I thought we'd just get some clarification on those statistics.

The subamendment that was presented by the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster speaks to allowing choice of insurance programs for farms. I do believe that this does make this bill better. Through the consultation it has become clear to me that many of the farmers and ranchers were asking for this to be considered. When

we do consultation, we need to try and understand what is going to work best for the stakeholders that are involved.

It does make sense to have coverage be mandatory. I agree with the concept. But I see no reason why we need to force WCB. The subamendment does speak to the need to be "in a form and manner that is satisfactory to the Minister," so it would be comparable or superior to what is being offered by WCB. I'm sure that many of the private providers would develop products that would be able to fit those criteria.

10:20

One thing that I did notice with regard to the comments from the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster: he made the comment that it was \$16 a month. But the gentleman that made the comment in Vegreville made the comment – a lot was happening during the meeting, but I believe that maybe one of the people that was there knows, the MLA from Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville or our Minister of Economic Development and Trade – that it was \$16 more per month than WCB, which gave coverage 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

When I was in my days of having employees on my farm, that was something that we looked at also. The opportunity to have coverage 24/7 was very attractive to my employees. So that is something that I do believe a lot of our farmers and ranchers would enjoy continuing with. There was another gentleman there that had anywhere from 14 to 16 employees at a time, and he did mention that his staff is worried that they might be in a position where they have to lose the coverage that they currently have. So, you know, the subamendment is really to encourage, to allow choice: mandatory insurance, but allow choice.

One of the very first letters that I received, Madam Chair, actually came from a feedlot in my constituency. It came November 18. The partner in the feedlot says:

Although we had heard rumours that there may be legislation regarding farm workers, the news report of the scope in this proposal has us very concerned. I have not had one farm operator in my circle indicate that they felt this move was necessary. It is not in anyone's interest to have unsafe conditions on their farm. Safety is very important on our mixed-farm operation. We have a private accident and health plan for our 14 employees which is superior to what WCB offers. Something voluntary may be appropriate for those that can't carry the coverage.

[interjections] I think it is possible, but it does need to be clarified, and I think the subamendment does speak to that concern of: are we going to have insurance that is comparable to WCB, and would the minister's office be able to verify that?

This operator says:

We are proud of our farm, our safety record, and operate an efficient business. The last thing we need is more government interference. Employees that don't like the farm they work for and how it's operated are always free to work somewhere else.

Another thing, Madam Chair: I don't understand why the government wants to mandate that all farmers and ranchers buy into the WCB fund. Many farmers I know have their own workplace insurance, and it is better. In fact, Shaun Rathy from De Winton – and I would be pleased to table the letter if it has not already been tabled; I do believe that it has already been tabled – sent me a letter with concerns about mandatory WCB. He said – and I quote – that it wasn't that long ago that the Premier was rallying in front of the WCB building, fighting for the poorly represented and unfairly injured worker who had no choice but the independent, mandatory WCB insurance coverage.

He asks:

Whatever happened to her WCB reform platform? She now intends to enforce mandatory WCB coverage onto even more

Albertans, leaving them at the mercy of the organization to which she up until recently was vehemently opposed. Why?

Just a thought that possibly we could look at, Madam Chair, is that maybe we could start by not having family farms and ranches mandated to pay into WCB when so many are already offering superior coverage on their own without coercion.

Did you know that the WCB has over \$10 billion in assets, with only about 7 and a half billion dollars in liabilities, giving it a funded position of \$2.7 billion, or a funded ratio of 136 per cent? The WCB is rolling in the dough from worker premiums and limiting benefits.

With that, I'd like to encourage everyone to be open to the opportunity to provide choice in coverage. I do believe that the subamendment is very clear that it would be coverage that would be equivalent to and possibly even better than the coverage that WCB is offering. I would speak in favour of this subamendment.

Thank you.

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

Mr. Shepherd: Thank you, Madam Chair. I hadn't intended to rise this evening, but based on some of the comments by my colleague from St. Albert and an occurrence earlier this evening, I felt it was appropriate that I get up and say a few words. As my colleague noted, of course, it's a bit more difficult for us as urban MLAs to stand and speak to this bill. Certainly, we don't have constituents that are as affected. But the members opposite have asked several times for us to share some of the views of our constituents and how they felt about this particular bill, so I'd like to take this opportunity to do so, particularly as one of my constituents is actually here this evening. He's been here with us for much of the day, and he was here with us yesterday as well because of his own personal interest in this bill.

He approached me as I was leaving the House this evening to tell me a bit of his story, having grown up on a farm, spent time working on a farm, having many family members who currently farm. He told me about the story of his uncle, who was unfortunately killed in a farming accident due to not following proper safety procedures and the normal standards of OH and S, which my constituent is well familiar with, having worked in the trades.

My constituent shared with me this evening that he is strongly in support of Bill 6. He's well aware of the implications.

The Chair: Hon. member, could I just confirm that you are speaking to the subamendment?

Mr. Shepherd: Okay. Sure. Absolutely.

I did have the opportunity to discuss insurance with my constituent as well, and he shared his thoughts on that with me. I just wanted to acknowledge that he was here with us this evening. I do appreciate his thoughts on this, the fact that he does support this bill in its current form, that he believes that mandatory insurance and OH and S coverage are necessary for all paid farm workers in Alberta.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to the subamendment SA2?

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on subamendment SA2 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:28 p.m.]

[Fifteen minutes having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:

Barnes	MacIntyre	Smith
Cooper	McIver	Starke
Cyr	Nixon	Strankman
Drysdale	Orr	van Dijken
Hanson	Schneider	Yao
Hunter		

Against the motion:

Babcock	Hoffman	Notley
Bilous	Horne	Piquette
Carlier	Kazim	Renaud
Carson	Kleinsteuber	Sabir
Connolly	Littlewood	Schmidt
Coolahan	Loyola	Schreiner
Cortes-Vargas	Luff	Shepherd
Dach	Malkinson	Sucha
Dang	McCuaig-Boyd	Swann
Drever	McKittrick	Sweet
Eggen	Miller	Turner
Feehan	Miranda	Westhead
Fitzpatrick	Nielsen	Woollard
Gray		

Totals:	For – 16	Against – 40
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[Motion on subamendment SA2 lost]

The Chair: We're back on amendment A1. Are there any further speakers to the amendment? Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to talk a little bit about this amendment first, and then I would like to propose a subamendment.

Back in the late 1970s, I believe, the governments of the world believed that we were running out of natural gas, so they decided, down in the States at least, that they were going to shut down all unnecessary consumption of natural gas. They decided that greenhouses were considered as nonessential, so they shut them down overnight. The reason why they did that was because they convinced people that the sky was falling and that we were going to be out of natural gas and, therefore, to make sure that all of the houses that need it can have it, to make sure that the people who need it the most will have it. Greenhouses went out of business overnight. It was a terrible situation. What's interesting about that is that we know now that we have well over a hundred years' supply of natural gas. So hindsight is 20/20 vision.

I think that in this situation with Bill 6 we are going to see that the approach by this government was brought forward with fear that the sky was going to fall, that WCB was going to be all of a sudden the silver bullet that fixed everything. I'm concerned that we've heard this argument quite a bit this evening. We have seen some fantastic amendments come forward, good amendments that would have at least mitigated some of the problems that farmers would have faced with this bill. Over and over again we have seen this government quash these amendments.

I have been made aware that this evening is extremely important to farmers and ranchers. They're watching, and they are hoping and praying that something good will come out of tonight. It has been the intent of the members on this side of the House to try to convince, through debate and, hopefully, through reason, that we can make this bill better. I think, from some of the conversations I've had with other members on the opposite side, that they have indicated that this is a free vote for them. Unfortunately, I have seen

anything but a free vote on these amendments. It is, I believe, a sad state of affairs when we see good amendments come forward and then be struck down by this government and by the backbenchers in the NDP caucus.

Now, I was happy that the government had finally listened to hours of debate and thousands of protestors coming to this Legislature to voice their concerns. I think that if it wasn't for that kind of pressure, we wouldn't have seen even the amendments that we see today. This was not the government's original plan since we were told over and over again by the website, by releases, and by debaters in the House that family farms were going to be covered in every way, shape, and form under OH and S and WCB.

This amendment seems good at first until you realize that almost every single family farm hires the help of at least one person during the busy harvest season. Let me point out an issue in the OH and S Act that would completely negate hiring that one person. Section 3(1) of the OH and S Act reads, "Every work site must have a prime contractor if there are 2 or more employers involved in work at the work site." If there are two people working in the field, then the owner, as outlined in subsection (2), must also be on-site.

10:50

Let me go a little deeper into this. Let me break this down for you. If there are two people working in a field, then the owner, as outlined in subsection (2), must also be on-site. Let's say that to get the harvest in, a farmer needed two people in the field to get that harvest in, two people needed to be in the next quarter section, and one person needed to be tending to the feeding of the cattle, a situation not unheard of on many farms. Now, they only have four people working for them, which means either that harvest doesn't get brought in or the cattle do not get fed. So the owner hires a fifth person to drive the tractor to ensure that the harvest can be brought in. But now OH and S applies to everyone on the farm, which means that the two people working in each field need the owner to be on-site in both fields.

I think this is one of the reasons why we have seen exemptions in other provinces for these kinds of regulations. One of two things needs to happen now. The owner must be in two places at once — he must be in both fields, according to section 3, and then he must also find a way to feed the cattle — or he must hire two more people, for a total of seven people, and promote them in a way that those two new people can be prime contractors to watch over both fields so the owner can feed the cattle. Seem complicated?

An Hon. Member: And expensive.

Mr. Hunter: And expensive.

In this situation, with the way the OH and S Act is currently outlined, if this farmer wanted to hire one person, he would have to hire two additional people to watch over his farm and comply with OH and S regulations. Madam Chair, this is one example of how this government needs to consult with farmers in order to be able to get it right. This is one example to show that this bill, even with the amendments that have been brought forward, is insufficient to meet the needs of family farms and ranches in Alberta.

This is why I would like to put forward a subamendment. I have the required copies that I would like to submit. Would you like me to wait, Madam Chair, in order for you to get that?

The Chair: Until I get that, yes.

This will be known as subamendment SA3.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Hunter: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would move that amendment A1 to Bill 6, Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch

Workers Act, be amended in part C in the proposed section 9(2)(a) by adding "or" at the end of the proposed clause (d) and by adding the following after the proposed clause (d):

- (e) employees of a farm or ranch that employs 5 or fewer employees, whose employer has provided workplace injury insurance coverage equivalent to compensation available under this Act.

The rationale behind this subamendment, Madam Chair, is that by accepting this subamendment, the members allow farmers more options than just WCB as long as the farmers have comparable coverage.

I want to point out that the petition that we just filed had over 32,000 signatures on it. As far as we can tell, Madam Chair, that is the largest, by double, petition that this House has seen, at least in the recent past. Now, I guess the question that I have is: could all of these people, the 32,000 signatures on here, be wrong? If we follow that, that the members on the opposite side believe that they are all wrong, then we need to also say that perhaps many people in Alberta got something else wrong on May 5. If we follow this rationale, that maybe a lot of people made a mistake on May 5, then perhaps this government doesn't have the mandate that they believe they have.

An Hon. Member: Voters are never wrong.

Mr. Hunter: If voters are never wrong, Madam Chair, then I would submit that we have 32,000 people who are not wrong, and you need to listen, government.

Madam Chair, the members on the opposite side have stood up and have talked about the need for safety for farm workers, so they have, I guess, taken the position as being champions of farm workers. My question to the members opposite is: if you are the champions — and we've known about this bill now for two weeks — for the farm workers, would you please be so kind as to table all of the letters that you have received from these farm workers that give you the mandate to bring forward these draconian rules? If you have the ability, I would ask you to go ahead and table the letters.

Second, I would ask you to table the petition of all of the farm workers. There have got to be thousands of them out there. I would ask you to table the petitions. If not, do you really, truly have the mandate of the farm workers? Obviously, you don't have the mandate from the farmers and ranchers because they've spoken en masse and have said: kill Bill 6. So the only people that I can see that you would have the mandate from would be the farm workers, that you say that you're championing. If that is the case, then I ask you to table for this Legislature the names of the people who have written to you or signed petitions saying: this has to happen; please make sure you do this. If you can't do that, you don't have a mandate. We have a mandate, 32,000 signatures on a petition. I think that's mandate enough.

Now, this amendment covers farms under five people so that if a family of three or four needs to hire one more person, they can still operate. A family farm should not be hampered from working efficiently because of a technicality accidentally left in this legislation. This amendment is not perfect and is being created through the brief amount of consultation we have had, that we have been able to do, since this bill was brought forward. We would prefer if this, obviously, went to committee, Madam Chair, so that farmers could have the proper input that they need. This amendment is a last-ditch effort to try and do what farmers want with very little consultation.

We have advocated again and again to consult first, legislate second, and this government has continued to do the opposite. We have continually asked to educate, not legislate. This government

has continued to legislate, not educate. We need to kill this bill or send it to committee and take the time to talk to the experts. We need amendments that the experts suggest we create, not just what we think is the right thing to do.

B.C. has exemptions for farms under 20 people. This is a small number by comparison, what this amendment suggests. We're not asking for 20; we're asking for five. Five people may be too small of an exemption, but we are trying to do what would benefit family farms. Alberta has the least amount of red tape for farmers compared to any other province in Canada, and I would suggest, Madam Chair, that the reason why we have prospered and that farming and ranching have flourished in Alberta is for this very reason. At least one of the reasons that they have flourished in Alberta is because of the low red tape, and I believe that when we start adding more red tape and more of these types of measures, it will definitely cause problems for farms and ranches. It will cause problems for their ability to be able to be productive and flourish in Alberta.

I don't know if this government wants that – I will have to believe that they don't – but when the consequences happen in 20/20 vision, after you look back on this situation, I believe you will see that these measures have not helped farmers and ranchers; they have hindered them. This is the sort of thing that I think is a travesty.

11:00

Family farms are already having difficulty, and they want to take care of their family farms. It's already a struggle. In fact, some of the family farms that I've talked to say that with the difficulty that family farms have in trying to incentivize their children to take over the family farm, it is very difficult already, and adding this additional red tape, adding this additional regulation is obviously not going to incentivize them to want to take over the family farm. It's going to be a disincentive. This subamendment would alleviate some of those restrictions that are deterring children from taking over family farms.

Now, I'm not sure whether or not I have the attention of the members opposite, so I'd like to get their attention, and I'd like to quote once again a book that they seem to love, *Animal Farm*. Here's what it says, one of my favourite sayings. It says, "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others." Now, the interesting thing about this is that the Premier has said this. The Premier has said that all Albertans deserve to come home safely, yet not too long after that she said: we're going to exempt Hutterites. Now, my question is: are all animals equal, or are some more equal than others? So my question for the Premier – and I hope that this body here can answer this question for me – is on whether or not the Hutterite exemption and the four and a half other pages of exemptions make us more equal. I don't believe it does.

I've brought forward a couple of different issues that I see or problems that I see with this bill, and bringing forward this subamendment, Madam Chair, I believe will, as we heard a few minutes before, take a bad bill and make it maybe a little less bad. I hope that the members opposite ask themselves whether their assumptions are true, ask themselves whether or not their assumptions are based upon ideological beliefs or, actually, facts. We have heard many things said in this House that have been assumptions, assumptions that have no data to back them up. Here's the reason why the opposition is opposed to this bill: the assumption is ideologically based rather than it being data based. I hope and I would ask the members opposite to make sure that they question their assumptions, as all legislators in this House should, and then ask themselves whether or not it will be the right thing for Albertans.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

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

Mr. Nielsen: Thank you, Madam Chair. All animals are equal. I read this, and I see that five employees don't get to have the same rights that everybody else does; therefore, I can't support this subamendment.

The Chair: Lacombe-Ponoka.

Mr. Orr: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm thrilled to be able to rise and speak to this subamendment. I think what we're seeing here is the reality that it's actually hard to legislate well. In fact, it's really hard to legislate well. What we're really, really, really, truly dealing with here is an issue of human rights and social justice all the way across the board. I know that the members across the way think that they have some kind of a corner on human rights and social justice and that they're the only ones who live in that corner of the universe, but I have to ask you: what about the rights of the farm families? What about the rights of the farm workers who actually would prefer to refuse or to choose some other kind of legislation? There are those who actually want to refuse WCB and would prefer to choose a different kind of insurance. Do their human rights not count? Does social justice for them not apply at all?

I'm sure that there are a number of you – well, I know that there are several of you that are well enough educated, who have taken some ethics courses in your past. If you will go back and think a little bit about ethics, the reality is that there are very few black-and-white choices in this world and in this life. It's always a balance of good and evil. It's always trying to discern: where is the best good, and where is the least evil? What we're having and what we're seeing here is an attempt to do something that's good for a small group of people. Quite frankly, if this bill had been written in a slightly different way, if there had been consultation along the way so that it could be written in a way that balanced the rights of all of the people that are involved in a different way, you probably would find that you would have a lot of support for this bill. I know that I would support it if it had been presented in a different way.

The reality is that this is about human rights and social justice and not just for one group. I would really like to just gently suggest to you that there are 32,000 petitions and thousands and thousands of letters that have been stacked up in this room from thousands of individuals whose social justice and human rights are being infringed upon. I won't say intentionally. I won't even come close to saying that. I don't believe that was your intent, but the effect is that, for them, your efforts to bring social justice and human rights to one group are actually infringing on the rights and justice of another group, and that's the whole problem here. There hasn't been consultation. There hasn't been the opportunity to actually balance the justices and come up with a truly ethical solution to a real problem. If we could write this differently, I assure you that there would be support for it.

I also would like, since I am on the theme, to remind us of the Canadian Bill of Rights, and one of the things that it does say, amongst many, is that every Canadian should have the right "to life, liberty, security of the person." I fully embrace that. I embrace that for the farm workers, that you are concerned about, but I also want to embrace that for the farm families, who feel that their life and their liberty to make choices and even their security of person and family are being infringed upon and maybe even the fundamental justice of how they're going to be treated here, because they are going to be dictated to. They are going to be legislated over top of without even having been consulted in the process.

I'd like to say that political capital is a fluid thing, just like any kind of leadership capital is. It's never fixed, and I fully agree that

the voters are always correct. You had a mandate in May, but now in November you have a no, a “no” mandate. The voters are speaking, and if you won’t listen to them now, I assure you that you’ll have to at the next election. This really is an issue of voters’ rights and human rights in our country. What the people are seeing is a government with its head down, with a determination, like a bull in a china shop, to push forward legislation that actually does not balance human rights and that is not ethical entirely.

The Premier says that she’s pushing this through regardless by Christmastime. Now we’ve invoked closure on debate. These are not democratic kinds of things. What we’re seeing here – and I hate to even have to say this – are the true colours of our NDP government. They sing a siren song, they lure unsuspecting voters, and they promise social democracy. Well, it’s definitely socialist, but it’s not very democratic. We have a new government. Some people think that it’s a new dictator party. That is not what people voted for, I assure you. They voted the last party out for the very same reasons. The people don’t want this. What we’re seeing is a repeat of the days of the Magna Carta, where the common people have to fight against the power of the king. It isn’t right.

11:10

An Hon. Member: Who are the barons?

Mr. Orr: The aristocrats who are in power. It doesn’t take long once you cross the floor.

I’d like to say that in our society – oh, I’ve got to hurry up. I’ll hurry up. Nobody believes government should be in the bedrooms of our nation. Anybody think the government should be in the bedrooms of our nation? No. And neither should the governments be in the barns of our nation because the same kind of activities happen there. I assure you that the farming and ranching community does not want this legislation. They don’t want you in their lives doing this. You cannot regulate this and claim to have a mandate from them. It is about social justice. The question is: whose social justice, and how are you going to balance the ethics of that? For that you will have to answer.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Banff-Cochrane.

Mr. Westhead: Thank you, Madam Chair. I was really leaning towards supporting this subamendment, but the bitter irony of the Member for Lacombe-Ponoka citing the principles of social justice and the Charter of Rights is just too strong for me, and I’m going to have to not support this subamendment.

The Chair: Any other hon. members wishing to speak to this subamendment?

If not, we’ll call the question.

[Motion on subamendment SA3 lost]

The Chair: We’re back on the main amendment, A1. Any further speakers to this amendment?

If not, we’ll call the question.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A1 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:13 p.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:

Babcock	Gray	Notley
Bilous	Hoffman	Piquette
Carlier	Horne	Renaud
Carson	Kazim	Sabir
Connolly	Kleinsteuber	Schmidt
Coolahan	Littlewood	Schreiner
Cortes-Vargas	Loyola	Shepherd
Dach	Luff	Starke
Dang	Malkinson	Sucha
Drever	McCuaig-Boyd	Swann
Drysdale	McKitrick	Sweet
Eggen	Miller	Turner
Feehan	Miranda	Westhead
Fitzpatrick	Nielsen	Woollard
Fraser		

Against the motion:

Barnes	MacIntyre	Smith
Cooper	McIver	Strankman
Cyr	Nixon	van Dijken
Hanson	Orr	Yao
Hunter	Schneider	

Totals: For – 43 Against – 14

[Motion on amendment A1 carried]

The Chair: We are back on Bill 6. Are there any further comments, questions, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Madam Chair. Of course, it’s my honour today to rise, as always, for the good people of Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre and speak to a change that could have been made to this legislation to make it a bit more palatable. As the members of this House are fully aware, the Wildrose along with tens of thousands of Albertans have been actively fighting against Bill 6 since its inception. However, to our dismay and despite the very best efforts, this government appears to be pushing it through before session ends this week.

Wildrose has been busy coming up with ways to make a bad bill better and to provide essential protection for farmers and to shelter them from the fanatical, rushed deadlines that the NDP has imposed with Bill 6. An idea that our party had suggested and that was unfortunately turned down as an inappropriate amendment was to provide Alberta farmers with a much-needed grace period as they adjust to the massive changes that this government will enforce on them in an extremely short time frame. It also would have allowed them time to properly educate themselves on the various changes and to put those changes into effect in their daily routines.

Madam Chair, it shocks me to think that as of January 1 of this coming year farmers will be expected to comply with all OH and S and WCB standards, not even two months from when this bill was first introduced. To describe the pace at which this bill was put forth and forced through by the NDP as frantic would be a grievous understatement. It seems that this government’s new goal is to legislate, institute, and then consult.

11:20

Our staff and MLAs have read inspiring letters from all over Alberta with stories of family farms passed down from generation to generation and heartwarming tales and fond memories of families bonding together. Madam Chair, you can feel the nostalgia and warmth that pour out through these letters as people recount mornings spent helping their families milk cows, collect eggs, and

work together as a team to create something that is bigger than themselves. The passion they feel for farming is amazing.

For generations these families' farms have been cared for and passed down with pride, with hundreds of years of history and fond memories wrapped up into a parcel of land. These farmers have spoken at great length about the love that they have for the lives on their farms and ranches and how grateful they were to have the experiences that they did growing up in the rural areas, experiences that, it seems, will now be very different if this government has anything to do with it.

Madam Chair, I would like to reiterate that the Wildrose is not opposed to farm safety, but we are absolutely opposed to how the NDP has handled this legislation, and we remain opposed to the pace at which they are aiming to impose it. The current deadline that the NDP has put in place for Bill 6 to be executed by speaks volumes and continues to show their naïveté about the industry they are legislating against. The fact that members opposite think that they can sweep in with legislation that completely transforms the agriculture industry and erases generations of tradition and practice, refuse to consult with those that it directly affects, and then threaten fines or imprisonment against those that aren't willing to get onboard a mere few weeks after this legislation is imposed continues to baffle myself and this caucus. To radically change the way this agriculture industry has functioned as an independent entity since settlers came to what is now known as Alberta and then expect at the drop of a hat that Alberta's farmers and ranchers would be willing or able to accommodate that request is laughable.

Madam Chair, this government is bound and determined to drag Alberta's agriculture sector kicking and screaming towards a government that micromanages and ties the hands of its citizens. The very least that this government could do would be to allow a buffer for farmers to react, to adjust to Bill 6 without the fear of being thrown in jail or fined massive amounts of money, that would further narrow the already slim profit margins that this very bill has already thinned.

Our caucus may not have been able to kill Bill 6, but our hope is that the members of this Assembly will band together to soften the blow that the farmers and ranchers are about to be dealt and to protect their way of life from further attack. I ask that my fellow MLAs take my words to heart tonight, slow down, and show our rural constituents the respect and protection that they deserve.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any further speakers to this? Amendments? Comments? The hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd like to move an amendment to Bill 6. Would you like it now, or shall I read it out?

The Chair: If you could just wait till I get the original copy. This will be amendment A2.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that Bill 6, Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act, be amended by striking out parts 1 and 2. If this bill is truly about protecting farm workers and the safety of farm workers, as stated by the Premier and many members opposite, then this amendment should be okay with them. It's likely not going to pass because they've already defeated a couple of better amendments. I'm sure they won't pass this one, but we'll give it a try.

This omnibus bill contains two prongs that are about worker safety; namely, occupational health and safety and workers' compensation. It also contains two prongs that are evidently less about worker safety and more about paycheques and forming

unions. As many of my colleagues have indicated, it is irresponsible to dilute important worker safety legislation with provisions that are unrelated to safety. A sign of respect for legislators would be to provide us sufficient time to consider this important legislation. Provisions to enable farmers to collectively bargain would not increase employee or employer responsibilities for safety. The government has not explained how farm worker safety would be enhanced by this part of the legislation.

Employment standards could contribute to farm worker safety, but because regulations will not be developed or consulted on for a few years, there's no need to debate or pass this legislation now. As responsible legislators we should take the time to make well-consulted changes to employment standards legislation, which the government itself admits will take months to years to develop and perfect.

We support farm safety, and we can do that without wrecking livelihoods, Madam Chair. Bill 6 goes too far and tries to cover too much without understanding what it means to everyone involved. Reducing the scope of this bill would offer at least some reassurance to concerned Albertans that their concerns have been heard.

This bill is going too fast. The government admits that this legislation will take a couple of years to correctly consult on and implement. How can family farms adjust? The government has not been able to even answer how many nonfamily farm workers each piece of this bill will affect. There's been no proper consultation. Public consultation events have been disastrous, and few farmers can get their voices heard.

We believe that farm workers and their families should be protected by insurance such as the private policies currently purchased by many of Alberta's farms in order to compete for workers with other labour- and machine-intensive industries. We support bringing farms under occupational health and safety legislation to the extent that employment-related farm deaths and serious injuries should be investigated and the learning shared to prevent future similar incidents. If workers' compensation insurance does become mandatory, we would like to see this government enable farm employers to choose workers' insurance that offers a better coverage than that offered by workers' compensation and which many farm employers currently provide.

The government has previously indicated that all farms, including family farms, would be covered under all four pieces of legislation. The government has since revised this position to clarify that only workers with employee-employer relationships on farms will be covered. The government can show responsibility by not passing legislation that the government itself has not yet taken the effort to understand.

Let me paraphrase Premier Notley, from her May 4, 2015, interview with Bridget Ryan of City TV Edmonton: so there's an extra year before we get to implementing this bill, but you know that the sky is not going to fall if that happens; you know, I think it's about just being responsible and listening to what Albertans want to tell us and not lecturing them, because there's been a lot of lecturing, I think, by this government, and I think a lot of folks are getting really tired of it. Those were the Premier's words. The sky will not fall if we take the time to get this important safety legislation correct.

Again to paraphrase the Premier, speaking at a provincial council at the Coast Hotel on January 31, 2015, about solutions built only in regulation: we're not giving any hints about what that solution will look like, but what it does mean is that it will not involve the force of law if it happens outside the Legislature. Based on this government's arbitrary and unconsulted-on policy changes on borrowing \$6 billion, restricting logging, optical drugs, adjusting

and backtracking on the minimum wage amongst others this summer, we know all too well what NDP solutions that are not in legislation look like, and I cannot accept that this is a way that will be any different.

11:30

Consulting and ensuring that important provisions are built into a smaller piece of focused and well-thought-out legislation will not make this policy work. It will make this policy better. So basically the Premier is saying that the sky isn't going to fall if we don't rush this through. She's saying: take the time, consult with Albertans, and consult with the farmers, and let's get it right. She said that herself, speaking last spring, so I don't know why she's changed her opinion from there now that she's the Premier.

You know, I think everybody just needs to take a breath. We all know we can make farms safer. We all know we can work together to make this legislation better. Let's work together and do the right thing and really support farmers in Alberta.

Thank you.

The Chair: Just a reminder, hon. members. A few times tonight proper names have been used in the House, so just be cautious with that.

The hon. leader of the third party.

Mr. McIver: Thank you. Thank you, Madam Chair. I'm standing to support my colleague's amendment. It's an important one because it really lays bare what is really going on here. What my colleague is saying is that if the government's wish is truly what they say it is, to enhance safety, then they would support this amendment.

Madam Chair, what I found amazing about this – the government wants to increase safety on farms and ranches. Good idea. Who wouldn't want to do that? The problem is that there doesn't seem to be an understanding about where we're starting from. To listen to government members when they talk about this, you would think that Alberta had the worst record in the world. Such is not the case. Such is not the case. We are amongst the best when compared to other Canadian provinces. So rather than building what's already there, work with farmers and ranchers and try to prevent those last injuries, those last deaths. You know what? Realistically, probably you'll never get rid of all of them because many parts of farming are industrial operations, lots of machinery, you know, animals that in many cases are large and unpredictable just because they're living beings. Nonetheless, it is laudable to try to get to zero deaths and zero injuries. It truly is.

But when you've got one of the best safety records in the first place and the attitude is to sweep away everything that's there because we can build it from the ground up better than almost at the top, that really is where I think we lose Albertans. We lose farmers and ranchers, and we lose city people because everybody in the city, at least the vast majority, knows somebody that works on a farm or a ranch or knows somebody that lives on a farm or a ranch and they know that their practices are safe.

There are a lot of old farmers and old ranchers around. If they didn't care about safety, there wouldn't be very many old farmers and ranchers around. I'm serious. If they've gotten to be an old farmer or an old rancher, the fact is that they have been hanging around and working on what is essentially an industrial site for many years and have managed to stay alive. How? Because they have good safety habits. It's not because they don't care. It's because they do care.

Probably one of the most offensive things about this legislation is that it assumes that today, before this brand new, shiny government – at least, they were; they're not quite so brand new

and shiny. At some point, they're actually going to have to take responsibility for their actions. That day hasn't come yet, but it might. This ever-so-recently brand new, shiny government has it in their head that they can erase over a hundred years of safe farming and ranching work and traditions, tear it all apart and rebuild it from the bottom up and do a better job than the people that have been living and breathing that business for a century. That is an assumption within the government's legislation that is false. In fact, it doesn't even have a chance of being right.

There are other things going on here, Madam Chair. If the government supports this, they will actually be demonstrating that this is about safety, and if they vote against it, they will be admitting that it's about something else.

You know what? The arguments that have been made do not hold water. Let's face it. Again, the argument that the government has trotted out, with tragedies that have happened on the farms in the last couple of years – and there are a couple of accidents and terrible situations where somebody has died and the remaining family members can't support themselves or someone has sustained an injury and they can't support themselves. I will agree with the government that those are tragedies, but the underlying assumption from the government to support their legislation, that if somehow occupational health and safety and the Workers' Compensation Board are imposed upon these farms, these things won't happen anymore, is patently false.

I will again remind this House that it wasn't that long ago, when I was the labour minister, I can tell you, that there was a lineup of people who worked in places covered by occupational health and safety regulations and Workers' Compensation Board regulations that got injured and couldn't support themselves. There was a lineup of people whose family member had died or was injured, a family member working at a place covered by occupational health and safety and Workers' Compensation Board, who were losing their home and all their possessions because they weren't covered. Occupational health and safety and Workers' Compensation Board are good ideas, but they are not the panacea and not the silver bullet that this government would have you believe, compared to what farmers and ranchers are doing today. It's just not true. It's just flat not true.

Actually, if they truly are interested in safety rather than tearing apart a hundred years of largely safe practices by people that have grown up and lived and, for some, have become old farmers and ranchers and kept themselves in one piece and healthy and surviving, it would perhaps behoove the government to take some time and listen to those people, that have probably seen the hazards and avoided the hazards, that have probably even seen some injuries and learned how to not repeat those injuries. Some of the poor folks might have seen a death and, as a result, have learned how to avoid future deaths on the farms.

Instead, the government wants to wash away all that knowledge, all that experience, all that successful track record. A caucus of government people made up largely of urban people – that doesn't make you bad people; I'm a city boy myself – thinks that they can wash away all that knowledge and be smart enough to replace it without listening to the people that have actually been living a farming and ranching life, they and their relatives, for over a hundred years in Alberta. It just defies logic. It just defies logic.

Here we are with a common-sense amendment. Honestly, you know what? I will say this, government members. My colleague has very politely, because he's a polite person – he's a gentleman. He's a gentleman, but in his gentlemanly, polite way he's calling you out. If you can't support this, then you are concerned about something other than safety.

An Hon. Member: Like labour.

Mr. McIver: Yeah. Like labour.

You know what? If you want to unionize farms, good. Just say it. Call it the We Are Unionizing Alberta Farms Bill. You know what? The law is on your side. We get that. There was a Supreme Court of Canada decision that requires farm and ranch workers to be able to unionize if they want, so that law is on your side. We acknowledge that. But don't do that and hide it under something you're pretending to be safety. If you want to do that, it's okay. The law is on your side. If it's a good idea, just be up front about it. What we hear from government members is that this is about safety.

11:40

My polite and thoughtful colleague, who, unlike most of us in here, is . . . [interjection] Oh, I thought you were calling a point of order or something. I thought I'd offended you, Minister. All right. You know, Minister, how I'd hate to offend you, right?

My polite and thoughtful colleague, who is also a farmer, which most people in this room can't say that they are, in his polite and thoughtful and pleasant way, because that's the way the man is, is calling you out. If you don't support this, then you must be thinking about something other than safety. What he's saying is that if this is truly about safety, then let's cut it down to the part that's about safety, and let's get on with that.

So I'm going to support it because I think that this is a really good point, where the government, if they support it, will reveal itself as being up front and honest with Albertans about being mostly concerned about safety, or they will reveal themselves as having some other agenda, which they haven't honestly and openly articulated to Albertans, if they vote against it. Me? I'm supporting it because I think that this is a good point. This is a really good place to demonstrate to Albertans whether this government is being honest about the fact that they think safety is the most important thing.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Just before we proceed, if I could ask the indulgence of the House for unanimous consent to revert to Introduction of Guests.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Introduction of Guests (reversion)

The Chair: The hon. House leader for the Official Opposition.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you so much, Madam Chair and for the indulgence of the House. I really appreciate that. I just saw a couple of very good friends of the Wildrose caucus arrive to support farmers and ranchers during this debate on Bill 6. I'd just like to take a moment. Donna Hanson, Suzanne Dargis, Adrian Pomerleau, if you would rise. If I might just add, a happy birthday to you, Nikita Pomerleau. It's her birthday today. And I would be remiss, while we're talking about birthdays – it's also my wife's birthday. When you see her next, wish her a happy birthday for me in this new family-friendly environment.

Thanks so much for joining us.

Bill 6 Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act (continued)

The Chair: Do we have any other speakers to amendment A2? The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Madam Chair, and I want to thank my colleague the hon. Member for Grande Prairie-Wapiti for his introduction of this amendment, which, as my colleague the Member for Calgary-Hays has pointed out, provides some clarity of purpose to what this bill is all about.

I've been to public meetings. I held a town hall in Vermilion on Saturday, and I went to the Vegreville meeting yesterday, and I heard farmers, a number of them, charge this government, saying: this isn't about safety; this is about you ramming unions down our throats. Of course, the immediate thing was a denial from the government minister, who says: no, no, no; it's all about safety. In fact, the reassurance on behalf of the minister of labour, saying that the rate of unionization of farm workers in provinces that have passed the labour standards act has actually been low: that, shall we say, did not placate the masses. It did very little to calm the edgy nerves in the crowd.

If the members of the government haven't already gathered this, farmers are an independent lot. Farmers choose farming for a number of reasons, but one of the reasons they choose it is because they're independent and they want to be their own bosses. They want to be masters of their own operations, of their own lands, and they do it as a family endeavour. In some cases, those family endeavours have grown to include employees from off the farm, from other households, from other areas. They provide employment to others. They are a fiercely independent lot, and they are somewhat resistant, some would even say very resistant, to the imposition of rules that they see as interfering with that independence. In fact, farmers, when told that their independence is being infringed on, will push back. We have seen that very, very clearly.

Farmers have expressed a great deal of concern, not so much with the Workers' Compensation Board or even the OHS. There are concerns about the OHS because right now the technical requirements have not been defined. Many farmers work off the farm, and they work in areas, like construction and oil and gas, where OH and S is a big part of their lives, and they see some of the challenges that, you know, the application of OHS in those situations would create within their own farming situation. They're asking a lot of very relevant and very pertinent questions as to how that would affect their own operation. These are reasonable questions. Nonetheless, in terms of the sections of this bill that are related specifically to safety – in other words, the sections with regard to occupational health and safety and with regard to workers' compensation – there is less resistance to those areas than we are seeing with labour relations and with the employment standards.

Now, what my hon. friend has stated is absolutely correct, and that is that workers should have the fundamental right to organize themselves into bargaining units, to collectively bargain, and to join a union if they so desire. That is a fundamental human right, and I support that human right. But as he also said, if that is what you want to do, put it in a stand-alone bill, and let's vote on that as a stand-alone bill. If you did that, if you separated it out from the smokescreen that you've created with the farm safety legislation, then I would suggest that you would get support with that because the law, as he states, is on your side, and quite frankly human rights are on your side. It is a basic human right, that workers should be able to collectively associate and collectively bargain. I know this, Madam Chair, because I was once a member of a labour union. Yes.

Mr. Cooper: Shame.

Dr. Starke: No, I'm not ashamed. Actually, I'm proud to have been a member of the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen of North America local P243, which has since then morphed to

become the United Food and Commercial Workers, as many people will know. I'm particularly proud because that organization, amongst the other things that it does, when I was a high school student provided scholarships and bursaries to high school students. I was the first Canadian recipient of the Earl W. Jimerson award, that awarded me with a scholarship for the first four years of my attendance at university. That's a good thing. So before anyone on any side of the House says that I'm anti-union, just be careful. I know that I owe a lot to labour unions, and I know that labour unions do a lot of good things.

In fact, when I was a councillor for the city of Lloydminster, I was asked to sit on the city's negotiations committee when we had negotiations with our unionized workers. One of the things that I was always very proud of was that the members of the union always said: we like you at the table because at least you're fair and you see the workers' point of view. I have to say that that was not always a view that was shared by those negotiating on behalf of the employer.

Part of the reason I think it's so important that there be a fair balance between employer and employee is that – I wish that the terminology was a little bit like in German. I'm just going to use a couple of German terms, and I'll provide the translation. The German term for employer is "Arbeitgeber," which means the giver of work, and the German term for employee is "Arbeitnehmer," which means the taker of work. The giver and the taker of work. I think that represents a relationship between the two that is more co-operative and represents a relationship that is more a relationship amongst equals.

11:50

Now, I recognize that there are differing opinions as far as the relative powers that rest and vest with employers and employees. I would suggest to you that many of the members opposite would suggest that employees have been poorly treated in this province for a long time. In fact, I would suggest that they maintain that employees are constantly poorly treated. You know, it's somewhat reminiscent of some of the charges that are made: "How did you get that? By exploiting the workers, by hanging onto outdated, imperialist dogma which perpetuates the economic and social differences in our society." It is the kind of statement that one looks at and says: well, is that even realistic?

Well, that is the belief that is held by some. Personally, I believe there needs to be a balance between the employer and the employee, and the labour unions are important in maintaining that balance. So while there is suspicion of the motivations of labour unions in some situations, I understand what the basic purpose of labour unions is.

I also understand, from my own childhood, Madam Chair, that labour unions can go too far. I know this because my father, who was a foreign-trained butcher – he was a butcher that was trained in Germany and had considerable skills – received from his union brothers derision. He received taunting. He was called names by those that were supposed to be his union brothers. Why? Not because he was German but because he worked hard. He worked hard, and he worked fast, and he worked well. He took great pride in doing that.

The names he was called by those in the labour union, especially the shop stewards, especially the heads of the union, who charged him with embarrassing his other union comrades, his other union brothers, because he made them look bad because he worked too hard – he accepted overtime too readily, he showed up early for work and was prepared to stay late and didn't complain about it, and he didn't take the extra breaks, that were never part of the contract but were just taken. That was the kind of environment that my father endured, working in a packing house in Edmonton for

nearly 40 years. When I asked him, "Why do you take that, dad?" he said, "I take that because I need to provide for you and your sister and your mother, and I take that because I take that as my responsibility."

So, Madam Chair, I want to be clear that I recognize the positive aspects that can come from union involvement and union membership, but I also want to make it clear that I recognize that there is a dark and a seedy side to the labour union movement. To suggest that there is not is simply not looking at things realistically.

I remember when there was a strike at Canada Packers when I was seven. I was less than that; we were in the old house, so I was about five or six years old. I remember my mother watching television every day, praying that the strike would be over so that my father could go back to work because strike pay simply did not keep our household going. I remember when there were other work stoppages at Canada Packers and my father would go work at another plant, a non-union plant, so that he could continue to have income coming into the house. Then his union brothers would call him a scab and a strikebreaker and try to make him stop what he was doing, which was simply providing for our family.

So I've seen the negative side of the labour union worker, friends, and it's not all the idealistic world that many would believe the trade union movement to be. Somebody said earlier today that it's not all about black and white; there are many shades of grey. I would suggest there are many shades of grey in this as well.

With regard specifically to the amendment, Madam Chair, that is why I think it is a good idea to separate the whole question of unionization of farm workers under the Labour Relations Code and separate the question of employment standards because employment standards are more about hours of work, vacation pay, and other things. In fact, when I was at the meeting yesterday, or now just about the day before yesterday, in Vegreville, the Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour said: well, we would develop the employment standards specific to farms. But the information on the website had gone out already, stating what the plans were for employment standards, and farmers didn't like it. Farmers were extremely concerned about how it redefined the entire relationship between themselves, their children, their neighbours, their relatives, those that worked on the farm with them.

So, Madam Chair, those two things have muddled this entire argument, and it is one more aspect of how this particular bill has been poorly handled and poorly managed by the government. One could say that they're inexperienced. This is perhaps the first major, complex piece of legislation they've introduced; therefore, they should be cut some slack. If it wasn't such a profound difference to the agricultural communities in our province, I would say: "Okay. Fine. Let's cut them some slack."

But, ultimately, we in this Chamber are responsible for being legislators. We in this Chamber are supposed to pass the best legislation possible. We are supposed to pass it, hopefully, without flaws. We are supposed to pass it, hopefully, after long periods of consultation and debate, in which we consider the pros and the cons of the legislation. Madam Chair, I'm not convinced that that has happened in this case. I'm not convinced that we have developed the best piece of legislation possible.

One way to make it clearer that this legislation is about safety, that it's not about unionizing farm workers, that it's not about imposing employment standards that, quite frankly, run contrary to the way most farms and ranches operate is to separate those areas out. Now, if they want to be introduced as separate pieces of legislation because they're important to this government, by all means, do that – do that – and we can have that debate separate from other aspects of this. But to do an omnibus bill, as this is – and omnibus bills certainly have been criticized at the federal level for being these large pieces of

legislation rather than having specific pieces of legislation – and to do it in the way that is being proposed at this point is not good legislation. It is not a good way to proceed. It should be something that we, in our responsibility as legislators, should resist.

Madam Chair, I would urge not just members on this side of the Legislature but members on the opposite side of the Legislature to consider that, to consider at least splitting away these two areas. They have said: this is not what it's about; it's all about safety. Well, if it's all about safety, then let's concentrate on the sections of this that are involved with safety.

We've made some, I think, reasonable suggestions for amendments already. I know they've been rejected. However, I think this gives another opportunity to clarify this bill, to pare this bill down to what really is the main focus of the bill. I think that it gives this bill some additional clarity, that I think we as legislators should always be striving for.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I move that the committee rise and report progress.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Sherwood Park.

Ms McKittrick: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports progress on the following bill: Bill 6. I wish to table copies of all the amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.

12:00

Mr. Bilous: Madam Speaker, I seek unanimous consent of the House to move to one-minute bells for this next motion.

The Deputy Speaker: For the next motion?

Mr. Bilous: For Government Motion 27 – correct – which I will move shortly.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Government Motions

Time Allocation on Bill 6

27. Mr. Bilous moved on behalf of Mr. Mason:
Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 6, Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act, is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill in Committee of the Whole, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of the bill at this stage shall be put forthwith.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. This Assembly has now debated Bill 6 for approximately 24 hours.

Nearly all opposition members have now participated in the debate, including the leaders of each of the opposition parties. The bill has been amended based on feedback that I and my colleagues have heard from farmers and ranchers.

I expect the members opposite to oppose this motion, but I'd like to remind them, Madam Speaker, that as an MP the Leader of the Opposition voted for time allocation 60 times, including on omnibus bills. He had no problem with time allocation to change the Income Tax Act, the Wheat Board Act, and even to change the RCMP Act. I have a couple of quotes from the Leader of the Official Opposition when he was an MP. He said, "Why is there a problem limiting debate on issues? . . . Why will you not agree to a time limit to limit debate?" That was on May 9, 2007. He went on to say, on November 17, 2011, "The motion is to time limit debate and to get it done today, so that we're done in about 15 hours." As you can see, at that time he had no issue with using closure amongst many other times.

As I stated when I first rose, Madam Speaker, we've now debated Bill 6 for 24 hours in this House. The bill has had ample opportunity for debate, for robust conversation throughout Committee of the Whole. I appreciate all of the members from all sides of the House giving their input on this bill, and now I urge the Assembly to move ahead and pass the committee stage.

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Well, I would say thank you, Madam Speaker, but let me tell you that I am not very thankful at all about what is happening in this Assembly this night. [interjections] They think it's funny.

Let me just start with the preposterous comments from the Deputy Government House Leader regarding the Leader of the Opposition voting some time ago. This side of the House has proposed a number of proposals that would make this Chamber work much better, and one thing I can tell you is that in Ottawa they have real committees, who do real work for extended periods of time, where they hear from expert witnesses, where they get testimony, and the only bill that this government is concerned about sending to committee is one from the opposition.

Now, this evening we see them moving closure after one day. Committee of the Whole did not start until 3 o'clock today. There are many members on this side of the Chamber who have not had an opportunity to rise at this stage of the bill. There are many members on this side of the House who also didn't have an opportunity to speak to second reading.

An Hon. Member: Actually, that's not true.

Mr. Cooper: No. I think you'll find that the Member for Highwood, the Member for Airdrie, and the Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock did not speak to the main motion at second reading.

We have heard from this Government House Leader in the past that this time allocation thing is a way for government to short-circuit democracy. That's exactly what's happening tonight. Democracy is being short-circuited. Democracy is so short-circuited in this House that the leader of a recognized party doesn't even get to speak to the fact that they are stifling debate, and it is shameful. When the Premier laughs at me, it's difficult not to laugh at her. There are lots of reasons why she shouldn't be laughing at me, but it would be unfair of me to point them out this evening.

Let me just say that on December 2, 2013, in this very Assembly there was a significant discussion with the Government House Leader of the day. "I would [like to] make the argument that the

government must apply time allocation in such a way as to permit each member of the House to speak to each bill” at the stage prior to applying time allocation. This side of the House has over seven amendments that they would still like to propose, and now they have one hour. At no time in Ottawa or in this Assembly have we seen one hour of debate for time allocation. This government likes to blame everything on the previous government, and even they provided two hours of debate, the horrible, horrible, horrible previous government. They never limited debate to one hour.

I think that it is a real shame, a real shame, that on a bill where over 30,000 people have signed a real petition, not just sent it around on the Internet but actually taken the time to find a real petition, that’s been approved by Parliamentary Counsel – earlier today we saw over 2,000 letters tabled in this Assembly, and then we see total disrespect for farmers and ranchers clear across this province when this government stifles debate. I think it’s an absolute shame, and I can tell you without a doubt that this side of the House will be voting against this motion, and if they cared about democracy, they would, too.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 27 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 12:09 a.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Babcock	Gray	Notley
Bilous	Hoffman	Piquette
Carlier	Horne	Renaud
Carson	Kazim	Sabir
Connolly	Littlewood	Schmidt
Coolahan	Loyola	Schreiner
Cortes-Vargas	Luff	Shepherd
Dach	Malkinson	Sucha
Dang	McCuaig-Boyd	Sweet
Drever	McKittrick	Turner
Eggen	Miller	Westhead
Feehan	Miranda	Woollard
Fitzpatrick	Nielsen	

Against the motion:

Aheer	Hunter	Pitt
Barnes	Loewen	Schneider
Cooper	MacIntyre	Smith
Cyr	McIver	Starke
Drysdale	Nixon	Strankman
Fildebrandt	Orr	van Dijken
Fraser	Panda	Yao
Hanson		

Totals: For – 38 Against – 22

[Government Motion 27 carried]

Government Bills and Orders Committee of the Whole

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

Bill 6

Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act (continued)

The Chair: Have we no further speakers to amendment A2?

Hon. Members: Question.

The Chair: The question has been called.

[Motion on amendment A2 lost]

The Chair: We are back on the bill. Are there any further questions, comments, or amendments with respect to this bill? The hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Madam Chair. It’s my pleasure to rise in the House today and further the baby steps taken by the NDP government in amending Bill 6 by proposing an amendment to delete employment standards from the legislation.

It’s been a very disturbing few days in debating Bill 6, seeing the government so unwilling to consider the unique nature of farm operations when trying to impose employment standards. We learn at an early age that square pegs do not easily fit into round holes, and failure to consider the unique work of farming with familiar employment standards amounts to the same thing.

With that in mind, Madam Chair, I would like to table this amendment. I’ll just wait until it is passed out.

The Chair: The amendment will be known as A3.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much. Under notice of amendment to Bill 6, I move that Bill 6, Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act, be amended by striking out sections 1, 2, and 3.

Madam Chair, it’s worthy to note that across Canada all provincial jurisdictions have some level of exemptions to employment standards. Some of these jurisdictions exempt farms and ranches from virtually every employment standard involving minimum wages to be paid, statutory holidays, overtime, hours of work, and vacation pay.

Farming is a seasonal occupation, meaning that there are significant periods of time that don’t adhere to the niceties of a standard 40-hour workweek, where you can put your feet up on the weekend. Calves arrive when they arrive, Madam Chair, regardless of whether or not you’ve put in a 16-hour day. Mother Nature doesn’t take memos about Thanksgiving and Easter either. A person in the farming and ranching sector works . . . [interjections] A person in the farming and ranching sector works when the weather co-operates, not when some law dictates that they have spent enough time on the job for the day.

The Chair: Hon. members, I’m having some difficulty hearing the hon. member across. Thank you.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you, Madam Chair. The attempt to try and make this very unique segment of the economy fit a model for a manufacturing operation or a service business is a recipe for disaster and could backfire in a very real way. The nature of an omnibus bill is to try and package a multitude of changes into one neat pile. A serious flaw in this line of thinking, which the NDP was all too eager to point out when they were on the opposition side of the aisle, I might point out, is that each component of the omnibus legislation could and likely should have its own consideration and debate. Given that there has been zero conversation with farmers and ranchers, that this legislation will apply to, and what looks like zero consideration of what unique employment standards the farming and ranching industries have as their normal operating conditions in comparison to other industries, an omnibus bill isn’t the solution to improving farm safety.

Madam Chair, a worker in a factory probably would not accept that someone in a totally unrelated industry, who had never set foot in that factory, could write up useful and sensible safety legislation without working closely with the factory workers. In fact, it would be extremely foolish. Square pegs do not fit in round holes easily. The solution is not to get the omnibus hammer out to force something not designed to fit into a particular hole; the solution is to create a peg that is shaped to properly fit.

As such, the amendment is to separate employment standards from Bill 6 until such time as the unique industry is better understood by the people who intend to pass this legislation and the farmers and ranchers of Alberta have been able to have their say so that the best result for all Albertans is achieved.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other speakers to amendment A3?

Some Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment A3 lost]

The Chair: Back on the main bill. Are there any questions, comments, or amendments with respect to the bill? Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I, too, would like to rise and move an amendment for consideration because we're trying to make improvements to this piece of legislation here. With that, I'd like to move an amendment, and I have the required copies here.

The Chair: This will be known as amendment A4.

Go ahead, hon. member.

12:20

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Madam Chair. Notice of amendment to Bill 6: I move that Bill 6, Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act, be amended by striking out section 4. It's very brief.

While the introduction of omnibus legislation from the NDP, who rallied against such introductions when they were in opposition, is not necessarily a surprise to this Chamber, this place, there is one component of this omnibus package that requires extra-special attention. That, of course, is section 4, particularly 4(2)(e), which reads:

This Act does not apply to . . .

- (e) employees employed on a farm or ranch whose employment is directly related to
 - (i) the . . . production of eggs, milk, grain, seeds, fruit, vegetables, honey, livestock . . . animals within the meaning of the Livestock Industry Diversification Act, poultry or bees, or
 - (ii) any other primary agricultural operation specified in the regulations under the Employment Standards Code
 or to their employer while the employer is acting in the capacity of their employer.

Madam Chair, including the Labour Relations Code in this omnibus legislation is a problem; therefore, this amendment is worth the consideration of this House.

There is so much packed into this bill. It is like a Gordian knot. The more you pick up on one piece, the more the whole thing becomes unmanageable, somewhat like a Rubik's cube. At some point someone has to act like Alexander the Great and simply take a sword to the whole thing and try and get it unraveled. We've tried to put a sword through this thing, and the employment code section

is one thing. There may be something else about the employment section that this government really thinks essential, but they did not show us what it is. It's not the first weak argument followed by a whipped vote that we've seen in this House over the last month.

Making the inference that they're especially attached to the employment standards section, which they assure us is meaningless, we will attempt again to simplify this bill or reduce complication, actually focus in a little bit on safety instead of old union battles by striking out section 4. By trying to remove the reference to the Labour Relations Code, we are trying to help government keep their legislation straight and clear. With all the rallies and outcry over this bill never once have we heard anyone say that farm safety is not a concern. By the same token, never once have we heard that farm workers need to unionize. So why are these two separate and unrelated issues tied up in this bill?

One would think, Madam Chair, that in removing the exemption for farm workers from the Labour Relations Code, as this bill does in section 4, there has been a loud and resounding call for the right to unionize and participate in collective bargaining, that prompted the NDP to include this change. If such a call has been made, we haven't heard it. With all of the coverage on Bill 6, in print media, social media, and every other form of communication currently known, if this was such a major issue, surely there should have been coverage from one of these sources. If so many people were demanding the ability to have unions and collective bargaining on farms, there are friendly newspapers who would love to splash headlines all over the country about how unions are needed in Alberta. Yet there's been barely a whimper, if anything at all.

We saw from a consultation placard that the government was asking people if there is a time of the year when a strike would be too disruptive. I would ask the government: do any of you think that farm workers should be able to strike at any time of the year? Why would this government even consider including the Labour Relations Code in this legislation, which opens the door to all sorts of job actions, including strikes and work-to-rule provisions, that would risk valuable crops and the welfare of animals?

Madam Chair, I do not see any place in this legislation that is appealable. The government does not need to remove the exemption for farms under the Labour Relations Code. The relations between farmers and their employees have not generated sweeping calls to bring unions onto Alberta farms. The workers aren't just strangers that show up for a few hours a day. These workers are people passionate about farming and everything good that comes from that. They sometimes are active participants in the actual family farm activities and even form strong and lasting bonds with the people they work with and for. The relationship is not one of continual discontent and strife.

This makes me wonder, Madam Chair, as to why the government thinks it is necessary to put a labour relations component into Bill 6. If there had been long-standing tension between these farm workers and the families that employ them, this may make more sense, yet it seems that this is just another ideological policy, that makes an already vulnerable industry face additional costs and burden. Honestly, the introduction of a carbon tax, the locomotive fuel tax, higher minimum wages, all are driving prices higher on absolutely everything. More cost and administration are the last things that farmers and ranchers need by having to comply with extensive labour relation regulations in this code.

Madam Chair, Alberta isn't the embarrassing cousin that the hon. Premier says it is to impress her friends in eastern Canada and around the globe. There doesn't need to be the same ill-considered rush to force onerous labour relations onto every industry, especially one that doesn't seem to need this type of representation. No matter how much the government wants to believe it, Alberta

does not need ideological fixes of this type. Alberta does not need more collective bargaining, unions, interference, and/or more hassles for farmers or individual agricultural producers.

Albertans choose to farm for a variety of reasons, and they may be personal reasons. They want to bring goods and services of the highest quality and value to their neighbours, their friends, and, indeed, to the market itself. They don't need additional barriers and burdens on these ranches and farms. These are already staggering and buckling under the constant pressure of more and more red tape and bureaucracy. They want real solutions to real-world problems, and they are not getting it from a government that spends its time thinking up ways to destroy traditions, business operations, and lifestyle choices of many Albertan farmers and ranchers. Alberta farm workers aren't asking for unions and collective bargaining, and until such time as there is a clear indication from farm workers that such legislation is required, it's a mistake for this government to include it, making this omnibus bill more unwieldy.

The Chair: Any further speakers to amendment A4?

Some Hon. Members: Question.

The Chair: The question has been called.

[Motion on amendment A4 lost]

The Chair: On the main bill, the hon. Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. It's nice to see that it only takes a few thousand loud voices to get this government to actually stop and think about what their legislation says and to make some attempt to fix it. Since the stated objective of the Wildrose opposition is to help ensure that only the best laws are enacted to help Albertans, we take this role very seriously. With that in mind, Madam Chair, I would like to table this next amendment.

The Chair: This will be amendment A5.

Mr. Hanson: Notice of amendment for Bill 6: I move that Bill 6, Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act, be amended in section 1 as follows: (a) by striking out subsection (2) and substituting the following:

(2) Section 2(4) is amended by adding "with 5 or fewer employers" after "farm or ranch."

And (b) by striking out subsection (3).

This amendment reassures family farmers that whatever this government ends up deciding to implement for bigger corporate farms, they will have the status quo and exemptions like other provinces. With five or fewer employees they will maintain the status quo and keep their exemption from the Employment Standards Code. As we all know, for a century there have been all kinds of employment standards changes, but farms have been usually excluded from these laws. This is not an oversight. This reflects a fact that farms are unique. Partly it is the fact that workers often are those who live there; partly it is the nature of the work. When the rains are coming and the harvest needs to get in, you don't punch out at 8 p.m. When the cows are calving in the middle of the night, you don't just turn lights off and go to bed.

Now, of course, we don't know what rules apply because they haven't set the standards yet. But that's the problem. Farmers don't trust this government, full of brand new MLAs, with virtually no agricultural background but plenty of nonagricultural labour activism background, to know how to get this right. I had occasion, Madam Chair, to check the various education and employment

backgrounds of our esteemed NDP MLAs. As I understand it, virtually none of them have been part of or have run a farming operation. It shows in the lack of understanding of employment standards that could or should be included in legislation for small farms. This makes it harder, especially as new MLAs, to give some push-back when a select few in the Premier's office or even outside the Premier's office insist that something needs to be included in the bill, and: don't worry, we'll sort it out later.

12:30

Farm work is not like other work. Proof of that is that across the country there are partial or full exemptions for farm workers in most of the employment standards categories. This includes minimum wages, stat holidays, overtime, hours of work, and vacation pay. In fact, New Brunswick, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba have partial exemptions in every category for farm workers. In Ontario farm workers are exempt from every category except for some of the provisions that apply to young workers. So what exactly is the intention in having this section here? Why, if Ontario is willing to exempt farming from the kinds of standards we would expect in a factory or other setting, is this government sticking this section into the omnibus bill?

These exemptions recognize that a family farm or ranch is a business operation unlike many others. The workers often live right where they work and work where they live. There is no 20-minute commute in the car to get to the office. The office is commonly a combination of the dining-room table, with the computer somewhere else in the house. Mornings begin early, and nights run late, especially at critical times in the farming business cycle. Responsibilities begin at a very young age, and everyone has a role to play.

The government seems to have got the sense of this in its amendment, but what it keeps refusing to acknowledge is the problem in insisting that the minute a family farm hires a single person, it is suddenly just like any other workplace. There are large, corporate farms, but that is not the norm. There are lots of smaller farms, and they usually have to hire a couple of people. They are still family farms. No farmer wants to see their family, friends, or employees hurt. It's equally true that in an effort to make this industry safer, simply legislating employment standards that apply to every industry will not meet the needs of small farms. It will instead serve to drive them into the ground under a sea of red tape and expense.

This is a common-sense amendment that recognizes the importance of safety while putting that in the context of small farms. There's tremendous wisdom in that. That is why I urge you to consider the unique needs of small farms when voting for this amendment.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any other speakers to amendment A5?

Seeing none, we'll call the question.

[Motion on amendment A5 lost]

The Chair: Back on the bill. Any further comments, questions, or amendments with respect to Bill 6?

Mr. Fraser: Madam Chair, I have an amendment to Bill 6.

The Chair: This is amendment A6.

Go ahead, hon. member.

Mr. Fraser: Thank you, Madam Chair. I move that Bill 6, Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act, be amended by adding the following after section 10:

Review of amendments by committee

- 11(1) A committee of the Legislative Assembly must begin a comprehensive review of the amendments made by this Act
- (a) within one year after all provisions of this Act have come into force, and
 - (b) thereafter, every 3 years after the date on which the previous committee submits its report under subsection (2).
- (2) A committee must submit a final report to the Legislative Assembly within 6 months after beginning a review under subsection (1).
- (3) The report of a committee may include the committee's recommendations for any further amendments to the legislation amended by this Act or for changes to any related regulations.

Madam Chair, I have had a few different jobs in my past, but one that kind of relates is, obviously, my job as an advanced care paramedic. You can imagine that all the calls that I go to are very important calls. For those people, in that time of crisis or need it is important for them and they need to know that the person coming into their home to care for their loved one can be trusted. Part of building that trust is how you present yourself, how you approach the patient. I can't think of any other patients that are probably looked at as more precious, not more so than any other patient but when it comes to adolescents, children.

You can imagine that when you go to treat a child, the child may not be able to speak and may be having a hard time trying to understand what's going on. They're injured. Their parents are there, and you can imagine that they're very protective. As you walk through the treatment plan, not only do you have to engage the child in a way that the child can understand, that the child can relate to, but you also have to explain the procedures that you're going to go through with the parents. As you do that, what it does is it starts to build trust – right? – which is the main key. If you step in and you perform a treatment without going through all of that, you can lose the trust, and once you lose the trust, even though your intent is to help, you can no longer treat that patient in the most effective way.

In fact, this is what we've seen here. The Premier, admittedly with strong leadership, has admitted that she made a mistake and the caucus and the cabinet, that the way it came out was a mistake. The first communication: what it did was it set farmers and ranchers and our farming community on their heels, and to add anything further to that – they were already protective.

Now, I remember a time as a paramedic, with the hon. Premier and the Government House Leader, when we transitioned from the city of Calgary to Alberta Health Services. This was unknown for us, and we had a lot of concerns. In fact, at the time, believe it or not, I was the president of the Calgary paramedic union, CUPE 3421. So I understand the labour movement. I do believe in the labour movement, but I also believe in responsibility and sustainability for the long term because it's not just about one particular group; it's about everybody in this province. You know, as we do that, as leaders we're representing everybody, not just one specific group.

I just remember having meetings back then with the hon. Premier and the Government House Leader and the hon. Health minister because they were concerned about what the government was doing at the time. They weren't consulting with us. They were pushing us into a position where we didn't want to go, and our recommendation, surprisingly enough, was: "Hold off. Wait a minute. It's okay if you want to fund emergency medical services, but allow the cities to own and operate it so that you could get a handle on it." Quite often, when you think of corporate takeovers,

that's what happens. They wait. They don't change anything immediately. They just operate it as it was so that they can get a feel for the landscape.

There's an opportunity, through this amendment short and sweet, a way to earn back some of the trust by going back in after you've done your regulations, after you've done this extensive consultation, to review it, to make sure that parts of it, after the consultation, will be amended.

This is a gesture of goodwill, not only to the thousands of farmers – and quite honestly, in all the protests that I've seen, I've never seen anything as big as this one in my time in government or on this side of the House. I've never seen the passion and the tears, and I can tell you, coming from a farming community, my father's farming community – I grew up in the city – that, man, they are super angry. They are super angry. I have never heard my dad that angry on the phone in a long time. He's a quiet, reasonable guy. He is a patient man. He was a small-business owner for over 40 years. You know, if I was half of the man that he is, well, maybe I'd be the Premier. I don't know. He's just wise, and when he gets mad, then I know there's a problem, and I knew it when I was a kid.

The thing is that that could be easily resolved by making some good gestures moving forward, and this is one simple piece: go in; review it after a while.

I thank the members for listening. Please vote.

The Chair: The hon. minister of economic development.

12:40

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Madam Chair, and I thank the hon. Member for Calgary-South East for this amendment. I just want to speak to it briefly. First and foremost, I have no issues with the spirit of this amendment and what it's proposing, to come back to a legislative committee, once the act has been in place for some time, to review it, to make sure that it stays current and that all members of the House have an opportunity to provide that kind of feedback on an ongoing basis. For that, I commend him, for his idea and, like I said, for the spirit of this.

The challenge that I have, Madam Chair, is that regulations will still be in the process of being developed, again, in consultation with the farming and ranching community next year, and the challenge with this amendment is that the committee would begin next year while the regulations are still being developed. With that, you know, I have concerns, because we need to get the regulations in place to see how they're operating before we can review all of this in a comprehensive package.

Like I said, I appreciate the amendment, but for that reason, Madam Chair, I cannot support this amendment. Thank you.

The Chair: Any other speakers?

Mr. Fraser: Madam Chair, in section 11(1)(a) it says, "after all provisions of this Act have come into force." The regulations at that point wouldn't have come into force. Essentially, it allows them to make the regulations, put them into force, and then it's one year after that. So that explains that, and if there's wording to amend that bill, let's amend it and make it so.

The Chair: Any other speakers to amendment A6?

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you to the member. My interpretation – although I am not a lawyer, I still have concerns. We're talking about: a legislative committee "must begin a comprehensive review of the amendments made by this Act," which is what we're debating right now in this House. I appreciate 11(1)(a), "within one year after all provisions of this Act have come

into force"; however, I still have concerns on how this could be interpreted.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The Chair: Any other speakers to this amendment?

Seeing none, I'll call the vote.

[Motion on amendment A6 lost]

The Chair: We're back on the bill. The hon. Minister of Health.

Ms Hoffman: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I just wanted to take a moment to talk about sort of where I was about five years ago. When I had first been elected to the Edmonton public school board, one of my colleagues brought forward the idea that we create a policy around ensuring safe, respectful, inclusive work and learning environments for staff, students, and families who were LGBTQ. At the time we received tremendous push-back. I have to say that some of the phone calls I received, some of the e-mails I received made me feel very unsafe and very disrespected. But it was the right thing to do. I know that there is great concern about what this is going to mean among some members of the farming community, but I know that the right thing to do is to make sure that the protection is in place to ensure safety for vulnerable workers.

I just want to say that I am so proud to be part of an Assembly that just voted unanimously, last week, to provide protections by adding gender expression and gender identity to our discrimination rights. I don't think that we would have been in a position five years ago to have the courage to do that as a unanimous Assembly. I know that it's efforts that sometimes create great discomfort that actually move us far ahead as a society, and I think that this is going to be one of those bills. I think that five years from now we'll be able to look at some of the changes that we've done in partnership with farm workers, with farm owners, with ranch owners, with ranch employees, and I think that we're going to be really proud of what we've accomplished. There are times of great tension and disruption, but I know in my heart of hearts that we're doing the right thing here by providing the very basic protections to the most vulnerable, Madam Chair.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster.

Dr. Starke: Well, thank you, Madam Chair. I have an amendment to move, and I'll hand it to the pages.

I'll read the amendment into the record and will give a little bit of time for it to be distributed, but I'll preface my comments with a few remarks.

Based on the past voting record of the government on other amendments, amendments that I think were reasonable, amendments that I felt were sincere efforts at improving this legislation, this desperately flawed legislation, amendments that I thought would provide some opportunity for the government to provide at least some degree of – I don't want to use the word "comfort" because I don't think we can comfort rural Alberta at this point with this. With the communications that I've been receiving, at least over the last couple of weeks, Madam Chair, I think what we should all anticipate, if this legislation goes ahead, is a large number of farmers leaving the farm. That will be the effect of this legislation that you're patting yourselves on the back for. This legislation will result in a lot of farmers saying: "That's it. They've pushed me off the farm." If that was your goal, well, congratulations. Good work.

There are a lot of farms in this province that are currently owned and operated by people in their 50s or their 60s or their 70s. These

are folks that are perhaps looking at a time when they're going to leave farming, and this will be the straw that breaks the camel's back, this requirement for increased intrusion into the lives of an independent, proud people that don't want government interference in what they do. But that is the NDP way. The NDP way is to intervene, to interfere, and to have a we-know-better attitude from central government. It is very frustrating because one of the things that I learned very early on was that farm people can teach you a lot. I said that in my speech at second reading.

One of the most consistent concerns that has been brought up in the consultations is addressed by this amendment, and I'll just read it into the record. I move that Bill 6, the Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act, be amended as follows. In part A section 3 is struck out, and the following is substituted:

3 This Part comes into force on January 1 of the year following notification by the Minister to the Assembly that public consultation has been completed on this Part.

In part B subsection (3) in section 4 is struck out, and the following is substituted:

(3) This section comes into force on January 1 of the year following notification by the Minister to the Assembly that public consultation has been completed on this section.

In part C section 8 is struck out, and the following is substituted:

8 This Part comes into force on January 1 of the year following the Minister notifying the Assembly that public consultation has been completed on proposed regulations under the Occupational Health and Safety Act referenced in this Part.

In part D section 10 is struck out, and the following is substituted:

10 This Part comes into force on January 1, 2017.

Madam Chair, these four provisions are in this amendment to provide the government with the opportunity to address a concern that came up repeatedly. One of the main causes of anger amongst Alberta farmers, ranchers, and rural Albertans is that they were not consulted and that not only is this legislation going to be passed in the next 24 hours and the first aspects of it are going to be coming into effect in 22 days but that the consultation that has been promised will happen after the legislation is enacted, after the legislation is put into place. After all of the misinformation, after all of the confusion that has been caused by this government about this piece of legislation, after the way it has been clearly interpreted by farmers and ranchers, not incorrectly, that this legislation threatens the farming and ranching way of life in this province, this government expects to be trusted. Well, I will tell you something: good luck with that one. Whatever else you may think about farmers, farmers aren't stupid.

Ladies and gentlemen, if you want to save some face, if you want to rebuild your tattered reputation with rural Alberta, if you want to have any opportunity whatsoever of regaining the confidence of those that live on the land, those that feed you, then I would strongly suggest that you look at this amendment.

What it does, essentially, in the first three parts is state that the legislation will not come into effect until January 1 of the year, following the completion of consultations, after you've talked to farmers, after you've done your consultation process, not before. Show them some respect. Section D moves back the coming-into-effect date to January 1, 2017, and that is designed that way because I know that the Workers' Compensation Board part of this, which is, ostensibly, the real reason that you've put this into place, will come into effect not in 23 days but in one year and 23 days.

12:50

Madam Chair, I do not think that there is anything that this government at this point can do to fully regain the trust of Albertans. They can't regain the trust of rural Albertans, for sure, and I can tell you that this is not an urban-rural split issue because

urban Alberta supports the farmers in this, too. They know where their food comes from. Although I realized that it was probably a quixotic quest to suggest that we could pass amendments that would actually help with this piece of legislation, that we could pass amendments tonight with the co-operation of a government caucus that would listen carefully and consider carefully each and every amendment before they simply voted them down to participate like sheep – although I would proffer up to you that they understand very little about sheep or any other farm animal – I will tell you that it is disappointing, to say the least, that these reasonable amendments, these amendments that would have improved these pieces of legislation, were not given fuller consideration. I give the Minister of Economic Development and Trade credit that he at least addressed the last amendment and indicated why he couldn't accept it although, quite frankly, I think that the explanation from my hon. friend was certainly adequate. Nonetheless, we have this last amendment, this last-ditch attempt before democracy is cut off, to try to improve this bill one last time.

Albertans have been watching these proceedings. The ratings for the Assembly Online channel have skyrocketed. If that was your goal, well, that has been accomplished.

Mr. Cooper: They're selling ads soon.

Dr. Starke: They're selling ads? Fantastic.

Madam Chair, that's perhaps a good thing. This has resulted in Albertans becoming engaged in their democracy, and that is a good thing. But I will tell you that there are many Albertans that are not impressed with their newly minted government. There are many Albertans that are indeed very disappointed that this government, that came in with so much promise, with so much potential, and with so much willingness and desire to do things differently – well, quite frankly, I recognize these patterns. I recognize these patterns because I was part of these patterns: the summary dismissing of good amendments just simply because, well, the opposition is the opposition, and we just don't listen to them. I know now that some of that was a mistake, a big mistake.

But even then, Madam Chair, we did accept reasonable amendments from the opposition. Not nearly as many as we should have, but we did accept reasonable amendments. Those amendments, I believe, improved legislation that we had. This piece of legislation can be improved by pushing back the coming-into-force date. That is what this amendment asks for. I urge the government to consider supporting this particular amendment, as I know that members on this side of the House will.

Thank you.

The Chair: The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Madam Chair. I rise in support of the amendment. The Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster talked about regaining the trust of rural Alberta. One thing that we notice is that you have made a mark. I would say that it was very telling at the meeting in Athabasca today that a third-generation NDP man, who had worked on the campaign for the Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater, stood up at that meeting and called the member out, saying: "You're breaking your promise. You said to us that you would listen to your constituents, and now you're breaking your promise." You have made your mark, and you will see how it all works out. That third-generation NDPer apologized to all Alberta farmers for this government. He apologized for this NDP government, and I suspect that he might be revoking his membership.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. McIver: You know what, Madam Chair? This is an amazing olive branch that my esteemed colleague has given to the government, a chance to retain a little . . .

Mr. Cooper: A peace offering to rural Alberta.

Mr. McIver: A peace offering. Really, a chance to retain a little bit of credibility with rural Alberta.

You know, you can laugh at us all you want. You can ignore us. You've got the majority. But you know who's got the hammer? Albertans. And Albertans are not pleased with Bill 6. When Albertans get a chance, they'll wield the hammer. You know what that looks like? It looks like May 5, only you won't enjoy it so much next time they wield the hammer. You know, when you poke them in the eye that much, they notice that. They tend to notice when they are ignored.

You know what? The amendment is incredibly reasonable. My colleague, actually, with this amendment is making the assumption that the government is going to keep part of their promise, that they're going to talk to farmers and ranchers before they put this in action, give them a reasonable amount of time to adjust, and then do it. You know, I didn't think there was any way, with what's gone on so far, that the government could retain any shred of a chance to have faith from the rural community and Albertans. This won't repair all the damage that the government has done to itself in the last week or two, but it will probably repair some of it. What it says, if you do this, is that you will take some time, talk to farmers and ranchers. Even if you don't – I sincerely hope you do – you'll give them some time to adjust.

They've been ranching, they've been farming, they've been running their businesses, and they've been feeding their families on farms, doing it safely and credibly and in a good way for over a hundred years. They deserve some respect. What this says is: give them the respect, give them the dignity if you're going to make changes that they have not approved. Lord knows, you shouldn't make the changes unless they approve them. But it at least gives you a shred of credibility with them. When they think about what's happened here, they might say: we hate what you've done, but we're going to have a chance to adjust before the cement goes hard on the law, before the regulations come into place, before it's all over.

This really is the opportunity that you have – the last opportunity, it seems – to make that happen because of the time allocation that you have put on to cut off debate on something that is so very important to all of Alberta and extremely important to rural Alberta. Boy, I'll tell you what. If I were you and I had a chance to save a little bit of credibility with the very people that you work for, that we all work for – I know they're my boss, they're our caucus's boss, and they're the boss of all of us, the people of Alberta.

You know, respect matters. I've heard members from the government side talk about respect and dignity of Alberta workers and Alberta citizens. I'll tell you that in the Bill 6 debate, the way Bill 6 has been rammed through, the way farmers and ranchers up till now have been ignored, a little dose of respect at the back end of this thing would go a long way and would be a very positive development at this point, certainly one that I think even opposition members would appreciate if the government could see their way clear to doing this.

That's what it comes down to, folks. We're down to the bitter end, the last chance to do the right thing for Albertans, Alberta families, Alberta farmers, Alberta ranchers. I sincerely hope that the members on all sides of the House – and I guess I'm particularly talking to members on the government side – can find their way clear to supporting a very reasonable amendment, which is indeed

an olive branch offered by my esteemed colleague from Vermilion-Lloydminster.

1:00

The Chair: The hon. minister of economic affairs.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much. I'll keep my comments brief. I know opposition members have other comments. I just wanted to respond to the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster. I wanted to thank him for this amendment that he's tabled and his colleague, the leader of the third party, for speaking to this.

A couple of things I just want to clarify. First of all, again, this is something where I agree with the spirit of what this is trying to do. I have been to numerous public meetings over the last few days engaging with farmers and ranchers, and I can tell this Assembly that this amendment is not necessary, Madam Chair, because our government has committed to engage in a province-wide consultation that will take anywhere between 12 to 18 months. The purpose of it is to develop the regulations with the very experts, farmers and ranchers. We're going to be going through numerous vehicles, or ways, of engaging with the public to ensure that every Albertan who wants to give their feedback and explain their situation will have the opportunity through a variety of tools. This consultation will take place not just before we draft the regulations, but once they are drafted, we will go back out and ensure that we've correctly captured the carve-outs or the caveats. We want to respect the way of life that farmers and ranchers have built. It's not just a job; it is a way of life. They have very unique working circumstances, and we want to respect that.

Again, I do appreciate the hon. member's intention with this amendment, but the purpose of this bill in coming forward with WCB protections as of January 1 is that Alberta is the only province that doesn't offer paid farm workers that protection. I acknowledge that there are some farmers throughout the province who go above and beyond, who have offered private insurance, who take care of their workers. We recognize that safety is a primary concern for all farmers and ranchers. However, there are examples throughout the province of where there are paid farm workers who do not have coverage, and this bill will ensure that they have that coverage starting on January 1. But we are going to work with the farming and ranching community to make sure that we get our regulations correct.

One last point to what the leader of the third party said. He said that Albertans have said that they do not want this bill. Some Albertans are displeased with this bill, Madam Chair, but no one in this Chamber exclusively speaks for all Albertans. There are Albertans who have been asking for this, who are in favour of this. There are farm workers that have been asking for protections. Quite frankly, it's time that Alberta joins the rest of our country and ensures that paid farm workers have those basic protections.

For that reason, Madam Chair, I will not be supporting this amendment.

The Chair: Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Madam Chair. As we wind down in the stifling pressure of closure, I just want to say one very brief thing. What this amendment does is that it allows the government to walk the talk, to actually have words on paper that require them to do what they say. If the last six or seven months have taught us anything about this government, it's that we've seen a pattern of saying one thing and doing another, of misinformation, of actions and behaviours that don't build trust. What my hon. colleague has proposed is putting down in the legislation that the consultation will actually be meaningful, that they will in fact respect farmers and

ranchers clear across this province, because they don't believe that that will happen.

If the government wants to walk the talk, if they want to put teeth into the words that they say, if they want to communicate in such a manner that there is weight behind their words, this is the last opportunity to do that. I strongly encourage the government to think about exactly what this means and how they can put some meaning behind what they say that they will do and reassure farmers and ranchers that they will listen. That's exactly what the amendment does, and I encourage all members to support it.

The Chair: Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Madam Chair. Normally I rise in this Assembly to speak for the people of Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre, and in a few minutes I will speak on their behalf with the rest of my colleagues and proudly vote against this in Committee of the Whole. But I just briefly want to speak on behalf of the thousands of constituents that are reaching out to me and my colleagues from the rural Alberta ridings of these NDP MLAs. Thousands of them are reaching out to us right now, asking us to tell their representative to stand up and represent them. Stand up for them. That's what they were sent to this House to do, just like the rest of us. Today I'm going to stand up, and I'm going to represent the people of Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre. I can assure you that the people where I live are going to remember that I stood up here today for them, and they're going to remember that these rural MLAs did not stand up for their constituents today.

Madam Chair, that shouldn't matter. There is going to be a terrible political consequence to this. There is absolutely no doubt about it. Everybody who has been back home this weekend knows that the rural MLAs in the NDP caucus are in serious trouble, but that should not be what makes the decision for them. They should make the decision because to come to this Assembly here is a great honour. To represent all your constituents is a great honour, and they should be taking that seriously. They should be taking that responsibly. Every one of them on this other side of this Assembly, through you, Madam Chair, knows what their constituents have asked them.

There is going to be trouble along the way, where you're going to have a tough time deciding what to do in this job. There's no doubt about it. You're going to have a tough time understanding what your constituents want. On this issue that is not the case. There is no doubt. The overwhelming number of constituents, of farmers and ranchers, are making it clear that this bill is unacceptable. They have stood inside town halls. The minister has stood there and has heard without a doubt that the message is: kill Bill 6. But these NDP MLAs from rural Alberta, that represent thousands of farmers, are about to stand up and vote with the government against their own constituents. That is an embarrassment, and they should be ashamed of it.

I sure hope they get the courage to stand up and vote for their constituents. I know that I'm going to, I know that my colleagues in the Official Opposition are, and I know my colleagues in the third party are. That is the right thing to do. Again, reach for the courage. Ignore your whip. Stand up for your constituents. Do what you were elected for.

Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

Mr. McIver: Madam Chair, you know, I heard the minister talk about that nobody speaks exclusively for all the farmers and ranchers, and he's right. But you know what? There were 2,000 of them on the doorstep here. I know that people tried to get rallies in support of Bill 6, and they weren't there.

At some point democracy actually has to be represented. There is no doubt. I am sure there are a few people that disagree with our position, that agree with Bill 6, but for every one of those, it's pretty obvious there are hundreds or thousands that are against Bill 6. Why? Because we've heard them. We've gotten e-mails, unbelievable e-mails, from all over the province, phone calls. We've had people here by the thousands protesting. We've had your ministers being shouted down. I give them credit for talking to them, but sometimes you have to let something come into your head and not bounce off the outside of it if you want to stick around here. I know you could do it. Democracy matters. Representing people matters.

You know what? You're not messing with somebody's hobby. You're messing with their lives. You're messing with the very people and families that feed all of us in one of the industries that so far should have a bright future. You know what? The government has gone to the trouble to trash out the coal industry and the oil and gas industry and to tax everything that moves, but there is one industry that ought to stick around. It ought to include the family farms. You ought to let it happen, and you ought to let them participate when you do it. Bill 6 flies in the face of every ounce and every bit of that. It's wrong. It's wrong.

The Chair: Are you speaking to the amendment?

1:10

Mr. McIver: I am speaking to the amendment.

The amendment gives you a chance to actually say that you're going to listen to some of those farmers and ranchers. Frankly, it's the last chance. You know, again, I talked to some members of the government side, and they said: well, how did you guys stick around for 44 years? Well, we didn't get voted in once; it was a bunch of times. But I'll tell you what. Our government, that stuck around for 44 years, was imperfect, folks. You know that. We know that. But you know how we stuck around? When something really bad and something really negative was going to happen, out of everybody's sight, in caucus, people got a hold of the Premier of the day and said: "No, Premier. We're not doing that because our constituents said that that's not what they want." And the government survived, and Alberta was better, and Albertans' interests were represented.

That is the way that democracy is designed to run, that's the way democracy ought to run, and that's the way any government with self-respect ought to represent the people that voted for them, to bring them here. That is what we're asking you to do. That's certainly what people on this side of the House have done. Our party, the other opposition parties have listened to those people, and the message has been crystal clear.

You know what? There are going to be lots of issues over the next three and a half years that can be debated with areas of grey, but, man, if there was ever a black-and-white issue with the vast majority of Albertans, more so the vast majority of Albertans that are directly affected by Bill 6 – boy – while they're not a hundred per cent of one mind, there's not much doubt that a vast majority of them are in agreement that this is bad medicine. It's bad for the future of Alberta. It's bad for our food supply. It's tough on some really nice people – some really nice people – people that you've got in tears, people that are going to lose sleep for the next year or two. You know what? You are killing them. You are killing them.

I'll tell you what. One of the things that I've heard and that I sincerely hope isn't true is that there's going to be bad news, personal bad news, coming out of the farm and ranch community because of the stress that Bill 6 is putting on them. You may see

that bad news come out tonight or you may see it next month or you may see it the month after, but when you do – boy, oh boy – I wouldn't want to be thinking about the decision that I made today if you go ahead and plow ahead with Bill 6 without actually taking the time to talk to farmers and ranchers before you do it.

You know what, folks? This is the last minute of overtime because while we will have the third reading, after the time allocation you've put on it, it's too late for amendments, folks. This is your last chance to do a shred of the right thing before . . .

The Chair: I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, the leader of the third party, but pursuant to Government Motion 27, agreed to on December 9, 2015, which states that after one hour of debate all questions must be decided to conclude debate on Bill 6, Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act, I must now put the following questions to conclude debate.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on amendment A7 lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 1:14 a.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Hunter	Pitt
Barnes	Loewen	Schneider
Cooper	MacIntyre	Smith
Cyr	McIver	Starke
Drysdale	Nixon	Strankman
Fildebrandt	Orr	van Dijken
Fraser	Panda	Yao
Hanson		

Against the motion:

Babcock	Gray	Notley
Bilous	Hoffman	Piquette
Carlier	Horne	Renaud
Carson	Kazim	Sabir
Connolly	Littlewood	Schmidt
Coolahan	Loyola	Schreiner
Cortes-Vargas	Luff	Shepherd
Dach	Malkinson	Sucha
Dang	McCuaig-Boyd	Sweet
Drever	McKitrick	Turner
Eggen	Miller	Westhead
Feehan	Miranda	Woollard
Fitzpatrick	Nielsen	

Totals:	For – 22	Against – 38
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[Motion on amendment A7 lost]

[The remaining clauses of Bill 6 agreed to]

[Title and preamble agreed to]

The Chair: Shall the bill be reported? Are you agreed?

[The voice vote indicated that the request to report Bill 6 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 1:19 a.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the committee divided]

[Ms Jabbour in the chair]

For the motion:

Babcock	Gray	Notley
Bilous	Hoffman	Piquette
Carlier	Horne	Renaud
Carson	Kazim	Sabir
Connolly	Littlewood	Schmidt
Coolahan	Loyola	Schreiner
Cortes-Vargas	Luff	Shepherd
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Cyr	McIver	Starke
Drysdale	Nixon	Strankman
Fildebrandt	Orr	van Dijken
Fraser	Panda	Yao
Hanson		

Totals: For – 38 Against – 22

[Request to report Bill 6 carried]

Mr. Bilous: Madam Chair, I move that we rise and report.

[Motion carried]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Seeing that the hour is late, I ask for unanimous consent to move to one-minute bells for the duration of this evening.

[Unanimous consent granted]

Ms Woollard: Madam Speaker, the Committee of the Whole has had under consideration a certain bill. The committee reports the following bill with some amendments: Bill 6. I wish to table copies of all amendments considered by the Committee of the Whole on this date for the official records of the Assembly.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the Assembly concur in the report?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: Opposed? So ordered.
The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Bilous: Thank you very much, Madam Speaker. A little drowsy after a very long week that all members shared, I move that we adjourn the House until 9 a.m. on Thursday.

[Motion carried; the Assembly adjourned at 1:25 a.m. on Thursday to 9 a.m.]

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Province of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
First Session

Alberta Hansard

Thursday morning, December 10, 2015

Day 32

The Honourable Robert E. Wanner, Speaker

Legislative Assembly of Alberta
The 29th Legislature

First Session

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Jabbour, Deborah C., Peace River (ND), Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees
Feehan, Richard, Edmonton-Rutherford (ND), Deputy Chair of Committees

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Carson, Jonathon, Edmonton-Meadowlark (ND)	Miranda, Ricardo, Calgary-Cross (ND)
Ceci, Hon. Joe, Calgary-Fort (ND)	Nielsen, Christian E., Edmonton-Decore (ND)
Clark, Greg, Calgary-Elbow (AP)	Nixon, Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (W), Official Opposition Whip
Connolly, Michael R.D., Calgary-Hawkwood (ND)	Notley, Hon. Rachel, Edmonton-Strathcona (ND), Premier
Coolahan, Craig, Calgary-Klein (ND)	Orr, Ronald, Lacombe-Ponoka (W)
Cooper, Nathan, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (W), Official Opposition House Leader	Panda, Prasad, Calgary-Foothills (W)
Cortes-Vargas, Estefania, Strathcona-Sherwood Park (ND)	Payne, Brandy, Calgary-Acadia (ND)
Cyr, Scott J., Bonnyville-Cold Lake (W), Official Opposition Deputy Whip	Phillips, Hon. Shannon, Lethbridge-West (ND), Deputy Government House Leader
Dach, Lorne, Edmonton-McClung (ND)	Piquette, Colin, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater (ND)
Dang, Thomas, Edmonton-South West (ND)	Pitt, Angela D., Airdrie (W)
Drever, Deborah, Calgary-Bow (Ind)	Renaud, Marie F., St. Albert (ND)
Drysdale, Wayne, Grande Prairie-Wapiti (PC), Progressive Conservative Opposition Whip	Rodney, Dave, Calgary-Lougheed (PC)
Eggen, Hon. David, Edmonton-Calder (ND)	Rosendahl, Eric, West Yellowhead (ND)
Ellis, Mike, Calgary-West (PC)	Sabir, Hon. Irfan, Calgary-McCall (ND)
Fildebrandt, Derek Gerhard, Strathmore-Brooks (W)	Schmidt, Marlin, Edmonton-Gold Bar (ND), Government Whip
Fitzpatrick, Maria M., Lethbridge-East (ND)	Schneider, David A., Little Bow (W)
Fraser, Rick, Calgary-South East (PC)	Schreiner, Kim, Red Deer-North (ND)
Ganley, Hon. Kathleen T., Calgary-Buffalo (ND)	Shepherd, David, Edmonton-Centre (ND)
Goehring, Nicole, Edmonton-Castle Downs (ND)	Sigurdson, Hon. Lori, Edmonton-Riverview (ND)
Gotfried, Richard, Calgary-Fish Creek (PC)	Smith, Mark W., Drayton Valley-Devon (W)
Gray, Christina, Edmonton-Mill Woods (ND)	Starke, Dr. Richard, Vermilion-Lloydminster (PC), Progressive Conservative Opposition House Leader
Hanson, David B., Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills (W), Official Opposition Deputy House Leader	Stier, Pat, Livingstone-Macleod (W)
Hinkley, Bruce, Wetaskiwin-Camrose (ND)	Strankman, Rick, Drumheller-Stettler (W)
Hoffman, Hon. Sarah, Edmonton-Glenora (ND)	Sucha, Graham, Calgary-Shaw (ND)
Horne, Trevor A.R., Spruce Grove-St. Albert (ND)	Swann, Dr. David, Calgary-Mountain View (AL)
Hunter, Grant R., Cardston-Taber-Warner (W)	Sweet, Heather, Edmonton-Manning (ND)
Jansen, Sandra, Calgary-North West (PC)	Taylor, Wes, Battle River-Wainwright (W)
Jean, Brian Michael, QC, Fort McMurray-Conklin (W), Leader of the Official Opposition	Turner, Dr. A. Robert, Edmonton-Whitemud (ND)
Kazim, Anam, Calgary-Glenmore (ND)	van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)
Kleinstuber, Jamie, Calgary-Northern Hills (ND)	Westhead, Cameron, Banff-Cochrane (ND)
Larivee, Hon. Danielle, Lesser Slave Lake (ND)	Woollard, Denise, Edmonton-Mill Creek (ND)
Littlewood, Jessica, Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville (ND)	Yao, Tany, Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)
Loewen, Todd, Grande Prairie-Smoky (W)	
Loyola, Rod, Edmonton-Ellerslie (ND)	
Luff, Robyn, Calgary-East (ND)	
MacIntyre, Donald, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake (W)	

Party standings:

New Democrat: 53 Wildrose: 22 Progressive Conservative: 9 Alberta Liberal: 1 Alberta Party: 1 Independent: 1

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Robert H. Reynolds, QC, Law Clerk/ Director of Interparliamentary Relations	Philip Massolin, Manager of Research Services	Chris Caughell, Assistant Sergeant-at-Arms
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		Janet Schwegel, Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>

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Deron Bilous	Minister of Economic Development and Trade
Oneil Carlier	Minister of Agriculture and Forestry
Joe Ceci	President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance
David Eggen	Minister of Education, Minister of Culture and Tourism
Kathleen T. Ganley	Minister of Justice and Solicitor General, Minister of Aboriginal Relations
Sarah Hoffman	Minister of Health, Minister of Seniors
Danielle Larivee	Minister of Municipal Affairs, Minister of Service Alberta
Brian Mason	Minister of Transportation, Minister of Infrastructure
Margaret McCuaig-Boyd	Minister of Energy
Shannon Phillips	Minister of Environment and Parks, Minister Responsible for the Status of Women
Irfan Sabir	Minister of Human Services
Lori Sigurdson	Minister of Advanced Education, Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour

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Renaud	

Standing Committee on Alberta's Economic Future

Chair: Miranda
Deputy Chair: Mr. Schneider

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Carson	Hunter
Connolly	Jansen
Coolahan	Piquette
Dach	Schreiner
Fitzpatrick	Taylor
Gotfried	

Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee

Chair: Ms Gray
Deputy Chair: Ms Payne

Anderson, W.	Miranda
Clark	Nielsen
Cortes-Vargas	Nixon
Cyr	Renaud
Jansen	Starke
Loyola	Swann
McLean	van Dijken
Miller	

Standing Committee on Families and Communities

Chair: Ms Sweet
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Hinkley	Pitt
Jansen	Rodney
Littlewood	Shepherd
Luff	Swann
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Payne	

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Bhullar	Nixon
Connolly	Shepherd
Cooper	van Dijken
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Standing Committee on Private Bills

Chair: Ms McPherson
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Anderson, S.	Kleinsteuber
Anderson, W.	Littlewood
Babcock	McKitrick
Drever	Rosendahl
Drysdale	Stier
Fraser	Strankman
Hinkley	

Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing

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Coolahan	Nielsen
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Ellis	Starke
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Loyola	

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Kazim	

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

9 a.m.

Thursday, December 10, 2015

[The Speaker in the chair]

Prayers

The Speaker: Good morning.

Please bow your heads. Hon. members, as a new year approaches, let us reflect upon our lives as individuals and as a community of legislators. For most of us this past year was a year of unbelievable change; a year of great privilege, and, much more importantly, a year of profound responsibility; a year of emotion, sometimes of tension, but also of laughter; a year of pain, when we came together with tears and sadness out of the loss of a brother. For some of us this is a time of Christian celebration. It is a time we share with all of our fellow citizens, a time of peace, a time of rest, a time of contemplation. Let us accept our responsibility to repair our province, needing strength, not division; peace, not conflict; hope, not fear.

Please be seated.

The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Member's Apology

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will need about four minutes.

The last week or so in this Assembly has been particularly heated. That can happen on occasion, not that it does anyone here much credit. Many members on this side have been quite upset about question period, and while I feel that my concerns are legitimate, my anger has caused me to make statements that were inappropriate, and for that I have regret. Allow me to elaborate and to apologize to you, Mr. Speaker, and the members of this Assembly.

Question period has been raucous for a while. The other day an hon. member apologized for using the words “goons” and “gangsters.” The truth is that many of the words thrown our way from the benches opposite were much more R-rated than “goons” and “gangsters.” While question period should be lively, the truth is that none of the parents in this Assembly would want their children to sit at the Clerk’s table and listen.

The other issue which has upset us has been the wasting of time and the impact it has had on opposition questions. Traditionally question period has had an average of well over 17 sets of questions dealt with every day. For a variety of reasons the 29th Session of the Legislature has seen an average of just over 14 sets. That adds up to over 90 missed questions so far this session alone.

The two things together have led to frustration and even anger. I lost my temper, and I should not have. I should have come and spoken directly to you, Mr. Speaker.

Instead, I tweeted something inappropriate. I broke a minor rule in tweeting from this Chamber, and I assure you that that will not happen again. But I also called into question your impartiality and integrity. That is more serious. I ought not to have done that, Mr. Speaker. I have a profound respect for this place, and I have a profound respect for the Office of the Speaker and its critical role in protecting the traditional privileges of members, particularly the privileges of the minority in a Westminster Assembly. I have requested a meeting with you, and I hope that you will grant that meeting. Out of a deep respect for the institution and an acknowledgement of the complexities of your role I am going to apologize to you and to members of this Assembly and completely withdraw

any comments in the House or tweets regarding you on these matters, made inside or outside the Chamber.

I look forward to high-quality and fair questions in the future. I think all members on both sides of the Assembly should work with you to make that happen. Mr. Speaker, good manners, respect, and civility require that I extend a hand of goodwill, so I will unreservedly apologize for any incivility or disrespect towards you or your office. It is my sincere hope that members of this Assembly can move forward with productive questions and debate, which fulfill their critical role in holding the government to account.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member. I look forward to speaking with you personally.

Orders of the Day

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 6

Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act

Mr. Mason: Mr. Speaker, I’m pleased to stand to move third reading of Bill 6, the Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act.

The Speaker: The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If you seek it, I’m sure you will find it: unanimous consent of this House to go to one-minute bells for the duration of the morning.

[Unanimous consent granted]

The Speaker: Someone who wishes to speak to third reading? Her Majesty’s Official Opposition leader.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to all the members of the Assembly. I am a true democrat. I am. I think that the Legislature should work. It should produce good laws for Albertans. That’s what a democrat is. Bill 6 is not a good law. There are so many things wrong with Bill 6. It is a big-government solution in search of a problem. Everyone cares about farm safety. Nobody cares more about farm safety than the moms and dads that actually are operating and own the 45,000 family farms in Alberta.

I also know, from statistics, from empirical evidence – that’s right – from the historical perspective of what takes place on farms, that Alberta’s fatality stats per thousand farmers are the lowest or one of the lowest in the country. Fewer people die on Alberta farms and ranches than in any other provinces in Canada, which, by the way, have far more regulations than Alberta does. No province has a better safety record than Alberta. We should be proud of the moms and dads that operate the 45,000 farms in Alberta.

Alberta farmers have a great OHS record, and most Alberta farmers carry insurance that is cheaper and better than WCB. It’s about offering choice to farmers: choice of WCB, choice of better insurance, choice so they can protect their family and provide better benefits to their families and workers. This government is taking away those choices. The government would actually know these things if they had consulted with farmers, if they’d taken the opportunity to put this bill to committee to hear from those experts, to hear from the agricultural groups, to hear from the moms and dads and farmers and ranchers right across this province.

The Premier actually says that the bill has been studied too much. She’s right. But do you know that every single study has indicated

the same thing? Minor tweaks may be necessary for little parts here and there in relation to farm safety, minor tweaks in relation to OHS, minor tweaks in relation to employment standards. Minor tweaks. Every study has indicated the same thing. But the Premier is committed to the big government knows best approach, which obviously does not work. We've seen it in past NDP governments, right across this country, and that's regardless of the evidence, Mr. Speaker. It's shocking that this government would ignore the empirical evidence, years and years of historical data. It shows clearly a government and a Premier that are out of touch with Albertans. Bill 6 is fundamentally flawed, and it will cause anger throughout Alberta for many, many years.

This bill should have gone to committee. All bills, government or private members' bills, should go to committees, where the government would still have a majority, but they would have an opportunity to hear from witnesses. Do you know what? The backbench, Mr. Speaker, would have an opportunity to participate in democracy instead of just strolling in here and doing what they're told. The participation would be huge. I see smiles from the front bench, but – that's right – there are no smiles on the backbench because they're not participating in democracy.

9:10

All bills should go to committee. The government talks about my federal record on bills. They're right. I have voted for closure, not at this stage – not at this stage – but after months and months of committee work, after hearing from experts right across the country, after touring across the country and hearing from experts in all provinces and territories. Do you know, Mr. Speaker, that that's what the federal Finance committee does? They actually, before a budget, do prebudget consultations. They listen to Albertans. They listen to Alberta businesses, to farms, to ranches. They listen because when you listen, you make the right decisions.

This NDP government, this Premier have closed ears to Albertans. They are so ideologically driven that they are not prepared to listen to the facts, to listen to the thousands upon thousands of farmers and ranchers that have come to this place and protested this bill, that have gone to communities right across this province, that in just weeks, Mr. Speaker, have organized to come here and come to many, many other communities. We have had a number of town halls, and the anger is real. They will not forget this government's lack of consultation

Now, Mr. Speaker, we know that democracy works at the federal level. In fact, the NDP has more opportunity at the federal level by far than the Wildrose Party does at this level, at the provincial level. That's not right. We need to restore democracy to this place. This is what we are here for, to make sure that democracy has a voice. Democracy actually means that the people have to have a voice.

Bill 6 has so many problems. The protections for small family farms are just not good enough. Forcing farms to give up on good insurance, better insurance and replace it with inadequate WCB coverage is a huge mistake. The OHS impacts are yet to be felt, but, Mr. Speaker, with respect, there will be many unintended and unanticipated consequences that will have Alberta farms and ranches suffering.

Let me give you one which has not yet been discussed. I'm from Fort McMurray, and I know what safety means. I know how important safety is. Safety first: it's a motto I've heard since the very beginning of living in Fort McMurray, 50 years ago. It's a motto that's ingrained in our culture there because it's so, so important to the future of the people that work there. OHS requires that people work in safe buildings, buildings that are up to building code. Now, I know that not many members of the NDP have visited a farm, and they certainly haven't done so recently because they

haven't consulted with farmers, but the building code has never applied to farm buildings, Mr. Speaker. It is possible that every single farm work site in Alberta will not be considered safe under OHS legislation.

Think of the consequences, Mr. Speaker. Every farm building: not safe under current legislation. I think that's real. The consequences and cost of that to farmers might be so staggering that we might not have farmers in Alberta that are competitive with the world, that are able to continue to operate in that competitive environment, that are able to continue to feed Albertans, Canadians, and the world. It is a serious issue.

The government is struggling to write legislation. We saw it in Bill 4, which the government mismanaged to the point that the Finance minister broke the law. He became a lawbreaker on Bill 4. We saw it with Bill 5, where government sloppiness required amendments to legislation that all parties supported. We saw it in Bill 8, where this government didn't consult, where they lost the support of school boards, and where, as a result, Mr. Speaker, they had to make two amendments after they said that the bill was perfect. [interjections] It's perfect except when everybody complains. That's exactly why we need to consult, why they should have consulted with the school boards, that were so angry, and their anger made them come forward in a couple of days with amendments. We know that because I had the opportunity to talk to school boards. [interjections]

The Speaker: Hon. members. Minister of Education, please.

Please proceed.

Mr. Jean: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate you intervening on that lack of respect here, sir.

We did see it in Bill 8, and we continue to see it, Mr. Speaker. We see the school boards upset. I had an opportunity to sit down with both school boards from Fort McMurray some time ago, and their concern was the lack of consultation by this minister. Clearly, not listening to the people of Alberta will cost this government a lot, and Bill 8 is just one of the examples. After saying that it's a perfect bill and presenting it, they had to come forward with amendments to fix the problems so that they would make people partially happy.

That would be avoided if this minister actually had the opportunity to persuade the government to put all bills to committees for discussion, for input, for expert opinion and advice. You still have the majority on the committees, but that gives people the opportunity to participate in democracy. Participating in democracy, I would submit, Mr. Speaker, is the most important thing that we can allow Albertans to do in this place to feel that they are part of the government's future and a part of Alberta's future.

This government is teetering on the edge of incompetence. After only seven months they can hardly bring anything to the Assembly that is ready to pass and become law. That is worrying. But, Mr. Speaker, we know that they have the majority. We will be oppressed by the majority on Bill 6. We have no choice. As the Wildrose we have done everything we possibly could to stop, to slow down, to change the law. Fortunately, again with Bill 6, they did change some of it, and that is as a result of the Wildrose Official Opposition being so strong.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud, very proud to stand here today in relation to some people. I'm proud of the thousands of Albertans who came to this Legislature, who went to the town halls right across Alberta and spoke. The Wildrose listened. We listened. We came back here, and we made it clear to the government that the people of Alberta, the farmers and ranchers of Alberta, were unhappy. I'm so proud of them.

Just with days' notice they came to this place, thousands of people, not once, not twice; three times, four times. Do you know why the government is shutting down the bill, in my opinion? They're shutting it down because they knew that there were further rallies coming to this place today, next Tuesday. There are more this weekend right around Edmonton. There are thousands of people. Even after this bill is passed by this government, forced through this legislative process, forced through every single process with only one hour to speak, Mr. Speaker, they will continue to have their voice heard through the Wildrose caucus. We are very proud of them. I want to thank them personally for that. It meant a lot to the Wildrose caucus to have the support of Albertans, to have the support of tens of thousands of Albertans.

What am I not proud of? I'm certainly not proud of democracy in this place. I'm not proud of the members opposite, who, although they toed the line for the Government House Leader and toed the line for the Premier, did not toe the line for the people that they work for, the voters and electorate of Alberta.

I'm almost finished, Mr. Speaker. The people that I'm particularly not proud of are those people that did not vote as they were supposed to for the people that elected them. I speak particularly of the Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose, with 2,000 farms – how is he going to face those people? – or the Minister of Energy, the Member for Dunvegan-Central Peace-Notley, with 1,500 family farms in her riding. How is she going to go back there and say, "I didn't vote for you. I voted how the Premier told me"? Or the Member for Fort Saskatchewan-Vegreville, who is ignoring and insulting the 1,400 family farms in her riding, and the Member for Leduc-Beaumont, who has 1,200 family farms – 1,200 family farms – and that actually represents over 4,000 people that they're not representing. The ag minister, the Member for Whitecourt-St. Anne, who has 1,200 farms. The Member for Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater, who was yelled at by the 1,100 farms and ranches in the riding. He was, and he knows that. He knows it clearly as all the backbench there knows that have the 11,000 Alberta farms in their ridings.

They know, Mr. Speaker, because we saw it, and they're concerned. That's why they're shutting down debate. That's why they're forcing closure in the strongest way that I've ever seen it done.

9:20

Then, of course, there's the Member for Strathcona-Sherwood Park and her 600 farms. The Member for West Yellowhead: 700 farms. The Member for Peace River: 400 farms. The Member for Stony Plain and the Member for Spruce Grove-St. Albert, which I believe have a rally this weekend to oppose Bill 6: 400 farms. Only 400 farms and a rally against this bill, 400 family farms, 400 very important Albertans that don't have a voice in this place because the government has shut its ears, will not listen, is ideologically driven to control the farms that have worked so well and have the lowest statistics as far as unsafe workplaces in the country. Of course, we can't forget the Member for Banff-Cochrane and the 200 ranchers and the Minister of Municipal Affairs, the Member for Lesser Slave Lake: 200 farms. All of them have heard clearly from their constituents. Every one of them has, and what do they do? They do what they're told by the Premier. They do what they're told by the Premier. They ignore their constituents. I'm not proud of those members. I am not proud of democracy in this place today. I am not proud to have an NDP government in Alberta.

Bill 6 is a mess, and I am very proud of our Wildrose MLAs who have participated in the debate on Bill 6 and, Mr. Speaker, some of the longest hours ever in this place over the last few weeks. I'm very proud of the 22 MLAs that represent the Wildrose members across this province. They have debated this bill late into the night

and started again the next morning with just a few hours of sleep if any. This place has had more than 12-hour-plus days on this bill. That's more than any bill in recent memory from my perspective. I've only been a legislator for 11 years, but I can assure you that I've never seen anything like this before. That's how anxious the NDP is to push the bill through, though, to ram it through this place without proper debate, without proper consultation, without listening to the people of Alberta, and they should be ashamed of themselves.

Despite our best efforts and the anger of farmers and ranchers throughout Alberta, Bill 6 will be rammed through this morning. They are not listening. When that happens, the anger will be very real. People in Alberta will remember, especially farmers and ranchers, but it's not too late. I have optimism. I am here to help, just like the Wildrose is here to help, and that's why today we're giving them an opportunity, so I would ask them to listen very carefully. The members opposite who represent rural ridings, who have those 11,000 farmers and ranchers and their families in those ridings, can still do the right thing. They can. I'm sure that they're listening, so I am sure that they'll be persuaded.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I am hoping that they will do the right thing. I'm hoping that they will support farmers and ranchers in Alberta and the future of family farms in Alberta.

I will move a motion for third reading of Bill 6, the Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act, that it be amended, Mr. Speaker, by deleting all the words after "that" and substituting the following: "Bill 6, Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act, be not now read a third time but that it be read a third time this day six months hence." Do the right thing. I have appropriate copies here in proper form. This is the chance. This is the last chance for them.

Now, to the members opposite, what I would say is: do the right thing. Stand up for your constituents. Join the Wildrose and stand up for Albertans, for Alberta farms and ranches. Vote for this hoist amendment, and go back to the drawing board with Bill 6. Take six months and listen to farmers and ranchers. Listen to the people that know better than we do. Listen to the experts. Listen to them because they have more invested than all of us put together. It is their way of life, their culture, their future. It is something that we should not attack. Vote for this hoist amendment, and go back to the drawing board on Bill 6. Your political careers do depend on it. They do. But, even more importantly, just do it because it is the right thing to do to restore democracy to this place and bring democracy to Alberta for all Albertans.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to thank the Leader of the Official Opposition for his speech. I think there are a number of things about that speech that bear some examination. The Opposition House Leader – the opposition leader. I apologize. I've got to keep everybody straight here. Yeah. The Leader of the Official Opposition has complained on the one hand that there's not enough time to debate the bill, that the government is running roughshod over the opposition and limiting debate, then in his next breath he talks about the longest hours that have ever been spent on a bill. He says that we've had 12-hour days, that we've had more discussion than any bill in recent history. You know, you can't have it both ways. This government has provided hours and hours and hours of debate, but it's clear what the opposition is doing.

The Leader of the Opposition talks about the good safety record of Alberta farms, and that is a good thing. But what he's saying and

what he's suggesting by that is that we don't need to do anything, Mr. Speaker, and that's the real agenda of the Wildrose here. The real agenda of the Wildrose is to prevent this legislation from ever being passed. They claim they're in favour of farm safety, but what they really are saying is that farms are safe enough now and we don't have to do anything, and that's what the leader of the ... [some applause] and some of the members opposite are applauding that remark because that's what they actually believe and that's what they're actually trying to accomplish here. That is so disrespectful to the families of people who have lost ... [interjections]

The Speaker: Please don't yell, whoever that was. Please proceed.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and forgive those interruptions. I want to say very, very clearly that the problem here is that people have been dying on farms. People are injured on farms. It may be less than some other places, but that doesn't matter. Those lives are worth while. Those lives are valuable. Those families who've lost loved ones or whose breadwinners can no longer earn a living: they deserve support. They deserve to have their food on the table. They deserve to have a place to live and put clothes on their children. The Wildrose is saying: "Well, that's not necessary. Everything is fine." I think it's clear from the Leader of the Official Opposition, from the leader of the Wildrose Party, what the real agenda is here, and that is to keep the status quo. They talk all about how we're all in favour of safety, but we just heard the Leader of the Official Opposition basically say that nothing is wrong and we don't need this legislation.

Now, Mr. Speaker, if I can return to the whole question of how this debate has proceeded. As the Leader of the Official Opposition, the Wildrose leader, has said, we've spent some of the longest hours in this place, more than any bill in recent history, debating this bill. There's been ample – there's been ample – opportunity. The Wildrose, instead of using time to put forward amendments and constructive changes, used most of the time in here trying to delay second reading of the bill. We've spent probably well over 20 hours of debate just on second reading alone. It's the stalling tactics of the Wildrose, getting up and talking to, making these motions, and I know the tactics very well. I know exactly what they're doing and what they're going to do next. This hoist is no surprise because this is the last attempt that they have to try and delay and hold back the bill, at the same time arguing out of the other side of their mouth that they haven't had enough time to debate the bill.

Well, the fact of the matter is, Mr. Speaker, that they've had plenty of time. We've all had plenty of time to debate this bill. We know what the issues are. We know what we have to do, and the government is going to do it. I want to make absolutely crystal clear to all members of this House that this hoist is nothing but a delaying tactic. It's an attempt to derail the bill. The Wildrose doesn't really want to do what they say they want to do. What they want to do is leave things exactly as they are.

I urge all members of this House to oppose this amendment. This is simply a tactic of the opposition to try and derail the discussion and to consume the time of the House. I think that it's shameful, Mr. Speaker, and I think that we need to get on with this debate.

9:30

The Speaker: The Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to speak today with regard to Bill 6 and the potential dangers that are in the legislation as it has been presented. My wife and I own a farm. We enjoy that lifestyle. My wife and I chose the farm lifestyle as the

best place to raise our family. I along with my wife and my children work on our farm, but I am not a farm employee, my wife is not a farm employee, and our children are not farm employees. Our farm is a chosen lifestyle, and it is an integral part of our family culture. When my children are able to help with the seeding or harvest, they are not working; they are actively involved with our family lifestyle. This is a family activity. It is not a work site. They have a connection with the land that, I'm sorry to say, most urban people do not comprehend.

We are not doing anything that would cause harm to others, yet this government would believe it is necessary to invade my family space and impose their will on our family lifestyle, our family culture. This government expects my family to trust them, telling us that they promise to develop common-sense solutions, allowing these customary parts of farm life to go on as before. I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker, but I cannot leave that to a government that has violated our trust. There is way too much at stake here to just simply trust them.

Bill 6 as it currently stands is dangerous. There will be unintended consequences. Bill 6 as it stands is going to change a way of life: my way of life, my family's way of life, my community's way of life, the way of life of thousands of farmers and ranchers across this province.

I'm a farmer, Mr. Speaker. I grow food so that people all over can eat. It is a unique calling – raising livestock, seeding and harvesting – and it can be challenging, believe me. But I do not worry about those situations where I will be found in a bad situation and not be able to complete my work. I, unfortunately, broke my pelvis in 1994 in a boating accident. I was laid up in hospital for a few weeks that summer, and my community and neighbours and friends were there for my family. For the better part of six weeks they volunteered their time and resources to help my family through a difficult time. Never did I nor do I worry about what would happen. The farming community sticks together, protecting farmers in difficult circumstances in a much better way than anything we could imagine in this place. The farmers that came to help were not workers. They were farmers, and farmers come to help and volunteer their time when their neighbours need them.

Nobody cares more about the protection of farms and farm workers than the people living and breathing the lifestyle every single day. Nobody wants to see farming protected in this province more than our farmers, and they prove it all the time with their unbreakable spirit of giving to and helping one another. Farmers are constantly on the move, making things happen. In our communities they rely on friends, relatives, neighbours, their spouses, their children, and sometimes employees to help make it work. If Bill 6 is passed, I do worry that it may limit the ability of my neighbours and friends being able to help.

Will Bill 6 allow these customary parts of farm life to go on as before, as the minister has stated? I worry that it will not. Bill 6 as it currently stands opens up the family farm to the full weight and exposure of the Employment Standards Code, the Labour Relations Code, the Occupational Health and Safety Act, and the workers' compensation regulation; that is, until the regulations are developed over the next year or so, says the government. That is some dangerous stuff, Mr. Speaker. Bill 6 could have and should have been broken up to deal with each of these pieces of legislation separately.

I do believe mandatory insurance is the right move, the right way to go. As well, Mr. Speaker, farmers and ranchers need the flexibility of choice in insurer as long as coverage is equivalent to or better than the coverage provided by WCB. We have competition in automobile insurance, home insurance, event insurance, et

cetera. The fact is that we already have choice in agriculture, but Bill 6 takes away the choice.

Mr. Speaker, farm workers have written both to me and to other Wildrose members, and they're worried about the benefits they already enjoy changing and do not want to downgrade to the WCB. In their case the farmer and farmer-worker relationship has meant that insurance products provide coverage all the time, 24/7, not just when on-site. That's a pretty good employer, looking to insure his employee at all times. This shows just how much the farmer values their farm worker.

Mr. Speaker, I have outlined my lifestyle, and I have outlined the detriments of this Bill 6 to my livelihood and that of my family and my community. I implore the members opposite to suffer the wrath of the whip, use the power their voters gave them, look out for their interests, and defeat this legislation.

When Bill 6 was introduced, this was the responsibility of the Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour. She owned it. As the matter progressed and things started to go a little awry, we saw what kind of mistake this was. The Premier took ownership of the bill. The buck stops here, she proclaimed. But today all of us, everyone in this Assembly, take collective ownership of the bill.

The record will show who voted in favour and who voted against Bill 6, and each and every one of us will be held responsible and accountable for our actions. There will be unintended consequences. Each and every one of us will be held responsible for our actions, imposing the legislation or fighting against this legislation. Three and a half years from now the people of Alberta will judge. They will judge us all on the decisions we make here today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: I'll wait for the next speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm grateful to the Member for Strathmore-Brooks as well.

That was an inspiring speech we just heard. I'll only take one issue with the hon. member. I think city people appreciate a little more than you give them credit for what farming is about.

Outside of that, I want to start, Mr. Speaker, by a quick thank you to our PC Party staff and my colleagues. This has been quite a battle on behalf of Albertans, and we couldn't have done it except as a team.

Mr. Speaker, this is now on my list of things to undo in three and a half years. I'm going to talk a little bit about some context here, which is why I'm supporting this hoist amendment. You know what? There are things you do in government that are mistakes, and you need to fix them, and you need to recognize it as soon as possible and do it. I've been thinking of a couple of proud moments that I had when we were in government. There was a budget-saving decision made once upon a time to change the way people were fed in Alberta homes. It turned out the food wasn't very good. I remember sitting in the meeting when we talked about the fact that there are people – and this isn't just about a gutful. This is the only food they get. We made a decision to go back, at more expense, to homemade meals. That was a good decision. That was admitting your mistake and fixing it.

9:40

There was a decision along the way to see if it was the right financial decision to close the Michener Centre. I can remember visiting it and knowing that that was the wrong decision, and I

remember being proud of the government when they fixed it. This feels like that, Mr. Speaker. This feels like the government ought to see just how bad this is.

Mr. Speaker, the government members have to think about what damage they're doing. You know what? The fact is that we had thousands of farmers and ranchers out there, and they're concerned about their families. They're concerned about their livelihood. They're concerned that people may lose their farms. They're concerned about suicides. They are losing sleep. The government's promise that it's going to be okay isn't good enough. The government has already said that they're going to take 18 to 24 months to do this. Why not let Alberta farmers and ranchers sleep and talk to them before doing what they're contemplating doing today? Don't wait till you've got tragedies on your hands. You don't need to do that. You don't. It's not necessary. [interjections] Again, I hear people chirping right now. You know what? You need to take this seriously because you're talking about real people and the consequences that you're having on their lives. I know I'm being shouted down when I'm talking about caring about Albertans, and that's a shame. That's really a shame.

Here's the problem, Mr. Speaker. Most of the assumptions that the government has made to support this bill are incorrect. They've said that the Workers' Compensation Board and occupational health will somehow prevent bad employers from doing bad things. You know what? They don't. There are bad employers in Alberta and the rest of the world that have WCB and OH and S that do bad things to employees. The government has kind of told Albertans that this will magically make everyone who is bad good. It's not true, folks. You know it's not true, Albertans know it's not true, and farmers and ranchers know it's not true. You're going to have to look pretty damn far and wide to find a farmer or rancher that's mistreating their staff, because that's not how they live. So that assumption is wrong.

The assumption that people can be forced to do unsafe things and that that will stop: you know what? If somebody is being asked to do unsafe things under the current system, they'll still be asked to do unsafe things under occupational health and safety. It happens in other areas of endeavour. The government's assertion that this will magically stop all bad behaviour is absolutely not correct. Everybody knows it. It's time to actually face up to it and admit it and deal with the facts. This is not a magic bullet.

You know what? Thousands of farmers and ranchers have made their opinions known. Don't crush their dreams. This isn't a job for them; this is what they do. This is their life. This is their lifestyle. The government has claimed, Mr. Speaker, that they will – and I love this – create a culture of safety. Incredibly disrespectful to farmers and ranchers, who have had a culture of safety for themselves and their families, their employees, their neighbours, their friends who help out, for hundreds of years. And this government thinks they can roll in, with an almost entirely urban caucus, and tell farmers and ranchers that they know better. Not so. Think, and think again, please. It's just disrespectful, and it's incredibly arrogant to actually take that attitude, and we've heard it repeatedly. You know, farmers and ranchers have enough problems feeding us. They bet on the weather. They work with world prices that they can't control. They don't need their government, that should be there protecting them, making it worse.

Mr. Speaker, now I'm going to spend a few minutes talking about democracy. You know, we came here to represent the people that voted for us. All of us did, on all sides of the House. This is probably the most reprehensible example of the exact opposite happening here. You know what? Thousands of people came out. They want safety. They have safety. I can tell you what: they actually want to sit down with the government and negotiate. They know that there

are no more rules, and they've offered and said that they'll sit down with the government and negotiate good rules. They've said it. You've heard them. You've ignored them, but you've heard them, and it's sad.

Mr. Speaker, the people of Alberta are watching this, and they are not impressed – I can tell you that right now – because Albertans are being ignored by the government. Education minister, I know that you don't like to listen to them. I know you're angry this morning, and you should be. Every Albertan, I'm sure, is on your tail, like they should be on everybody in your government. They're angry. I don't blame you for having your feelings hurt, but maybe you could do the right thing at the last opportunity and stop this craziness. Or you could keep chirping across the aisle because you don't want to listen to Albertans. This is serious.

Mr. Speaker, the fact remains that Albertans have made their message clear. This won't make farms any safer at all. It probably won't save a single life. Alberta's farms and ranches are amongst the safest in Canada. If you think you're going to save a life or an injury with this, you're fooling yourself. Here's what you are doing. You are causing farmers and ranchers to lose sleep. You're causing them to fear losing their farms and their ranches.

You know what else I find a little bit offensive, Mr. Speaker? The government has trotted out a couple of tragedies to make their point. I will give them credit; they're real tragedies. I feel terrible about them. Everybody should feel terrible about them. They are examples where people who have been killed or injured on farms have not gotten the support they need. It's really caused a tragedy for them and their families. They're real tragedies, and I feel bad about them, too.

But the reason that it's reprehensible is because they're telling Albertans that when they pass this legislation, that will never happen, and nothing could be farther from the truth. That happens where WCB and OH and S exist. I know it does. I spent several months as the Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour minister, and I can tell you about people with very similar stories, equally tragic, none of them funny – none of them should be taken lightly – that happened while working for places with WCB and OH and S coverage.

Again, the main arguments that the government has used to support this bill, Mr. Speaker, just do not hold water. Albertans know that. City Albertans know that. Farm and ranch Albertans know that. The government knows that, but they have some other agenda. It's obvious. It's obvious. Every argument that they've tried to make is based on bunk. I think that's a technical term, but I think it's parliamentary, so I'm choosing it instead of some of the other less parliamentary choices that I could make. Farmers and ranchers have made their feelings known. Farmers and ranchers want safety. Farmers and ranchers have offered themselves up, even while they're under attack by this government, to sit down with them and in a reasonable way negotiate new rules.

The government has already said – well, actually, like everything else, they've said a whole bunch of different things. But the official word is 18 to 24 months although one of the government members stood up in the House last night and said 12 to 18 months. We'll mostly take their word for it; we'll imagine that that person misspoke. The fact is, folks, that the government could actually stay on their schedule of 18 to 24 months. Sit down and talk to people, and wouldn't it be nice if you could shove it down our throats in six months, if you did that and have us support the bill after you talk to farmers and ranchers? Wouldn't that be a joy? Maybe you won't have farmers and ranchers losing sleep. Maybe you won't potentially have them committing suicide, and maybe you won't be giving them the false hope that you're going to prevent every injury and death that happens in the future.

It's time to honour the wishes of the people that elected us to be here. The vast majority of Albertans do not want this bill to go forward. The message is clear. The only ones that don't seem to be getting the message I'm looking across the aisle at. It's maybe time to do the right thing, and that's my request.

The Speaker: Are there any questions for the hon. member under 29(2)(a)? The hon. Member for Peace River.

9:50

Ms Jabbour: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. You know, I've been here in this House as we've debated Bill 6 for every single one of the more than 25 hours, and I'm glad to finally have a chance to speak. You know, I'm tired.

The Speaker: Hon. member, are you under 29(2)(a)?

Ms Jabbour: Oh, I apologize. No.

The Speaker: Anyone under 29(2)(a)?

Proceed, hon. member.

Ms Jabbour: I will continue. Sorry. I thought it was my time.

Anyway, as I said, I am tired. I am tired of the rhetoric, the fear-mongering, the half-truths that we're hearing from the opposition, and I'm tired of the false accusations that I cannot possibly represent the farmers in my constituency unless I agree with your point of view. I am tired of the accusation that I can't possibly understand farmers.

You know something? I spent most of my growing up years on our family farm out by Hairy Hill. I rode a stoneboat with my grandfather and my uncle every year. I went into the chicken coop with my grandmother. I helped collect eggs. I even followed it through and plucked chickens and did all that fun stuff, canning with my grandmother and my mom. I helped my grandmother feed the threshing crew every year. I helped feed the pigs, the cows. I helped my grandmother churn butter because that's how we did it back then, right from scratch. I did all these things. When we were forced to sell our family farm, I mourned because I wanted my children to have the same experience as me. I value the family farm, and I understand and appreciate the culture. I would never support anything that would destroy that.

You know what? My grandfather was big on safety. I think he coined the phrase: "Don't do that. You'll put out an eye." Honestly. But as kids we still did dangerous things. I remember that we sat in the granary, and wheat would pour in, and as kids we'd just push it around, play in it. I am sick now thinking that we did that. Children die doing that. Somehow we survived, thank God. But things have changed on the farm. We got away with some of those things because back then we didn't have the high-tech equipment. Farms are very, very different now, and the safety culture has to change along with that because farms have become more modern. They use mechanical equipment that didn't even exist back then. They've become far more dangerous places.

This reminds me a lot about the debate on seat belts. You know, the hon. Member for St. Albert last night spoke about going back through *Hansards*. I had the opportunity to read *Hansards* from many years ago. The debate on seat belts was huge. There was so much opposition. I myself remember that I was against it because when I learned to drive, we didn't have seat belts. I would sit in the car, I'd put my little child right behind my arm, and that's how I'd drive, keeping her safe. I would hit the brakes, and I'd go like this. That was what I understood safety to be because we didn't have seat belts. When they came in, people argued: "Oh, this is terrible. This is going to destroy our ability to drive and our freedom and our

rights.” But you know what? Seat belts came in, and it was the right thing to do.

Bill 6 is enhancing a culture of safety on farms, and this is not an insult to farmers. We know farmers put a priority on safety. This legislation will support and enhance that. While it only applies to paid farm workers, all are going to benefit from improved awareness and attention to safety and elevated safety standards. My constituents believe in farm safety, and they’re supportive of paid farm workers having the same workplace protections as farm workers across Canada, the same workplace protections that every other worker enjoys.

You know, I’ve been really upset on behalf of my constituents, initially because there was confusion and misinformation, and our government has accepted responsibility for that. That upset me, but once the misunderstandings were cleared up and they understood what the intent of the bill was, the attitudes changed. They understood that the family farm was not going to be negatively impacted, and my constituents are supportive because they believe in farm safety.

What was more upsetting to me was the way the Official Opposition stirred farmers up with misinformation and half-truths. You are the ones who created angst and tears among our family farm members because you led them to believe something very different from the truth.

I want my constituents to know that I have spoken up on their behalf, and I will continue to do so. I raised their concerns with caucus and with the minister, and as everybody can attest, I have been very vocal. Consultation is ongoing. We have been very clear about that. It has been happening for many years. Consultation has been happening, and it will continue to happen. I promise my constituents that I will continue to work on their behalf. I will bring their concerns forward, and I will hold my government to account, making sure that we keep our promises regarding this bill. My constituents will be consulted, and my constituents will have input on the regulations as we go forward.

I support Bill 6 because it will finally give basic workers’ rights to farm workers, and it will improve safety on both large industrial farms and, in fact, all farms. I know my constituents also support those concepts of safety. I promise my constituents that I will advocate for them, and I will never support anything that threatens the culture and way of life of the family farm. Bill 6 will not destroy the family farm. Family farms continued to thrive across Canada when safety legislation was brought in, and they will continue to thrive in Alberta under this legislation.

So when I vote for Bill 6, I will be standing up for my constituents. I will be standing up on behalf of family farms, I will be standing up for the safety of paid farm workers, I will be standing up to protect farm employers, and – God forbid – should an accident occur, they will be protected. I will be standing up for farm workers in my constituency, who deserve the same right to a safe workplace that every other paid worker in Alberta receives.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [some applause]

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Any questions under 29(2)(a)?

Hearing none, the Member for Drumheller-Stettler.

Mr. Strankman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It’s an honour to be in this august Chamber, as we’ve heard those words, and it’s indeed a privilege to rise, as I’ve said before, as a lifetime agrarian or farmer and to hear our Chamber’s Deputy Speaker from Peace River exhibit her heartfelt beliefs.

I would like to respond to it in a fashion that was presented to me by my compatriot here from Drayton Valley-Devon. We were talking about the effects and the presentations of Bill 6 in regard to

communication and why we would as anglos, speaking primarily English, not understand one another. The Member for Drayton Valley-Devon talked about his life experiences as a teacher, where he was trying to communicate his ideas. It seems we are miscommunicating. Why would that be? How can that be? We are here under a democratic process to try and adversarially communicate our ideas, but we’re miscommunicating them.

I certainly appreciate the emotion of the Member for Peace River. You know, at the risk of some consternation from my caucus mates, I, too, would applaud the Member for Peace River for her heartfelt dissertation. It’s well appreciated.

But we are, Mr. Speaker, in many ways miscommunicating. Why would thousands of Albertans approach this august Chamber in discontent? It wasn’t singularly by the actions of this caucus. The Member for Peace River commented about miscommunication by this government in bringing forward their policy.

This amendment that we are speaking to, Mr. Speaker, talks about that this not be read for a third time but six months hence. Those are not exactly the words, but it talks about pushing the pause or the reset button on this. I do know that there are some 11 to 15 members in the government, including the Member for Peace River, who have direct agricultural background, direct agricultural experience. Why are we miscommunicating here?

Madam Speaker – or Mr. Speaker. I’m sorry. I’m looking at the Deputy Speaker. But I was going to . . .

10:00

The Speaker: Hon. member, I just want to mention, with respect, that when you’re referring to the member, she’s sitting as an MLA, not as the Deputy Speaker. I appreciate that.

Mr. Strankman: I’m fully aware of that: the Member for Peace River, Mr. Speaker. I’m apologizing for that.

The Speaker: Correct. Thank you.

Mr. Strankman: I was going to try and rise on a point of humour and relate to my member’s statement that I gave I believe it was two days ago now. The time is running together here now. I was talking about the principle of co-operation. That is the hallmark of the NDP government. In fact, I tried to bring in a private member’s bill using almost word for word, verbatim, the previous government, and because of miscommunication – and there are members across who will agree and know full well what I’m talking about – the bill got put to committee. How did that happen? Why are we miscommunicating? We’re adults here. We’re representatives in 87 different ways throughout the province. We are the representatives of those people. And we are here miscommunicating? I’m short of words, but I’m going to continue on.

Mr. Speaker, one of the other things that I wanted to rise and talk about was how change occurs. This government has a mandate, an elected mandate, to bring forward some of their policies, and that’s absolutely within their purview. It’s absolutely within the purview of this government. But change does not necessarily occur – and I’ve talked about that before – from within. It does not occur from within this Chamber; it comes from without.

The people that are standing on those steps, many of them – and they will know because the sheriffs in this place know that I specifically went out there to make sure that there was no violence, that there were no undue things. I like to think that I’m on a first-name basis with the sheriffs. I’ve been on a first-name basis with some sheriffs at another time and place, when I had a little rash on my wrists from my disobedience, thinking that civil disobedience was the way to bring about change. It’s not. The legal change occurs in here.

You can do all sorts of radical things outside – and we've seen that – not necessarily illegal but people expressing their opinions, without the province, in rallies and gatherings and e-mails. We've had stacks of letters and petitions coming forward, people expressing their opinion to this august Chamber. So why are we miscommunicating? They're not doing it in a vengeful fashion. We are presenting, in our role to this Chamber, the opinions of the people.

I have great consternation about how this government is operating. Members opposite have said, cabinet ministers have said that we have 200 government agencies, boards, and commissions that are to be reviewed. One of them happens to be in my constituency. It's called the Special Areas Board. The Minister of Municipal Affairs will know that it's a corporation of the government. It's not a Crown corporation, but it's a corporation of the government.

These all need to be reviewed, so we need to learn how to communicate as representatives of those people out there in 87 different ways. We need to learn how to positively bring this together. If we continue to miscommunicate, it's going to rise in raucous discussions. Members both on this side of the House and the opposite side of the House have openly and horribly embarrassed themselves with their emotions. We need to be professional about this. It's something that's unacceptable. We need to bring this forward in a respectful manner. That is all we are trying to do here, Mr. Speaker. We are trying to listen. This side of the House is trying to present the opinions of those who are outside this Chamber and as representatives within this Chamber. That's our role and responsibility.

Just to go back, reset a little bit, the Member for Peace River talked about her life experiences. One of the things that came up through indirect questioning at a Bassano rally was the idea of grandfathering in or bringing things in, and the minister of agriculture wasn't able to definitively answer the question because the regulations haven't been formulated yet. There's no accountability to the formulation of the regulations. The Member for Peace River gave a heartfelt dissertation, and I take the member for the worth that's presented, and I take the emotion to my heart. But when those regulations are created – the Member for Fort McMurray-Conklin, the Leader of the Official Opposition, talked about building codes, for example. It's a small example. But what about the barns? What about the buildings? What about the grain augers, whatever it may be, on these farms that may not now be within code? Will those farms, effectively, be devalued because they don't pass this regulation, because they only hire one farm worker a year? We brought forward amendments allowing for up to five.

I spoke one time using the example of Saskatchewan. It's not meant to be negative to the farm workers. It's with the greatest respect to the farm workers because, statistically, to the understanding of this side of the Chamber, Alberta does not have a horribly – it's within statistics. Alberta is within the same statistics as other jurisdictions that are equal for safety regulations.

So there are unintended consequences to this type of legislation. We're not trying to be vehement to the government. We simply want to present our ideas, and we present these ideas in this Chamber, Mr. Speaker, with great risk when we talk about trying to bring forward these amendments that may have unintended consequences. That's why 19 different farm organizations, stakeholders, the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, and others have come forward saying that they would like to have further input. That input was being progressed with by the third party in this Chamber, but when this government came into effect, there was some sort of a tectonic shift of the plates and then this miscommunication that happened, and the government is going ahead with their farm worker legislation, singularly. It's well

respected, well understood that it's completely within their mandate.

But why are we having all these people standing outside? Are they all in some situation where they cannot understand? I find that extremely hard to believe. So I implore the government to take a listen, to take a look, and I implore, particularly, the 11 to 15 members, not unlike the Member for Peace River, who have farmers who may have their farmsteads, through unintended consequences, Mr. Speaker, devalued, for example, because of the potential implication of this legislation that's coming forward. It's something to cause pause for thought.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any questions of the Member for Drumheller-Stettler under 29(2)(a)?

Hearing none, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I move that we adjourn debate on Bill 6.

[Motion to adjourn debate carried]

10:10 Government Motions

The Speaker: The Government House Leader.

Time Allocation on Bill 6

28. Mr. Mason moved:

Be it resolved that when further consideration of Bill 6, Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act, is resumed, not more than one hour shall be allotted to any further consideration of the bill in third reading, at which time every question necessary for the disposal of the bill at this stage shall be put forthwith.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do not need to take more time of the Assembly to discuss this matter. All of the issues related to this were canvassed when a similar motion was made at second reading, so I have nothing further to add.

The Speaker: The House leader for the Official Opposition.

Mr. Cooper: Well, Mr. Speaker, it's with great frustration, sorrow, disappointment, disgust – the list goes on and on and on – that I rise today to speak absolutely, unequivocally, one hundred per cent against this motion of closure. Only a few short months ago this government was elected on a message of a new way of doing things, on change, on openness, on transparency, on a new Alberta, a better Alberta, but less than eight months later we are exactly back where we were prior to this election.

Mr. Speaker, it baffles me how it's possible. We heard the Government House Leader earlier today talk about how the opposition wants to talk out of both sides of their mouth: "Oh, we've had lots of hours of debate. We haven't; we have. We've had lots of people that could speak to all stages of the bill." This morning we have had three – three – speakers to third reading of a bill that will drastically change much about the way that farmers and ranchers operate clear across this province, all at a time when the Government House Leader says: we've had lots of time for debate. Three speakers. There are 22 members of this Wildrose caucus, and the vast majority of them represent farmers and ranchers, and I can tell you that what they would love to do today is rise out of their seat and speak to the needs and to the concerns of every one of their constituents.

But what do we have, Mr. Speaker? A government that's running roughshod over the thousands and thousands of farmers and ranchers across Alberta. Over 30,000 ranchers and farmers and urbanites and folks right clear across this province asked this government to stop, to slow down, to consult. We presented that petition yesterday in this House. And what did we have last night at midnight? Invoking closure while the opposition was proposing solutions and ideas. Now this morning, after a mere hour of debate in third reading, we have this government invoking closure on a bill that they are trying to run and hide from.

It's not just me, Mr. Speaker – it's not just me – that is disappointed in this government. It's not just the 30,000 people that signed the petition. It's not the overwhelming majority of farmers and ranchers. It includes people that also have a voice in this province in the form of the media. I'd like to just take a very brief moment to speak about that from an article in the *Edmonton Journal* dated December 9.

Officially it's called "time allocation" – a banal sounding expression like the title of a book written by an efficiency expert. More commonly it's called "closure" – which sounds vaguely like something has been resolved amicably. Both are euphemisms. It should be called the "legislative lynching" or maybe the "governmental guillotine" – a tool used by government to strangle, or cut off completely, debate in the Alberta legislature.

Alberta's NDP government used it this week to choke debate over Bill 6, the Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act.

Those aren't my words, sir, although they are just as strong as I would love to use here in this place.

The Government House Leader has risen in his place in the past to speak about this. It's very disappointing.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

[The voice vote indicated that Government Motion 28 carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 10:16 a.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, S.	Gray	Miller
Carlter	Hinkley	Miranda
Carson	Hoffman	Payne
Ceci	Horne	Piquette
Connolly	Jabbour	Renaud
Coolahan	Kleinstauber	Rosendahl
Cortes-Vargas	Larivee	Sabir
Dach	Littlewood	Schmidt
Dang	Loyola	Sigurdson
Drever	Luff	Sucha
Eggen	Malkinson	Sweet
Feehan	Mason	Turner
Ganley	McCuaig-Boyd	Westhead
Goehring	McPherson	

10:20

Against the motion:

Aheer	Hunter	Rodney
Anderson, W.	Jansen	Schneider
Barnes	Jean	Smith
Cooper	Loewen	Starke
Cyr	MacIntyre	Stier

Drysdale	McIver	Strankman
Ellis	Nixon	Taylor
Fildebrandt	Orr	van Dijken
Gotfried	Panda	Yao
Hanson	Pitt	
Totals:	For – 41	Against – 29

[Government Motion 28 carried]

Government Bills and Orders Third Reading

Bill 6

Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act (continued)

[Adjourned debate December 10: Mr. Schmidt]

Mr. Schmidt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I yield the rest of my time.

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

Dr. Starke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I must confess that as this bill has progressed through the House, I struggled with what I would say in third reading. I spoke on second reading, I spoke on the referral motion, and I spoke in the debates on a couple of the amendments. I thought to myself: what could I possibly add in third reading that hasn't already been said? What perspective could I possibly offer that hasn't been introduced? I struggled with that. As a lot of us are, we're running on a little bit less sleep than we might be otherwise accustomed to.

What I returned to were some comments made by the hon. Member for West Yellowhead yesterday, and I will tell you, Mr. Speaker, that that's why we have the debates in this House: perspectives. There are jewels and nuggets in what people say on both sides of the House that can trigger thought, that can trigger us to become better legislators. The Member for West Yellowhead was very passionate in stating that this is about fundamental human rights, that this bill is about ensuring the absolute fundamental human right of a worker to refuse work, and it's about protecting vulnerable paid farm workers. When he said the term "human rights," I thought of our colleague the hon. Member for Calgary-Greenway because he was recognized as the most passionate defender of human rights in our caucus. I thought to myself: what would Meeta say?

Of course, since we aren't able to ask him, we go back to past notes, and I brought out the notes from his speech on third reading, pages 269 and 270 of *Hansard*. Mr. Speaker, I'm going to copy the speech and keep it in my desk because it reminds us of what the strongest advocate for human rights would say. What he said on that night is:

There are proud, proud people in Alberta with strong conservative values and an entrepreneurial spirit that will ensure that [the] wrongs are corrected. They will ensure that these wrongs are corrected.

He went on – and he was redressing the government – to say:

You best be prepared to make sure people have income and that strong, dignified people that are used to working for themselves, to making a go of their own entrepreneurial pursuits, are not left to rely on the charity of others.

Mr. Speaker, I had the best seat in the House when the Member for Calgary-Greenway gave that speech. I was sitting here. He went on to quote a Punjabi expression about the strength of my own chest. I have tremendous, tremendous faith in the farmers and ranchers of Alberta because I know the strength of their chests. I

know that they're a strong, resilient people, and I know that they will come through this.

I also know those people, Mr. Speaker, with regard to the right to refuse dangerous work. They find this suggestion baffling because whenever I ask them about the right to refuse dangerous work, they tell me two things: "If I know the situation is dangerous, I would never put an employee of mine in that position. That's my job." I know that if you're in a leadership position, if you are in an employer position, that is typical of what happens, not just on the farm. I know that if we had a nasty dog or a cranky cat or a cow that wanted to kill you, I would never say to an associate: you want to go look after that cow? Never. I would take on that risk, that responsibility myself. You don't delegate stuff like that. When we say that workers should have the right to refuse dangerous work, most farmers I talked to looked at me and said: well, no, they don't have to refuse it because I don't ask them to do it.

The second area, protecting vulnerable paid farm workers. Well, the truth of that, Mr. Speaker, is that in many, many cases across the province that is already being done. That is being done by the forward-thinking, concerned employers that employ farm workers in this province. They look after their employees. They look after them because they have to. The labour market is very competitive, and they know that labour is mobile, that these labourers can work anywhere they want.

The real tragedy, in my view, of Bill 6 is that just about everybody I've talked to agrees on those principles. They agree that farm workers should be able to refuse unsafe work. We get that. We agree with the government on that. We get that farm workers should have basic rights to be protected in the event of injury or in the event of a fatality. We get that. Farmers get that. We agree with you. If we could somehow, through skilful crafting of legislation, confine what we're talking about to those issues, this issue would have been looked after, and we could have all said: we have done good work for Albertans. We would be satisfied with that, and I would suggest that we would all be very pleased with that.

The problem with this legislation is that it goes on to do many, many, many other things, and that is the issue here. It's those other things that this legislation does, that have been put out there to the farmers and then retracted. Then they said that it's a misunderstanding, and then they said: no, it's not a misunderstanding. All of the confusion that was created initially by the government: has some of it been added to for political purposes? That's right, too. The Member for Peace River was right. That has happened as well. You know, quite frankly, it does us all as legislators a disservice when we do that, all of us. It does a disservice when we say more than what is there, when we distort what is really there, and when we talk about the intent differently.

You know, I have tried as best I can, whenever I've addressed this issue and this bill, to stay away from the partisan side of things. This is not an issue about parties. This is not an issue, as some have suggested, that will unite the right. This is an issue that should be uniting what's right, not the right, and that is why there is support for this measure not just in the Official Opposition, not just in our caucus but also from the Alberta Party and from Albertans across this province regardless of political stripe. The legislation, simply put, goes too far. Even though the government has done everything in its power to correct some of the misconceptions, to correct some of the things that are now no longer a part of it, to move the amendment that did provide some clarification – and that is why I voted for that amendment – the problem was that there needed to be much more of that, and the problem was that this government needed to recognize that it had responsibility for the misunderstanding it created. Because of that, you have broken the trust of the farmers and ranchers in this

province. When you make that error – and you've acknowledged that error – when that error is made, you must pause the legislation and give time to at least try to make it right.

10:30

The speed at which this is going through, for the, admittedly, noble cause of protecting vulnerable farm and ranch workers that do not have protection – and it is a noble cause. It's a cause I agree with. But in attempting to do that, you have gone too far. You have stretched too far, and you have extended the consequences of this legislation far beyond what you even intended. When that error was pointed out to you, you said: oh, no, no, no; that wasn't our intention. I get that, but that is still what is believed in rural Alberta. So it is your duty as the government, because we cannot convince you to do that, to recognize that you're in error.

It is your duty to recognize that you have to push the pause button. We gave, I think, eight different opportunities to improve this legislation, to change this legislation, to show the people of Alberta that, yes, you are listening and that you are consulting with them as you have promised you would, and you voted them all down. You voted down every single amendment that would have improved this legislation. I ask you: given that you've done that, why should anyone in Alberta believe you that you're going to listen going forward? Why should anyone in Alberta have any confidence that the consultation going forward, the consultation that will happen after the legislation is passed because you would not delay either the legislation or the coming-into-force date – why should they believe you now? Your actions last night spoke louder than words. You rejected every amendment that would have improved, that would have been amendments that, yes, were proposed by members on this side of the House, but they weren't our amendments; they were amendments that came from the people.

Mr. Speaker, it's our job as legislators at times to put aside the political, and that's what I've tried to do this morning. I've tried to think about my friend. I've tried to think about: what would Meeta say? I'm going to actually, quite frankly, use him as something that is going to inspire me. I know that he did, and he will continue to do so.

I'm speaking on behalf of the people that have contacted me, the 80-year-old grandfather who has 30 cows left, some of whom in cow years are just as old as he is in human years. He goes out every morning to feed them and every night to feed them, and if it wasn't for those cows, he'd have no reason to live. He's told me that. He's said: if I don't feed those cows – they get me out of bed in the morning; they give me a reason to live. But if we force a bunch of legislation on him – and you're saying: oh, no, no; we're not doing that. Well, that's not what your original legislation and not what the original documentation said. If grandpa read that documentation, he still believes it because he wants to trust his government. In order to undo that wrong, you need time, and you're not giving yourself time.

The husband and wife who work two jobs, one in Lloydminster and one in Mannville, and are driving back and forth between a job that they hold in Mannville and the farm that they have in Mannville, are now worried how this is going to affect them because they hire and pay not a neighbour but a friend, who works on the farm because they can't always be there. They're worried about how a carbon tax is going to affect the fact that they have to drive 82 kilometres both ways virtually every single day to look after their farm.

The gentleman that contacted me, that sent me a picture of four generations of his family, along with a neighbour had gotten on their horses to bring the cows home in the fall. He says: according to my reading of the information from this government, we won't

be able to do this anymore. They're worried about their lifestyle, and you have to understand that they're proud of that lifestyle. I think you do. I think you understand that. I'm not going to say that, oh, because you're from the city, you have no comprehension. I don't think that's right. I think you understand that. I think that in your heart of hearts you understand that.

But these are the people that I feel for, you know, the groups of friends and neighbours. The hon. Member for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock talked about it. These stories happen every year in Alberta where someone is hurt, someone can't finish doing the harvest, and the neighbours all come and do it for him. That happens all the time. And you know what? That happens not just in rural Alberta; it happens in urban Alberta. It's because that's who we are. That's being Albertan. Quite frankly, when we politicize these issues rather than working together as legislators to try to improve legislation, basically, it demeans us and it makes us less in discharging our responsibility for doing what we are supposed to do.

Mr. Speaker, I will be voting against this piece of legislation. I will vote against this legislation because I believe this legislation is wrong for Albertans. I believe that although well intentioned and although the things that are trying to be accomplished in terms of the insurance are basic human rights that nobody disagrees with, if it had been confined to that, then we could have all agreed, and we would have righted something that should have been corrected a long time ago. I get that. But, unfortunately, the approach that the government has taken has been far too broad stroked, far too broad handed, far too ham handed. As I said last night, you have not adopted a surgical approach to this, and because you've failed to do that, because you've put out misinformation, that it was then – I will say it – multiplied and increased, but the initial source of that information was the government.

Mr. Speaker, I will vote against Bill 6 in third reading as I have throughout, and I will say to my constituents back home that I was proud to do it.

My final comment on this issue is that last Saturday in Vermilion we had a town hall, and one of my constituents, somebody that probably, you know, wants to remain anonymous, spoke against this. He just begged me to vote against this bill. That I am proud to do today, and I would urge everyone on both sides of the House to vote against this bill.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Under 29(2)(a) are there any questions of the Member for Vermilion-Lloydminster?

Mr. Strankman: One quick question to the member. Can he imbue the House a little more with comments where he talked about the rural fabric, like the 80-year-old constituent that he has, please?

Dr. Starke: Well, Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question, but I think in the interest of letting other members talk and given that our time is limited, I'm just going to say that I'm proud of that fabric. I'm so grateful that, since I grew up in the city, I've had a chance to live in that fabric. I'll tell you right now that while I live in Edmonton four days a week and this is where I grew up, Edmonton isn't my home anymore. My home is in the country.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Anyone under 29(2)(a)?

The hon. Member for Highwood.

Mr. W. Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, finally I get to rise and speak about Bill 6 in third reading. I've been quietly sitting back here and contemplating and listening to most of you people

talk about Bill 6, and I'm proud to be part of my Wildrose caucus opposing Bill 6.

I want to talk about "fearmongering," the word that came out this morning. I'm quite curious about that because in my constituency, in the little town of Okotoks, this government had an information session and only booked 100 seats in the auditorium. Well, a thousand farmers showed up with short notice: combines, tractors, and opposed to Bill 6. They were opposed to Bill 6 based on logic and reason, not rhetoric and ideology. So I take offence to this "fearmongering" because we didn't call that meeting, they did, but we responded effectively. Legislation without consultation is not democracy.

Now, I grew up on a farm, and I've seen a few more sunrises than most of the folks in this House. I grew up on a farm, and in the '50s we'd just gotten electricity. We didn't have indoor plumbing. We didn't have running water. You talk about fearmongering. When your outdoor toilet is 300 yards from the house in the middle of winter, that's fearmongering.

I'll tell you that I'm very proud of the Albertans that have shown up at the Legislature, in halls, in church basements, opposed to Bill 6. They're not afraid of Bill 6. They just ask to be heard, and they haven't gotten the answers they deserve. My constituents are extremely frustrated, saying: when we asked direct questions of the ministers who showed up, they did not provide us with answers. This government even admitted that they misled folks, saying: oh, we blame it on the bureaucrats; it's the bureaucrats' fault. Well, it's easy to pass the buck that way. It's just not fair. Ideology, rhetoric without logic or reason is not the way to legislate. It's not fair to Albertans, it's not fair to my farmers, friends, and it's not fair to my constituents.

10:40

I for one am extremely disappointed with that side of the House. Tens of thousands of people have stood at the steps of this Legislature, in halls, in constituencies, in communities saying: "We are opposed. Slow this process down. We deserve to be heard." Well, you never listened to them. You haven't listened to them. And 24 hours of debate is significantly not enough. We need more time. We need more effort. We need more consultation with the citizens in my constituency. Albertans deserve better.

Mr. Speaker, I'm extremely disappointed sitting back here as one of the more elderly statesmen, if you will, listening to these young people who sit around with their \$8 lattes talking about dirty oil, climate change issues, royalty reviews, carbon tax. Let's talk about the true fabric of our province, the farmers. This is a complete dismantling of a way of life.

Let me put it in perspective. This is not about farm safety. One of my constituents pointed out to me that more people in Canada are injured or die from bicycle accidents. Wow. So what are we going to do, legislate bicycles now? Come on. This is not about farm safety. This is rhetoric. This is ideology.

I am opposed to Bill 6. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any questions for the hon. member under 29(2)(a)?

Hearing none, the hon. Member for Little Bow.

Mr. Schneider: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to speak to Bill 6, the Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act. I would consider this a depressing day or a disappointing day in this House, but I will continue. Everyone knows the word "enhanced." You've heard the word. It's a buzzword of people that would advertise. It's something that draws you to something, that makes you feel like you want to get involved and purchase something or get involved in that. I would buy something that was enhanced, and I expect you would, too.

But, Mr. Speaker, when I read through the sweeping, broad, undefined changes contained in this bill, it's clear to see that it's not enhancing much. If anything, the way that it has been so hastily thrown together with no input, sir, from farmers – no input from farmers; there's none given – it is a detriment to the lives of the men, women, and children who live on a family farm and ranch. At first reading of this bill the Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour introduced Bill 6 as an omnibus bill. Then on November 27 the minister released a statement in an attempt to do some damage control, saying that “the legislation provides two simple things.” Number one, a paid farm worker can say no “to something dangerous.” Number two, if the paid farm worker is “hurt or killed at work, they or their family can be compensated.”

In Vegreville on Tuesday of this week the Minister of Economic Development and Trade reiterated several times that the government wanted to ensure that farm families were protected. Many participants at the meeting in Vegreville stated that they also wanted to ensure that their employees were protected. That is why they carry private insurance, because they have a choice. What they want, Mr. Speaker – and I think this House has only heard it maybe 300,000 times in the last 24 hours. I understand we've talked about this for 24 hours. Farmers want choice on this. They want the choice to be able to use the insurance that is, at the very least, exactly the same as WCB and, in most cases, more enhanced for less money. They are generally concerned that they are now forced to carry WCB as opposed to what they would feel is superior insurance.

In fact, some of their employees have also expressed concerns they have with WCB. The staff are worried. I received two letters myself while I was standing in Bassano in the Strathmore-Brooks riding. Two employees came up to me and handed me letters that they wanted me to table in the House, which I've done. They're very concerned. They're concerned about how the hours will work out now and how they'll get the work done that they want so that they can take care of their families.

If the Premier's true intent is simply to provide farm and ranch employees protection, she could have accomplished this with a much simpler bill. Instead, Mr. Speaker, she's chosen to introduce omnibus Bill 6, with changes to the Employment Standards Code, the Labour Relations Code, the Occupational Health and Safety Act, and workers' compensation regulations. She has chosen to introduce a bill so wide open to interpretation that no Albertan can really know what the Premier's true intentions are. And what will come next? That's the question: what is next? This is an issue of trust. What were the Premier's true intentions?

By no means is it necessary to implement changes to four pieces of legislation in order to ensure that farm and ranch employees receive proper protection. Many operators already carry private insurance – I've already said it – and they're asking for choice. Others voluntarily use WCB. That's the choice. Something is being taken away with this bill, Mr. Speaker. That's not democracy.

Mr. Speaker, this government is expecting Alberta farmers and ranchers to trust the government as they develop common-sense regulations. Alberta farmers and ranchers have spoken loud and clear. They do not trust this government. They do not trust a government that has little or no experience in agriculture. They do not trust that this government possesses any common sense when it comes to the life on the family farm or in those farming communities, where I'm from, where many of my members are from, and where some of the NDP members come from. They are certainly not prepared to give free rein to a government that has broken their trust on this issue.

The Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour said, “Our legislation allows us the flexibility to develop common-sense

regulations.” In other words, Mr. Speaker, the legislation as it stands allows this government the flexibility to do whatever they want after Bill 6 is passed. Nobody in their right mind would agree to that. This government needs to develop the regulations first and prove to the farmers and ranchers that they can trust this government. Trust is earned – trust is earned – not demanded.

Protection for farm employees: fine. But Bill 6 is an attack on the family farm, our way of life, our Alberta family farm culture, and our freedom. In communities across Alberta, culture, as you know, Mr. Speaker, matters. Culture is the window through which the rest of the world sees our province, and it is a beautiful window today. In our farming and ranching communities that culture is a culture of togetherness, of neighbours helping neighbours in times of need, and of an honest day's work. We already heard the member to my left, who had himself been in a hospital for three weeks, and the neighbours came and helped him out and did his job for him. That's what people do. That's what farmers do.

I believe that protection for farm and ranch workers is the right thing to do, but to impose this legislation onto the family farms and ranches is beyond excessive. This government needs to listen to the farmers and ranchers and their employees, that are speaking, and nobody's listening. That's the feeling they get. Good grief, how many letters and e-mails and petitions and who knows what are telling us: we don't trust, we just want to be heard, and we want choice. If Bill 6 truly is about protecting the farm and ranch employees – is it? We won't know that. I guess we're not going to know that for about 18 months.

Mr. Speaker, the minister stated on November 25, in this Assembly:

I think that we can all agree. These folks . . .

those folks being farmers and ranchers,

. . . face enough uncertainty without having to worry about what would happen to their families if they were injured or, worse, killed on the job. When most Albertans go to bed at night, they don't need to worry about that, and that's because most of us are covered by laws that protect our health and safety on the job.

I do not agree with this fearful, misleading, and, I would say, fearmongering characterization of the realities of farm life.

The Minister of Justice stood here last night and talked about an employer – it could be me – telling my employee to stick his arm inside that running machine and take a block of wood out. That's in *Hansard*, man; I checked the Blues. It's all there. This is the fearmongering I'm talking about.

While safety is the goal of every single farmer I know, they also know what would happen in the event of an accident. Their community would be there in full force to help. We've witnessed it over and over.

Mr. Speaker, Bill 6 as it stands should not be made into law. The family farm is a cornerstone of Alberta's way of life. The blend of personal and business time is inseparable. Bill 6 is a travesty being forced on our rural communities by those with no understanding of the issues – no understanding of the issues – and, as amply demonstrated by their actions, no willingness to listen.

I cannot stand by and watch a way of life and the way of life of so many friends and relatives be impacted so drastically and negatively by a bill so thoughtlessly crafted. For my constituents and the constituents across Alberta that have written me and my fellow MLAs because their NDP MLAs will not return their calls or e-mails, I will not vote for this bill.

10:50

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Are there any questions for the hon. Member for Little Bow under 29(2)(a)?

Hearing none, I would recognize the Minister of Energy.

Ms McCuaig-Boyd: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's been lots of talk, and last night I did hear – first of all, I'm grateful to be able to speak to this, and I'll try to be brief out of respect for others who wish to speak. Last night it was mentioned by our opposition that he had checked resumé of us and did not find information about farming, and that would be true in my case. My resumé would not say that I married into a family. We spent 28 years as a cow-calf operator. I do understand farming. My adult children are who they are today because of farming. As you can see, this has become emotional for me.

This past week we have received many calls, some in support, some not, but a climate has been created where people are afraid to speak. I myself was somewhat concerned to go home last week. I do know now what it's like to be cyberbullied. I do know what it's like to have threats.

I do want to speak about the concerns of moving forward. I have had offers from farmers in my area about being part of the solution. That's what I want to speak to. We've adopted amendments that clarified our intention to cover wage earners under this legislation. We are not protecting kids on family farms. Sorry. You're not. The legislation covers wage earners who are not farm owners. If there's an accident and a child is injured, there are other mechanisms to investigate. If a child is injured at their home, it does not attract OH and S investigation. Other investigations would occur.

Moving forward, I want you to know that I commit to being part of consultations for these regulations, and I would invite members of all parties to be part of the same solution. We have choices moving forward. We can continue to stir and fearmonger and provide misinformation, or we can all agree to work together to provide the best input we can for these future regulations. We can dwell in the past for political reasons, or we can move forward for Albertans and for our constituents. We need to hold all of us accountable and move forward. We need to stand up for all farms. We will be judged in the future – that's true – but we will be judged by our actions, what we do and what we don't do for Albertans, so I invite all of us to work together moving forward to make sure that we get these regulations right for our constituents and for Albertans.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Hon. members, on all sides of this House we have all felt and seen emotion, and I think that's a statement for all of you of the degree to which you care.

The hon. Member for Strathmore-Brooks.

Mr. Fildebrandt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Minister of Energy for her heartfelt comments. I think it is truly a reflection that even on an issue that has been divisive as this, there is much that unites us. We all want what's best for farmers and ranchers. We all want to improve farm safety, and much as we passionately disagree on what has happened in these last weeks, I thank the minister for her comments. I think they were very well received.

I had prepared remarks for right now, but because closure has been invoked, debate has been limited. I'm not going to be able to give them because I want to give my colleagues in this caucus a chance to speak. We're going to have to limit how long our remarks are on third reading on this bill so that we all get a chance to speak or as many of us as possible. Most of this caucus still hasn't had a chance to speak to third reading, so I'm not going to be able to deliver my prepared remarks, which enunciate my concerns about this bill, at this stage. So I'm going to have to wing it a bit, Mr. Speaker, with all the danger that comes with doing so.

As the Minister of Energy has passionately put it, we all want what's best for farmers and ranchers, on all sides of the House. The

problem has been how the government has gone about it. The problem has been that the government has legislated first, regulated second, and consulted third. That is not how responsible democracies make laws. That is not how responsible elected representatives reflect the will of their constituents.

My office has been overwhelmed by the e-mails and phone calls from constituents not just in Strathmore-Brooks but in constituencies across Alberta, particularly rural and semirural constituencies held by members on the government side of this House, farmers and ranchers who have been looking for a voice, someone who would articulate what they have to say, looking for their representatives to stand up for them. I have heard members on our side – the Member for Little Bow, the Member for Drumheller-Stettler, neighbours of my constituency – speak up passionately for farmers and ranchers because they are farmers and ranchers. They live and they breathe agriculture. They get it. They understand what we need to be doing here.

Our caucus, the Official Opposition, has put forward consistently constructive amendments and proposals to fix this bill. First, we proposed sending it to a committee, where we can study it. We would not have had half the debate on this bill in this House that we have had if we could have just sent it to a committee for fulsome discussion, to call witnesses and discuss it. We proposed delaying the bill for a few months, after the government rejected a committee, to hit the pause button, let the temperature come down, take a log off the fire, let the temperatures come down both in this House and outside this House, but that was rejected. The Official Opposition and the third party put forward constructive and positive amendments to the bill in the Committee of the Whole. Every single one of those amendments was shot down by the government merely because we are the opposition. That is not the way a responsible Legislature functions. We have tried to make this bill work for Albertans.

11:00

Now, eventually we got amendments out of the government. They said that these amendments were just clarifying what they wanted to do all along. Mr. Speaker, I've got to call the government out on that one. The details that were released in the town tells at Grande Prairie and on the government's own websites directly contradict what they're saying. They did intend to impose punitive regulations on the family farm that would cover even farm kids. It would cover volunteers. They blamed it on miscommunication, but it was not. They were just telling Albertans what the bill originally intended to do. It went too far, and it was draconian. It was what we were worried about and warning about. But under pressure from the thousands of farm workers who stood outside of this House on the steps of the Legislature and the Official Opposition, the government eventually backed down.

Now, the bill that is going forward, that is being rammed through this House after debate closure, is still a bad bill. It is bad not just in its contents but because it has still not listened to Albertans. But I think all members on this side of the House can take pride in the fact that we have forced amendments on this bill that significantly water down the punitive regulations that would have badly hurt the family farm. This side of the House, all parties on this side of the House, deserve credit for making this bill less bad than the original intent was.

But the people who deserve the most credit for it, Mr. Speaker, are not the opposition parties. It has been Albertans that fuelled us to do it. We have not whipped Albertans into a frenzy. Albertans have told us how hard they wanted us to fight, and that's why we've been here all night long and all morning, fighting consistently every day – day and night – for Albertans. I would not have fought half

as hard, members on this side would not have fought half as hard on this bill if we had not received hundreds of phone calls, hundreds if not thousands of e-mails, 30,000 names on a petition tabled. That is what drove us. That is why we have fought so hard.

While this bill is still being rammed down the throats of Albertans, with an undemocratic time closure being imposed, hypocritically, by members who condemned that kind of action just about six months ago, despite this, we have still managed to take some of the most odious sections of this bill out and get a better piece of legislation for Albertans. All Albertans and all members of the opposition should be proud of that.

Mr. Speaker, there was more I wanted to say, but because of time allocation I'm not allowed to speak on behalf of my constituents for the full, normal time allotted in our democratic Chamber. I will conclude by thanking Albertans for standing up, for signing petitions, for calling their MLAs, for standing on the steps of this Legislature. I assure them that when the time comes and we have the chance, we will fix the rest of the problems with Bill 6.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. member.

Any questions under 29(2)(a)?

The Member for Lac La Biche-St. Paul-Two Hills.

Mr. Hanson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'll be very brief. I just wanted to say that I'll be voting against this bill because of the 32,000 signatures on the petition, because of the 2,000 letters and e-mails that were written to us and presented in this House, because at a meeting last Saturday in my home community of St. Paul that's what I was told to do by the people that I represent. I would like to thank everybody for coming and exercising their democratic right by stepping up in the demonstrations out front, going to all the meetings all over the province. We will represent you as the Wildrose Party.

Thank you.

Mr. Orr: I rise to speak in favour of this amendment. I rise because the people of Lacombe-Ponoka have overwhelmingly spoken against Bill 6. The people of Alberta tried to talk to the government. They were not heard. People from Lacombe-Ponoka have driven to the Legislature, given up a day of work multiple times to try and speak to this government. They have written letters; they've made phone calls. Official county councils have consulted and asked that the bill be slowed down until people can be consulted. Province-wide this protest has grown to a crescendo: 32,000 petition signatures, thousands of letters tabled. In all of that, I received exactly one letter in support of the bill.

I care about farm workers in unjust situations, but you don't do them justice by persecuting tens of thousands of farm families. This is a democracy. I don't see workers protesting on the steps or writing letters or making calls. They are not feeling threatened, or they would cry out. The only letter I've received is actually a lobbying letter.

The farm community has something that forced legislation can never give them. They have true social insurance, far better than socialist interference. When a house burns down, they raise money, and they rebuild it together in my riding. When a car accident happens, they come together and they do the chores, they harvest the crops, and they hold fundraisers and are not forced by social welfare legislation. They have true community. They have true social security. They don't have to fight with inspectors who by default appear to criminalize them. Neighbours do it with honour and respect, not shame and suspicion. Albertans do not want socialists re-creating their culture for them.

The misinformation surrounding this bill comes from the utter mismanagement of the government side. Even this morning I wanted the WCB orientation material that was rolled out to CA staff a couple of days ago so that I could give out reliable information to people. My staff this morning called the WCB, asked for a copy of the materials, and today, now, the WCB says: sorry, we've been told not to give it out anymore. The messaging changes every day. What are we supposed to tell people? And you want them to trust this?

In 1981, when closure was first invoked in this province, the government of the day limited debate to six more days, not hours. This government is limiting debate to one hour. Six days versus an hour? The social democracy crowd are truly strangling debate and democracy.

I urge all members to vote for the amendment and against this bill. I'll stop with that so that other members can speak.

The Speaker: Under 29(2)(a). The hon. Opposition House Leader.

Mr. Cooper: Under 29(2)(a). Thank you. I just might add very briefly. I know that my hon. colleague for Lacombe-Ponoka agrees that the work that goes into this place, the work that goes into communicating with farmers and ranchers, the work that goes into making legislation happen doesn't take place in isolation. Mr. Speaker, I know that the hon. member agrees with me that there are other people outside of this Chamber, not just farmers and ranchers, who give up their life to try and make Alberta better. There are a lot of people who give up their lives and their time, work extremely long hours. In this past week I know that many of them have been working 15, 16 hours a day. Many on the government side have as well.

I just see that a number of our staff team have joined us in the gallery this morning. I won't take the time to introduce them by name, but I would just like to take the opportunity to say thank you for all of the work you do for this province and on behalf of farmers and ranchers.

The Speaker: Under 29(2)(a). The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Mr. McIver: Yeah. I'll be brief because I've already been on my feet. My position hasn't changed. We're dead set against this bill the government has. But I want to ask the hon. member over there because it needs to be said this morning. No matter how much we disagree, our party does not agree with bullying, cyber or otherwise. Does your party agree? I'm sure the answer is going to be yes, but I think it's a good day to hear it out loud.

11:10

The Speaker: Is there a response to the question?

Mr. Cooper: I don't think I'm allowed, but unequivocally, with no question, there isn't anyone on this side of the House who does not agree with that, and that behaviour should be condemned to the full extent.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Any others under 29(2)(a)?

The Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, I thank the hon. member for his introduction. You know, I won't point out that the Official Opposition House Leader was just maybe not quite in order in his introduction because I want to do the same thing.

In the gallery, Mr. Speaker, is Darlene Dunlop. She and her partner, Eric Muekamp, who is not here, have fought relentlessly on this. To them goes a great deal of credit for raising the consciousness of the public and the Legislature on this matter. It should be a proud day for them, and I thank them for what they've done.

The Speaker: Thank you, hon. members.
Anyone else who would wish to speak?

Mr. Hunter: Mr. Speaker, I know that the time is short, so I just want to say this. At the beginning of this discussion we said that we are in favour of safety. All farmers have asked us to make sure that everyone in this Legislature knows that they are in favour of safety. They work hard to make sure that the best practices are applied on their farms and ranches throughout Alberta, and this is something that we have to be proud of and stand firm on. This is something that we have to make sure that we champion every single day.

Unfortunately, what we have today is a lessening of their ability to do what they do so well and have done so well for 98 years. This is the sort of thing that we didn't want to see happen. This is why we brought forward amendments, Mr. Speaker, and this is what we have fought against. Rather than allowing them more choice in their ability to provide insurance for their people and for their operation, they have restricted that choice. This is the sort of thing that is unacceptable to farmers and unacceptable to us in the opposition.

Now, one thing that I'd like to say, Mr. Speaker, is that while I was down in Mexico, I had the opportunity to be able to climb to the top of a pyramid at Chichén Itzá, and it was one of the best experiences my family had. Unfortunately, the next time we went back, we were not allowed to climb to the top because someone had fallen off the top, so they had restricted everybody from being able to go up to the top.

That's the kind of legislation that we saw today, that they are reacting rather than acting. This sort of thing does not make good legislation. When you act, that means you consult. You make sure that you have all the figures, all of the information, and all we have seen is a reaction to a problem. This is where we are fundamentally different in our arguments from this government. We will continue for the next three and a half years to oppose any kind of reaction. This is not what this province needs or deserves, Mr. Speaker, and this is why I am one hundred per cent behind the motion to send this to committee.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: That's under 29(2)(a)?

The Speaker: Under Standing Order (29)(2)(a).

Mr. Smith: Can I just speak to it instead?

The Speaker: So long as there is no other member under 29(2)(a).
The Member for Drayton Valley-Devon.

Mr. Smith: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm still learning, as I think we both are.

You know, I would acknowledge today that this issue has brought the emotions to the forefront. I've seen some of us grumpier today than I've seen before in the House. I've seen tears on both sides. I think that that speaks to the commonality that we all have as legislators, that we are all human and that we are all people. However, I want to get past the emotion. As somebody that is as emotional as I am and, as my kids would attest, often cried at *Little House on the Prairie*, sometimes we have to get past the emotions and look at the reality. I've heard too many of my constituents, farmers and ranchers, too many from across this province voice legitimate concerns about this bill, and as legislators we cannot ignore that. We just can't, not if we're going to do our job properly and appropriately.

At the very heart of this institution, Mr. Speaker, we are democrats. We believe that when the people speak, we should listen, and we

should rule in accordance with the wishes of the people. We can all have our own convictions, and we can believe in those convictions passionately. The Member for West Yellowhead spoke very passionately last night. I understand the passion. I have my own passions as well. But we are first and foremost charged with enacting legislation that reflects the will of the people. I think it's clear that a wise government, a government that was acting democratically, a government that was concerned about the wishes and the will of the people would be able to pull back, would be able to understand the purpose of this hoist amendment, would understand that there's value in this for the people of Alberta.

Reflection, listening, getting it right: we've heard all of those comments this morning. They have value. They're important. I would appeal through you, Mr. Speaker, to this Assembly that we don't have to talk past each other, that we can talk to each other. We can together, with each other, take another crack at this. Push it off that six months. To the hon. member: we can talk to each other. It doesn't have to be past each other.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Nixon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I must say through you to the hon. member that I certainly do appreciate his comments. One area that really resonated with me in his presentation was his responsibility to his riding as an MLA. That's something I take seriously. It is a great honour always to rise in this Assembly for the people of Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

But I also feel that over the last few weeks opposition MLAs have had to also take on another responsibility, and that is to continually rise in this Assembly and speak on behalf of tens of thousands of people that don't even live in our ridings. That deeply concerns me, that those people's views, in my opinion, have not been brought to this Assembly to be debated properly on such an important bill. Why?

Mr. Speaker, today the government has brought forward closure. Closure. They say that we are trying to drag out the bill. There are 22 of my caucus mates here, who represent a lot of farmers. Beside me there's the third party, which has eight members. So that's 30 members, just there alone, that want to have a chance to stand up and speak to something that is going to affect our friends and neighbours, that have sent us here, in a significant way, in our view, something that has created more turmoil back home than I've ever seen and that I certainly hope I never see again in my career.

This government has brought forward closure, Mr. Speaker. Does that seem fair? They've done it three times in, I think, 30 hours. I'm not sure because I've been in here for so long with lack of sleep fighting for my constituents. What I want to talk to the member about is how he feels and how the people in his community feel about the fact that this government is now going to shut down debate on something that's so important.

11:20

Let's be clear. Farmers and ranchers back home and all the communities that surround them and urban communities as well – they're coming along as they're starting to realize what happened – do not trust this government. This government has lost the complete trust of our communities. Now, granted, they didn't have much trust in the community that I come from. That's fair. They did not. But they did have trust in the communities of several members across the way, enough trust that they elected them, sent them to this Assembly to do what I'm doing, and that is to stand up for what the majority of their constituents want, to stand up and fight for what they have asked.

Now, as I said last night, Mr. Speaker, I'm a new MLA. I'm only six or seven months into the job. I know that along the way there are going to be tough choices that we're going to have to make. The burden of office is going to be on us to make decisions when it's not always going to be clear what our constituents want or what the majority of the riding wants. In this case, it is without a doubt clear what Albertans want us to do. It is without a doubt clear what they want. There is no grey area here. We had to bring on extra staff just to keep up with the communications. We had to bring on extra staff to try to help the constituents of the MLAs across the way who are not answering their phones.

The Speaker: Hon. members, I must advise that we have used our 60 minutes. Pursuant to Government Motion 28, agreed to earlier this morning, I must now put every question necessary for the disposal of Bill 6 at third reading.

Firstly, on the amendment.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on the amendment lost]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:22 a.m.]

[One minute having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Aheer	Hunter	Rodney
Anderson, W.	Jansen	Schneider
Barnes	Jean	Smith
Cooper	Loewen	Starke
Cyr	MacIntyre	Stier
Drysdale	McIver	Strankman
Ellis	Nixon	Taylor
Fildebrandt	Orr	van Dijken
Gotfried	Panda	Yao
Hanson	Pitt	

Against the motion:

Anderson, S.	Gray	Miranda
Bilous	Hinkley	Notley
Carlier	Hoffman	Payne
Carson	Horne	Piquette
Ceci	Jabbour	Renaud
Connolly	Kleinsteuber	Rosendahl
Coolahan	Larivee	Schmidt
Cortes-Vargas	Littlewood	Shepherd
Dach	Loyola	Sigurdson
Dang	Luff	Sucha
Drever	Malkinson	Swann
Eggen	Mason	Sweet
Feehan	McCuaig-Boyd	Turner
Ganley	McPherson	Westhead
Goehring	Miller	

Totals: For – 29 Against – 44

[Motion on amendment to third reading of Bill 6 lost]

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

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 11:28 a.m.]

[Three minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Anderson, S.	Gray	Miranda
Bilous	Hinkley	Notley
Carlier	Hoffman	Payne
Carson	Horne	Piquette
Ceci	Jabbour	Renaud
Connolly	Kleinsteuber	Rosendahl
Coolahan	Larivee	Schmidt
Cortes-Vargas	Littlewood	Shepherd
Dach	Loyola	Sigurdson
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Drever	Malkinson	Swann
Eggen	Mason	Sweet
Feehan	McCuaig-Boyd	Turner
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Against the motion:

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Drysdale	McIver	Strankman
Ellis	Nixon	Taylor
Fildebrandt	Orr	van Dijken
Gotfried	Panda	Yao
Hanson	Pitt	

Totals: For – 44 Against – 29

[Motion carried; Bill 6 read a third time]

The Speaker: The hon. Government House Leader.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank all members of the House for their contribution. While it has been rather contentious, I note that this session has also seen a number of moments of harmony and unanimity on the passage of some bills. I think it's been a productive session. Not only have we passed a budget, but we passed a number of very important pieces of legislation as well. I would like to thank all members, including the Minister of Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour and the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry and particularly the Premier, for their leadership with respect to this past bill. I would also like to acknowledge the yeoman work done by the Member for Calgary-Mountain View in fighting for this particular bill. I'd also like to thank the opposition House leaders for their co-operation in helping to bring this week to a conclusion.

Mr. Speaker, it's my duty now to advise the House that pursuant to Government Motion 14 the business for the sitting is now concluded.

The Speaker: Hon. members, pursuant to Government Motion 14, agreed to on December 1, 2015, the House stands adjourned until February 2016. We have already all lost one member in this weather. Let us make sure that you drive home safely and peacefully and take the time for a rest.

The House is adjourned.

[The Assembly adjourned at 11:36 a.m. pursuant to Government Motion 14]

Bill Status Report for the 29th Legislature - 1st Session (2015)

Activity to December 10, 2015

The Bill sponsor's name is in brackets following the Bill title. If it is a money Bill, (\$) will appear between the title and the sponsor's name. Numbers following each Reading refer to Hansard pages where the text of debates is found; dates for each Reading are in brackets following the page numbers. Bills numbered 1 to 200 are Government Bills. Bills numbered 201 or higher are Private Members' Public Bills. Bills numbered with a "Pr" prefix are Private Bills.

*An asterisk beside a Bill number indicates an amendment was passed to that Bill; the Committee line shows the precise date of the amendment.

The date a Bill comes into force is indicated in square brackets after the date of Royal Assent. If a Bill comes into force "on proclamation," "with exceptions," or "on various dates," please contact Legislative Counsel, Alberta Justice, for details at (780) 427-2217. The chapter number assigned to the Bill is entered immediately following the date the Bill comes into force. SA indicates Statutes of Alberta; this is followed by the year in which it is included in the statutes, and its chapter number. Please note, Private Bills are not assigned chapter numbers until the conclusion of the Fall Sittings.

1* An Act to Renew Democracy in Alberta (Ganley)

First Reading -- 9-10 (Jun. 15, 2015 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 30-38 (Jun. 16, 2015 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 85-94 (Jun. 17, 2015 eve.), 152-57 (Jun. 22, 2015 eve., passed with amendments)

Third Reading -- 157-59 (Jun. 22, 2015 eve., passed on division)

Royal Assent -- (Jun. 29, 2015 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 15, 2015; SA 2015 c15]

2 An Act to Restore Fairness to Public Revenue (Ceci)

First Reading -- 104 (Jun. 18, 2015 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 161-62 (Jun. 22, 2015 eve.), 183-93 (Jun. 23, 2015 aft.), 201-13 (Jun. 23, 2015 eve.), 213-27 (Jun. 23, 2015 eve., passed on division)

Committee of the Whole -- 242-57 (Jun. 24, 2015 aft.), 259 (Jun. 24, 2015 eve., passed)

Third Reading -- 259-71 (Jun. 24, 2015 eve., passed on division)

Royal Assent -- (Jun. 29, 2015 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force January 1, 2015, with exceptions; SA 2015 c16]

3 Appropriation (Interim Supply) Act, 2015 (No. 2) (\$) (Ceci)

First Reading -- 77 (Jun. 17, 2015 eve., passed)

Second Reading -- 107-14 (Jun. 18, 2015 aft., passed on division)

Committee of the Whole -- 145-52 (Jun. 22, 2015 eve.), 159-61 (Jun. 22, 2015 eve., passed on division)

Third Reading -- 182-83 (Jun. 23, 2015 aft.), 213 (Jun. 23, 2015 eve., passed on division)

Royal Assent -- (Jun. 29, 2015 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force June 29, 2015; SA 2015 c14]

4* An Act to Implement Various Tax Measures and to Enact the Fiscal Planning and Transparency Act (\$) (Ceci)

First Reading -- 331-32 (Oct. 27, 2015 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 379-81 (Oct. 29, 2015 aft.), 501-22 (Nov. 17, 2015 aft., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 753-68 (Dec. 2, 2015 morn.), 795-99 (Dec. 2, 2015 aft.), 839-54 (Dec. 3, 2015 morn.), 867-70 (Dec. 3, 2015 aft.), 912-25 (Dec. 7, 2015 eve., passed with amendments)

Third Reading -- 925-30 (Dec. 7, 2015 eve., passed on division)

5* Public Sector Compensation Transparency Act (Ganley)

First Reading -- 448 (Nov. 5, 2015 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 619 (Nov. 25, 2015 aft.), 650-60 (Nov. 26, 2015 aft., passed on division)

Committee of the Whole -- 782-95 (Dec. 2, 2015 aft., passed with amendments)

Third Reading -- 870-71 (Dec. 3, 2015 aft., passed)

6* Enhanced Protection for Farm and Ranch Workers Act (Sigurdson)

First Reading -- 501 (Nov. 17, 2015 aft., passed)

Second Reading -- 735-51 (Dec. 1, 2015 eve.), 801-37 (Dec. 2, 2015 eve.), 930-36 (Dec. 7, 2015 eve.), 937-51 (Dec. 8, 2015 morn.), 981-86 (Dec. 8, 2015 aft.), 968-81 (Dec. 8, 2015 aft.), 1008-18 (Dec. 8, 2015 eve.), 1019-28 (Dec. 9, 2015 morn.), 1028-37 (Dec. 9, 2015 morn., passed)

Committee of the Whole -- 1054-71 (Dec. 9, 2015 aft.), (Dec. 9, 2015 eve.), 1076-1109 (Dec. 9, 2015 eve., passed on division with amendments)

Third Reading -- 1111-26 (Dec. 10, 2015 morn., passed on division)

- 7 Alberta Human Rights Amendment Act, 2015 (Ganley)**
First Reading -- 548 (Nov. 19, 2015 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 618-19 (Nov. 25, 2015 aft.), 693-704 (Dec. 1, 2015 morn., passed on division)
Committee of the Whole -- 907-11 (Dec. 7, 2015 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 911 (Dec. 7, 2015 eve., passed)
- 8* Public Education Collective Bargaining Act (Eggen)**
First Reading -- 649 (Nov. 26, 2015 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 717-34 (Dec. 1, 2015 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 987-1000 (Dec. 8, 2015 eve., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 1000-1007 (Dec. 8, 2015 eve., passed on division)
- 9 Appropriation Act, 2015 (\$) (Ceci)**
First Reading -- 612 (Nov. 25, 2015 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 613-18 (Nov. 25, 2015 aft., passed on division)
Committee of the Whole -- 621-31 (Nov. 26, 2015 morn., passed)
Third Reading -- 631-38 (Nov. 26, 2015 morn., passed on division)
Royal Assent -- (Nov. 27, 2015 outside of House sitting) [Comes into force Nov. 27, 2015; SA 2015 c17]
- 201 Assuring Alberta's Fiscal Future Act (Fraser)**
First Reading -- 104-105 (Jun. 18, 2015 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 128-39 (Jun. 22, 2015 aft.), 302 (Oct. 26, 2015 aft., defeated on division)
- 202* Alberta Local Food Act (Cortes-Vargas)**
First Reading -- 105 (Jun. 18, 2015 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 303-313 (Oct. 26, 2015 aft.), 401-404 (Nov. 2, 2015 aft., passed on division)
Committee of the Whole -- 573-83 (Nov. 23, 2015 aft., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 891-95 (Dec. 7, 2015 aft., adjourned)
- 203 Election (Restrictions on Government Advertising) Amendment Act, 2015 (Strankman)**
First Reading -- 349 (Oct. 28, 2015 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 404-10 (Nov. 2, 2015 aft., adjourned), 474-77 (Nov. 16, 2015 aft., passed), 477 (Nov. 16, 2015 aft., referred to Select Special Ethics and Accountability Committee)
- 204* Residential Tenancies (Safer Spaces for Victims of Domestic Violence) Amendment Act, 2015 (Drever)**
First Reading -- 448 (Nov. 5, 2015 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 477-84 (Nov. 16, 2015 aft., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 680-86 (Nov. 30, 2015 aft.), 883-84 (Dec. 7, 2015 aft., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 884-90 (Dec. 7, 2015 aft., passed on division)
- 205 Persons with Developmental Disabilities Services (Public Consultation) Amendment Act, 2015 (Renaud)**
First Reading -- (Nov. 18, 2015 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 583-84 (Nov. 23, 2015 aft., adjourned)
- 206 Recall Act (Aheer)**
First Reading -- 649 (Nov. 26, 2015 aft., passed)
- Pr1* The King's University College Amendment Act, 2015 (Schmidt)**
First Reading -- 377 (Oct. 29, 2015 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 905 (Dec. 7, 2015 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 905-06 (Dec. 7, 2015 eve., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 1073-74 (Dec. 9, 2015 eve., passed)
- Pr2 Bethesda Bible College Amendment Act, 2015 (Nielsen)**
First Reading -- 377 (Oct. 29, 2015 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 905 (Dec. 7, 2015 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 906 (Dec. 7, 2015 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1074-75 (Dec. 9, 2015 eve., passed)

Pr3 Rosary Hall, Edmonton Repeal Act (Shepherd)

First Reading -- 377 (Oct. 29, 2015 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 905 (Dec. 7, 2015 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 906 (Dec. 7, 2015 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1075 (Dec. 9, 2015 eve., passed)

Pr4 Canadian University College Amendment Act, 2015 (Orr)

First Reading -- 377 (Oct. 29, 2015 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 905 (Dec. 7, 2015 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 906 (Dec. 7, 2015 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1075 (Dec. 9, 2015 eve., passed)

Pr5* Concordia University College of Alberta Amendment Act, 2015 (McLean)

First Reading -- 377 (Oct. 29, 2015 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 905 (Dec. 7, 2015 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 906 (Dec. 7, 2015 eve., passed with amendments)
Third Reading -- 1075-76 (Dec. 9, 2015 eve., passed)

Pr6 Covenant Bible College Amendment Act, 2015 (Fildebrandt)

First Reading -- 377 (Oct. 29, 2015 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 905 (Dec. 7, 2015 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 906 (Dec. 7, 2015 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- 1076 (Dec. 9, 2015 eve., passed)

Pr7 Living Faith Bible College Amendment Act, 2015 (Nixon)

First Reading -- 377 (Oct. 29, 2015 aft., passed)
Second Reading -- 905 (Dec. 7, 2015 eve., passed)
Committee of the Whole -- 906-07 (Dec. 7, 2015 eve., passed)
Third Reading -- (Dec. 9, 2015 eve., passed)

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Alberta Hansard 2015 (29th Legislature, First Session)

Indexes

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Main Estimates 2015-2016

The main estimates (budget) for 2015-2016 are all being considered in the legislative policy committees. Below is a list of ministries, the schedule of debate, and links to posted transcripts. At 7:30 p.m. on November 23 the Committee of Supply will meet.

Meetings are scheduled for three hours and start at 9 a.m. (morning), except for Executive Council debate, which starts at 10 a.m.; 3:30 p.m. (afternoon); or 7 p.m. (evening).

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